

The Changing face of Terrorism

POINT TO DEVELOP

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon.

Recently terrorist attacks have increased and have manifested changes: they are by smaller groups, more brutal, more sophisticated with technological advances.

There is more interaction among terrorist groups facilitating operation and making it difficult to tackle.

shift of focus from ideology to ethnic, religious or 'nationalistic' or even 'economic' variety.

Support from legitimate foreign governments adds complexity to the problem.

Tackling terrorism needs action on three lines- political, law and order, psychological.

Democracies are specially vulnerable to terrorism's new form.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon. It has been with us for aeons. Even in the very first century there was the Sicarji, a terrorist group based on religion, operating in Palestine. The 'Assassins', fed on hashish, terrorized the population in the eleventh century. But over the years the face of terrorism has changed. It has become the years the face of terrorism has changed. It has become more lethal, more widespread more difficult to control.

A CIA publication defines terrorism as the "threat or use of violence for political purposes when such action is intended to influence the attitude and behavior of a target group other than the immediate victim and its ramifications transcend national boundaries". Contemporary terrorist groups are less organized than their forbearers

and their depredations are unorganized acts with political motivation. Depredations are unorganized acts with political motivation. At the same time they are more implacable, less structured and more difficult to predict and penetrate. The unpredictability magnifies the effect of violence and makes it difficult the combat.

Terrorist groups have sprung up every up everywhere and there are too many targets. And if public places such as airports are watched over by security

forces more vigilantly, the terrorists shift the focus to soft targets-schools, market places, trains, buses.

Technological advances have helped the modern terrorists to arm themselves with small, portable easy-to-operate weapons. The entire range of weaponry available for national defense is more or less there for the terrorists as well. Terrorists are also increasingly making use of bombs and explosives. Sophisticated timers are available to set off the explosives as and when the terrorist wants. Detection of the perpetrators becomes almost impossible. Human bombs have been increasingly and successfully pressed into active service to eliminate a target. In Tamil Nadu, a live human bomb from LTTE, the dreaded terrorist outfit of Sri Lanka, killed the late Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi. 'Semtex' was the awesome and gruesome weapon of earlier terrorists. Now it is RDX and other advanced and much more lethal things. Modern terrorists are constantly devising advanced and deadly ways to terrorise their targets. Deadly chemicals introduced in the water supply system, germs deliberately released into the air to cause disease epidemics, biological methods of adversely affecting the ecology-these are no longer in the realms of fiction alone; today, terrorists have the knowledge and capability to actualize them in this world. There are reports suggesting that modern anti-US terrorists were planning to paralyze the US by indulging in 'agro-terrorism', i.e., by deliberately introducing animal and plant diseases in the country.

The most worrisome trend in modern terrorism is its brutalization. These terrorist groups are without compassion or ethical considerations. Moral scruples do not weigh with them; they are mostly cold-blooded liquidators for whom there are no innocents. Most of the attacks are directed against people rather than property. It is clearly because attacks on people get full media attention. In the horrible Beslan tragedy of Russia, Chechnya terrorists killed 155 innocent school children in cold blood and wounded many more to hog the limelight and to espouse their cause for a free Chechnya; these innocent children had nothing to do with these terrorists' so-called justified demands.

Today, terrorist groups have global networks or establish contact with groups in different countries. The Al Qaeda, the terrorist outfit of Osama Bin Laden that was brought into existence in 1988, has 'branches' in practically every part of the world, notably in the Islamic nations. This organization maintains a workable link between Muslim fundamentalists in various countries. This, in fact, becomes easy if states support various groups with finance, training and weapons. In India too, contacts were detected between the ULFA and the LTTE of Sri Lanka, the NSCN and the Myanma guerillas. In the not too distant past,

Pakistan apparently helped the Khalistanis. At present, it is very active behind the militants of Kashmir. This networking not only facilitates terrorist operations but also makes the task of combating it more difficult.

