MEETING ON DECONSTRUCTING TERROR

16-17 February 2018

Pune, India

Co-hosted by Strategic Foresight Group

and

Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at Harris Manchester College,

Oxford University

An international meeting on Deconstructing Terror was held in Pune, India on 16-17 February, 2018. The meeting was co-hosted by Strategic Foresight Group and Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts (CRIC) at Harris Manchester College, Oxford University and attended by 20 international experts.

The meeting followed discussion on the subject at a session on different perspectives on terrorism at the Annual Conference of CRIC held in Oxford in September 2017.

The meeting discussed conventional, as well as new ideas to understand terrorism and to deal with it. Some of the observations which throw new light on the subject are summarized below:

Concept of Terrorism

The UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004) defines terrorism as criminal acts intended to cause death or serious injuries or to intimidate population, governments or international organisations, with political, philosophical, ideological or religious motives. The Resolution declares all such acts to be not justifiable and recommends punitive measures.

The said Resolution derives from several earlier resolutions defining acts of terror. As these acts are of criminal nature, it was easy to seek consensus by member states of the UN Security Council to reject them.

The States have a tendency to agree on understanding of terrorism in criminal terms and to reject it. This is because terrorist groups primarily target states or the system of states as they consider themselves weak in a system made of state entities.

While the terrorist groups target States, they actually inflict damage on populations. Therefore, there is a triangular relationship between the attacker, the object and the victim. This makes it difficult to deal with terrorism. Such a triangular relationship makes response complex.

Thus, while "acts of terror" are defined legally by the UN Security Council and also a report adopted by the UN General Assembly, the phenomenon of terror eludes definition due to political connotations.

The UNSC definition leads to sanctions. However, many scholars are sceptical of this approach, as the groups listed for sanctions cannot be delisted easily if they want to change their behaviour. Moreover, as the decisions in the UN are taken primarily from the statist point of view, the perspectives of the groups who oppose the states are not considered. This may include genuine grievances.

Drivers of Terrorism

In order to deal with terrorism or political violence it is first essential to understand it. At the ground level, a combination of three factors drives people to indulge in ideologically driven political violence.
- Sense of unfairness on behalf of the community
- Feeling of humiliation on behalf of the community
- Closure of political channels for addressing perceived injustice.

It is important that ALL of the three conditions must exist and that the emotions are felt by the potential perpetrators in acts of terror and political violence on behalf of a larger community and not merely on behalf of the self. Underlying this phenomenon is often a disturbed relationship between communities or countries over generations. So long as people who feel aggrieved understand the complexity of the situation, they can address the issues through dialogue and reconciliation. However, once they cross the mental boundaries of the present and past or local and global, they perceive historical developments, as well as events taking place in distant space in terms of a singular and simplistic understanding of injustice. This can propel them to follow a path of violence.

At a level above the ground, geo-political developments, military interventions, and political agendas of vested interest can generate, accelerate or trigger breakdown of complexity and collapse into singularity leading to political violence, including terrorism.

Changing Patterns of Terrorism

Since terrorism can occur due to deep rooted disturbances within and between communities, as well as various political and geo-political actions, its nature can change. Only ten years ago, terrorist groups around the world had multiple agendas, including jihadist, right wing, Christian beliefs, Maoist beliefs, ethnic aspirations, and anarchic thinking. In addition, once terrorist groups were formed, several elements joined them for pecuniary benefits through drug trade, extortion, and other criminal activities. This dimension of business of terror did not create terrorism, but added to the motives of some of the groups.

In the last 10 years, Jihadi groups have survived and expanded in strength, whereas other groups pursuing tangible objectives such as share in the state power have either accepted political solutions or they have been eliminated.

