



## RAPPORTEURS REPORT

# The Common Challenge of Terrorism in South Asia and Prospect of Regional Cooperation 2-3 November 2010



# Session I: Problems of Terrorism in South Asia

Chairperson : N.S.Sisodia

S. D. Muni	Jehan Parera	Deepak Thapa	Sumit Ganguly
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The first session was chaired by Shri N.S. Sisodia, Director General, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. There were four presentations focusing on the problem of terrorism in South Asia, its impact on the states and the peoples of the region and the ways and means to tackle the menace of terrorism.

The Chair, in his welcome address said that over the decades, terrorism had become a daunting challenge for the states in the South Asian region and there was a need for the states to come together to fight this menace. This was important, he noted, because the threats of terrorism transcended national territorial boundaries and no state could fight terrorism alone. Therefore, he said, it was vital for countries of the region to work together to tackle this phenomenon.

Prof S.D. Muni, in his presentation titled, “Beyond Terrorism: The Need to Understand Terrorism in a Wider Context”, asserted that after 9/11, the use of the term ‘Terrorism’ has steamrolled other terms such as insurgency, asymmetric warfare and unequal warfare. He argued that all varieties of terrorism were functional in South Asia and in some cases there were linkages among them. At the international level also, ideological and diaspora linkages have been used by some organisations engaged in terrorism for fund raising, advocacy of the cause and for arms procurement. Prof Muni opined that almost all the countries of the region were guilty of supporting terrorism in a neighbouring country at one point of time or other in history. He also said that more than regional and international cooperation, it was the bilateral cooperation which had been most successful in countering terrorism in the region so far. He recommended that the countries in the region needed to carefully calibrate the use of force to tackle terrorism and that the core challenge lied at the national level. He added that use of force \was not enough and it had to be backed by other means as well.

Jehan Parera, from Sri Lanka, in his paper, “Lessons Learnt and Post-War Developments in Sri Lanka”, highlighted that it had been more than eighteen months since the war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government had ended and apparently there were no terrorist attack on Sri Lankan soil since then. The war also defied the notion that terrorism can never be defeated. He also mentioned the positive role international community played in Sri Lanka’s fight against terrorism. Sri Lanka had to pay a very heavy price in terms of loss of lives of non-combatants and displacement of innocent civilians. In the aftermath of the war, the country faced strong international condemnation for alleged human rights violation during the conduct of the war. The estrangement between the international community and Sri Lankan government might thus take a long time to fade away. The government of Sri Lanka, he noted, needed to recognise that the causes of the conflict remained unaddressed and it had to take appropriate steps to meet the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

Deepak Thapa from Nepal presented his paper on “Cycles of Violence: Conflict in ‘Post-Conflict Nepal’”. He focused on the domestic situation in Nepal since the coming of Maoists to power. He asserted that there were many groups in the Terai region, fighting for their rights, as there prevailed a perception that the Madhesis, the inhabitants of the Terai region, had been marginalised in Nepal. He argued that post-conflict Nepal had to tackle the issue sincerely if it were to emerge as a more peaceful and stable state of the South Asian region.

The last paper of the session was by Prof. Sumit Ganguly, who spoke on “History and Prospects of Counter-terrorism in South Asia”. Tracing the origin and evolution of terrorism in South Asia, he argued that there had been two major patterns so far as the phenomenon of terrorism in South Asia was concerned, i.e., all the terror groups began as local movements or indigenous uprisings, with the aim of finding solution to a particular local problem, however, such local uprisings assumed bigger shape and size due to apathy of the respective governments. Equally important, in the process, was the realisation on the part of groups that terror could become a very effective tool. These groups also managed to get external support and this helped them in strengthening their position vis-avis the states. Prof Ganguly noted with disappointment that, even though there was considerable need for counter-terrorism cooperation, the States of the region had exacerbated local grievances and even sponsored terror groups rather than taking to the path of cooperation. He said that countries of the region had chosen the former over the latter in order to achieve their foreign policy objectives. There were, however, some exceptions, and India-Bhutan cooperation was one of them. Prof Ganguly opined that the weakness of counter-terror efforts stemmed from a multitude of reasons including a weak SAARC, lack of trust, and limited capabilities of the States to deal with terrorism. The prospects of joint counter-terrorism efforts of the countries, according to Prof Ganguly, were mixed. In the case of India and Pakistan there was hardly any hope of any effective cooperation while the future of India-Bangladesh and India-Sri Lanka cooperation, even that of India-Nepal despite all the hassles, on fighting terror looked bright.

