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Ten Years After The Mumbai Attack

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(The editorial is based on the article "Ten Years After The Mumbai Attack" which appears in The Hindu on 26th November 2018. It analyses terror attacks in India.)

Ten years ago, Pakistan carried out one of the most heinous of terror attacks perpetrated anywhere in the world. The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, named after the date in 2008. The targets were carefully chosen after being surveyed for maximum impact, viz. the Taj and Oberoi Hotels, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, the Jewish center at Nariman House, and the Leopold Cafe, since these places were frequented by Europeans, Indians and Jews.

Terrorism is hardly a postmodern* phenomenon. Several of the terror attacks in the 21st century reflect a paradigmatic change in the tactics of asymmetric warfare* and the practice of violence. **Attacks carried out in different corners of the world by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the Islamic State, al-Shabaab, and similar terror outfits, are very different from those witnessed in the previous century. The tactics employed may vary, but the objective is common, viz. achieving mass casualties and widespread destruction.**

Background

- In 1993, over 250 people were killed in Mumbai in a series of coordinated bomb explosions attributed to Dawood Ibrahim, reportedly as a reprisal for the demolition of the Babri Masjid.
- In July 2006, bomb explosions in a number of suburban trains in Mumbai killed over 200 people and injured several more.
- The most audacious terror attack till the 26/11 Mumbai terror incident was the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 by the Pakistan-based terror outfits, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

26/11 Attack

- The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack was one of a kind and not a mere variant of previous instances of terrorist violence.

- **It was the rarest of rare cases, where one state's resources, viz. Pakistan's were employed to carry out a series of terror attacks in a major Indian city.**
- It was a case of 'war by other means', in which the authorities in Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, the Pakistani armed forces, were involved.
- The Mumbai terror attack was not based on a sudden impulse. Several years of planning and preparation had preceded the attack, even as the peace talk was going on between India and Pakistan.
- **From an Indian standpoint, it was for the first time that an operation of this nature involved Rapid Action Force personnel, Marine Commandos (MARCOS), the National Security Guard (NSG*) and the Mumbai Police.**

Lessons Learned

- **The incident made changes in India's attitudes toward terrorism. It hardened the country's attitude towards terrorists and militants of all stripes.**
- Following the Mumbai attacks, the government of India came up with many measures to deal with the new threat. **The National Investigation Agency was created to investigate terrorism issues, four National Security Guard (NSG) hubs were set up for a rapid response to attacks. (Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Chennai post-2008, and in 2017 Gujarat got the 5th NSG hub)**
- An amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act was created to provide for the arrest and interrogation of terrorism suspects.
- Outcomes of 26/11 were also to get the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), an intelligence agency clearinghouse, in motion. Subsidiary MACS at the state level came up next.
- **One of the major decisions of the government was to place the Indian Coast Guard under the Indian Navy and make the latter the overall in-charge of maritime security, in coordination with the state government agencies and the marine police.**
- A number of radars and automatic identification systems were later set up along the coast, and also a command, control and coordination center was set in New Delhi to monitor the operations.

National Security Guard (NSG)

- NSG is a Federal Contingency World Class Zero Error Force to deal with anti-terrorist activities in all its manifestation.
- Motto: Sarvatra Sarvottam Suraksha
- The Union Cabinet took the decision to create NSG in 1984 and it formally came into being from 1986. NSG is under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It consists of officers/personnel from Army, Central Armed Police Forces and State Police Forces.

New Challenges

- **Although India's national integrity remains fundamentally secure, pressures from various elements in the growing challenges of communalism and religious fanaticism have acquired disturbing dimensions.**
- Political manipulation of religious sentiments for narrow political ends which creates long-term implications for the future of the country has also become one of the main challenges.
- The situation in Kashmir remains a cause for deep and continuing concern. Mishandling of a brewing political crisis brought about by the state government's dismal performance, marked by rampant corruption and inefficiency, led to an explosive situation in the sensitive valley.
- For India particularly, which has been the host to one of the largest inflow of refugees with practically no outflow, the magnitude and frequency of the refugee movement has been the main problem. This has particularly grave implications for the social, economic and political stability of the sensitive north-east.
- In addition, cybersecurity threats, border tensions, cross-border crimes top the list of challenges.

Streamlining Security

In the wake of the terror attack, several steps were initiated to streamline the security set-up. With increased vigil and streamlining of the counter-terrorism framework, newer methodologies, newer concepts were more daringly executed.

- Coastal security was given high priority, and it is with the Navy/Coast Guard/marine police. The Navy constituted a Joint Operations Centre to keep vigil over India's extended coastline.
- A specialized agency to deal with terrorist offenses, the National Investigation Agency, was set up and has been functioning from January 2009.
- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has been constituted to create an appropriate database of security-related information. Operational NSG hubs have been created to ensure rapid response to terror attacks.
- The Multi-Agency Centre, which functions under the Intelligence Bureau, was further strengthened and its activities expanded.

Way Forward

- **The actual number of terror attacks have declined in recent years**, but this does not mean that the situation is better than what existed a decade ago. Terrorism still remains a major threat, and with modern refinements, new terrorist methodologies and terrorism mutating into a global franchise, the threat potential has become greater.

- **One of the major gaps in security relates to ports**, especially the smaller ports and harbours of the country, most of which lack any kind of security cover should be provided with special securities. Even in the larger ports, measures should be taken to check the containers that pass through, as that requires specialized equipment.
- **Many of the coastal police stations have yet to become functional.** Besides the infrastructure of jetties, police stations and vessels, the problem of inculcating the personnel with a maritime culture should be quickly addressed. Automatic Identification Systems for all the fishing vessels in Indian waters should be provided. And there should be the use of technologies to protect the sensitive borders.
- **Communications interoperability was a significant issue** during the Mumbai attack and previous terrorist attacks. Public safety agencies must continue to expand and test interoperability of multi-agencies. Coordination, which still remains a problem should be addressed.
- **Finally, the social fabric of the country has to be held firm.** So that it should not get harmed and create security concerns from outside extremist pressure.
- ***Postmodernism**, also spelled post-modernism, in Western philosophy, a late 20th-century movement characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power.
- ***Asymmetrical warfare** consists of unconventional strategies and tactics adopted by a force when the military capabilities of belligerent powers are not simply unequal but are so significantly different that they cannot make the same sorts of attacks on each other.

