# Asian Conflicts Reports

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Council For Asian Terrorism Research

# South Asia: the case for a strategic reappraisal

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As Pakistani authority unravels in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as violence mounts across the border in Afghanistan, and as tensions between India and Pakistan are exacerbated by the terrorist atrocity in Mumbai, it is abundantly clear that the new Administration ind Washington has inherited an acute and unprecedented crisis in South Asia. It must be increasingly evident, moreover, that past US strategies on Pakistan-Afghanistan have failed to secure their objectives over years since 9/11, and now demand urgent review. The imperatives of a critical strategic reappraisal become more insistent as Pakistan's evident 'descent into chaos' accelerates, and senior officials at Islamabad articulate fears of a threat of a Taliban takeover in wider areas, reaching as far as Karachi.
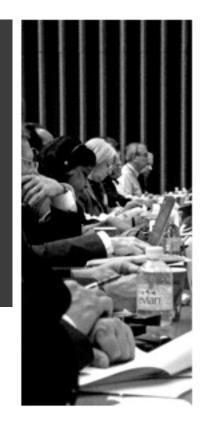
The crisis for American policy is heightened by a succession of attacks on US supplies and supply routes, including several in the provincial capital, Peshawar. The most recent among such major attacks took place on February 3, 2009, destroying a crucial highway bridge in the Khyber Pass region, northwest of Peshawar. December 2008 had witnessed a succession of devastating attacks in and around Peshawar, starting on December 7, when a large group of militants attacked two transport hubs in Peshawar, destroying 220 containers and 70 armored vehicles. The very next day, another terminal was attacked, followed by a fourth attack on December 13. These incidents were the culmination of a continuous stream of attacks through the year. Indeed, Pakistan started pushing supplies along a longer route through Balochistan and the Chaman border, after it was forced to suspended the supply line through the Torkham border on September 5, 2008, for a few days. Earlier, on March 23, two persons were killed and 50 others were injured when six bombs ripped through 40 oil tankers in the Bacha Mina area near the Torkham border in the Khyber Agency. Each tanker was carrying some 45,000 litres of fuel for NATO Forces in Afghanistan. Supply convoys have come under frequent missile and small arms fire *en route* through Pakistan.

These instances provide only a partial index to the growing risks to the ISAF supply routes through Pakistan. Taliban leaders, including 'commander' Hamidullah, the Taliban spokesman in the Orakzai Agency, have repeatedly warned of attacks on the ISAF supply lines. More significantly, these warnings have coincided with threats of 'organized protests' by various Islamist political formations, including the Jamaat-e-Islami, against continued supplies to the 'occupying Forces' in Afghanistan, through Pakistan. There are also some indications that these threats and attacks receive implicit support from certain elements within the state establishment. Pakistan has an agreement with the US for the secure transportation of supplies to Kabul but, as one commentator notes, "some officials in the Pakistani Government have ordered the security forces to shut their eyes to the attacks on US and NATO supplies in Peshawar."

Current thinking on 'solutions' to the problem emphasize increased protection for the supply hubs in Peshawar and heavy escorts to convoys on their journey through the Khyber Pass. At the same time, the necessity of developing alternative routes is increasingly emphasized. CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus, on January 20, 2009, stressed, "It is very important as we increase the effort in Afghanistan that we have multiple routes that go into the country... There have been agreements reached, and there are transit lines now and transit agreements for commercial goods and services in particular that include several countries in the Central Asian states and also Russia." Russia remains the principal source of fuel for the ISAF's needs in Afghanistan. Routes are also being explored through Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and some agreements have been arrived at, though actual transportation across these countries is still to commence.