Prof Ganguly added that no South Asian state could devise a counter-terrorism mechanism alone. He held that India could lead from the front in such an endeavour. He emphasised, however, that success of any such counter-terror measure would largely depend on how and to what extent Pakistan cooperated with other countries of the region on this issue. Therefore, he suggested, India should not hesitate in seeking the support of international community in its fight against terrorism.

The chair concluded by saying that in the light of the fact that terrorism had emerged as the gravest threat to the South Asian region, the nations of South Asia had to no other option but to work together to meet the challenge effectively.

*This report was prepared by Rahul Mishra, Research Assistant at IDSA.*

## Session II: Country Perspective on terrorism in South Asia

Chairperson : Afsir Karim

Mohamed Ziad	Arvind Gupta, Ashok Behuria, Pushpita Das & PV Ramana	Karma Tsering Namgyal	Shivaji Felix
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The session was chaired by Major General (retd.) Afsir Karim. There were five presentations focused primarily on country-experiences.

Dr Arvind Gupta, Chair, LBSC, IDSA, presented his paper on “India’s Experience in Dealing with Terrorism”. Dr Gupta observed that India had been experiencing the menace since Independence and there was a view, he said, that Indian state adopted a soft and hesitant approach and relied more on democratic values. However, on the whole, as various studies indicated, India had handled the issue quite effectively. Dr Gupta argued that India faced four different types of terrorism -externally sponsored terrorism, identity related ethnic conflicts in the north east, left wing extremism and, Jihadi and reactive terrorism. India found it difficult to handle externally sponsored terrorism, he underlined. Moreover, the proliferation of nuclear weapons in SA region, he held, provided the context for asymmetric warfare.

While dealing with the challenge, he argued that India had tried to resolve the problem within democratic and constitutional framework. Moreover, there had been no dearth of effort to sensitise the security and para-military forces regarding Human rights issues. Several legal measures had also been there to deal with terrorism. India had also sought international cooperation to fight this menace. He observed that lack of political consensus, suboptimal counter terrorism strategy and absence of any doctrine and mis-governance were certain shortcomings in India’s approach He concluded by saying that terrorism had not succeeded in India. Despite the adverse circumstances, India had managed the challenge well. But he acknowledged that a lot remained to be done on various fronts.

In his paper on “Statement on Combating Terrorism: Country Presentation”. Mr Karma Tsering Namgyal from Bhutan argued that some terrorist outfits had tried in the past to use Bhutanese territory as a sanctuary for their activities. However, Bhutan had taken appropriate counter-measures in the past to dislodge these forces from its territory. Terrorism had no place in Bhutan and it ran counter to the Bhutanese gross national happiness. He said that Bhutan understood that security was a top priority for Bhutan and without it, Bhutan could not achieve the gross national happiness. Therefore, Bhutan had taken enough steps to root out the terrorism and expressed its willingness to work with the international community to deal with the challenge. He said that Bhutan had not experienced any terrorist attack since December 2003, when it had launched an operation against some terrorist outfits operating out of its soil against India. However, there had been a number of incidents of bomb blasts in Bhutan and attacks by rebel groups could not be ruled out in future. Mr Namgyal said that Bhutan had capacity and resource constraints and constraints related to the managing of its porous border with India. He also dwelt on the a number of practical and legislative steps the royal government of Bhutan had taken to deal with this challenge. Apart from that Bhutan is a signatory to the UN treaties and the SAARC convention on Terrorism and the protocol. The bilateral cooperation between India and Bhutan was also duly mentioned as an important element of Bhutan’s counter-terrorism strategy.

