

# Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis

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# October 2013: Comparing State Responses

The threat of terrorist violence today is increasingly seen to be linked to extremism – religious or otherwise – which has manifested in a variety of ways across the globe. Accordingly, the countries responding to the threat not only use kinetic means, but a range of strategies to address the root causes and grievances leading to extremism. This issue examines a number of cases to provide insight into some of the strategies that countries have adopted to counter the threat both of terrorism and extremism.

Three common trends in counterterrorism and counter-extremism strategies are identified in this issue. First, it is increasingly becoming evident that extremism cannot be addressed effectively in an environment where violence continues unabated. Violence tends to encourage a militarized response that is by itself ineffective in combating the threat posed by extremism. Breheny's article on Pakistan's quest for a new national security policy highlights the difficulties faced by the recently elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in combating the threat posed by Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan. Similarly, Ang shows how the recent violence in Zamboanga perpetrated by rogue elements of the Moro National Liberation Front poses problems for the ongoing peace negotiations to resolve the grievances of the Moro people in southern Philippines.

Second, in order to effectively neutralize extremism, consensus in the political and societal spheres and among the law enforcement community is required. This is perhaps one of the more formidable challenges, because extremism itself is not limited by borders. Fernando addresses this issue with respect to the support for creating a separate state for Tamils in Sri Lanka's north and east. Breheny also explores this aspect in her assessment of the political

milieu that underlies the Pakistani government's attempt to formulate a coherent national security policy.

Finally, countering extremism requires an approach focused on prevention in addition to catering for appropriate responsiveness. Deshpande asserts this in his evaluation of India's fight against the Indian Mujahideen. He notes that although a number of measures have been taken, India's approach still lacks a focus on prevention. Breheny also asserts that a preventive and forward-looking approach is important in the case of Pakistan, citing the change in regional dynamics which will take effect once the US withdraws from Afghanistan in 2014.

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## Post-Election Terrorist Violence in Pakistan and the Quest for a New National Security Policy

Emma Breheny

*As Pakistan attempts to formulate a new national security policy in an environment marred by sustained militant violence, the future of the country's long-term stability hangs in the balance.*

The wave of terrorist violence that swept Pakistan after the May 2013 parliamentary elections has revived debate on the formulation of a new national security policy. Such a policy is being seen as a starting point to review existing counterterrorism approaches in Pakistan and suggest alternatives to meet internal security challenges. Historically, Pakistan's approach has been to fortify itself from perceived external threats (India, Afghanistan) using internal elements such as Islamist militants. It is now increasingly being realized that this logic has undermined Pakistan's internal security situation and needs to be reversed to deal with the current threat posed by rogue internal elements. An important means to effect such a reversal is

the National Counterterrorism Policy that is currently being drafted by the government, as well as appropriate management of relations internally with the military leadership and externally with Afghanistan and India.

### Post-Election Violence

Despite the convincing mandate delivered to Nawaz Sharif and his party Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) during the recent elections, militant violence has continued since he took over as Prime Minister of Pakistan. During the election campaign, Sharif promised to initiate dialogue with Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Movement of the Pakistani Taliban) to put



Nawaz Sharif (L), Pakistan's Prime Minister.

Photo credit: B.K. Banagsh/AP

<http://hereandnow.wbur.org/2013/06/06/pakistan-power-blackouts>

an end to the violence that has claimed thousands of lives. Along with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf party (PTI, Pakistan Movement for Justice), the PML-N was one of the few political voices advocating a policy of dialogue with TTP. All other major parties – the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Awami National Party (ANP) and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) – were in favor of military operations to deal with TTP.

However, the move to engage in dialogue with TTP has become complicated by the latter's sustained campaign of violence which intensified before the May 2013 elections and continued thereafter. The US drone strike on 29 May 2013 that killed TTP's deputy leader Waliur Rehman and an ongoing military operation to quell militancy in the Khyber Agency further complicated attempts at dialogue, since these developments were interpreted as acts in bad faith on the Prime Minister's part. In response, TTP withdrew its offer for talks and carried out a spate of attacks that have claimed hundreds of lives since.

On 15 June 2013, a female suicide bomber boarded a bus carrying students of Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, killing 14 and wounding 22 female students. Another suicide bomber then targeted the nearby hospital where victims were being treated. The anti-Shia militant outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ, Army of the Jhangvi), which has links to TTP, claimed responsibility for the attack. The coordination and tactics seen in this attack demonstrated LeJ's resoluteness and its enduring operational capabilities.

