

**INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL
VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH**



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Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis

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Is Political Discordance Leading to India's National Counter Terrorism Center's fallout?

By Uday Ravi

This article focuses on the challenges faced by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in implementing the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), a nodal agency responsible for tackling all counter-terrorism efforts in the country.

The debate over India's National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) has reached a stalemate as the dynamics of the local state governments are dictating national policy. As a setback to the ruling Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), not all state governments are consenting to the formation of the NCTC especially with regard to the extraordinary powers proposed to the agency. This article highlights some of the key challenges faced by the central government in trying to establish this counter-terrorism body.

Provisions of the NCTC

The Union Home Ministry's proposal is to house the three major operational components namely intelligence, counter-terrorist operations, and investigations under the NCTC and place it under the Intelligence Bureau (IB). This would position the NCTC to improve coordination with the concerned agencies and gather information in a timely manner, as well as mobilize resources needed to execute the assigned task.

Some of the state governments especially those ruled by non-Congress political parties have expressed reservations about NCTC. This stems from the fact that under Section 43 (A) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, UA(P)A, an officer of the central government would have the power to arrest and search without seeking the state government's permission. In other words, NCTC officers can carry out raids without a prior permission of respective states and arrest anyone over terrorism related cases. The state authorities would also be obliged to share confidential details with NCTC, if required. This is to enable the NCTC to gather real-time intelligence and distribute information to other agencies. In

addition, NCTC has also been given powers to take the assistance of any special force in the country including the National Security Guards (NSG). State governments view these provisions as intrusions in their power especially since law and order which includes terrorism comes under the purview of the respective state governments under the Indian Constitution.

A Lukewarm Response – Centre Vs. State

At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister and Union Home Minister to discuss the issue of NCTC with all the Chief Ministers in New Delhi on 5 May 2012, the Home Minister stated:

"NCTC is in the best interests of the country to fight terrorism as it is a shared responsibility of the central and state governments to curtail terrorism."

Prevention of terrorist acts requires reliable and timely information and this can only be achieved when a dedicated agency is created. A brainchild of the Home Minister, the formation of NCTC was conceived soon after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks. At the time the idea was conceived, NCTC was intended to enhance the capabilities of the existing agencies all over the country including the state intelligence and law enforcement agencies. However, the political storm over NCTC seems to have divided the ruling Congress-led UPA government and the opposition—National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with the latter accusing the central government of infringing on the principles of federalism and autonomy.

More importantly, certain coalition partners of the UPA government such as West Bengal's Trinamool Congress led by its Chief Minister

have staunchly opposed the creation of NCTC and have termed it unconstitutional causing an embarrassment to the UPA government. The Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) also commented that NCTC brings about the same sentiment as creating the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in his state and has opposed NCTC in its present form. Under the AFSPA legislation, all security forces are given unrestricted and unaccounted power to carry out their operations, once an area is declared conflict affected. The biggest opposition to NCTC comes from states ruled by non-Congress political parties such as Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu.

All these state governments argue that the local state police machinery will be undermined if the central government exercises sweeping powers over the jurisdiction of the state. In addition, the Chief Ministers expressed their disapproval over the lack of a consultative process in formulating the NCTC. Their concerns were best summarized by the statement made by the Chief Minister of Odisha:

"NCTC can assume command over any crisis or situation and act unilaterally without any concern for local sentiments and such powers would certainly undermine

the authority of the state governments and vitiate their federal rights".

However, the opposition to NCTC from certain states has little to do with federal principles; rather it is more about politics. The opposing parties intend to create an anti-government sentiment and veto the policies of the present government. Non-Congress ruled states perceive the NCTC as an instrument with which the central government can usurp the powers of the state governments. India has a multiplicity of security agencies and many of the state governments did not voice such serious concerns when the National Investigative Agency (NIA) - an agency which has similar powers as the NCTC in dealing with terrorism was formed. It appears state governments are not serious in fighting terrorism as political ambitions have taken superiority over security matters. In the backdrop of such vested interests, using federalism and autonomy to dilute the real need for a security apparatus does not augur well for the long term interests of India.

Fighting Terrorism in India - A Shared Responsibility

Putting it in a proper context, the objectives of NCTC and state law enforcement mechanisms



A picture capturing the disapproval of the non-Congress Party Chief Ministers at the Chief Ministers Conference chaired by the Union Home Minister and Prime Minister of India on 5 May 2012 to discuss the issue of NCTC. Photo Credit: NDTV <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/nctc-meet-ends-without-consensus-india-needs-anti-terror-body-says-chidambaram-206762>

are not mutually exclusive. Given the complex and multifaceted nature of the threat, it is quite obvious that concerned state governments cannot fight terrorism and insurgency on their own without the support of the central government. Even now, the central government provides significant assistance in the form of special forces, emergency response teams, military and financial resources and development assistance to the state governments to contain militancy.

At the same time, the counter-terrorist forces sent by the central government cannot be effective without the cooperation of state governments as the latter has local information about the terrorists, terrain and layout of the target area. In the case of a terrorist attack, it is the local police who would be informed first and hence reach the scene the fastest. Upon reaching the scene, the police are in the best position to quickly act on information and mobilize different units within their force. It is quite evident that

the central investigating agencies will require some time to reach the scene. In the event of launching a counter-terrorist operation, the state police machinery can undertake preliminary duties before the arrival of the personnel of central government agencies. This includes coordinating with intelligence agencies to track the terrorists, sealing off entry and exit points, carrying out a background check of the individuals involved, commencing negotiations to be handed over to central experts after their arrival, forming joint teams of police and cordoning off affected areas, taking forensic samples, managing crowd and traffic control, preserving evidences and leads, video graphing and photographing the incident site and scene, managing media and press etc.