Mr Shvaji Felix from Sri Lanka in his paper on “The impact of Terrorism on Sri Lanka: A Multifaceted Analysis”, argued that it was important to appreciate the historical context as a causative factor and held that terrorism in Sri Lanka was in many ways a response to the Ethno-national Hegemony which was a byproduct of Sinhalese chauvinism in the post-colonial period. The ‘Sinhala only’ project led to the

marginalization of the Tamil minority and led to a push for greater autonomy by the Tamils. Later, such ethnic polarization resulted in ethnic violence in the north and east and gave birth to a violent separatist movement led by the LTTE. He observed that the conflict had serious political and economic ramifications. Many political leaders were assassinated during the conflict. The economy could not progress appreciably because of terrorism and the war efforts in Sri Lanka. One of the worst affected sectors in Sri Lanka was tourism. However, Felix argued that despite the conflict, the tea and textile industries showed their resilience and the Lankan economy grew continuously over the last 20 years.

He observed, nevertheless, that the end of the LTTE had not rid Sri Lanka of all its problems relating to the conflict and the country had to grapple with many other important issues. While prosecuting the final phase of the war there was a clear curtailment of the freedom of the press and there was also a demand by western countries for investigation into Human rights abuses. He also warned that Tamils of Sri Lanka would continue their demand for their genuine rights and the government had to understand that military success has to be followed by a political package to take care of the Tamil concerns.

The fourth paper by Mohamed Ziad from Maldives (which was read out by Dr Smruti Pattnaik, Research Fellow at IDSA because of his inability to attend the conference), highlighted the comprehensive and holistic strategic framework that Maldives had adopted to deal with the looming threat of terrorism. The paper argued that Maldives was vulnerable to terrorism because of its strategic location. The paper analyzed the threat from terrorist outfits at three levels- global, regional and domestic. Among other threats, the paper outlined the issues of piracy, narco-terrorism, politically motivated acts of terror, influence of global terrorism on the large expatriate work force etc. The various facets of the counter terrorist efforts of the state and the concerned governmental and nongovernmental agencies, the paper suggested, could be based on a) National Integrated Approach, b) Intelligence based operations, c). Deterrence through Credible Show of Force, d). Use of minimal force and gradual escalation, e). Rule of law and the need for political awareness, and f). international partnerships. The paper said that Maldives was open to the idea of joining regional and international efforts to fight the menace of terrorism.

***This report was prepared by Dr Nihar Nayak, Associate Fellow at IDSA***

## Session III: Country Perspectives

Chairperson : S. D. Muni

Dr Davood Moradian

Imtiaz Ahmed

Shyam Tekwani

The session was chaired by Prof S D Muni. The first speaker Dr Dawood Moradian, commenting on the phenomenon of terrorism and its impact on Afghanistan, stated that 9/11 has focussed international attention on terrorism and broadened its scope and definition. He traced the history of terrorism to the Roman empire and said that since then it has reappeared in various forms during various phases of history in different societies. He held that four essential factors give rise to terrorism: (a) enabling community, (b) sponsoring state, c) legitimising ideology and (d) organised crimes. Emphasizing that there was a need to contextualise terrorism in specific local/regional realities, he drew attention to ten interdependent factors which often led to terrorism. These are: state-deficit, governance-deficit, nationalism, identity, leadership or elite, religion, development, incomplete process of modernity, ethical issues and connectivity. In the South Asian context, he pointed out absence of visionary leadership, and lack of governance are the main factors which are responsible for giving rise to terrorism.

Dr Moradian also talked about two Afghanistans— (a) a promising Afghanistan and (b) suffering Afghanistan. He brought to light the triangle of terror which exists in Afghanistan, consisting of the al Qaida, the Afghan militant groups and the ISI. The solution to prosperous Afghanistan, he pointed out lies in forging a consensual strategy at the international level to engage these three groups. He also cautioned against the process of engagement being monopolised by any single country. He noted that India should not hesitate to extend its helping hand to the Afghans at this critical stage because the Afghans understand that India had a key role in shaping events in Afghanistan. He also said that India and China should join hands for the sake of regional peace and security.

Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed spoke about the role of academics in combating terrorism. Commenting on the nature of the Westphalian state, Dr Ahmed proposed three elements which defined the modern state, which were: (a) political society, (b) market/economic power and c) civil society which was primarily engaged in producing social capital. Combating terrorism, he pointed out, was a two-sided problem— structural and intellectual. While academics, he stated sometimes become ‘partydemics’, thus becoming hostage to party politics and propoganda, others were often driven by business interests, whom he termed business-academics. Business academics he posited could be dangerous as in their zeal to outshine in the business of academia, they could fall into the political-business nexus. When this nexus served the religious centred terrorism, he pointed out, these academics could become potential conduits for terror. Thus terrorism he held was an intellectual exercise and the link between the two could be found in the dialectical relationship between structural and intellectual. He isolated three factors which generally give rise to academic terrorists- mediocrity, media-genicity and mechanicality. He concluded by proposing four Is in order to combat the menace of terrorism. These are: incarceration, intelligence, institutional innovation and investment. He concluded by saying the latter two were particularly significant as academics should disseminate intellectual inputs amongst the public.

Shyam Tekwani, the third presenter, talked about ‘Media and Terrorism’ and stated that media and terrorism have a symbiotic relationship. He argued that terrorism was not an ideology but a methodology. Quoting Margaret Thatcher, he said that publicity was ‘the oxygen of terrorism’ and often terrorism could be understood as ‘propaganda by deed’. Stating that use of media changed drastically in 1972, with the proliferation of visual media when terrorist attacks entered the drawing rooms of people at large. Televised

images have great psychological impact, as images through media contributed towards the cult of myth-building underling the notion of invincibility of terrorists. Towards the end he underlined certain cautionary principles while scrutinizing reports appearing in the media. These were the misperceptions embedded in media reporting, ecosystem of the media, i.e. the way stories were constructed and processed, sensationalising events, i.e., dramatising the atmosphere and labelling events, which often exacerbates the relationship between media and state. He also pointed out that with the advent of new media, terrorists were creating their own media space for propaganda purposes. He held that the media had to understand that it had a major role to play in fighting terrorism.

**This report was prepared by Dr Medha Bisht, Associate Fellow at IDSA**

## Session IV: Regional Cooperation in Counter Terrorism

Chairperson : Shri Prakash Singh

Shehryar Fazli

C. Thapa

Anand Kumar

The session was chaired by Prakash Singh who observed that the future of world peace depends on how problems in South Asia are solved. Citing the increase in the number of casualties from terrorism in the region, he did however, stress that Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had achieved some success in tackling terrorism. But India was faced with the challenge of tackling the Maoists who, according to him, had established their presence in 223 districts of India (out of a total of 626 districts). He also stressed that the situation in Afghanistan, in particular, was critical for the future of peace in US, Europe and India.

Shehryar Fazli's presentation titled "Opportunities for Regional Stability: The View from Pakistan" underlined how terror groups in Pakistan posed a threat to Pakistan itself and how this has been a troublesome trend since the 1980s marked by the rise of the "Punjabi Taliban" in the Punjab province of Pakistan. These groups were ultra-orthodox Deobandi groups. The challenge for Pakistan was to tackle the low conviction rates of terror suspects due to poor case build-up, poor investigation and forensic capacity and poor witness-protection. In the context of India-Pakistan relations, the speaker stressed the need to engage civilian institutions in Pakistan and facilitate the process of democratic transition. He also suggested that the interaction between the moderates in the two countries needed to be strengthened. At the regional level he argued that the SAARC convention has to be taken forward.

In the Q&A session Fazli had many queries on the prospect of democratic transition and consolidation of civilian authority in Pakistan. He laid emphasis on provincial autonomy and judicial independence as two interesting developments that needed closer attention. Dr. Arvind Gupta pointed out how Pakistani civil society was yet to come to terms with India. Discussions also highlighted the need to empower civilian government in Pakistan and gradual diminishing of the military's role in Pakistan. Relating to Madrassas in Pakistan, Shehryar pointed out how choice of Madrassas as a venue for education was often a practical consideration for ordinary Pakistanis with the poor state of public schools.