The Russian-Central Asian routes will, however, prove far more expensive than the current supply trains through Pakistan. Indeed, in terms of economy, only the route through Iran – from the Chahbahar Port and across the newly constructed Zaranj-Delaram highway to Kabul – offers comparative cost advantages, though its acceptability to the US in particular may prove problematic. It is clear, however, that an increasing measure of pragmatism is now prevailing in Washington on this count and, while US relations with Teheran remain fractious, top NATO officials did clarify, on February 2, 2009, that its members could use Iranian routes to re-supply

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their Forces. Despite both Iranian and US sensitivities on the issue the Iranian route can certainly be activated through third-country supplies – and India can play a significant role in this – either to participating NATO Forces, or better, to the Government at Kabul, evading the burden of political and diplomatic baggage that any direct negotiations with Tehran may necessitate.

The principal limitation of all current and emerging arrangements – through Russia, Central Asia or, potentially, Iran – however, is that the transit countries are only agreeing to the passage of 'non-lethal' supplies over their soil. This will remain problematic, of course, but is not insurmountable. The overwhelming bulk of supplies for war are non-lethal and the necessary quantities of lethal supplies may continue to be transported through Pakistan till alternatives crystallize.

But the challenge of establishing multiple supply routes into Afghanistan goes far beyond maintaining the integrity of supplies. It is critical, now, to recognize that the strategic choice on the routes is far more fundamental to US objectives in Afghanistan-Pakistan – and in its 'war' or struggle against terrorism – than a question of maintaining uninterrupted supplies. Pakistan has had a stranglehold over US policy in the South Asian region for far too long, and its principal instrumentalities have been its loudly proclaimed, though consistently ambivalent, assistance to the 'war on terror'. In this, Pakistan has extorted a maximal price for every one of its apparent 'services', even as it has remained no more than a 'minimal satisfier', acquiescing to the least of available conditionalities for the liberal aid it is receiving, even as strong evidence accumulates that the state's agencies remain complicit with at least some elements within the Taliban and the complex network of Pakistan-based (and in many cases, state-backed) al Qaeda-linked terrorist and Islamist extremist organizations.

It is, furthermore, increasingly apparent that the 'problem of Afghanistan', and, overwhelmingly, of global Islamist terrorism, is squarely located in and emanates from Pakistan. The excessive reliance on a duplicitous Pakistani state and military-political leadership for any counter-terrorism goals or for stabilization of Afghanistan is necessarily counter-productive. Within this context it is crucial to understand that Pakistan has an enduring vested interest in provoking and sustaining instability in Afghanistan. There is, of course, a rooted commitment in Islamabad to the peculiar 'doctrine of strategic depth' but, more significantly, any measure of strength and stability at Kabul would directly tend to create challenges to Pakistan's territorial integrity. No regime at Kabul has accepted the validity of the Durand Line as the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the withdrawal of the British from the region. It is significant that the Durand Line agreement of 1893 had no clause defining the expiry of its term, and Pakistan claims the territories of the NWFP only as the successor state in the region to the British Empire. While there is evident dispute on this, it has variously been claimed that, by international convention, any agreement that does not define a date of termination, can in fact be terminated with due notice by either of the contracting parties; or that the agreement would automatically lapse after a duration of 100 years. Pakistan, of course, insists that the absence of a termination clause implies agreement in perpetuity. Nevertheless, it is certain that, if Afghanistan were to stabilize, the question of the Pashtun areas of Pakistan would immediately become extraordinarily volatile and would constitute a direct threat to Islamabad's waning control over its border province. Pakistan, consequently, has an abiding rationale to provoke perpetual instability in its northern neighbor – and this must necessarily militate against the objectives of both the ISAF and Kabul.