The LeJ attack was followed by another on 22 June 2013 that killed 10 mountaineers – mostly foreigners – in the otherwise peaceful Gilgit-Baltistan region. TTP, while claiming responsibility for this attack, linked it explicitly to the US drone strike that killed Waliur Rehman.

It promised more attacks on foreigners by its newly established Ansarul Mujahideen wing that was created specifically to respond to drone strikes with suicide attacks. This raising of stakes in the militants' tit-for-tat with the Pakistani government has brought further pressure to bear on Prime Minister Sharif. His decision to criticize the US government for the Rehman drone strike whilst also vowing to put an end to violence demonstrates the conflicting position he is in.

The TTP-led jailbreak at Dera Ismail Khan, which led to the escape of 250 militants on 30 July 2013, further underscored the weakened position of the authorities and the steady toll from years of fighting what many see as the outcome of Islamabad's support to the US in its fight against Al Qaeda. Lackluster preparations to thwart the jailbreak and minimal resistance by police on the night of the attack despite being warned in advance indicate the weak capacity of Pakistan's security apparatus. Such incidents are sure to embolden militant elements in Pakistan, including TTP.

### A New Approach?

The formulation of the new national security policy is thus taking place within a milieu in flux. A draft was handed to the Prime Minister on 13 August 2013 and this was followed by consultations with all provincial governments and political parties. The document outlines a five-pronged long term strategy to address terrorism and extremism in Pakistan, which will require an overhaul of the fractured relationships between law enforcement, intelligence, military and civilian agencies to achieve the necessary coordination.

There are three key variables that will determine the strategic environment in which the new national security policy is adopted and implemented as well as whether the policy is ultimately successful in addressing internal security issues. First, the historical discord



General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the current head of Pakistan's military due to retire in October 2013.

Photo credit: Reuters

<http://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/who-will-take-over-pakistans-army>

between civilian and military decision-makers on issues of national security must be overcome. The PML-N has a history of strained relations with the military top brass, with Nawaz Sharif's last government (1997-1999) deposed by the then military chief General Pervez Musharraf in a bloodless coup in October 1999. The military's support is critical to any reform of security or foreign policy in Pakistan. As such, Prime Minister Sharif will have to get the armed forces on board for his proposed counterterrorism policy to materialize. Comments from the head of Pakistan's armed forces, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani over the past 12 months indicate an unprecedented commitment to tackling extremist violence in partnership with the civilian government. However, he is retiring in October 2013, and it is yet to be seen if his successor will view things differently.

The second critical variable is whether to negotiate with TTP. There have been disagreements between the government and the military over the issue of negotiations with militants. General Kayani has previously stated

that for talks to begin, militants must at minimum acknowledge the Pakistani state and its constitution, but has nevertheless shown an unprecedented willingness to consider the option of talks. Tactically, his concerns are likely to include the possibility that negotiations will backfire and end up strengthening TTP. Though the Prime Minister now has approval from the All Parties Conference to begin the negotiation process with the TTP leadership, providing concessions to militants without receiving the military's support has the potential to undermine future cooperation of the armed forces with the government on counterterrorism operations if the negotiations fail. On this issue, therefore, Prime Minister Sharif is in a situation where he must proceed carefully.

Finally, Pakistan's external relations with its neighbors and the US will significantly shape the direction of the new national security policy. The intertwining of Pakistan's external threat perception and the origins of its current domestic problems has historically been overlooked by decision-makers. A promising development is the



military revising the Green Book, where it lists its strategic priorities, to reflect the reality of the threats currently facing Pakistan. The 2013 Green Book named domestic terrorism as the number one security issue ahead of the long-standing India-Pakistan rivalry that has preoccupied the Pakistani military for decades. But there is still a need to recognize that patchy relations with the current regime in Afghanistan and a reliance on the Afghan Taliban for gaining what analysts have called “strategic depth” in Afghanistan may no longer be tenable. Furthermore, funding for counterterrorist initiatives will also be an issue for Pakistan which is neck-deep in debt, making any further estrangement with Washington very counterproductive.