The second presentation by Chiran Thapa titled "Counter-Terrorism and Regional Cooperation in South Asia" introduced the challenge of terrorism in the region by highlighting the assassinations of several heads-of-state in South Asian countries. He argued how South-Asia had become a major theatre for counter-terrorism operations post-9/11. The concept of sovereignty of nation-states was, according to him, brought into question with the attacks on two sovereign states in counter-terror operations post-9/11. 9/11 also brought out the weakness of American unilateral capacity to counter terrorism and the highlighted the need for cooperation. His paper identified an important corridor of terror and counter-terror operations – the BIPA corridor (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan). The main features of this corridor were the heavy concentration of Muslim population and terrorist groups in this belt. He pointed out that the fluid definition of "terrorism" was a big factor in weakening regional response capacity to fight terrorism. Proposing "4-eyes" in Counter terrorism strategy, Chiran identified the need to (1) inhibit intent through socio-economic improvements; (2) impede implementation of terror plots; (3) improve investigation; and, (4) incarceration. His concluding remarks identified how India faces an unfriendly periphery and yet it had to play a lead role. In regional cooperation, the practice of cooperation was lacking highlighted by, what he



cited as, India's "double standards" on Nepal's Maoists and Pakistan's "double standards" in its anti-terror pledges. The way forward was to see "one man's terrorist is another man's terrorist".

In his presentation on "Assessing Counter-Terror Cooperation in South Asia", Anand Kumar highlighted how South Asia had been a victim of terrorism for a long time. He focused on counter-terrorism successes achieved in recent years in the cases of Bhutan (tackling ULFA, NDFP, KLO), Bangladesh (not allowing Indian insurgent groups to take shelter under Sheikh Hasina), Myanmar (which has demonstrated a mixed-policy towards Indian insurgent groups such as the Naga insurgents which exist on both sides), Sri Lanka (which overpowered the LTTE and still faces the task of accommodating Tamil interests), Maldives (which is facing growing radicalization in recent times) and Nepal (where Maoists have taken to democratic politics). The Nepal case was cited by him as a suitable analogy for the mainstreaming of Taliban.

Dr. Sheel Kant Sharma, in his guest remarks highlighted how SAARC has been trying to address the issue of terrorism in a far-sighted manner through conventions and other legal instruments. The 2008 Colombo Summit, which came out with a joint declaration on the need to fight terrorism collectively was, according to him, a landmark in the history of SAARC. He also stressed that compared to the United Nations, SAARC had in fact been more pro-active in tackling terrorism through its approach because of its emphasis on multi-pronged cooperation.

The Chair emphasized the need for strengthening the civilian government in Pakistan and the need to re-enforce SAARC in his concluding remarks.

*This report was prepared by Joe Thomas Karackattu, Associate Fellow at IDSA*

## Session V: The Way Forward

Mr. Jayant Prasad

Dr Arvind Gupta

At the concluding session of the two-day South Asia Conference, Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Special Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India, delivered the valedictory address and said that terrorism was a common problem. He urged the countries of South Asia to prepare national strategies to fight this common challenge together. He also pointed out that this kind of conference was useful and would help policy makers in formulating national strategies.

He began by saying that the nature of terrorism has changed. A quarter century ago, it was regarded as a law and order problem, but now it is posing the biggest security threat to nation states. Almost all the countries of the world have been affected by terrorism. Today, terrorist groups are operating beyond the national boundaries and are drawing support from many sources including the states in many cases. They have global networking with potential allies, other terrorist groups, arms suppliers, and have financial support from different sources. Meanwhile, al Qaeda has established linkages with groups having similar agenda in many parts of the world from Algeria to Philippines. In recent years, Algeria's Salafist groups have even developed close connection with the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and with other insurgent groups.

