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# Time To Get Tough

## Reform the police to tackle terrorism

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Terrorism seems to have the entire country in its grip. There is hardly a state which is not affected by the terrorist menace, though the shades may be different. There is 'ethnic terror' in the north-east, 'Naxalite terror' over vast swathes of central India and there is the 'Islamist terror' which, starting from J&K, has spread to other parts of the country. Of these, the last one is undoubtedly the most devastating by virtue of its linkages with the forces of global jihad.

Their objectives may be different — separatism for the north-eastern rebels, new democratic revolution for the Naxals, and azadi for the militants in J&K. But, in practical terms, these boil down to creating communal disharmony, disrupting the economy and destabilising the political structure. A grim scenario is building up which calls for a comprehensive strategy.

The salient features of the terrorist threat need to be clearly understood. First, it has today an all-India sweep, from Kashmir to Kerala and Mumbai to Manipur. Second, the terrorists, with their sophisticated weaponry and expertise in the use of IEDs, pack an enormous punch. Third, the frequency of these attacks is now anybody's guess. Earlier, it was one major incident every quarter. Now another incident could happen tomorrow or just any other day. Fourth, while the Naxalite movement is more or less entirely indigenous, the north-eastern insurgents and the Islamist terrorists have a significant nexus with external forces which enable them get weapons, ammunition and explosives from our neighbouring countries — apart from access to sanctuaries, training facilities and guidance.

Are we capable of facing the threat of terror? The answer is an emphatic yes provided we show the political will, chalk out a comprehensive plan and extend necessary legal and administrative support to the states irrespective of the governing party. There are three outstanding examples

of our success against terrorism. Punjab offers the best illustration. The state witnessed what was one of the most lethal terrorist movements the world has seen, and yet it was vanquished. In Andhra Pradesh, which had become the epicentre of the Naxal movement in the country, the state police have been able to clear the affected districts of the Maoists, who have since fled to the neighbouring states.

In Tripura, the security forces have been able to break the backbone of the ATTF and the NLFT, the major insurgent groups operating in the state. There is no reason why the central and the state governments, working in tandem, cannot contain the terrorist threat we face today.

We should, to start with, define our anti-terror policy in unambiguous terms, and make

are our first line of defence against terrorism. These must be energised and motivated. The police stations should be strengthened and the system of beat patrol revived. Unfortunately, we have allowed the state satraps to politicise these forces and blunt their striking power. In a couple of states, the ruling parties are using them virtually as their private militias. The Supreme Court directions on police reforms should be implemented without any further delay. The apex court itself would have to crack the whip against the recalcitrant states. The investigation and law and order work must be separated in the metropolitan towns at least. Intelligence must be insulated from political influences and revamped on the lines recommended by the Saxena committee.

There is a Money Laundering Act on the statute book, but it needs to be made more stringent because the terrorist outfits continue to indulge in hawala transactions in a significant way. The UN Security Council Resolution 1373 lays great stress on choking the financial sources of terrorists.

A stringent anti-terror law is a must. The argument that the existence of TADA or POTA in the past did not finish terrorism is juvenile. Notwithstanding the existence of the Indian Penal Code, we still have incidents of murder and rape. Does it mean that the penal sections relating to these crimes could be abolished?

Besides, if a particular law is misused, the answer lies in incorporating safeguards and ensuring that those overstepping the limits of law are suitably punished. Throwing the baby out with the bathwater is no solution.

We are a nuclear power. We aspire to have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. But we are looking pathetic and clueless in the face of recurring terrorist attacks in our cities, including the national capital. A determined and firm response is called for. Veerbhogya Vasundhara (the brave shall rule the earth), say our ancient texts. The terrorist threat can surely be contained, if not demolished, once we decide that national security shall take precedence over all other considerations.

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it clear that the country shall not compromise in its battle with terrorism under any circumstances; that it shall be dealt with sternly and at all costs. At the same time, the state must give an assurance that legitimate political demands will be met and that genuine socio-economic grievances shall be addressed. This policy will have to be backed by appropriate structural changes in the law enforcement machinery. A federal investigating agency must be set up in view of the fact that terrorist crimes have interstate or even international ramifications. The state police agencies, with their compartmentalised approach, would not be able to do justice to such cases.

The state police units, it must be remembered,