In any event, it is now time to urgently explore every possible policy alternative with regard to Pakistan. The West has, since 9/11, been trapped in a policy *cul de sac* in South Asia, sinking billions into an unreliable 'partner' in the global war on terrorism, only to see the situation worsening steadily. It is, moreover, abundantly clear that, irrespective of what the international community chooses to do, restoring order and accountability in Pakistan in the foreseeable future is increasingly passing out of the scope of any conceivable external intervention. As both the global and domestic *jihad* take firm roots within Pakistan, and as powerful elements within the state structure remain complicit with the objectives and instrumentalities of this *jihad*, it is necessary for the international community in general, and for the US-NATO-Kabul alliance in particularly, to marginalize Pakistan's significance to their goals along every feasible parameter. While establishing multiple routes for supplies into Afghanistan can only go a small way towards releasing the region from Pakistan's destructive dynamic, it is, nevertheless, a significant step in this direction. The consolidation of a supply route through Iran, particularly, has the potential of opening up wider avenues of cooperation with Tehran in support of Afghan stabilization. These are imperatives that the US-led alliance cannot afford to ignore. •

# Somalia's Pirate Menace

## Kamarulnizam Abdullah

The 2008 hijacking of a Ukrainian-registered vessel transporting military equipment to Kenya through the Gulf of Aden has raised great concern and reinvigorated debates regarding the international maritime security in some key areas of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). Although the vessel, the MV Vaina, and its crew were released after the ship's owner agreed paid an undisclosed ransom, the hijacking crisis in the waters along the Horn of Africa is far from over. The same group of pirates that took the Vaina, armed with only several AK-47s and rope ladders, had hijacked the Saudi super tanker Sirius Star earlier in the year. The incident shows not only how audacious the pirates have become, but also their ability to conduct raids further and further from the bases ashore.

The Somalia coast and the Gulf of Aden were the most dangerous SLOCs in the world in 2008, a year marked by an unprecedented rise in global incidents of piracy on the high seas. According to a report by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), based in Kuala Lumpur, the Somalia coast and Gulf of Aden saw a total of 42 successful hijackings with 815 crew members taken hostages. These two areas–the Somalia coast and the Gulf of Aden–account for 86% and 92% respectively of vessels and crew held by pirates. Just since January 2009, there have been 22 attacks, with 7 vessels and 123 seamen currently being held hostage by Somali pirates.

The dramatic increase of piracy along the Somali coast is closely related to economic and political developments in Somalia itself. The existence of at least two warring factions fighting for political power has plunged the country into disarray. The Somali government exercises no authority outside the capital, Mogadishu. The rest of the country is essentially lawless. The failure of the Somali state has created a dire economic environment that, coupled with period of long drought, has left the Somali population with few options for survival. For those in the north and north-eastern cost of the country in particular, piracy is a seasonal but lucrative activity. As long as the anarchic political situation continues to force Somalis into piracy, progress toward effective government will continue to be undermined by the power of organized crime syndicates, warlords, hired thugs, unscrupulous businessmen, and corrupted former government officials.

Somalia is a textbook example of a failed state. There is no legitimate government and warring factions have kept the country in a constant state of chaos. Hence, the neglected underlying issue behind the rise of piracy in the area is not only the growing numbers of pirates, some of whom are trained former military and militia, but also how best to bring peace and stability, establish effective and strong government, and restore law and order. In other words, the piracy threat along the Somali coast requires comprehensive, long-term solutions.

The Somalia case is a not unique. Not so long ago, the Straits of Malacca (SOM) held the distinction of being the most dangerous waterway in the world. Piracy attacks in the SOM increased beginning in 1997, in the aftermath of the Asian economic crisis and resulting Indonesian economic and political turmoil. In 2004 alone, 38 piracy attacks were recorded in the Straits (a figure widely held to represent underreporting of actual incidents). Yet, by 2007 and 2008, piracy attacks in the straits saw significant reduction, with only 7 and 2 reported incidents respectively (numbers that, while likely also artificially low, nonetheless represents a major decline). The dramatic reduction in piracy in the SOM is explained, in part, by the success of the regional Malacca Straits Patrols (MSP) and the increased Indonesian political stability resulting from the resolution of conflicts in East Timor and Aceh.