Also, after the completion of the operations, the local police would be best suited to file an appropriate First Information Report (FIR) at the respective police stations, prosecute the terror-



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presenting his government's stance by defending the legislation for NCTC.

Photo Credit: CNN IBN http://static.ibnlive.in.com/ibnlive/pix/sitepix/05_2012/nctc_chidambaram3_338x225.jpg

ists and take the legal case forward. While carrying out these tasks, it is imperative to point out that the actions by the state government agencies will help pave the way for the smooth transition of investigations to the central government's investigative teams without loss of information. In addition, the help of the state government will also be required in tracking down witnesses and securing the witnesses until the prosecution is conducted. Specialist teams of the state police forces can also be useful while conducting operations along with the central teams during emergency situations.

Central government investigative agencies can get this essential groundwork done only with the active cooperation of the state government and local police. Keeping the local police out of the operations will only hamper the investigations of the central government agencies and limit their capabilities in gathering enough evidence to form a case. Therefore, integration of the state government and the police force in any operation is an indispensable feature which cannot be ignored by the central government.

Conclusion

The NCTC project is significant for the national security of India. NCTC is the only unified framework upon which the central government can

implement a nationwide strategy aimed at countering terrorism. Similar to the national counter-terrorism organizations in the United States and United Kingdom, India is in urgent need of a dedicated body such as NCTC that can exercise operations with a central command with the active cooperation of the state governments and act as a coordinating body for all terrorist and counter-terrorist related issues.

The issue should be seen in the context of a national priority as India faces security threats with multiple dimensions - homegrown (Left Wing Extremism and Northeast insurgency) as well as cross-border terrorism. So far, the challenge seems to be the lack of coordination and misperception between the central government and state governments. The intentions of the central government in setting up the NCTC are based on valid security assessments that the country is facing but the concerns of states are also of significance. Setting up the NCTC would also demonstrate India's strong commitment in fighting terrorism. Therefore it is imperative for all governments at the central and state levels to place national security concerns above partisan politics to deal with the issue of terrorism.

**Watch out for the special issue on
Capacity Building and Community
Engagement in July!**

Confrontational Politics and Emerging Challenges to Counter Terrorism in Bangladesh

By Iftekharul Bashar

This article argues that the re-escalation of confrontational politics may affect Bangladesh's hard earned achievements in counter-terrorism.

Bangladesh has made some commendable achievements in counter-terrorism. In the last three-and-a-half years, the country has not witnessed any major terrorist incident. This is significant for a country which experienced several high-impact terrorist incidents in the past. However, the unfolding political bickering involving the ruling Awami League (AL) and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) could be undermining the successes achieved by law enforcement agencies. So far, there is a concern as to whether the state will be able to sustain its hard earned achievements in counter-terrorism as political instability persists.

Since 1990, Bangladesh's political scene remains dominated by two political parties: the Bangladesh Awami League (AL), and the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Apart from 2007-2008, when the country was under the military backed caretaker government,

these two parties alternately ruled the country. The virulent antagonism between these two major parties often turns into violent clashes resulting in disruption of urban life, public insecurity, deaths of innocent civilians and disruption of economic activities.

Since April 2012, there has been a sharp escalation of confrontational politics sparked by the abduction of a BNP leader and former parliamentarian Ilyas Ali, an Organizing Secretary in the BNP. He and his driver remain missing since 17 April 2012. The BNP suspects the AL government to be behind the abduction. The AL government categorically denied the allegation and promised to take all measures to find him. However, the opposition seems to be increasingly frustrated due to the lack of progress. Local rights groups have reported at least 22 disappearances in 2012 and more than 50 since 2010, mostly of politicians. General strikes called by the opposition



Hundreds of opposition protesters are rallying in Bangladesh's capital to demand that authorities release 33 activists and find a missing opposition leader.

Photo Credit: Associated Press/Pavel Rahman

http://article.wn.com/view/2012/05/20/Bangladesh_opposition_protests_ended_activists_/

parties led by the BNP have become rampant and street clashes between the opposition parties and the police are rising. The recent arrest of 33 top ranking opposition leaders on charges of street violence has further complicated matters. Many observers believe that confrontational politics is re-emerging in the country in a more lethal form.

There are several indicators that religio-political extremism is on the rise. While the activities of militant groups such as the Jama'atul Muja-hideen Bangladesh (JMB) and the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) are on the wane, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) seems to have taken over. Bangladesh is witnessing a change from a rural based militancy to a more urban and sophisticated extremist activities.

The commonality between militant groups like JMB and HuJI-B and extremist groups like HT is the shared hatred of democracy and the desire to establish an Islamic state in Bangladesh. The difference is while the militant groups want to do it themselves; the extremists want to achieve their objectives by infiltrating into the state apparatus. HT has already been able to recruit a significant number of youths in the country's main universities. HT does not overtly support violence, but many of its members do not denounce it either. Therefore, it would not be a surprise if HT members with higher levels of exposure to extremist ideology opt for violence.

Defeating HT's propaganda needs a stronger commitment from the government who need to help the country in building more opportunities for the disgruntled youth who are vulnerable to extremist propaganda. Law enforcement response might have worked relatively well for containing militant groups; however, there is a high possibility that a similar strategy will not be effective in dealing with an extremist group which use cyberspace and social media for propagating its ideology.

