Impediments to Tackle Terrorism in India

Dr. Ahmad Reza Taheri

One of the major threatening challenges which our world has to cope with is terrorism. Despite the fact that terrorism poses significant threat to the security of the states and societies no country so far has been able to tackle it effectively. India, the theme of this article, is not exceptional. The Republic of India has been experiencing terrorism since its independence. Accounts indicate that since 1947 the number of terrorist cells in India has increased remarkably. A 2008 report claims that, "there are as many as eight hundred terrorist cells operating in India." [i] India's major concern perhaps is religious terrorism mainly with ideological and political roots.

Terrorism in India has emerged both from internal and external sources. Internal sources are the home grown terrorists and external sources are the foreign elements involving against Indian security. As far as the external terrorism is concerned, the Indian mentality mainly holds Pakistan responsible. The reason is that much of external terrorism in India either has been supported by the Pakistan's ISI or has been carried out by the Pakistani terrorist cells.

In India, the main targets for both internal and external terrorists have been Jammu and Kashmir, Central India, North East states, and financial or IT capitals. A report shows that from 2000 to 2006, around eighteen major terrorist attacks took place across India.[ii] According to another source, since the 1990s there has been an increase in the frequency of attacks in Mumbai and Delhi.[iii] Of recent years, Pune and Bangalore home to many foreign students and employees which hitherto have been known as the India's safest places, are turning up as easy targets for the terrorists.

Yet, taking into account the big geographical set up of India, the complex ethno religious structure, multilingual and social groups, overpopulation and poverty, unfriendly neighborhood with Pakistan, and deficiency of Indian democracy, one can still claim that India's overall strategy to fight home grown terrorism has been satisfactory. But, its strategy to fight external terrorism has not been effective. It is mainly because unlike the internal terrorism which can be dealt

with through social, cultural, economic and political development policies, external terrorism is partly out of Indian reach to be dealt with. This form of terrorism threatens India's security more ever than before. With the ongoing religious fundamentalism and sectarian violence in the Indian neighborhood (Afghanistan and Pakistan) terrorism can become more complex and dangerous in India.

However, though the aforementioned developments imply that India's approach to fight terrorism has been satisfactory, nonetheless it has not been considered effective. It is because there are some major impediments to fight terrorism efficiently. Apart from common problems such as poverty and unemployment which can pave the way for terrorism, there are some other key preventative factors in combating terrorism. These factors, more or less, are common in other developing countries in general and are usual to India in particular. These are discussed in the following way. The first seven obstacles are indirect and structural but the last two obstacles seem rather direct but superficial.

Problem with Indian Democracy: Apart from positive aspects of Indian democracy, the deficiencies of this democracy should not be overlooked. Of course, the debate on democracy and terrorism is lengthy, complex and disputable which requires space beyond this article. Yet, what I try to put in this context is that "rich democracy" should be differentiated from "poor democracy". Terrorism is more common in nations with poor and formal democracies such as some of the third world and developing countries in the East and South, and it is less common in the rich and effective democracies such as the Western Europe and the North America. India, for that matter, is a developing country with various sociopolitical, ethno religious and multilingual communities coming from different backgrounds. While its political system is secular, majority of the society is religious. While many of its politicians lack standard academic education, many with standard academic education do not participate in politics. Besides, contrary to its neighbors such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and Myanmar, where intelligence and military do play strong role in the overall mechanism of these countries, Indian intelligence and army is relatively passive in the state's overall mechanism. This is a weak point on the Indian part. Although the police and intelligence interference in power politics and society can undermine the principles of democracy, without intelligence role in the political system terrorism cannot be tackled. Of course, there is no

need for constant police interference in rich democracies. A rich democracy like Switzerland, for example, does not need a strong police or intelligence role to fight terrorism. But, a democracy with some elements of religious fundamentalism and national authoritarianism like India needs effective police control to tackle terrorism, otherwise terrorism would continue to threaten the Indian national security. This theory even can work in democracies like the United States of America. American government never fought terrorism with soft methods alone. The CIA and the FBI have defused many terrorist plans against the US. In doing so, no doubt, rights and liberties of many American citizens have been restricted. Today, many Americans are of the opinion that by bugging and checking on people's conversations and internet activities, US intelligence agencies are violating the basic principles of democracy. A recent (2013) disclosure by Edward J Snowden (former technical contractor for the United States NSA and a former employee of the CIA who leaked details of top-secret US mass surveillance programs to the press) is indicative of the fact that even rich democracies have to employ nondemocratic measures to fight terrorism. Thus, the implementation of undemocratic measures, at times, may worth the restriction on rights and liberties. Back to the point, however, Indian Intelligence is not that much powerful as the US Intelligence is in fighting terrorism. It is partly because of the nature of democracy in India; problem is Indian democracy. To cite one more example, one of the problems with Indian democracy is its unregulated freedom of press. On 26 November 2008, for instance, while police and security forces were engaged with the terrorists at Taj Mohal Hotel in Mumbai, the entire scene was broadcast on TV in India and worldwide continuously till the end of the scene. This act itself provided an opportunity to the mastermind terrorists to watch their own acts alive on TV and to study the Indian police tactics. Put differently, perhaps it was expediential not to allow the media to highlight the incident that much alive on TV.

