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# Terrorism in South Asia

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# Introduction

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- South Asia has been a region riddled by innumerable manifestations of political violence and terrorist activities. The nature and the reasons for terrorism varies from country to country.
- The South Asian region currently faces a grave security threat due to increasing extremism and terrorist activities. The politics of violence and extremist trends in South Asia can be linked to the contradictions arising as consequence of faulty national policies.



# Definition Discrepancy

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- There is a distinct discrepancy in defining terrorism as a result of which a universally accepted definition of “terrorism” is sorely lacking. There is still no consensus on this issue even amongst the members of the UN.
- Currently, in the absence of a universally endorsed definition of terrorism, countries continue to make their own interpretations and employ their own local laws and judicial and administrative pronouncements as they see fit.
- The aphorism that “*one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter*” is still very prevalent.



# Threats, Vulnerabilities and Key Actors

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South Asia has been a victim of violence perpetrated by a myriad of groups with diverse objectives and varied ideologies. One way to categorize terrorist violence is to identify groups according to motivation, which yields three distinct categories :

- those motivated by nationalist politics;
- those motivated by religious extremism;
- ethno-nationalist separatist groups.



# The Terror Landscape in South Asia

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Almost every country in South Asia has faced the problem of terrorism - in one form or the another.

**Prof. S.D. Muni** addresses five aspects of terrorism in South Asia :

- ❖ the conceptual diffusion;
- ❖ the anatomy and structure of terrorism in South Asia;
- ❖ its external dimensions;
- ❖ the responses of various South Asian states to this challenge and
- ❖ policy imperatives.



# Afghanistan

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- Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Afghanistan has remained in the limelight for counter-terrorism activities.
- There are certain lethal organizations that continue to remain as major threats in Afghanistan like Al-Qaeda , the Taliban, the Haqqani network and the Hizb-e- Islami.
- The term “macro-terrorism” is applied in reference to Afghanistan because of its narcotics production and export business.



# Bangladesh

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- In Bangladesh , the government is acting against the Islamist radicals like JMB(Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh) and HUJI (Harkat-ul-Jehad-al-Islami ).
- Bangladesh also faces the problem of left-wing extremism in certain pockets but their influence seems to have been reduced in recent times.
- The alarming aspect in Bangladesh is the host of factors that are conducive for the spread of terrorism such as high youth unemployment, acute economic disparity, rising religious fervour, and easy availability of firearms serve to fuel terrorist activities.



# Bhutan

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- Bhutan has successfully destroyed the camps of ULFA and few other Indian Northeastern terror organizations in December 2003 .
- But some reports suggest that these groups are trying to regroup in Bhutanese territory. Bhutan also faces a threat from the Maoists group who are active in both India and Nepal.



# India

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- India, geographically being the largest country in South Asia, has been afflicted by terrorism, secessionist movements and insurgent activities.
- In 2001, there was brazen terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament. On 26 November 2008, there was a series of coordinated attacks in Mumbai commonly referred as “26/11”. Another one is 14 February 2019, Pulwama attack by the Pakistan based Islamist militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- Despite several anti-militancy and counter-terror operations carried out by the security forces and severe steps taken out by the government , the nation continues to be a victim of terror activities, mostly carried out by Pakistan sponsored militants sneaking into Indian territories. Pakistan denies all allegations, stating that these acts are committed by non-state actors.



# Maldives

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- Terror has managed to mark its footprint even in Maldives. The country has experienced a rising phenomenon of Islamic extremism.
- Several Maldivians have been killed in fighting along with Al-Qaeda cadres in Waziristan and NWFP(North West Frontier Province).



# Nepal

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- In Nepal, the Maoists were waging war against the monarchy. Now , when the monarchy has been overthrown , the Maoists have aligned with other political forces to run the government.
- It would be the first case of the successful mainstreaming of a rebel group which is quite big and has a significant influence in the country's population.



# Pakistan

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- Pakistan and Afghanistan faces the most serious threats. The Taliban is active in both these countries. There are other Islamist radicals in Pakistan – some of whom are sectarian whereas others have an anti-India agenda.
- The U.S. Country Reports on Terrorism describes Pakistan as a “*Terrorist safe haven*” where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit ,train , transit, and operate in relative security because of inadequate governance capacity , political will, or both.



# Sri Lanka

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- Sri Lanka has successfully managed to eliminate LTTE. And the state seems to be contemplating various formulae to accommodate Tamil interests.
- But the struggle against terrorist activities has not ended.
- The April 21, 2019, terror attack in Sri Lanka is a grim reminder of South Asia's vulnerability to terrorism.



# Terrorism and Democracy

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The relationship between terrorism and democracy is a key concern.

- Are certain types of regimes more likely to experience terrorism than others?
- In particular, are democracies more at risk than other types of states?
- Do regimes that do not tolerate dissent force opponents into terrorism?
- Will democracy prevent terrorism?



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Whether Terrorism  
acts as a barrier to  
South Asian Peace Process  
or not ?



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- In the South Asian context, it is found that terrorism often acts as the root cause of mistrust among the South Asian states and thus disrupts the efforts of peace process between states of this region.
  - So, it can be said that , terrorism has been negatively playing a crucial role in the way of peace process in South Asia.



# SAARC, Regional Cooperation and Counter-Terrorism

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- Since the birth of SAARC in 1985, Leaders of SAARC member states have accorded counter-terrorism as the number one priority and numerous pledges and commitments have been made to collectively combat it and eventually eliminate it.
- A SAARC Terrorism Monitoring Desk has been established in Colombo since 1995 to “collate, analyse and disseminate information about terrorist incidents, tactics, strategies and methods.”
- On February 2009, during a SAARC council of ministers’ meeting , a declaration on “Cooperation and Combating terrorism” was made.



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# The Role of United Nations



## Four Pillars of Counter-terrorism Strategy



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- Pillar I : Measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
  - Pillar II : Measures to prevent and combat terrorism
  - Pillar III : Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations in this regard
  - Pillar IV : Measures to ensure respect for Human Rights for all and the Rule of Law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism



# Recommendations

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- Develop a consensual definition of terrorism.
- Eliminate double standards.
- Upgrade the SAARC Terrorism Monitoring Desk into a regional Counter-Terrorism Centre.
- Capacity building of law enforcement agencies.
- Explore people-centric counter-terrorism strategies.
- Collectively work on indisputable agendas first.
- Nations should comply with Red Corner Notice issued by Interpol.



# Conclusion

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- Modern day terrorism has a complex and multidimensional character. It transcends borders. Although, South Asia continues to be plagued by the rising wave of terrorism, the countries in the region still have not been able to collectively deal with this menace.
- Hence, what South Asia sorely needs is political consensus and a collective will to implement the endorsed and adopted counter-terrorism measures. The threat of terrorism that has bedeviled South Asia can be best ameliorated through cooperation at various levels.



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Thank you...