During 2001-2007, Bangladesh experienced the rise of Islamist militancy that challenged the state. In August 2005, JMB indulged in a spate of bombings and detonated 510 bombs under an hour in 63 districts of the country. The countrywide blasts carried out by JMB was largely aimed at projecting their strength in the country. The JMB pamphlets that were found near the blast scenes called for replacing Bangladesh's existing electoral and judicial system by their interpretation of Islamic rule. They also threatened that if it is not done, they will implement it through an armed struggle. In the same year, the group attacked several judicial premises. In 2007, the group also carried out a number of attacks targeting land-transport infrastructure.

However, the state managed to overcome it by responding to militancy with a far stricter policy than ever before. More than six years after the incidents in 2005, Bangladesh has emerged as one of the few countries in the world that has operationally managed to reduce the risk of terrorism.

Many counter-terrorism professionals believe that the political will of the government in countering terrorism in all forms and manifestations has made their counter-terrorism strategy a success. However, there is now a concern about the sustainability of such success as the political landscape is proving to be more complex and challenging.

Consequences of Confrontational Politics vis-à-vis State Security

The political unrest in Bangladesh comes with huge economic and security costs. Though the government projected a 7% growth rate for 2012-13 fiscal year, it is highly probable that the country will not be able to attain it due to the adverse economic impact of political unrest. Many Bangladeshis also believe that if the situation persists, the country's hard earned achievements in counter-terrorism will be threatened in

the near future. The return to Islamist militancy is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. How does confrontational politics weaken the safeguards that Bangladesh has built against terrorism? Firstly, confrontational politics creates a space for the extremist non-state actors to utilize the opportunity when the mainstream political parties remain locked in confrontation. Secondly, it gives them an excuse to propagate that democracy cannot solve day-to-day problems people are suffering due to poor governance and inefficiency of the public sector. Therefore, they can sell their idea to the poor masses that an Islamic state or Khilafat system is the only solution to address their problems. Thirdly, it diverts the attention of law enforcement agencies dealing with counter-terrorism to law and order issues, such as tackling vandalism on the streets.

One of the hard realities faced today is that the democratic institutions in Bangladesh such as the parliament seem to remain weak and fragile. It appears from the unfolding incidents that Bangladesh is going to experience further destabilization, if the political parties do not solve their differences through dialogue.

There are other outstanding issues as well. Bangladesh appears to have managed to reduce the threat of terrorism by depending heavily on law enforcement response or policing. It still remains unclear to what extent Bangladesh will be able to respond to ideological extremism, which is an important catalyst that increases the threat of terrorism. Additionally, the government has not provided a clear roadmap to rehabilitate the terrorist detainees and re-integrate them into society.

The efforts undertaken thus far in terms of community engagement have been ad hoc arrangements. In addition, there seems to be no roadmap for the future. Bangladeshi counter-terrorism professionals are faced with many obstacles such as inadequate resources and lack of technological prowess which hampers counter-terrorism intelligence gathering. Although the inter-agency coordination has slightly improved, it is still suffering from functioning in a structured manner.

Moreover, key institutions are often a victim of patronage politics and hence the level of professionalism needed for sustaining the achieve-



A police officer sits on a motorcycle near a bus which was set on fire by suspected activists of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Photo Credit: Associated Press.

<http://asiancorrespondent.com/82690/blasts-arrests-reported-at-bangladesh-opposition-strike/>

ments in the long term is lacking. As a result, Bangladesh has not been able to develop adequate human resources to combat terrorism with non-kinetic measures.

Bangladesh cannot afford to allow militant activities can re-emerge, destabilize the country, affect its relationship with its neighbours, tarnish the country's global profile, and damage its vulnerable economy. of the numerous political differences the parties have. To keep the country safe and secure from the threat of terrorism, it is important that Bangladesh's 'zero tolerance policy' towards terrorism remains in place irrespective of the numerous political differences the parties have.

Conclusion

A clear, coherent and consistent policy on counter-terrorism as well as counter-radicalization backed by a strong political will and leadership can defend the country from terrorism in the long term. As the country moves towards the next general election due in 2014, reaching a consensus on election mechanism and other unresolved issues through a political dialogue is crucial. If the current situation continues, the sustainability of Bangladesh's counter-terrorism efforts will be under stress. It may become a victim of narrow and confrontational politics, and professionalism will be taken over by cronyism. As a prospective geo-economic pivot in the confluence of South and Southeast Asia, developments in Bangladesh will have a far reaching impact on the region.

GLOBAL PATHFINDER

The ICPVTR Terrorism Database – Global Pathfinder - is a one-stop repository for information on the current and emerging terrorist threats. The database focuses on terrorism and political violence in the Asia-Pacific region – comprising of Southeast Asia, North Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Oceania.

Global Pathfinder is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, key terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps. It also contains specific details and analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles.

For further inquiries regarding subscription and access to the Global Pathfinder database, please email Ms. Elena Ho Wei Ling at the following email address: isewlho@ntu.edu.sg

Transformation of Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan

By Saba Noor

This article discusses the recent transformation of sectarian terrorism in Pakistani society and challenges it can pose in the near future.

Even as the Pakistani security forces launched operations against the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in various parts of the Federally Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (KP), a new threat has appeared in the ever evolving militant landscape of the country. While the Taliban-led terrorism is on the decline, sectarian terrorism is expanding not just in terms of its spread but its lethality. In addition to inter-sect rivalry and violence involving Shias and Sunnis, there are now intra-sect confrontations involving Deobandi-Barelvi and Deobandi-Salafi within the Sunni sect itself.