Escalation of piracy attacks in the Somalia coast and the Gulf of Aden revives concern over the intertwining of piracy and terrorism that began with the year 2000 suicide bombing attack on the U.S. Navy destroyer Cole that killed 17 US sailors in Yemen. An earlier attempted suicide attack on the USS the Sullivan failed, but another succeeded, two years, destroying the French supertanker Limburg, killing one crewman, and spilling 90,000 barrels oil into the Gulf of Aden. Similar maritime terrorist attacks have occurred elsewhere, most notably, the Abu Sayyaf Group's sinking of the Superferry 14 in February 2004 that killed 116 people in the Bay of Manila.

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**1** Piracy has grown off the Somalia coast—where al-Qaeda was in the past active

**2** The experience of the Straits of Malacca offer insight into how the problem can be addressed

**3** A long-term solution will involve rebuilding the failed Somali state

It is clear that the motives of today's pirates reach beyond quick financial gain. Piracy on the high seas is becoming a key tactic of terrorist groups. Intelligence reports indicate that terrorist groups such as Abu Sayyaf, Hezbollah, and Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine numerous terrorist groups in Asia have the potential to develop their maritime capability. Al -Qaeda affiliated groups in the region have already shown both expertise in maritime operations and the willingness to share it and learn from one another's successes. The maritime dimension of the November 2008 terror attacks on Mumbai have intensified that concern. Prior to the USS Cole attacks, LTTE Sea Tigers launched suicide air attacks against Sri Lanka Navy's Uhana cargo vessel in the same year.

It is widely posited that today's terrorists are trained fighters equipped with speedboats, satellite phones, global positioning systems (GPS), automatic rifles, grenades, and sophisticated weapons such antitank missiles. But maritime security experts warn otherwise. Terrorist groups do not necessarily need sophisticated nautical skill and equipment to capture and attack a ship. The supertanker seizure in November 2008 at the Gulf of Aden involved little more than AK-47s and rope ladders. The Limburg bombing was a similarly low-tech attack that cost less than USD1000.

The international community should take heed of the surge of piracy attacks along the Somalia coast and the Gulf of Aden, particularly as terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda have already taken advantage of the chaotic situation in Horn of Africa. The international community's immediate response has been to dispatch warships to patrol to the area. The European Union sent ships to escort not only EU-flagged vessels but also foreign shipping bound for EU ports. The United States has taken a similar course of action. Malaysia deployed two of its navy ships in the area after two of its cargo vessels were captured by the pirates. Japan has deployed elements of its Coast Guard to the Gulf of Aden and is planning to introduce a new Maritime Police Law that would give its naval vessels to arrest and detain suspected pirate ships around the globe. But this deployment of international fleets to patrol what have become the world's most dangerous waters is only a short term solution.

A more comprehensive and lasting approach would be to assist littoral states such as Djibouti, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia and Egypt–through financial, training, and technical assistance–in developing an indigenous regional capacity to protect global shipping. Given the presently unstable political and economic situation in Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, the initial focus should be on establishing Yemeni and Saudi capacity as a foundation for an eventual regional monitoring capability. Initial strategic cooperation between these two littoral states, reinforced by an international fleet of foreign navies to patrol the Gulf of Aden area would be a good start.

Southeast Asia's Malacca Straits Patrols provide a positive longer-term model. The MSP is a multilateral, regional initiative involving coordinated naval patrols, intelligence exchange mechanism, standard operating procedures, and "Eye in the Sky" (EiS) aerial surveillance in the SOM. The MSP–which began as a Malaysia-Singapore-Indonesia initiative but has recently added Thailand–has proven a successful mechanism through which piracy incidents have been reduced remarkably in a way that is compatible with regional sensitivities and norms. According to the IMB, maritime crime has been reduced by 65% across the region since the MSPs began in 2004.

