

Habilian Association

Cooperation among states 'key to counter extremism': Indian scholar (/en/201706253287/interview/cooperation-among-states-key-to-counter-extremism-indian-scholar.html)

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Dr. Anshuman Behera is an Assistant Professor at NIAS, Bangalore. Prior to joining NIAS Dr. Behera worked with Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi and Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi. Dr. Behera's research areas include Conflict Resolution, Internal conflicts in India, Nepal and

Bangladesh, terrorism in South Asia, religious radicalization. What comes below is the transcript of Habilian Association's interview with this researcher of terrorism from India.

Habilain: Would you please describe the terrorism phenomenon in India and the various perpetrators behind that?

Anshumn Behera (AB): Terrorism, as it is understood widely, in India is one of the major threats to its internal and external security. Terrorism in India can be classified under two categories: the home grown and the externally supported. The home grown terrorism and the terrorist groups have specific demands ranging from separatism to autonomy. The externally funded terrorist groups such as Hizb-ul Mujahideen (HuM), Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), Harkat –ul- Jihad-al Islami (HuJI) are mostly guided by Islamic religious fundamentalism actively funded and supported by Pakistan. The home grown terrorist groups such as Indian Mujahideen (IM), Al-Ummah (AU), and Students' Islamist Movement in India (SIMI) are both motivated by Islamic religious fundamentalism combined with the local religious tensions in India. These groups are also believed to have been supported by Pakistan. The militant groups within India (read the Maoists, Northeast groups) strictly don't fall under the terrorist group bracket.

Habilain: What is the main source of terrorism in today India: Separatist movements, rural Maoists, Wahhabi terrorists or Hindu extremists?

AB: by far the major source of terrorism in India has been radical Islam propagated by radical and extreme version of Islam' and fully funded and supported by the external actors such as Pakistan. The separatist movement in Kashmir can't be understood in isolation. The separatist movement in Kashmir doesn't deal with the local dynamics only. The role of the terrorist groups operating from across the border with full support from Pakistani administration is major source of terrorism in Kashmir. As mentioned before the Maoists in India don't fall under the definition of terrorist group. At the same time there is no denying of the fact that the Maoists do use terror as a method to further their interest. Similarly, the Hindu extremists also don't come under terrorism. The Hindu extremists are more involved mostly in inter-religious strife same as the any other religious extremism. But they don't graduate to be called as terrorist groups.

Habilain: Which is the main target of terrorist groups in India, populations, government interests or tourists?

AB: It is a difficult question to answer. The main targets of terrorist groups differ. The terror attacks by the groups like LeT has been to cause maximum damage both in terms of lives, properties, and critical infrastructures. The Mumbai attack (also known as 26/11) is a case in point. The terror groups operating in Kashmir have multiple targets. Their main targets are the security forces including the Jammu and Kashmir police personnel. The HuM has also been targeting the elected local representatives, sarpanchs, and other Kashmiris who they perceive as pro-India. Along with the targets these terrorist groups attempt to terrorize both at the physical and psychological levels.

Habilain: Do you have any background of Jihadism in India? What are the most active Jihadist groups in India?

AB: There are multiple narratives on the issue of Jihadism in India. Many argue that the history of Jihadism in India goes back to as early as Eighth century A D. Arguably, or it goes without an argument, the seed of Jihadism was shown in early 20th century when more than two thousand Indian Muslims left for Turkey to wage jihad in support of falling Ottoman Caliphate. Since then the Jihadism in India has evolved in many

shades and forms.

There exist a number of jihadist groups in India-big and small. The most active ones are LeT, IM, Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), HuJI, HuM, and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM).

Habilain: How serious is the threat of Islamist extremist terrorism in India?

AB: The Islamist extremist terrorism is a grave threat to India on two counts. One, it questions and disturbs the secular ethos of Indian democracy and constitution. Secondly, its association with global jihad opens up India to deal with the issue both internally and externally.

Habilain: What is the impact of Pakistani jihadist culture on jihadist groups in India?

AB: The impact of Pakistani jihadist culture on Indian groups is huge. As I said before, these groups from Pakistan are the major source of creating and sustaining the jihadist groups in India.

Habilain: What is the impact of Wahhabi ideology on jihadist groups in India?

AB: What do you mean by Wahhabi actions? Do you mean the impact of Wahhabi ideology in India? Wahabbism or the Saudi version of Salafism, as it widely believed, is used inter-changeably with radical version of Islam. Yes, the Wahhabi ideology plays an important role in radicalizing and indoctrinating some Indian Muslims, especially the youths. I must say that there exists a commonality among the various schools of radical and extreme version of Islam. What we witness in India is a mixture of all radical schools of Islam operating with vary narrow or sometimes with no distinction at all.

Habilain: How serious is the danger of extremists' infiltration from Bangladesh to India?

AB: With Seikh Hasina coming to power in Bangladesh in 2009, there has been a serious crack down on the Islamist radical and terrorist groups. The trial and punishment of war criminals of 1971, killing and arrest of number of terrorists belonging to the outfits such as JMB, HuJI-B and Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS) have forced many of the terrorists to flee into India. The role of JMB in couple of attacks in India in last couple of years is alarming. There are reports that the JMB is on a recruitment drive from West Bengal of India. These are alarming news for India for sure.

Habilain: What is the role of Saudi Arabia in supporting terrorist groups such as Jamait-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkat-ul-Jehad, Hefazat-e-Islam, and Jamat-e-Islami (JeI) that are engaged in unsettling Bangladesh and fomenting terror there?

AB: The role of Saudi Arabia in supporting terrorist groups in Bangladesh in unsettling Bangladesh is exaggerated. There could be non-state actors in Saudi Arabia funding these groups in Bangladesh as they do in many other states.

Habilain: How do you evaluate Indian Government proceedings in countering extremism? What actions do you offer to statesmen or political parties to better perform their task?

AB: The Indian Government's response to counter terrorism has been effective in many ways. India has been successful in controlling the number of terror incidents in most parts other than Kashmir. The important terror groups such as IM have almost been neutralized as the kingpins have been arrested and put behind bars. At the same time, I must say that India is yet to achieve a lot in terms of deradicalising, especially the youth. India needs to engage with the younger mass more pro-actively than before to win them away from the radical ideologies and principles that are easily available through social media and many other sources.

Habilain: What is the key to counter extremism in the region?

AB: The key to counter extremism in the South Asian region is better cooperation among the states, especially between India and Pakistan. As the relationship gets into a bad phase the number of incidences relating to terrorism goes up. The states need to understand that terrorism, unlike many other security issues, don't get confined to on territorial boundary. The hub of terror groups, Pakistan, is also one of the worst victims of terrorism.

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