The Pakistani security forces have been successful in controlling the frequency of suicide attacks and incidents of terrorism in the urban areas. However, they have failed to counter the menace of sectarian killings in various parts of the country. In 2010 and 2011, there were 57 and 30

cases of sectarian violence respectively, whereas in the first four months of 2012, as many as 41 incidents have been reported.

This recent wave of sectarian violence in Pakistan is qualitatively different from the traditional sectarian discourse in terms of broader ideology, trends and theaters. This indicates the transforming trends of sectarianism in the Pakistani society.

Historical Background

The trends of sectarianism in Pakistan can be traced back to post-partition changes which affected various aspects of social, political and economic life. The polarization of the two communities was aggravated with the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Zia-ul-Haq, fourth Chief Martial Law Administrator and sixth President of Pakistan, int-



Protesters gathered in various cities across Pakistan to protest the multiple attacks on the Eid Milad-un-Nabi processions on 5 February 2012. Photo Credit: Human Rights Advocacy and Media Watch <http://pakistanblogzine.wordpress.com/2012/02/06/who-are-these-people-attacking-eid-milad-un-nabi-processions-in-pakistan/>

reduced the state's "Islamization" agenda that revived the existing sectarian (Shiite and Sunni Muslim) divide in the country. Zia attempted to Islamize Pakistani society through legislative changes and the propagation of Islamic ideology (through the Sunni interpretation of Islam) to prolong his regime. This led to irreparable damage to the social fabric of Pakistani society.

Zia's promulgation of the Zakat and Ushar Ordinance 1980 (a religious tax that applies only to Muslim citizens in Pakistan), to the regulation of the assessment, collection and disbursement of Zakat and Ushar became a major incident to isolate Shiite community from the rest of the population. As a reaction to the Ordinance, 50,000 Shiite from all over the country gathered under the banner of Wifaq-e-Ulema-e-Shiite Pakistan in Islamabad and demanded that Shiite should be treated in accordance with their religious laws. Although Zia amended the law after strong protests by local Shiite community, the incident widened the gap between the Sunni and Shiite communities.

Many other domestic and regional factors also played an important role to aggravate sectarian differences in the Pakistani society. At the domestic level, the Shias established the political party, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jafria (TNFJ), now known as Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan (TJP), to protect the interests of the Shiite community. While the impact of the Iranian Revolution strengthened the cause of the Shiite movement, the moral and financial support provided by Saudi Arabia had similar effect on Sunni groups.

In 1985, Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a Sunni cleric of Deobandi school of thought from Jhang, established Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), translated as "The Army of Mohammad's Companions". The main objectives of SSP were to transform Pakistan into a purely Sunni Muslim state, to protect the Sunnis in Pakistan, to uphold the Sharia law and to attack Shiites because they are considered "non-Muslims". Shiites re-

sponded to this by forming Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) translated as "Soldiers of the Muhammad". SMP is a violent Shiite sectarian group which aims to protect the interests of Shiite community and to counter the Sunni militant groups in Pakistan. Between 1980s and 1990s, both groups engaged in the destruction of each other's businesses, burning down valuable properties and assassinated religious, political and business leaders in various parts of Jhang district, Karachi and Gilgit-Baltistan. The decade of the 1990s witnessed a frightening upsurge in sectarian terrorism in the country, which is currently at its highest level. The creation of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) in 1996, a breakaway group of SSP, led to further sectarian violence.

Transformation of Sectarian Violence

The transformation of sectarian violence started in the end of the 1990s when Musharraf's government initiated a strong crackdown to break the organizational structure of sectarian groups like LeJ and SSP. In the short-term, targeted security operations proved to be successful in reducing the frequency of sectarian incidents in the country. However, in the long-term it helped sectarian militants integrate their ideologies into other extremist organizations like TTP and Al Qaeda. This integration not only boosted the resources of the Sunni sect groups but also provided a broader agenda far beyond the traditional Sunni-Shiite differences. The influence of TTP ideology within LeJ can be seen in their actions. For the first time, LeJ specifically targeted and kidnapped high-profile Westerners in Pakistan.

The most important aspect of the recent sectarian discourse is that it is not only confined to the traditional Shiite-Sunni differences, however, it has also spread into the sub-divisions of the Sunni sect particularly Deobandi-Barelvi and Deobandi-Salafi/Takfiri. Deobandi and Barelvi are the two major Sunni groups of Muslims in Pakistan. Barelvis subscribe to many Sufi prac-

tices, whereas, Deobandis believe in the literal interpretation of the holy text and are opposed to additions to original Islamic practices.

The attacks on Sufi shrines demonstrate the divide amongst Deobandis and Barelvi in Pakistan. The first attack on a Sufi shrine was in Jhal Magsi, Balochistan on 20 March 2005. Since then, as many as 24 attacks have occurred, resulting in the death of 200 persons while 542 others were injured. Initially, the attacks were confined to the conflict-prone areas like Jhang, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Balochistan. However, by the beginning of 2010, all important shrines in mainland Pakistan such as Data Sahib in Lahore, Abdullah Shah Ghazi in Karachi, Baba Farid in Pakpattan and Sakhi Sarwar in Dera Ghazi Khan were targeted. The attacks on Sufi shrines are an attempt to disrupt the intra-sect harmony in the country and also an influence of Al Qaeda's Takfiri ideology within the ranks of LeJ.