Why, if the international community succeeded in reducing piracy in the Straits of Malacca, are similar measures not being applied in the Gulf of Aden? The short answer is that the challenge in the latter case reaches far beyond maritime piracy. The first step is to build the political will to address the root problems in Somalia and in other countries along the Horn of Africa. Unfortunately, the international community seems to have run out of interest or options for restoring peace and stability in Somalia. The United States, the African Union, and the United Nations have all failed to find lasting solutions, with peace keeping limited to a few urban areas while the menace of piracy goes unchallenged in the coastal areas. Fixing the underlying instability that feeds piracy along the Horn of Africa will require diplomacy, economic assistance and truly international and interregional approaches. The warring parties should be forced to the negotiating table, United Nations peace keepers should be given more mandates to enforce law and order in the country, and the international community must find approaches to help Somalia redevelop economically and politically. Otherwise, anarchy will drag on in Somalia and maritime piracy on its coasts will continue.•

# Pakistan civil-military relations and the war on terror

## Ayesha Siddiqa

Pakistan's President, Asif Ali Zardari, has moved to consolidate his political position by undermining Pakistan's second-largest political formation (and his erstwhile ally), the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) led by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

On February 25, Pakistan's Supreme Court passed an order striking down the electoral victories of Sharif and his brother Shahbaz Sharif. In effect, the order dethrones the PML-N from Punjab, its traditional power-base. Earlier, Zardari's PPP had used a number of overt and extra-parliamentary measures to force the PML-N out of power from the provincial government of the country's most important province, Punjab.

Zardari evidently believes that his course of action, which has contributed to political instability in the country at a critical juncture, will pass unchallenged by the United States of America because of its concerns about links between Sharif and his brother, Shahbaz Sharif and the religious right-wing. Zardari's advisors therefore believe he will therefore be able to ensure the PPP takes control of the Punjab provincial government and thus strengthen the party's overall grip on the country.

Such tactics, however, are dangerous as far the larger war on terror is concerned. A planned agitation of lawyers to see restoration of Supreme Court judges sacked by the regime of General Pervez Musharraf, which has Sharif's backing, will likely become the primary focus of Pakistani political life in coming weeks. The dethroning of the Sharifs opens up the prospect of confrontation between the PPP government a broad coalition of conservative parties including the PML-N, Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaaf and Jamaat-e-Islami. Invariably, the focus will shift away from the war on terror to the political movement inside Punjab. The instability this political showdown will engender could also empower jihadist groups operating in Punjab, who will not only be able to operate with impunity, but secure the support and patronage of competing political groups.

Moreover, continued instability at home will have a direct impact on civil-military relations. As Zardari moves into confrontational political terrain, the chaos that will follow will strengthen the military and the jihadist groups it has for so long patronized. Street-level confrontation, it takes no great imagination to see, will increase President Zardari's dependence on the military for saving the situation. Also, the PPP government would be compelled to seek peace deals with jihadists in Pakistan's north-west, in the hope of buying time to deal with political problems closer to home. Some signs of this increased influence of the military and religious right on policy-making are already evident in three key areas of concern.

First, the timing of the Swat and Bajaur peace deals, coming as they did on the eve of events in Punjab, is of considerable significance. The Swat deal has been brokered with the help of the Tanzim Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM), which has links with al-Qaeda, and Sufi Mohammad, who is known to have taken jihadists into Afghanistan. Interestingly, the military has abandoned its plan to jam Fazlullah's controversial radio station, which helped mobilized jihadists across the region. The new strategy to deal with Fazlullah's inflammatory broadcasts appears to be in line with the views stated by the Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, Lieutenant-General Ahmed Shuja Pasha to the German magazine *Der Speigel*. According to the general: "Shouldn't they be allowed to think and say what they please? They believe that jihad is their obligation. Isn't that freedom of opinion?" Such a view is, quite clearly, symptomatic of the duplicity that Pakistan's army is accused of.

A second area of concern pertains to Waziristan where a new *shura,* or council, of jihadists has just come into being. The Shura Ittihad-ul-MUjahideen (Council of United Mujahideen: SIM) now includes Baitullah Mehsud group, Mullah Nazeer group and Haji Gul Bahadar group. The *shura* has declared Osama bin-Laden and Mullah Omar as their leaders. Interestingly, Mullah Nazir had the none-too-covert support of the Pakistani military until very recently.