## Conclusion

The Pakistani military has rightly identified internal violence as the greatest challenge to Pakistan's national security in the present context. How this challenge is addressed and the ability of the new national security policy to produce a unified government response is the next hurdle to be overcome. External relations naturally are a critical part of the puzzle, but Pakistan must also look within to identify those interests that have continued to pursue their own agendas abroad at the cost of the interests of the nation.

There is no clear indication whether negotiating with TTP and other militants is going to benefit Pakistan at this point. The political position of TTP would be further bolstered by government attempts to bring them to the negotiating table. TTP's active opposition to the unpopular drone strikes may also be vindicated in the eyes of the public. A military campaign followed by negotiations when TTP is in a weaker position would be an alternative to the present approach, but Prime Minister Sharif appears determined to use his political capital to pursue his electoral pledge of talks with TTP. However, the attack on

a church in Peshawar on 22 September 2013, which killed 81 and wounded 131, has further complicated the status of negotiations with TTP. There are conflicting reports of responsibility and motives for the attack, with the Jundallah (a banned outfit linked to Al Qaeda) and Jund al-Hafsa (a wing of TTP) groups both named. Prime Minister Sharif now faces deeper scrutiny of his stance on negotiations with militants. Future attacks by breakaway TTP groups aimed at undermining any progress on talks cannot be ruled out.

As the shape of a post-US withdrawal Afghanistan becomes clearer over the next 12 months, the need for Pakistan to devise a national security policy to effectively stabilize its internal situation will become critical. Without such a policy, Pakistan will see the continued spread of militant activity into urban areas such as Karachi and the strengthening of groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. A concrete strategy for normalizing external relations and weakening domestic militants needs to be the nation's priority going forward.

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# The Bhatkal Arrest: Whither Indian Mujahideen and India's Response to Terrorism?

Rohit Deshpande

*The arrest of Yasin Bhatkal is a success for India, but key leaders of the Indian Mujahideen remain at large, and it is not yet clear whether his arrest will help prevent future terrorist attacks by a group that remains a threat.*

On 28 August 2013, Yasin Bhatkal, one of India's most wanted terrorists and a founding member of the Indian Mujahideen (IM), was arrested on the Indo-Nepal border. The National Investigation Agency (NIA), acting on intelligence from the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB, Armed Border Force) based in the northern state of Bihar, nabbed Bhatkal with the help of local police. The arrest of Bhatkal not only raises questions about the future of the IM, but also provides an opportunity to reexamine the general state of India's responsiveness to the threat of terrorism. India's security apparatus has been under pressure this year due to several high-profile attacks, including bombings in Hyderabad and Bangalore in February and April 2013 respectively.

## The Future of IM

To understand the implications of Bhatkal's arrest on the IM, it is important to first examine his role in the group. Bhatkal is believed to have been heavily involved in recruitment and bomb-making for the IM. He rose to prominence after Riyaz Shahbandari (also known as Riyaz Bhatkal, but not related to Yasin Bhatkal) and his brother Iqbal fled to Pakistan in the wake of the 26 July 2008 serial blasts in Ahmedabad in the Indian state of Gujarat. The two brothers had been part of the IM's core leadership, and their departure left Yasin Bhatkal effectively at the helm of the IM's operations in India. One of his most important tasks was to convey instructions from the Shahbandari brothers in Pakistan to IM cells



Yasin Bhatkal and his accomplice Assadullah Akhtar (faces covered) being taken to court in Motihari, Bihar. Photo credit: Madnagar/Hindustan Times <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/newdelhi/revealed-how-india-got-yasin-bhatkal-from-nepal-town/article1-1114860.aspx>

based across India. Bhatkal was also directly involved in managing the group's operations on Indian soil, and is alleged to have been at the scene of several high-profile bomb attacks attributed to the IM over the years, including the February 2013 Hyderabad bombings and February 2010 German Bakery bombing in Pune.

The loss of Bhatkal's bomb-making capabilities due to his arrest is less likely to affect the IM as critically as some observers are claiming. The amount of information available on bomb-making online and the reasonable likelihood of Bhatkal having shared his own expertise with other members of the IM point to a smaller impact on the group's bomb-making capabilities. The IM is more likely to feel the absence of Bhatkal's capabilities as a recruiter instead. Furthermore, IM cells operating across India may become more distant to the group's leadership in Pakistan given the loss of an important conduit for instructions and funding. Yet this does not necessarily mean that the IM's ability to carry out attacks is compromised. In fact, a less tightly coordinated IM could prove to be a more formidable challenge for India's security apparatus.