The sectarian transformations are further evident by the attacks on Sufi shrines in early 2011 that led to clashes between SSP and Sunni Tehrik (ST), a militant group of Sunni-Barelvi sect, established to counter the growing influence of Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith schools of thoughts in Karachi. Groups within the same sects began fighting over monetary donations and property, for example by forcibly occupying mosques. Also, in 2011 when LeJ and Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) targeted Eid Milad-un-Nabi processions (processions organized by Barelvi sect to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad) in Dera Ismail Khan and Faisalabad. Similar attacks occurred on 5 February 2012 in various cities including Mansehra, Gujranwala, Gojar Khan, Mirpur, Khairpur and Karachi.

Parallel to the Deobandi-Barelvi sectarian rift, another unfolding sectarian trend in the country is Deobandi-Salafi/Takfiri divisions. Although these divisions are nascent, it has an impact on the religiously complex society of Pakistan. The

Salafi/Takfiri concepts are harsher than the Deobandi ideology and hence gives its followers the right to declare other Muslims apostate and worthy of death. An example of the emerging differences among different political religious parties are portrayed by orthodox Deobandi groups such as Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (JUI-F), Jammat-e-Islami (JI) factions and ultra-orthodox Wahabi groups who are influenced by Al Qaeda ideology. Ideologically, the difference between pro Al Qaeda Salafi groups and the orthodox Deobandis also become visible in the radical literature produced by the former. Furthermore, the tactical differences between the factions are evident in their choice of targets and tactics when they undertake jihadi activities. Orthodox Deobandi groups are against the use of suicide terrorism, killing of non-combatants, and Pakistani security forces, whereas, ultra-orthodox Salafi groups are more prone to use such violent tactics.

Along with sub-sect differences, Sunni-Shia rivalry is becoming increasingly more lethal and ruthless. Another clear example of this disturbing violent trend is the series of executions of Hazara Shias in different areas of Gilgit/Baltistan and Balochistan. Furthermore, attacks on the Muharram mourning processions have become commonplace. The sectarian groups have adopted more lethal tactics to target Shia community such as the use of suicide attacks and indiscriminate killings of Shias in public. In October 2011, LeJ distributed an open letter in Quetta declaring an all out war on the Hazara Shia community.

Significantly, in the last few years the sectarian rift has escalated throughout the country and not confined to any specific area or province like its early phase of 1990s. This can be an outcome of LeJ's strategic change in 2010 when the group reorganized into at least eight small cells to better coordinate its activities across Pakistan (from the southern port city of Karachi to Wa-

zirstan in the restive tribal belt bordering Afghanistan).

Challenges and Future Implications

Contrary to the Taliban-led militancy which people disowned, sectarianism pre-dates Afghan jihad and has its deep roots in Pakistani society. So current transformations will not be confined to any particular area or ethnicity. It will also directly polarize the Pakistani society along sectarian lines further. The ideological nexus among the Sunni sectarian outfits, Taliban and Al Qaeda has blurred the differences in agendas of these terrorist organizations. For such a fluid threat, designing a counter-ideology strategy will not be an easy task. The Pakistan military used heavy fire power and weaponry to quash and quell militant groups. The counter strategies to fight the new formation would be different and more difficult to implement. Since sectarian groups operate in small cells in urban centers, they can easily hide amongst the people after

conducting operations. So unlike military tactics used against the Taliban terrorists, smart policing with well-informed intelligence input is imperative to fight these entities in urban centers of the country.

Conclusion

The current wave of sectarian violence in Pakistan points towards the rising influence of sectarian groups in Pakistani society. Further, it indicates that traditional discourse of sectarianism is changing. Currently this discourse is not limited to Shiite and Sunni conflicts. On the other hand, the scope has significantly increased to other sects within the Sunni Muslims.

This rise is due mostly to alliances with groups like LeJ, Al Qaeda and TTP. These groups whose ideologies are anti-Shiite and anti-western not only pose a threat to Pakistan, they can also cause a serious threat to the peace and stability of the entire region. The Pakistani



Two Taliban suicide bombers targeted Sufi shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan, 3 April 2011. Photo Credit: Sheikh Asif Raza. <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2011/04/04/taliban-suicide-blasts-at-sufi-shrine-in-pakistan-kill-41/>

government should take serious measures against this growing threat of sectarian terrorism before this turns into a full blown crisis.

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor

Dr. Arabinda Acharya

Associate Editors

Uday Ravi

Nadisha Sirisena

For inclusion in the CTTA mailing list, please email your full name and the name of your organization with the subject "CTTA Subscription" to Uday Ravi at the following address: isuravi@ntu.edu.sg

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The CTTA: Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis is now open for contributions from researchers and practitioners in the field of terrorism research, security, and other related fields.

Topical areas of interest are terrorism and political violence, organized crime, homeland security, religion and violence, internal conflicts and all other areas of security broadly defined.

Article length could be anywhere between 1,000 to 2,000 words. Submissions must be made before the 15th of every month for editing purposes and for inclusion in the next month's edition.

Electronic copies of the articles (MS Word format) may be submitted to the Associate Editor, Uday Ravi at the following address: isuravi@ntu.edu.sg

The Syrian Cauldron of Violence: The Role of the Islamist Opposition

By Ahmed S. Hashim and Gregoire Patte

This article provides in depth analysis of the ongoing Syrian revolution against the regime of Bashar al-Assad and highlights the role played by Islamists opposition.