The third—and least commented upon—cause of concern pertains to the Punjabi jihadi outfits such as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, the Jaish-e-Mohammad and the Lashkar-e-Taiba, which continue to maintain links with Pakistan's intelligence services.

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**1** President Zardari hopes to consolidate through machinations—not institution-building

**2** The internal instability this has provoked has strengthened jihadists

**3** Ultimately, the government could lose both power and the war on terror

These outfits are known for providing manpower and planning to the war in the tribal areas and in Afghanistan. In fact, reports indicate that Maulana Masud Azhar of the Jaish-e-Mohammad is now in Waziristan assisting Baitullah Mehsud. Despite this, the army continues to provide them protection.

## Politics and Civil-Military Relations

All of this demonstrates that the war on terror and the state of Pakistani domestic politics are organically linked—and that a serious effort to transform civil-military relations will be needed to secure progress in either.

Last year's elections in Pakistan re-started the debate on how the balance of civil-military power could be transformed to strengthen democracy. Well-wishers of democracy believe that the country's strong military, which many consider to in fact be the largest political party in the country, is now too demoralized and defamed to seek a rapid return to power. Expectations of this kind re-kindle memories of the early 1970s and the late 1980s when a shift from the military to political governments had given similar hope to ordinary Pakistanis and the world. However, those periods failed to anchor democracy in Pakistan's political life. The country was back in the hands of the military in 1977 and then later in 1999. Now, too, the military might be temporarily pushed back from the front-stage of Pakistan's political life—but it continues to play a crucial role in politics and policymaking, and has not given up all hope to returning to power in the future.

To understand this, it is important to understand key features of Pakistan's political structure. Instead of being, as some have argued, a parallel state, the military actually represents and considers itself the state of Pakistan. Pakistan's military considers itself as defender of the state's territorial and ideological frontiers including from what they see as irresponsible, inefficient, corrupt and insincere politicians.

The military's special position dates back to the early years after independence when it managed to carve a niche for itself in the newly independent state due to the climate that emerged after Pakistan's first war with India over Kashmir. A further strengthening of the institution was driven by United States military assistance during the 1950s and the 1960s. Since the first coup in 1958, the military never looked back and returned to power three times (1969, 1977 & 1999).

At this juncture, the military is a formidable political, economic and societal force. In fact, its three elements of power are intertwined and produce the same result–a strong institution that has bulldozed every other institution in the country.

However, the power of the military is not only owed to its own organizational autonomy and strength but to the general weakness and ineptness of the political class. Politicians have not learnt from past mistakes and develop a formidable strategy to push back the politically forceful armed forces.

Zardari's record so far suggests he is no different from his predecessors. Its single greatest flaw, in fact, is the inability to build institutions to counter the military's power. The Ministry of Defense (MoD), which is the government's key interlocutor with the military, is highly militarized; its civil bureaucrats simply do not have the capacity to counter the power of the generals. One of the first moves of President Zardari after taking office was to replace the civilian secretary of defense and bring in a retired general favored by the army chief. The Parliament and its Cabinet Committee for Defense (DCC) does not have any information mechanisms independent of the military structure.

All of this has a direct bearing on the war on terror, the battleground on which the civil-military power struggle within Pakistan is being waged. In an effort to increase the influence of the civilian government on Pakistan's security policies, President Zardari had moved to strengthen the Intelligence Bureau (IB). Currently, the IB is being posited as the key interlocutor between the government and the military and also liaises with foreign intelligence agencies and governments. However, it is unclear that strengthening one covert organization to undermine another covert organization will contribute to the cause of re-institutionalization. It would have been more productive to focus on strengthening the civilian-bureaucratic control of the Ministry of Defense.