He held that in South Asia various terrorist groups operate under different names in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both these countries are severely affected by terrorism and this would create problems for other countries of South Asia. These terrorist groups aim at maximum civilian casualties— which B. Ramancalls “mass casualty terrorism”— to attract the attention of the wider world. This was evident in 9/11 attacks in the US and 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Terrorist organizations are better equipped with modern technology and are adopting new techniques and methods for achieving their objectives. They are acquiring weapons of mass destruction and looking for more everyday. The governments and law enforcement agencies are also adapting themselves to the emerging situation and strengthening their security preparedness. International and regional cooperation among nation states have also improved in recent years to fight terrorism. Their main aim has been to prevent, protect, prepare, respond and build strategies to defeat terrorism through better regional partnerships, Mr Prasad argued.

He drew attention to the fact that terrorism has been identified by South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as the most serious challenge facing the countries of South Asia and its elimination is now top priority. Various proposals such as the establishment of SAARC Police and SAARC Anti-Terrorism Task Force etc. have been initiated in this regard. In addition, a number of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms have also been put in place to promote better cooperation among nations to fight terrorism. In last 15 years, regional cooperation on counterterrorism has improved. The SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters would strengthen regional cooperation to fight cross-border crimes. He hoped that all SAARC countries would proceed on this. During the third SAARC Interior/Home Ministers meeting held in Islamabad in 2010, India offered to hold a meeting of the High Level Group of Eminent Experts to Strengthen SAARC Anti-Terrorism Mechanism in New Delhi in January 2011 and Bangladesh offered to establish a Joint Task Force for better regional cooperation on counterterrorism. Other countries also suggested holding meetings and forums to undertake a periodic review and assessment of the situation and prospects in the region on counterterrorism cooperation.

In the end, he said that there is a growing threat of terrorism coming especially from Afghanistan-Pakistan region and felt that it could spread to other countries of the region. He pointed out that India's cooperation with SAARC countries had grown appreciably and it had bilateral cooperation with almost all of them. He emphasized that there was a need to develop a habit of counterterrorism cooperation in the region. From devising mutual legal institutions the SAARC countries must move towards joint actions. Moreover, besides such counterterrorism cooperation, they need to develop and strengthen relations in other areas of cooperation such as trade, cultural exchanges, people to people contact etc.

Dr Arvind Gupta, Lal Bahadur Shastri Chair, IDSA said that recently many measures have been taken by SAARC countries to combat the common threat of terrorism. This has given rise to lot of optimism, but a lot remains to be done to effectively deal with this problem. He provided an overview of deliberations in the two-day conference and said even though there was a conceptual confusion about how to define terrorism, it was recognized by all participants that terrorism was a common threat; it was a political problem and given the current political situation in South Asia, military actions alone cannot resolve the problem. Besides military actions, political, economic and social measures need to be taken through regional cooperation to tackle the problem. He felt it necessary to have an operational definition of terrorism to formulate counterterrorism strategies. He referred to the prevailing political problem between India-Pakistan as one of the main problems in furthering counterterrorism cooperation in the region. The problem is further compounded by the weaknesses of various institutional and legal provisions and lack of political will to enhance regional cooperation. He argued that as long as some governments thought that they could harness terrorism for achieving their strategic goals, there will be no movement forward on real and effective cooperation in this area.

Summing up the observations of the participants, Dr Gupta said that there was an expectation that India, as an emerging power and the biggest country in the region, should take a leading role to fight terrorism. He pointed out that India had cooperative frameworks at the bilateral level with many of the SAARC countries; however, for successful counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia, it was imperative for India and Pakistan to cooperate.

He dwelt on India's experience in dealing with terrorism and said that while India had resources and capability to handle its internal problems, to fight Cross Border Terrorism (CBT), it needed international cooperation. So far as the prospects of regional cooperation in fighting against the common challenge of terrorism is concerned, most of the participants agreed that there was a political consensus among SAARC countries on this but as an institution it has not succeeded much in taking substantial actions to tackle this problem.

The conference ended with the vote of thanks given by Dr Anand Kumar, the Conference Coordinator.

***Report prepared by Dr Saroj Bishoyi, Research Assistant, IDSA***