While the exact nature of what Bhatkal's interrogation has yielded remains unclear, it is likely that if he cooperates and does not mislead investigators, he can shed much light on the structure of the IM's network and its operational capabilities and methodology. Furthermore, Yasin Bhatkal may be able to provide intelligence to assist in the capture of other key members of the IM's leadership such as Riyaz and Iqbal Shahbandari. Investigators will also be keen to understand IM's source of funding and training, as well as its alleged links to Pakistani militant organizations and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

## Shift in India's Responsiveness to Terrorist Threats?

The hunt for Yasin Bhatkal has ended successfully, but along the way it has exposed some key weaknesses of the Indian security apparatus in responding to terrorist threats. Bhatkal was successful in evading capture using multiple identities due to the absence of a common source of identity information among national and state-level law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Kolkata Police arrested him in 2008 for counterfeiting currency without realizing his real identity, and he was let off on bail after serving a short sentence. India only launched a national identity scheme in 2009, but it has faced obstacles due to concerns over privacy and misidentification. More importantly, the new national identity scheme is not compulsory.

Bhatkal's case also highlighted obstacles to inter-agency cooperation present at the state and national levels in counterterrorism operations. In several of the attacks Bhatkal is believed to have had a hand in, prior intelligence warnings from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), a central government agency, were found to have either been ignored or not adequately addressed by the state governments concerned. Attempts to improve intelligence coordination by the central government were galvanized by the 2008 Mumbai attacks, but even these reforms have faced bureaucratic delays and political opposition. An example is the National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID), which was set up in 2010 but has yet to become operational. The NATGRID faced opposition from the IB because of the limits it would place on the IB's own access to sensitive information. It also was under scrutiny due to concerns regarding privacy and the prevention of data



leakage and theft. Another example is the Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems (CCTNS), which was proposed in 2009 in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai attacks but is still in the early stages of its implementation.

In the same vein as the NATGRID and CCTNS, the project to set up a National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) has also hit several roadblocks. Conceptualized on the model of its US namesake, the NCTC faced opposition over a lack of provision for legal scrutiny and over proposals allowing it to conduct its own operations independent of the state police. Chief Ministers in the states of Odisha, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, among others, opposed what they saw as an infringement of the states' rights to manage law and order within their jurisdictions. In its current form based on proposals submitted in 2012 to revive the project, the NCTC will operate independently of the IB and will have limited authority to carry out its own operations. It will then be nothing more than a coordinating organization for counterterrorism operations almost similar to the existing coordinating body under IB, the Multi-Agency Center (MAC), which is slated to be subsumed into the NCTC upon the latter's establishment. With groups like the IM, which are able to operate across India, inter-agency coordination freed from jurisdictional boundaries as envisaged in projects like NATGRID, CCTNS and NCTC, is crucial. Continued delays in implementing these projects are weakening India's potential to combat terrorist threats.

Although domestic counterterrorism coordination and intelligence gathering continue to face obstacles, the arrest of Bhatkal nevertheless showed that India has effective intelligence sharing mechanisms with other countries through the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). In 2012, India successfully convinced Saudi Arabia to

deport Zabiuddin Ansari, who was implicated in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and Fasih Mahmood, an alleged IM operative. In August 2013, India also managed to secure the deportation of Abdul Sattar, another IM operative. Furthermore, Nepal played a key role, not only in the arrest of Yasin Bhatkal, but also in the capture of Abdul Karim Tunda, a key bomb-maker of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

At this point it is difficult to uphold the claim that the successes against the IM will lead to the demise of the group, particularly since its key leaders remain at large. Furthermore, India's approach to counterterrorism is still essentially oriented towards responding to a terrorist crisis rather than preventing one. Steps have been taken in the right direction, although it remains to be seen whether they will deliver the required capabilities to address the terrorist threat India faces. For now, India's security apparatus must exploit the arrest of Yasin Bhatkal and continue to improve its internal coordination and cooperation mechanisms. Building a national consensus against the terrorist threat and the imperative to build key institutions to fight the same is of crucial importance as well.