Any democratic institution-building, though, is contingent on the survival of Pakistan's civilian government. President Zardari's actions have put this in jeopardy. Even as jihadist groups continue to gain influence throughout the country, the domestic political situation after the disqualification of the Sharif brothers does not bode well for the country. Zardari and his party appear to have walked into the military's trap by creating nstability and conflict in Punjab. Ultimately, the government could loose out on both fronts: the war on terror, and its own power. •

# Countering terrorism: Malaysia's experience

## Thomas Koruth Samuel

Malaysia has a long history of confronting and successfully defeating militant insurgents who employed terrorist tactics to advance their political ambitions. Beginning with the first Malayan Emergency (1948-1970) through the Second Emergency which ended with the signing of the 1989 Haadyai agreement, the Malaysian government has learned bitter lessons regarding what works and what does not in responding to insurgent threats. While there are clear differences between the insurgency undertaken by the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM) and the regional and global extremist movements operating now, it is nonetheless possible to draw useful lessons and insights to inform today's responses to terrorism and other forms of political violence.

**Understanding the root causes of terrorism is not condoning terrorism**

It is vitally important, in order to craft effective responses, to understand and accept that attempting to comprehend the grievances of terrorists is not the same thing as condoning terrorism. In order to take useful steps toward undermining support for violent ideologies, it is imperative to understand the grievances (real or perceived) that underlie them.

Over approximately four decades, communist insurgents in Malaysia committed tremendous acts of terror against the civilian population. While the Malaysian government never accepted the political agenda or condoned the violent means employed by the CPM, it did come to realize that they had a potentially strong following, especially among the migrant community that constituted their early base of operations. So it undertook to address some of the causes for the insurgency's appeal rather than focus solely on tracking down and punishing the perpetrators of terrorist acts. The CPM had convinced a segment of the population in Malaysia that the Government had no interest in their welfare and well being. Realizing this, the Government acted to liberalize citizenship laws that subsequently opened the way for the various minority groups to actively participate in the political, social and economic sphere of the country. Subsequently, support for the insurgency, particular from the ethnic Chinese, was affected. The act of giving citizenship privileges, while not a counter-terrorism strategy *per see*, was significant in setting the stage for the winning of the war by winning the hearts and minds of the people who had once constituted the support base for the insurgency.

**Root causes: Eliminating the root Vs. Cutting the tree**

Since almost all parties seem to deal with the root causes of terrorism, it is pertinent to then ask; what then are the *actual* root causes of terrorism? What explains why one group resorts to terrorist violence when the vast majority of others do not? It is imperative to realize that root causes of terrorism are both varied and multifaceted. There is no one single cause that leads to terrorism. Efforts to counter terrorism that do not take this complexity into account are doomed to fail.

The possible root causes of terrorism include poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, inequality, and perceived injustice – just to name a few. These factors, coupled with a lack of economic opportunities, breed a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. It is in such environments that terrorism and extremism flourish. Detractors of the idea that social, political, or economic deprivation is a root cause of terrorism often point out that many terror organizations like Al-Qaeda consist of members who come from relatively privileged backgrounds: middle or upper-class, literate, and often, Western-educated. This, they argue, proves that poverty, deprivation and illiteracy have little to do with terrorism.

This interpretation, however, represents an over-simplification of the problem. It is important to note that while the leadership cadres of terrorist organizations most often come from such privileged backgrounds, the vast majority of grassroots recruits – the so-called foot soldiers of terror cells – have limited education, often living their lives conditions of illiteracy, dire poverty, and poor economic prospects. It is from these sorts of environments that terrorists in Asia are most often nurtured and cultivated.

That would, to some extent explain the squalid locations chosen by terrorists to establish their training camps. Hence, it is pertinent to note that the training camps for separatist/insurgent movements in many countries are also situated in the poorest areas of that country in question. The extremist educational institutions that are so often cited as the main ⇒

promoters of extremist ideologies and behavior gained their popularity and support, in large part, because they were the only reliable sources of food, and lodging, and at least minimal education for children in such poor communities. Recruiters from terrorist organizations also cynically and continuously target the poor, the unemployed, and uneducated. Recruiters from terrorist organizations also cynically and continuously target the poor, the unemployed, and uneducated simply because their economic desperation and political and social isolation makes these people more susceptible to radical extremist ideology.