Religious Fundamentalism: No doubt, all religions condemn terrorism, yet religious extremists preach false doctrines that claim divine sanction for terrorism and promise redemption through martyrdom. There are religious schools in India where government does not have full control over their teaching syllabuses. Among other religions perhaps Islam can be referred to as a prime example. At many religious schools and mosques Islamic teachings and concepts are fanatically presented. Although some Muslim scholars preach peaceful Islam, some others preach radical Islam, as there are different ways of

interpretations. This ultimately may result in what we witness today --- suicide attacks and bomb blasts --- in the name of Islam. The pity is that apart from the ordinary Muslims, there are considerable numbers of the educated Muslims who favor radical Islam. The leading 9/11 hijackers in the US, for example, all had secular educational backgrounds. The number of such likeminded people is remarkable in India. Besides, the secret role of neighboring intelligence networks and terrorist cells in spreading the virus of Islamic fundamentalism into India where Muslims constitute around 13 percent of the population must not be underestimated. Put simply, religious fundamentalism is a challenge to the security of India because it is anti-democratic and anti-secular.

Communalism: Communalism is about the conflicts between extremist religious communities. Political parties are generally considered to play an important role in stimulating, supporting and/or suppressing communalism. Communalism is different from terrorism, but like terrorism it creates violence and terror. Indian social scientists consider communalism a threat to the national security of India. Today, communalism is being fanned by fundamentalism as well as by foreign agencies who deliberately exploiting this weakness in Indian society. There are a large number of Indian teachers and leaders who have no concept of nationhood, geopolitics, geo-economics, or national interest. The worse is that many political leaders follow such groups. [iv] Two examples of recent incidents of communal violence in India are the 2010 Deganga riots and the 2012 Assam violence, between Bodo Hindus and Bengali Muslim settlers.

India's Neighborhood: India has an uneasy and disturbed neighborhood. The developments in Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan certainly make an impact on India's internal security. These neighbors more or less have promoted, propagated, and exported fundamentalist tendencies and terrorism. Although there have been positive relations with these neighbors, this will not guarantee a peaceful neighborhood. In relations with Pakistan, for example, peace process between India and Pakistan is less likely to happen. China, for that matter, views India as a regional threat; it cannot tolerate the growth and influence of India in the region. Therefore, in such neighborhood, India has to cope with the threats of terrorism.

Narcotic Factor and Illegal Arms: Drug trafficking and flow of arms and light weapons in the hands of terrorists is a cause of concern. India is situated

between Golden Triangle in the East and Golden Crescent in the West, both known for export of heroin. In 2005, seizure of heroin in India increased by 270 percent. Drug traffic in India not only spoils the youth but also generates black money in the country. Black money rarely can be used for legal and constructive purposes. Well, the UNDP has estimated that there is $ 2.5 bn worth drug money in Pakistan, most of this money is being laundered by the ISI to fund Jihadists and illegal arm purchase. On the other hand, the terrorists and militants need arms and explosives to carry out their sabotage plans. So, arms such as rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and even shoulder fired surface to air missiles are available on sale or for gratis supply in Indian neighborhood. The ISI has had 3 million AK rifles in grease packing condition for supply to favored militant groups.[v] The point is to note that India is badly exposed to such unfavorable environment particularly when there are millions of beggars, vagrants, and slum dwellers with extremely poor living conditions in India. These dysfunctional sections of the society are potential targets for the gangsters and terrorists against the Indian security; they can be picked up by the terrorists.