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# Violence in Zamboanga and the Impact of Neglecting the MNLF in the Peace Process

Brian Ang

*This article examines the recent violence in Zamboanga and how it might affect the ongoing peace process between the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.*

On 12 August 2013, Nur Misuari, leader of a faction within the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), declared the independence of the Bangsamoro Republik, claiming the islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan in southern Philippines as well as the northern Malaysian territories of Sabah and Sarawak. This unilateral declaration of independence was not recognized by the government of the Philippines (GPH) or by any other government or international non-governmental organization. On 9 September 2013, rogue MNLF elements (hereafter referred to as RMEs) loyal to Misuari attempted to raise the flag of the Bangsamoro Republik at the Zamboanga city hall. Violence subsequently broke out between the RMEs and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) which continued throughout the month, claiming at least 200 lives and forcing more than 100,000 to flee their homes. The RMEs occupied territory and took hostages, drawing a comparison with the similar outbreak of violence in the region which occurred in 2001 when Misuari was ousted from the leadership of the MNLF, resulting in the group splintering into three factions.

## Desperation in the Face of Isolation?

The timing of the RMEs' attempt to raise the Bangsamoro Republik flag in Zamboanga coincided with the 40th series of talks between the GPH and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the Framework Agreement on the

Bangsamoro (FAB). The MILF, which split from the MNLF in 1978, overtook the latter as the largest rebel group fighting to create a separate state for the Moro people of southern Philippines, and also eventually replaced it as the primary negotiator with the GPH for a political settlement in favor of autonomy. The MILF rejected the MNLF's peace agreements with the Marcos administration in 1976 and the Ramos administration in 1996, under which Misuari become the governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). However, after more than a decade of engaging in separate negotiations interspersed with bouts of violence, the FAB signed by the MILF and the GPH in October 2012 laid out a roadmap for an autonomous political entity called Bangsamoro which will supersede the ARMM.

In this context, Misuari perceived the FAB as an attempt to sideline him and the 1996 peace agreement. He was already weakened by his loss of the ARMM governorship in 2001 and the resultant split in the MNLF. Nevertheless, Misuari retained considerable influence as an elder statesman of the Moro struggle. He controlled the largest faction of the MNLF, and a large proportion of the group's armed units remained loyal to him. Misuari also enjoyed external recognition from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) due to his involvement in the 1996 peace agreement which was facilitated by the latter. This became particularly important to Misuari in the wake of Malaysia beginning to

mediate between the MILF and GPH in 2001, which was around the same time that he was displaced from power.

### **A GPH Miscalculation?**

One explanation for the violence in Zamboanga is the GPH's neglect of the Misuari faction and increasing engagement with the MILF after 2001. This became particularly pronounced in the latest phase of negotiations under the Aquino administration out of which the FAB has emerged. The approach thus far has been to treat the 1996 peace agreement as separate from the ongoing negotiations to materialize the autonomous political entity of Bangsamoro. In light of the OIC's call for a review of the 1996 peace agreement, the GPH was due to attend a meeting to be held on 16 September 2013 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia with the Misuari faction and the OIC's Peace Committee for Southern Philippines (OIC-PCSP). However, the meeting was postponed due to Misuari submitting a request on account of the events in Zamboanga.

Misuari has maintained that the signing of the FAB is evidence for the government's abrogation

of the 1996 peace agreement. The Aquino administration has denied this and has stated that its intention is to complete the review process. It claims that Misuari's issues with proposed legislation to iron out concerns over the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement are resolved, including the plebiscite on territory (held in 2001), provisional government mechanisms (satisfied through the establishment of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development chaired by Misuari) and sharing of natural resources (which the GPH claims requires executive action rather than legislation). The Aquino administration also claims that the FAB is not purely focused on addressing the MILF's concerns, but is aimed at resolving the grievances of all Moro people. It maintains that it has not ignored Misuari, and that its overtures to open up the FAB negotiations to the various factions of the MNLF were declined by the groups themselves.

### **Zamboanga and the Peace Process**

Despite this, there is no clear indication whether the FAB is intended to incorporate past agreements to settle all Moro-related issues.



MNLF founder Nur Misuari.  
Photo credit: AP  
<http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/article/1324693/philippine-police-blast-way-zamboanga-home-nur-misuari>

The realization of the FAB is therefore likely to create complications for the 1996 agreement, which relies on the framework of the ARMM. Critics of this approach argue that the Aquino administration must give all factions of the MNLF and past peace agreements their due, in spite of its perception that peace with the MILF is a greater concern, particularly since the MNLF has been weakened over the years. With the announcement of arrest warrants for Misuari and other leaders of his faction in the wake of the violence in Zamboanga, it appears that the GPH is treating him and his faction as “spoilers” in respect of its negotiations with the MILF on the FAB.