Why Syria matters

The ongoing Syrian revolution against the regime of Bashar al-Assad now occupies center-stage in the Middle East. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen have had their revolutions — dramatic civil wars for Libya and Yemen — and while it is still too early to judge them optimistically as successful transitions, their respective trajectories seem to be limited to sporadic clashes in comparison with Syria's violent revolution. It has achieved the dubious distinction of being the longest lasting anti-regime uprising so far having entered its second year in March 2012. It is still not as deadly as Libya's civil war which took the lives of roughly 35,000 people; however, Syria's death toll has reached 12,000 and rising. Moreover, there seems to be no end in sight as the government of Bashar al-Assad is still solidly entrenched. Though the revolutionaries are also determined, they do not constitute a cohesive and unified political group and are too poorly-equipped to face off one of the most heavily-armed states in the Middle East.

The most important aspect of the Syrian revolt is the consequence of the fall of the regime. Firstly, Syria is heavily armed; so was Libya and the impact of the collapse of the Libyan state and its huge arsenal has been reflected in the increasing violence in the Sahel as well as in Libya itself. Even though the Syrian armed forces have remained relatively 'under-capitalized' since the collapse of the Soviet patron, its military is still formidable and its security and intelligence apparatus is well trained. They have to be on their toes because Syria borders the two most powerful states in the Middle East, namely Israel and Turkey. It has been to war with Israel four times;

and almost came to blows with Turkey in the 1990s. In addition, it borders Iraq, a former powerful enemy and it has had a history of enmity with monarchical Jordan. Syria has ground-to-ground ballistic missiles and robust chemical and biological arsenals. Should the Syrian state collapse entirely into mutually feuding communities, the disposition of this formidable arsenal becomes a serious regional matter, especially in the wrong hands.

Secondly, Syria is centrally located in the heart of some of the most intractable conflicts in the Middle East: Arab-Israeli, Israeli-Palestinian, Turco-Syrian (over water and territory), Kurdish-Arab, Sunni-Shia, republican versus monarchical systems, secular versus religious. The existence of the Assad dynasty since 1970 has ensured that these conflicts have been kept at tolerable levels. For example, Syrian oversight over Lebanese groups such as Hezbollah and the Palestinian al-Fatah has often helped to prevent escalation of violence in southern and northern Lebanon. If the Syrian state implodes, would remove a powerful state actor from the scene of these overlapping conflicts and leave the field open for a variety of non-state actors. The emergence of heavily armed sub-state actors would threaten to unsettle all the neighbors.

Thirdly, given that Syria is one of the most heterogeneous states in the region (and of course the most heterogeneous of the Arab Spring states to date), its implosion is likely to witness serious mutual bloodletting within the country. This will be of a type to which none of her neighbors will be able to turn a blind eye. Sunni Muslims constitute 75% of the population; of this percentage 65% are ethnically Arab; the remain-

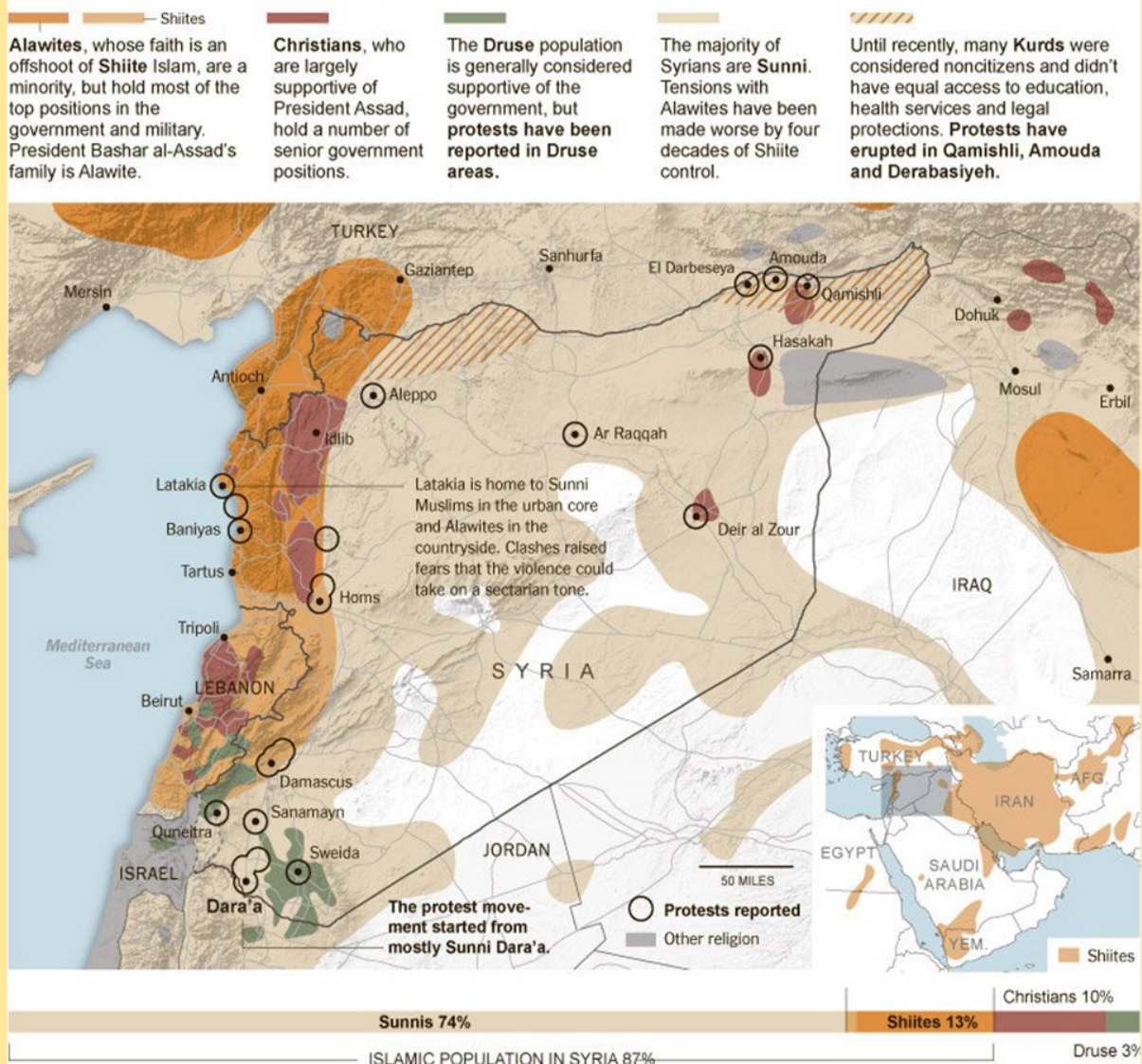
der are Turks and Kurds. The religiously heterodox Alawites who are Arab Shias constitute 12% of the country's religious population. The Sunnis and Alawites together comprise of around 87% of the total religious population. The remainder is made up of Druze – another heterodox Islamic sect - and Christians who are classed as Arabs. Ethnically, the country is composed of around 88%-90% Arab, however there are high levels of antagonism between these various