**Doctrine of killing terrorists Vs. Doctrine of killing the recruitment of terrorists**

Efforts to defeat the terrorists must take into account why and how terrorists are being recruited. There is a need to identify what are the factors that drive people to be recruited. Governments must then address those issues effectively and quickly.

Malaysia coined the phrase 'winning the hearts and minds' of the people during its long struggle against the CPM during the First and Second Emergencies. In the course of that campaign, the government came to the realization that it would never permanently turn the tide against the insurgents without the support of populations of the areas in which the insurgents operated. Too often, counter terrorism approaches are rooted in the flawed assumption that there are a fixed number of terrorists, and that once the current cadre of terrorists and terrorist leaders are eliminated, the terrorist threat will disappear. In reality, the number of terrorists are not finite and ironically, counter terrorism efforts can act to *increase* this number. Hence, counter terrorism approaches that focus solely on identifying, disrupting, capturing or killing individual terrorists without addressing and alleviating the root causes are doomed.

**Out-terrorizing the terrorist - Always done, seldom works**

A focus on employing kinetic approaches to capture or kill terrorists can achieve short term results, but these results are seldom lasting. The idea that sufficient force and aggression can impel terrorists to abandon violence and reform their violent ideologies is one that, while common, needs serious examining. Israel's incursion into Gaza under the pretext of disabling Hamas is a case in point. The collateral damage that has been inflicted upon the Palestinian civilians has been tremendous. The cost of such actions for countering terrorism is that governments risk losing the moral high ground and losing the support of the population.

Terrorist organizations have a much better understanding of this and have often deliberately provoked governments into overreacting with the very intention of garnering support and diverting attention from their own heinous acts. It is chilling to note that, in the case of Gaza, observers have pointed out that the main benefactor of the Israeli intrusion has been Hamas. Focus has shifted from Hamas's acts of firing missiles into civilian areas of Israel toward the extensive casualties and humanitarian crisis that has resulted from the Israeli intrusion.
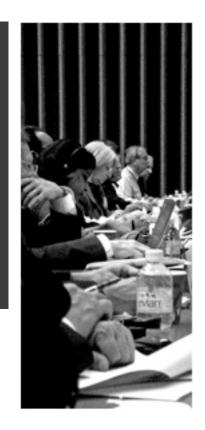
**The issue of "homegrown terrorism"**

It is ironic that while some Western governments are battling terrorists abroad, violent extremist ideologies seem to be flourishing within their own countries. According to the, the British newspaper, the *Telegraph* (7 February 2009), the CIA indentified UK-national terrorists as the biggest threat to US homeland security in a recent intelligence report to President Barack Obama. The report stated that British-born Pakistani extremists entering the US under the visa waiver program were the most likely source of another terrorist hit on US soil. British intelligence sources have also revealed, according to that report, that a staggering four-out-of-ten CIA operations designed to thwart attacks on the US are now conducted against targets in the UK.

These first generation Western citizens believe, by participating in extremist movements, that they are taking steps to redress the injustice and deprivation suffered by their "brothers" abroad. In today's globalized world, borders are blurred, identities are mixed, and sources of like religion, race and culture – which used to be highly localized, or at least regionalized – are now dispersed throughout the world. What happens in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan can have violent repercussion not only in those countries but far beyond their frontiers, as demonstrated in the case of terrorist bombings in places like Madrid, London, and Glasgow.

**Conclusion**

Progress toward a goal – in this case, countering the spread of terrorism and other forms of extremist violence – is sometime best served by stopping to reevaluate where we have been. Too often, in the efforts to "do something", we have not only failed to move ahead, but at times, we have regressed into habits of thought and action that have already failed in the past. There is urgent need to constantly reassess counter terrorism efforts at the national, regional, and global level to ensure that they are continuing to lead us to achieve our ultimate objectives and goals.•

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## Council For Asian Terrorism Research

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