Misuari’s concerns about the FAB, while valid to some extent, are now unlikely to get more attention following the position of his faction after the recent violence in Zamboanga. Militarily weakened in their traditional Sulu stronghold, the RMEs loyal to Misuari have caused significant damage to his image and that of his faction within the MNLF, which appears to be desperately grabbing at straws. Misuari got off lightly for the violence he instigated in 2001 under the Arroyo administration, with charges against him being dropped in 2008. At that point, his political future was uncertain after losing control of the ARMM governorship. The GPH is partly justified in viewing Misuari as a spoiler because his interference in the peace process with the MILF does not immediately link to concerns over his people. With the MILF looking towards a harmonious period of stability to begin soon in the south, perhaps it is time for Misuari to take a backseat. At the same time, if the Aquino administration is indeed looking towards an end to the Moro rebellion, then it must address the issues that Misuari is exploiting.

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## The *Madras Cafe* Protests: Eelamism Marches On

Srimal Fernando

*Protests against the recently released Bollywood film Madras Cafe provide an opportunity to examine the continued support among southern Indian Tamils and members of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the UK for a separate state in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated north and east.*

One of Bollywood's more controversial releases in recent times has been Shoojit Sircar's *Madras Café*, which is based on Sri Lanka's civil war. The film stirred up a range of reactions over its portrayal of events that occurred after India's involvement in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990. Tamil militancy developed in Sri Lanka during the mid-1970s partly in response to post-independence state policies that favored the majority Sinhalese at the expense of the minority Tamils. During the course of the conflict, India's role has been seen in different perspectives, even to the extent of being interventionists.

Cold War politics coupled with fears over its own restive Tamil population in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and a desire to project its influence were some of the reasons behind India's involvement. However, India found itself dragged into a direct confrontation with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the strongest

Tamil militant group that would eventually dominate the struggle for a separate state called Tamil Eelam. After the breakdown of peace engineered by an accord signed between India and Sri Lanka in July 1987, India launched Operation Pawan under which thousands of troops were deployed to rein in the LTTE. The LTTE's revenge for India's military involvement was the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by a female suicide bomber. It is this part of the conflict that *Madras Cafe* addresses, albeit via a selective interpretation of events.

The film follows the journey of Major Vikram Singh (played by John Abraham), an Indian army officer who is sent to Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka to take charge of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW, India's agency for external intelligence) operations there. The plot is fictionalized, but it is not difficult to draw linkages



John Abraham as Major Vikram Singh in *Madras Cafe*. Photo source: Urban Asian <http://urbanasian.com/bollywood/2013/08/madras-cafe-creating-waves-with-its-latest-trailer-release/>





Protesters in Mumbai, Maharashtra, demanding a ban on *Madras Cafe*, 22 August 2013. Photo credit: Divyakant Solanki/European Pressphoto Agency  
[http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/bad-history-mars-indian-movie-on-rajiiv-gandhis-assassination/?\\_r=0](http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/bad-history-mars-indian-movie-on-rajiiv-gandhis-assassination/?_r=0)

between what happens in the film and what has happened in reality. This is the basis used by Eelamists who allege that it portrays Tamils and the secessionist struggle unfavorably. In response to what they termed as a “misguided portrayal of the history of Tamil Eelam,” supporters of the Eelamist cause triggered protests in Tamil Nadu and in the UK.

### Protests

In Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu), the Naam Thamizhar (We Tamils) activist group sought a ban on the film citing its alleged negative portrayal of the LTTE. It also demonstrated outside venues screening the trailer of *Madras Cafe*'s Tamil version on 5 August 2013. This set the stage for theaters in Tamil Nadu to avoid screening the film when it released in late August despite India's Censor Board not making any cuts and the film's producers and cast claiming that *Madras Cafe* was not aiming to take sides. Naam Thamizhar's initiative was supported by Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which attempted to stop the film from being screened in Mumbai, India's largest city and its commercial capital.