Arab groups.

The Syrian Power Structure

The current political structure was created in the 1960s during four coups. The hitherto despised and poverty stricken Alawite minority came to political power through serving in the army; and the army dominated the Ba'ath Party. When Hafez al-Assad (father of Bashar) seized power

Protests Emerge From Many Corners of Syria's Diverse Population



Syrian Uprising and Sectarian Geography. Photo Credit: Dr. M Izadi, Columbia University's Gulf 2000 Project, U.S. Department of State. Available on: <http://scienceligionnews.blogspot.com/2011/05/syrias-protest-map.html>

in the 1970 coup, he consolidated this authoritarian system, tightly weaving Syrian society around the army, the security services, the party and the administration. The regime also used family, clan, regional and sectarian loyalties to form a clientele, who were rewarded with civil service jobs. An estimated 100,000 Alawites work in the security services; tens of thousands more serve in the army and the presidential guard (which is completely Alawite). Since 2000, under Bashar al-Assad, the party, administration and army have been under the direct control of the security services, which are in the hands of the Assad family. Syrians consider the Ba'ath Party as the fifth organ of the security services.

Like many other authoritarian systems, the Syrian regime benefits from a 'shadow state' of unofficial paramilitaries and thuggish criminal elements working for it. The best known and most fearsome is a formidable criminal element known as the *shabbiha*. The *shabbiha* are made up of people from the countryside, and probably criminals freed at the start of the revolt. In towns along the Mediterranean coast, local *shabbiha* gangs run protection rackets, weapons and drug smuggling rings, and other criminal enterprises. Membership of the *shabbiha* is drawn largely from President Assad's Alawite sect. The gangs operate with few constraints, ruled by force and were generally seen as being above the law. Its members were provided arms by the military units commanded by Hafez's brother, Rifa'at. However, by the 1990s, the *shabbiha*'s disregard for the authorities in Latakia, and the brutal enforcement of their protection racket, became too much of an embarrassment for the ruling dynasty which tried to rein it. Despite being forced to lie low, its power and influence have not significantly eroded. In late March 2011, the *shabbiha* came to the aid of Assad when major anti-government protests erupted in Latakia, as well as in the nearby towns of Baniyas and Jabla.

Islamists in the Revolution

The structural causes of the Syrian revolution are numerous and deep-rooted as with the other Arab countries. People were fed up with an authoritarian political system that seemed incapable of reform despite its early promises. The economic situation was dismal and youth unemployment quite high. Power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a small corrupt minority, those among the vast old business elite and public sector employees who benefited from its existence. However, the Bashar al-Assad was confident that Syria was 'immune' from the troubles afflicting other Arab countries. In January 2011, he told the Wall Street Journal:

"We have more difficult circumstances than most of the Arab countries but in spite of that Syria is stable. Why? Because you have to be very closely linked to the beliefs of the people. This is the core issue... Unless you understand the ideological aspect of the region, you cannot understand what is happening".

To his consternation, Assad discovered that a significant segment of the population dissented. The uprising began as a series of peaceful demonstrations demanding reform; these were met with brutality and considerable loss of life. The result was to enrage and radicalize the protestors who began demanding the ouster of the regime ('*al sha'ab yurid isqat al-nizam*, the people demand the overthrow of the regime). An increasing number of army defectors known as the Free Syrian Army have launched attacks, killing soldiers and security forces. Though largely secular in origin and motivated by concrete political and socioeconomic demands, the situation in Syria after 2011 allowed hitherto dormant Islamists of all shades to have come to the fore in the conflict and participate in the fighting against government forces. For the sake of simplicity. The Islamist groups in Syria can currently be divided into: a) the Sunni clerical establishment that was paid and controlled by the regime; b) the 'mainstream' Muslim Brotherhood

(MB); c) Syrian radical Islamists; and d) external radical forces claiming to be Al Qaeda or linked with it, are infiltrating into Syria to fight the regime.

