



Fighting Terrorism Strengthen and Modernize the State Police

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The simultaneous multiple terrorist attacks in Mumbai in end November 2008, was neither the first, nor unfortunately, likely to be the last by determined terrorists. There have been several such horrendous acts at regular intervals in the last ten years.

The Government of India has recently proposed a super institution to address terrorism. Given the above trends, will the proposed idea be useful? Are there alternative approaches, to effectively handle terrorist attacks?

I MUMBAI, NOVEMBER 2008: UNDERSTANDING THE ATTACKS

Though mainland India has not witnessed attacks like the one in Mumbai in November 2008, J&K has faced them since 1999. Such fidayeen attacks have taken place there at railway stations, temples, government buildings, military cantonments and other places where a group of six to ten well trained and highly motivated terrorists, mainly from Pakistan, belonging to either the Lashkar-e-Toiba or the Jaish-e-Mohammad would launch suicidal attacks.

In the recent years, the Jaish involvement in India has declined, while the Lashkar activities have continued for three primary reasons. First, the Jaish, led by Maulana Masood Azhar is deeply engaged in the sectarian warfare inside Pakistan along with the Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP), a well known Sunni sectarian organization. Second, the Jaish is also closer to the Taliban/al Qaeda forces within Pakistan, as most of its cadres belong to the erstwhile Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, which took active part in Afghanistan during the 1990s. HuM,

broke up into two, with a faction becoming the Jaish, after the release of Masood Azhar from the Indian jail. Third, unlike the Jaish, the Lashkar was never intensely involved in either sectarian attacks within Pakistan or fought along with the Taliban/al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Its activities have been primarily focussed on India.

Principal strategy of these fidayeen attacks has been the following:

- An initial attack by a few men would target the gates or perimeter of security cordons, inviting a heavy response from the security forces.
- Using this as a diversion, another group would sneak inside the building, with an objective to take over for a temporary period a key location or building and inflict heavy damage.
- By the time the security forces initiate a coordinated counter attack, those holed inside the building would have inflicted maximum damage.
- Their subsequent killing or escaping is of minor consequence, as their task, to inflict damage and affect the morale of the security forces would by then have been achieved.

Attacks on the railway station and the Ragunath temple in Jammu, J&K State Legislative compound in Srinagar have been of this nature. Outside J&K, the attack on Indian Parliament in 2001, was also with similar objectives and strategies.

The Mumbai attacks in November 2008, were devastating, but the strategies employed by the terrorists were not completely new. What has made these attacks prominent, leading even to its being labelled as India's 9/11, is the simultaneous strikes in two five star hotels and a railway station. The 24X7

live coverage glued every Indian to the TV. The numerous talk shows with a live coverage of terrorist attacks side by side, and every expert and concerned public voicing his or her opinion. The entire Indian nation was brought to a standstill, more by the media coverage, than the attack itself. Since the previous attacks including the attacks in Mumbai (train blasts), Ahmedabad, Bangalore, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Jaipur were equally horrendous and coming so soon after, the Mumbai attack was seen as sui generis.

II

FIGHTING THE FIDAYEENS: THE ROAD AHEAD

What then needs to be done? The most important aspect of fighting terrorism is a clear understanding of what is happening in the neighbourhood and how is it likely to impact on India's security. Given the delicate and unstable nature of Pakistan's polity (and perhaps even Bangladesh), India should anticipate such attacks plotted in the neighbourhood and carried out in select Indian cities. While India should exert diplomatic pressure and even military if there is a need, to avoid such attacks in the first place, the Union and State governments should realize the unfortunate reality and prepare itself to face the threats. Terrorism is likely to continue, led by non-

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only by the Union government or an intelligence organization like the Intelligence Bureau (IB). In terms of fighting the *fidayeen*s and pursuing terrorists in a methodical and systematic manner –

there are two successful models – the J&K experience and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) that went after the killers of Rajiv Gandhi. Both these experience need to be studied for their effectiveness and lessons learnt from their success and failure.

III

THE J&K POLICE EXPERIENCE

The security forces in J&K, mainly the Police (JKP), military and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have learnt by trial and error, on how to effectively deal with terrorism, especially the *fidayeen* attacks. As a rule, there is no manual in the world, which can help the security forces to handle suicide terrorism. Sri Lanka, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan today are living examples of what suicide terrorism can do to a country. However, if there is one place, in which the security forces, has a better record - it is in J&K. Today, the *fidayeen* attacks are almost nil in J&K.

Most of the terrorist attacks that have taken place all over India, cannot be addressed by the military or the CRPF, for they are not the first responders, in case of urban terrorism. It is the local police in New Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka that have to respond immediately. States, especially the above mentioned which are likely to witness the recent attacks in Mumbai need to learn from the JKP experience on effectively handling terrorism.

When insurgency hit the Kashmir Valley in 1989 and turned into terrorism in the early 1990s, JKP was as unprepared as the police force in most of the Indian states today. They were poorly equipped and did not have experience in handling insurgency or terrorism. Worse, they had an unsympathetic (at times even hostile) local population. While the JKP is criticized on many counts from high handedness, corruption and human rights violations (where there is an element of truth in all three counts), none can dispute the fact, that it goes to the credit of this force (with help from the military and paramilitary forces) to establish law and order from a situation of despair.

When compared to J&K, other states of India, which are facing terrorism, are much better placed. The situation in terms of law and order is not hopeless, as there was in Kashmir Valley in the

late 1980s and early 1990s; and the local population in respective states, may be critical of their respective police, but certainly not unsympathetic to the cause. Clearly, there is so much hope in these states, facing terrorism.