*Madras Cafe* also faced difficulties in the UK, where protests by pro-LTTE groups led by the Tamil Youth Organization (TYO) were successful in pressurizing cinemas not to screen the film. The UK is home to one of the largest populations of diaspora Tamils and the LTTE once ran its International Secretariat from London. The TYO-led campaign against *Madras Cafe* made effective use of the Internet to mobilize diaspora Tamils in the UK and its protest organized outside the offices of Cineworld (*Madras Café*'s UK distributor) delivered a strong message.

### Charged Post-War Environment

The protests against *Madras Cafe* by supporters of the Eelamist cause in India and the UK are yet another manifestation of the charged environment that has resulted from the military conclusion of the Sri Lankan civil war in May 2009. While sections of the Tamils in south India and diaspora Tamils in the West were an important source of financial and political support for the LTTE during its years of activity, the demise of the Tigers has pushed them to the forefront as representatives of the secessionist struggle. Since the end of the civil war in 2009,

Eelamists in Tamil Nadu and among the diaspora have targeted the Sri Lankan government over a number of issues.

In Tamil Nadu, where thousands of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees continue to remain in camps, the Eelamist cause has been actively taken up for decades by key political parties, including the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and its principal opposition, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Both parties have been vocal in their criticism of the Sri Lankan government and what they perceive as the marginalization of the Sri Lankan Tamil population following the defeat of the LTTE. At times, they have linked their dissatisfaction with the Sri Lankan government to other political issues. Two enduring examples are the disputes involving Tamil Nadu's fishermen being detained for straying into Lankan waters and over the islet of Kachchativu. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu has also been instrumental in obstructing the training of Sri Lankan military personnel by the Indian armed forces and the sale of naval equipment to Sri Lanka by India's central government.

Eelamists based in the UK have focused more on accountability for civilian casualties during the final phase of the civil war in 2009, exemplified by the British media outlet Channel 4 producing a series of films purporting to contain evidence of war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan security forces. Another issue that has seen much activism is participation in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka in November this year. British Prime Minister David Cameron will be attending, although this has prompted criticism from Eelamist groups and some members of parliament.

### Prospects for Countering Eelamism

Given that the *Madras Cafe* protests can be viewed as the latest in a long line of developments against Sri Lanka by Eelamists in

Tamil Nadu and among the diaspora, it is clear that much remains to be done to address the issue of the secessionist cause's endurance. Political expediency has been an important factor, causing the Indian central government to cave in to pressure from Tamil Nadu's Eelamist lobby. This was evident in March 2013 when the DMK left the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition in a move that nearly lost the UPA its parliamentary majority. The DMK justified its decision to exit the coalition on the basis of what it claimed was a lackluster response by the central government during the 22nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council where the US tabled a resolution against Sri Lanka. India subsequently voted against Sri Lanka and in favor of the resolution. The Eelamists' continued influence on bilateral issues between India and Sri Lanka may intensify with the 2014 Lok Sabha (India's lower house of parliament) elections. A UPA loss could mean a stronger platform for the Eelamist elements in Tamil Nadu since the BJP has over the course of 2013 displayed a degree of sympathy to their cause.

Regardless of these obstacles, it is also evident that Sri Lanka needs to enhance existing channels of communication with south India and diaspora Tamils. Outreach in order to engage these communities where the Eelamist cause has found many takers will be critical for the long term. Secessionism has no support in Sri Lanka. The recent victory of the Tamil National Alliance at the Northern Provincial Council polls held in September 2013 is an important development contributing towards diminishing the Eelamists' narrative. Those outside Sri Lanka who feel responsible for the Sri Lankan Tamils' well-being must be engaged to understand this reality. Failure to do so will only perpetuate this disconnect between the Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in south India and among the diaspora.

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# INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH



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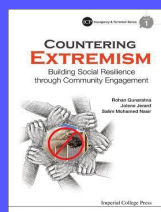
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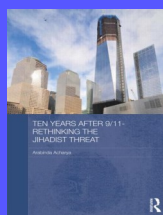
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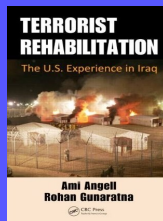
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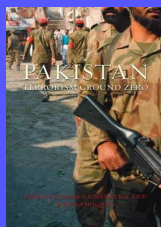
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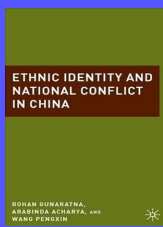
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