The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood took a militant stand and developed a theory of guerrilla warfare and launched numerous rebellions, of which the most dangerous was in the early 1980s and which was ruthlessly crushed by the state forces. Proscribed for many years in Syria and with its leaders in exile, the MB lost relevance in Syria. However, in the last decade it has made a significant come-back; it even sought a *modus vivendi* with the regime of Bashar al-Assad. More recently, it has taken a stance of opposition to the regime with the outbreak of the uprising. It is not clear whether MB members are directly involved in military action against the government.

Syrian radical Islamists known as Salafists believe in the overthrow of the regime and its replacement by an Islamic state. Indeed, a hitherto unknown Salafist cleric, al-Zouabi, even claimed that he provided the spark for the uprising. When questioned on how the 'intifada' in Daraa began, al-Zouabi told the French newspaper *Libération*:

"[It began] with the arrest and torture of a dozen children – the oldest was twelve years old – who had written on the walls, that the people want to overthrow the government."

The news of the torture of the children brought the people out onto the streets on 20 March and ignited the uprising. According to al-Zouabi, security forces fired on the protestors, killing six. It was in response to these events that he issued his fatwa calling for the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

As a group the Syrian Salafist combatants – 'mujahideen' – are not yet a significant force within the military ranks of the revolutionaries.

However, there are a growing number of combatant units with names distinctly linked with Sunni Islamist history, identity and motifs. Syrian Salafists have received considerable encouragement from the outspoken anti-Assad diatribes of Lebanese Salafist Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir. Fiery Salafist preacher, Adnan al-Arour, a Syrian in exile in Saudi Arabia has disturbed Syrians of all hues by some of his more outrageous statements issued with the blessings of the Saudi government. He has cursed the Alawites and other minorities who continue to support the regime and has allegedly called upon Turkey to invade Syria.

More worrisome is the onset of suicide bombings in Syria by a previously unknown group calling itself the al-Nusra Front. The Front has asserted responsibility for bombings in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. In a significant escalation of the violence, a string of suicide attacks have killed dozens of people since late December 2011. Twin bombings in the major northern city of Aleppo, killed at least 28 people. Some 70 people were killed in earlier attacks in the capital, Damascus, on 23 December 2011 and 6 January 2012. More recently, on 10 May 2012, 55 people were killed in Damascus. The deadliest attack since the uprising began was in 10 May 2012 which targeted a major intelligence installation. However, no evidence of the group's existence has surfaced other than the videos and statements it has posted on the internet. The language and imagery is reminiscent of the statements and videos put out by Al Qaeda affiliated organizations in Iraq.

The power of the local Syrian Salafist combatants is likely to be enhanced by the small but growing number of Islamist radicals affiliated with the transnational global jihadist movement of Al Qaeda. These combatants have been arriving in opposition strongholds in larger numbers during the first half of 2012. While their impact so far has been limited the 'transnationalists' have been motivated by Al

Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri's call to the 'mujahideen' to head to Syria in support of the rebels earlier this year. Zawahiri's has called for the ouster of Syria's "*pernicious, cancerous regime...*," railed al-Zawahiri. Dozens of jihadists who had once caused havoc in Iraq a few years ago may have now crossed back into Syria from Iraq, some of them Syrians and Lebanese who had previously volunteered to fight in Iraq and others maybe Arabs from other countries.

Ironically, both the Syrian government and Western intelligence and diplomatic sources believe that string of suicide attacks between December 2011 and May 2012 were supported by operatives affiliated with Al Qaeda, and that al-Nusra is an Al Qaeda front. The statement by al-Zawahiri appears to bolster Assad's accusations that what the country is facing is terrorism and not an expression of popular grievances. However, the Syrian opposition and the Free Syrian Army reject the government's claims entirely. They accuse forces loyal to the regime of setting off the blasts in the urban centers to smear the opposition, terrify people into submission and to highlight that without the regime the country could descend into chaos and sectarian warfare. The revolutionaries claim that the attacks on symbols of the Syrian state are the work of the security services seeking to discredit the uprising.

Conclusion

The Assad regime is likely to hang onto power for sometime as it is still quite militarily strong, the opposition is factionalized, has no centralized command and control, and has been diverted by the emergence of terrorist groups claiming to speak in the name of the uprising. Additionally, there is little chance of international intervention on behalf of the rebels. The violence in Syria is likely to continue as a low level civil war between government forces and rebels. Terrorism is also likely to become an established aspect of this increasingly sanguinary internal war.

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S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Graduate School of Nanyang Technological University

Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B4, Nanyang Avenue,
Singapore 639798

Phone: +65 6316 8925

Fax: +65 6791 1941

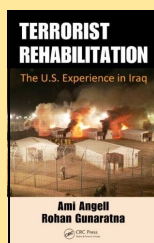
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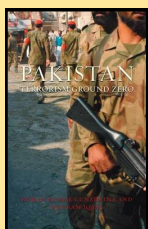
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Events and Publications



- Terrorist Rehabilitation: The US Experience in Iraq (CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2011) by Dr. Ami Angell and Dr. Rohan Gunaratna

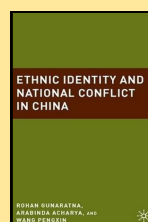


- Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero (Reaktion Books, 2011) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna and Mr. Khurram Iqbal



- International Aviation and Terrorism: Evolving Threats, Evolving Security (Routledge 2009) by Dr. John Harrison

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- Ethnic Identity and National Conflict in China (Palgrave Macmillan 22 June 2010) by Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Dr. Arabinda Acharya and Mr. Wang Pengxin



- Targeting Terrorist Financing: International Cooperation and New Regimes (Routledge 2009) by Dr. Arabinda Acharya