Bribery: Unfortunately like other developing countries, bribery is a major problem in India. In 2008, Transparency International had reported that around 40 percent of Indians had experience of paying bribes or using a contact to get a job done in public offices.[vi] In 2012, India has ranked 94th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.[vii] Different sources claim that both government employees and police benefit from bribery and financial corruptions. This problem is clearly felt in the entire system of police or security hierarchy right from the ordinary watchmen to the high ranking personnel. For example, a 2004-05 study has found that the driver-licensing procedure has been a distorted bureaucratic process which has allowed the applicants to be licensed without attending the driving test.[viii] Another similar study shows that among the surveyed individuals, approximately 60 percent of the license holders did not take the licensing exam.[ix] Today, bribing traffic police officers to avoid the police bureaucracy of imposing fines over the violation of traffic rules is a common phenomenon in India. A private independent survey (2004-11) on Foreign Registration Office (FRO) Pune Branch shows that close to 60 percent of the foreigners have bribed some FRO officers to register themselves with the office to avoid the slow and painful process of bureaucracy.[x] It has also been claimed that the Indian Armed Forces

have witnessed corruption involving senior officers from the Army, Navy and Air Force which has damaged the military's reputation.[xi] Although there might not be reliable data available on how many terrorists succeeded in bribing the government servants/officers and authorities to reach their targets, nevertheless it cannot be ruled out to claim that in such environment terrorists may easily proceed with their plans through bribery. No doubt, the police-criminal links can embolden the criminal and terrorist elements in India.

Weakness of Education: Along with the family institution it is also the responsibility of the state institution to educate the children. In the Western developed nations, it is the responsibility of the states to see the education of the kids done appropriately. In most of the developing eastern/southern nations, states do not effectively preserve this responsibility, as if family alone has to take this responsibility. In India there are many poor families who have no idea of how to invest on the future of their children. In other words, education has failed to play its due role in many poor families with fanatically religious and traditional backgrounds. Unfortunately, when it comes to higher educational centers, we see that a large segment of the academics and intelligentsia are engaged only in academic discussions over terrorism without sorting out the problem. Social science professors and academicians organize national and international seminars and conferences on terrorism; they collect and compile data, publish them and finally place them in the archives and libraries to meet the dust. Not to be forgotten that in many societies, social and cultural revolutions have been started from the educational institutions. Educational centers including universities can establish direct links with intelligence and military agencies. They can share with each other the theories and practices of combatting terrorism and contribute to eradicate it.

Inconsistency in Police Investigations: No counter terrorism strategy can be successful without the effective involvement of consistent police investigations. Although after each terrorist attack in India police would immediately take measures to deal with the problems, such measures usually would be temporary. It is because in the process of time police would lose its consistency in the investigations. This is particularly true with the low intensity terrorist attacks. Usually after each terrorist attack as security forces try to maximize their efforts in finding the culprits, to the same extent, culprits try their best to conceal themselves. This makes the job of police investigation pretty difficult. In the

long term, however, as Indian police would slowly lose its consistency, likewise, culprits would gradually find courage to reemerge with new attacking plans.

Inappropriate Security Checks: Improper and unprofessional security checks at big shopping malls, Western restaurants, theaters, cinemas, international hotels, religious celebrations, and even at the airports, is a real threat to the security of the citizens in India. Although apparently the presence of security guards is noticeable at the aforementioned places, physical checks are not carried out professionally. Attacks on Mumbai railway and Taj Mohal hotel are just few references.

To conclude, as pointed earlier, the first seven factors are fundamental problems which require efficient planning and long term policies. A genuine and well-functioning democracy, good governance, responsiveness to public grievances, effective policing and economic development, and effective diplomacy with the neighbors can help in dealing with these factors effectively. But, the last two factors appear to be less challenging yet vital. In this respect, intelligence and police forces require better training to overcome these problems.

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[i] "800 Terror Cells Active in Country", *The Times of India* (12 August 2008).

[ii] Samrat Sinha,"Major Terrorist Attacks in India: 2000-2006: A Profile", *IPCS Special Report* (27 July 2006).

[iii] For more information see the following links: 1) satp.org/satporgp/countries/India/database/mumbai_blast.htm 2) satp.org/satporgp/countries/India/database/delhi_blast.htm

[iv] Lt. GEN VP Malik, "New Challenges to National Security", *India's Security and Defense* (ed. Arun Dalvi), Department of Defense and Strategic Studies, University of Pune, 2006), p.78.

[v] Ibid., p.79.

[vi] India Corruption Study, Center for Media Studies (Transparency International India, New Delhi, 2008).

[vii] http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/

[viii] Bertrand, Marianne et al., "Obtaining a Driver's License in India: An Experimental Approach to Studying Corruption", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Nov 2007, No. 122,4).

[ix] "Corruption in Driver licensing Process in Delhi", http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/mullainathan/files/Corruption.in.Driving.Licensing.Process.in.Delhi

[x] This independent investigation was conducted by the author (Ahmad Reza Taheri) during 2004-11 on 500 foreign students mainly from Iran, Afghanistan, and Arab countries who were studying at different levels (B.A, M.A, PhD) in Pune.

[xi] Chakravarty, Pratap (23 January 2010), "Indian land scandal spotlights military corruption", (*Taiwan News*, retrieved 7 November 2011).