The focus has shifted from the ideological and anarchist brand of terrorism to so-called nationalist, separatist, religious and ethnic variety. Both religion and ethnicity have become dynamic forces. India is having to contend with this kind of terrorism in different regions. For instance, in the Northeastern part of the nation. The militants are battling the Indian security forces on the ground of ethnicity. Another form is 'economic' terrorism which includes mass counterfeiting and mass fraud. Reports suggest that a number of Pakistanis are active in India minting fake coins and circulating fake currency to destabilize the growing Indian economy.

The economic disaster that constant terrorist attacks are capable of wreaking on a country today can be as appalling as that brought about by war. Even the USA which is a powerful and rich nation found it tough to cope with the economic blow inflicted by the daring 9/11 attacks. Tourism is adversely affected. Women become victims of violence and are often forced into prostitution, as jobs become scarce and capital non-existent.

The nexus between terrorists and drug barons is another alarming trend. The Shining Path in Peru is an open example of terrorist- narcotics – smuggling link. The nexus is more covert, but certainly exists, in India. That the country is placed between two drug-producing regions- the golden triangle of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, and the golden crescent of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran – is a cause of concern to the authorities. It has been pertinently observed that the route for passage of drugs worldwide is full of violence, India, being a passage country offering a narcotics exit in Mumbai, lays itself open to the terrorist-smuggler nexus. An ideology is grafted on to give the trade a certain legitimacy. Narcotics dealers have enough funds to finance the terrorists who require ready cash to procure weapons. These weapons are also easily brought in with the help of the infrastructure set up by the drug smugglers. International banks are there to launder the drug money.

Terrorists are today adopting mafia tactics. They extort protection money from businessmen to fund their activities. Sometimes, ethno political terrorist groups get succour from foreign governments which exploit the genuine or imaginary grievances of the terrorists. It is alleged India capitalizes on the fact the LTTE is a Tamil terrorist outfit and helps it covertly to keep its small neighbor Sri Lanka under control. However, hostile governments cannot create the necessary grievances or potential terrorists where they do not exist. It is

unfortunate, perhaps, that the conditions- political and socio-economic that encourage the growth of terrorism are now in existence in several regions. Religious revival grows out of dissatisfaction rising out of corruption and consumerism. It soon grows into a rigid mould of what is termed "fundamentalism". Political infighting and instability again provide a suitable ground for the growth of terrorist groups. Socio-economic conditions of rising unemployment, lack of opportunity to earn a living, growing awareness of inequality in distribution of wealth and well being, exploitation at the hands of powers that be –these factors create a situation which encourages youth to join terrorist groups, and others to support them, in the North-eastern part of India, militancy is widespread on this very ground. A growing number of people of this region believe that successive Indian governments have deliberately neglected the economy of this region with a view to denying them the economic rights which by virtue of being Indians they rightly deserve. That the cadre strength of some of the local terrorist outfits such as ULFA is growing in this hostile region due to this very fact cannot be denied. With the proliferation of such conditions, there is a spread and growth of terrorist groups in several regions of the world.

It needs to be emphasized that these groups lack the ideological and moral fervor that prompted the terrorists of an earlier era. The idealism is superficial now; beneath the veneer is the lust of power. This explains the mushrooming of many terrorist groups espousing the same cause- witness Afghanistan or our own Kashmir.

Democratic states find it difficult to deal with terrorist groups. Because of freedom of movement in a democracy, more targets are exposed to terrorist attacks. The terrorists take full advantage of the rights and freedoms granted in such a system and cynically exploit them. The media, too, publicizes terrorist attacks and gives the groups the publicity they desire. The terrorists of today find it smooth going with human rights groups speaking up for them and with modern means of communications and transport within their easy reach. There have been numerous instances when some of the human rights groups and activists in India are known to jealously safeguard the supposed violation of the human rights of the terrorists. But when it comes to speaking for the rights of the common citizens or the security personnel, they are seldom known to rise to the occasion.

The terrorist groups are now decentralized and can spread their tentacles anywhere and everywhere. The modern face of terrorism can be combated only by a superior intelligence network. Indeed, intelligence is the key to decide the tactics to be employed to deal with the actual threat. The law enforcing machinery

has to gear up- think faster and anticipate the moves of the terrorists-if it wants to meet the challenge, but ultimately, whatever short-term tactics are employed, the conditions that give rise to terrorism should be tackled and that can be done only on a political plane.