Resurrection of the JKP started with rebuilding the morale of the police force. Better leadership, specialized training, improved intelligence and sophisticated arms and ammunitions played an important role in improving morale. While leadership is subject to individual personality traits, it is up to the political leadership to find the right officials for the job.

Half the battle is won, once the government identifies the right men for the job, from the top Director General of Police (DGP) at State level, to the Superintendents (SPs) at district levels. On the other hand, non-involvement of political leaders in terms of appointing the local police officials, especially from the DSPs to SHOs is equally imperative. Once the right men are identified, the system will automatically start addressing some of the core issues in dealing with terrorism.

Besides identifying the right men, every state facing terrorism should have their own special group to counter terrorism, on the models of the Special Operations Group (SOG) of J&K or the Grey Hounds of Andhra Pradesh. While the SOG of JKP has been under criticism from the Human Rights organizations, none can deny its success. True, there have been excesses in the SOG operations, but the force did learn in the process. Each state that are facing terrorism, need its own SOGs. It will be even useful, for the anti-terrorism groups of the States to learn from the SOG and Grey Hound by being physically present with them for a period of time.

The States should also understand, that the special group to tackle terrorism, should be more than a network of encounter specialists. Handling hardcore terrorists, who have an element of local support is totally different from encountering criminals in the streets. From the weapons to ammunition to strategies used, counter terrorism is fundamentally different from countering organized criminals. Criminal encounters are different from terrorist encounters.

Besides the specialised anti terrorism organization

in the State, which has a regional headquarters in every district or at least in those districts considered sensitive, there should also be a larger back up team, which can be called on an immediate basis, when there is a need. Every State has an Armed Constabulary or a Police Force in reserve, which could also be utilized to learn from the J&K experience, by spending a year and learning from scratch - from perimeter security to handling operations against determined terrorists.

When the threat level is high, especially with credible intelligence inputs, there is always a need for specialized cordon and search, which is much more than placing barricades in the main roads and local police searching for faces. There may also be a need to have quick response teams or rapid action forces deployed, which do not make much noise in the ground, but effectively monitor the situation and spring into action, when the situation warrants. The well trained armed constabulary forces, can supplement the special anti terrorism groups.

While there is an increased emphasis on national intelligence and better coordination between various organizations, there should be equal emphasis on strengthening intelligence collection at the local level. Undoubtedly, there is need for intelligence sharing, better analysis and coordination amongst the IB, RAW and other organizations. But the basis of reference should always be the intelligence collected by the police constable at the local level. To a great extent, the political interference and the workload has shifted this fundamental duty of the constable to collect basic intelligence and submit on time. Instead of working on a totally new organization at the national level, it will be prudent and easier to strengthen collecting local intelligence through

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the constables. The SOGs in JKP have reorganized themselves substantially on this issue of intelligence gathering at the local level; there have been even instances of the SOG members infiltrating into terrorist groups.

Finally, every state needs to spend effectively on police modernization. It is unfortunate, as a recent *Indian Express* news report highlighted, in most cases, the security forces could not even spend twenty percent of the budget allocated for modernization. From bullet proof vests to vehicles, there is a need to spend on modernization programme. The JKP has to start from scratch, employing indigenous ways to face the terrorists. Fortunately, the other State Police forces do not have to go through this, for there is better support both from the State and Union governments. Once the issue of corruption is addressed in modernizing the State Police, sky is the limit. Once again, there is something that could be learnt from the JKP experience on this important issue of corruption within, otherwise, there will be scam even in purchasing Police *lattis!* (Bamboo sticks used by the Police)

To conclude, there is a need for exclusive anti-terrorism organizations within the police force of each State, on the models of SOGs of J&K or the Grey Hound of Andhra Pradesh. Knowing the terrain, people and the language, they can prevent and fight *fidayeen* type attacks much better than any other force.

IV

THE SPECIAL INVESTIGATION TEAM (SIT) OF RAJIV GANDHI ASSASSINATION CASE

While the SOG model is likely to be effective both in defensive and offensive ways to deal with urban terrorism, at the national level, instead of having a grand institution, it will be useful to have exclusive teams, which are self sufficient to pursue the perpetrators to the logical end – proving their offence legally, in a long drawn struggle. While the functions of the SOGs are likely to be before and during terrorist attacks, the SITs would operate after attacks, which is equally important.

The SIT formed after the Rajiv Gandhi assassination was led by able officers picked up from different organizations and tasked to pursue the case. The SIT was organized into three major sub groups –

one attempted to unearth the plot, hence looked into intelligence related issues; the second looked into investigation, in terms of interrogations; and the last group pursued the case legally, in the special court set up for this purpose.

This team was assisted by the local police (as members were drawn from there as well), IB and RAW. The result was nothing but spectacular, as the SIT was able to investigate, interrogate, file the charge sheet and pursue the case in the courts, resulting in a clear verdict.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there is a clear need for a specialised group on the models of the SOG of JKP and a special investigation team like the SIT that pursued the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. This will be a better strategy to pursue, than forming a super organization at the national level. There is no need for a parallel organization like the IB or CBI; what is needed is strengthening the police in each state and pursuing the perpetrators of each attack to its logical conclusion through a SIT.

The Mumbai attacks have clearly revealed the positive and negative role of the media. This will remain the hard truth, and the State has to understand and have to take appropriate measures to address the situation. Police modernization, witness protection and protecting human rights are other equally important issues.

More importantly, there should be adequate laws to tackle terrorism, with stringent accountability procedures. Finally, the political parties, should consider terrorism as an issue pertaining to national security and should stop politicizing for petty gains. It is performance and not politicising terrorism that will win votes.



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