

The pandemic has not just disrupted the status quo but has served as a catalyst, hyper-charging existing trends. This pandemic seems to have had relatively little impact on the trajectory of violence, although terrorism in south Asia appeared to have retreated a step back, not fading but looming in the corner. The abstract is becoming clearer with the impending threats associated with the fresh Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and ISIS-K's fresh claim to conquer India.

Terrorism in South Asia is a multifaceted reality, especially in India. India's tryst with terrorism and violent extremism can be traced back partly to the religion-based partition in 1947, which ripped the sub-continent into two nations: India and Pakistan. Later, the ill-fated apportionment of Kashmir has become an unending dispute in the sub-continent. Kashmir became the target as well as the hub of terrorism. Islamist terrorism quickens around this conflicted region.

Apart from Islamist terrorism, separatist movements drifted from guerrilla insurgencies to terror attacks that had perturbed India's peace. The Maoist insurgents called Naxalites, defined by the then Indian Prime Minister as "the biggest threat to national security", are still active in Central India tribal hills, and have also been branded as "terrorists". India also remains highly vulnerable to terrorism by foreign terrorists, due to porous borders with all its neighbours and a long coastline. Sri Lanka's LTTE had carried out India's first suicide bombings. India dreads the militants of Pakistan mainly because of the unsettled situation of Kashmir. Afghanistan is another sore subject for India because of the presence of Islamic States of Khorasan (IS-K or ISIS-K) and Al Qaeda Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and It's becoming a more dreading country later to the exit of USA from Afghanistan as Taliban swiftly took over the country and formed their own government. Afghanistan already took the bashing when ISIS-K just recently had launched a terror attack on the Kabul airport. History testifies that Al-Qaeda and IS's rampancy rises under the rule of the Taliban. The future might hold the same. Al-Qaeda has a special wing for operation in the Indian Sub-continent, which naturally takes India as their main target. ISIS-K recently claimed to have an aim of the Caliphate in India and the plan of jihad has rolled out. The recruitment process is already on the go.

Newer ways to recruit and radicalize

India may prepare for their battle, which may come in a new form. Terrorist organizations have found new ways of radicalization, such as kinship and fundamental studies.



Image source: NBC News

Kinship is likely to play a key role in radicalization and terrorist activities in the mid-Covid world. This is because, with tighter security, monitoring and territorial controls, terrorist groups have turned to expand their networks via the families of their recruits, resulting in major terrorist attacks involving some or all members of the family unit. Radicalization may be brought through fundamental education. Madrassas provide fundamental Islamic studies. Madrassa girls were targeted by extremist groups with the hope that these girls will educate and radicalize the next generations at home. This might be the reason why the Indian government want a change in the syllabus in the Madrassa curriculum. But radical Muslims may not have liked it.

Concern for untraceable terror funding

Besides radicalization, collecting funds is equally important for terrorist groups. One significant concern is that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought forth new risks to the efforts of countering the financing of terrorism with fake charities, fake non-profit organizations and crowdfunding particularly becoming more frequent sources of terror financing. Terrorist organizations have also begun to exploit the anonymity afforded by Blockchain technology for fundraising and finances.

India has developed the necessary capabilities to counter-terrorism, including legal and institutional framework and technical capability to combat terrorism in its various forms and manifestations, particularly countering the financing of terrorism. However, these are clearly not enough to stop the cash flow to terrorism. With the domination of the Taliban in Afghanistan after the exit of the US Army, a surge in terrorism in the sub-continent is expected and might already be undergoing. Let's not forget that, between 1991-2001, Al Qaeda was rose from the ground of Afghanistan right after the US left the country after occupying Afghanistan for 20 years. After the attack of 9/11, US Army once again announced their war against the Taliban and haven't left the country until now since 2001. Now that, Taliban is back in the driving seat, terrorism is what's coming.

There hasn't been any large terrorist attack in the sub-continent for the last couple of years. India's vulnerability on the Global Terrorism Index remained unchanged in 2020, with improvements in several metrics. There had been a 30% decrease in the number of terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir last year, although there were speculations about a sustainable increment of terror induced violence in J&K because of the abrogation of article 370. Only the foolish will think that terrorism might have died down or constrained. The very recent claim by ISIS-K post the terror attack on Kabul airport confirms the impending threats. Terrorism might have taken a step back, only to hit back with doubled force. India must be prepared.

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