The Jihadi philosophy has a long history going back to the late 18th Century, in an area that is today in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was here that in the 1980s, new jihadi groups were born with active help from state actors. Eventually the phenomena of terrorism inspired by jihadi philosophy extended to eastern districts of Pakistan to Afghanistan and further onto the Middle East. For some years, Al Qaeda was at the core of this network. For the last two years, ISIS or Daesh appeared as the most lethal force. However, ISIS is now on the wane. In the long run, the Al Qaeda network, including its partners such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohamad in Pakistan and Al Qaeda branches in the Maghreb region in North Africa, Arabian Peninsula, and elsewhere may prove to be resilient.

Terrorist groups essentially reject the concept of states, except a global political entity in the jihadist vision. In this form, they are able to inflict damage on states and societies. However, once they try to imitate the state structure, it is easy for the modern states to defeat them. The modern jihadist groups therefore do no concentrate in one geography, but spread across regions and countries.

Global Threat

As the growth of terrorism occurs from the collapse of complexity and the rejection of the system of states, terrorist groups in their own vision are not confined to geographical

locations. Though, for political and practical reasons, they may have a specific target in a specific time frame. In the long run, they are interconnected phenomena, operating through the movement of personnel, funds, training and most significantly, ideology.

Role of States

While the system of states and essentially anti-statist terrorist groups are apparently opposed to each other, it is known that some states use terrorist groups as instruments of political objectives.

As the cost of formal warfare has increased substantially since the Second World War, particularly for states possessing nuclear weapons, the resort to proxy wars using terrorist groups has become more frequent. While some participants cited their observations of the use of terrorist groups by the State of Pakistan in its neighbourhood, others suggested that even great powers have been using terrorist groups as tactical weapons in the Middle East.

While the use of terrorism by states is known, it is not openly discussed for political reasons. A future discourse on international terrorism will benefit by bold and honest dialogue on the role of state actors in spreading terror. This may also help find solutions to at least part of the problem.

If a state uses terrorist groups for its geo-political objectives, the consequences are not limited to its intended target areas. As the terrorist groups gain strength from state support, they are able to use their man power and resources to spread their power to different parts of the world and to seek an edge over other terrorist groups.

Conclusion

The purpose of the meeting was to understand the phenomenon of terrorism and the implications for the future. Some of the tactics that terrorist groups might use in future, such as the use of cyber-technology and the use of weapons of mass destruction have potential to cause much larger damage than what has been witnessed so far. In particular, there is a risk of terrorist groups seizing control of dams and other water infrastructure, which can be damaging for large populations. But it would be short-sighted merely to concentrate on the tactics of terrorists. It is important to understand the psychology of terrorists and the role of state actors in manipulating it, if we have to find sustaining solutions.

Note: This report is a reflection of the perspectives derived by Strategic Foresight Group as co-convenor of the meeting. It is not a consensus statement and does not reflect all the discussions that took place in the meeting. As the meeting was conducted under Chatham House rules, views of individual participants cannot be made public.

List of Participants

1. The Rt Hon Lord Alderdice, Director of Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts at Oxford University (London)/ Co-Chair of the Meeting

2. Dr Sundeep Waslekar, President, Strategic Foresight Group (Mumbai)/ Co-Chair of the Meeting

3. Professor Danilo Turk, former President of Slovenia, Chairman of the High Level Panel on Water and Peace (Ljubljana)

4. Dr Mustafa Ceric, Grand Mufti Emeritus of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo)

5. Dr Assia Bensalah Alaoui, Ambassador at Large of HM the King of Morocco (Rabat)

6. Dr Musa Shteiwi, Director, The Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) (Amman)

7. Mr Saban Dişli, MP and former Deputy Chair of AK Party (Ankara)

8. Dr Hans-Joachim Giessmann, Executive Director, Berghof Foundation (Berlin)

9. Dr Nasharudin Mat Isa, Executive Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation (Kuala Lumpur)

10. Mr Jean-Louis Tiernan, Director General for Academic Partnerships, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (Ottawa)

11. Mr Jeppe Olsen, Former Senior Advisor to the National Police Commissioner of Denmark (Copenhagen)

12. Mr Cyrille Bret, Author (Paris)

13. Mr Niccolò Rinaldi, European Parliament Head of Unit, Asia, Australia and New Zealand Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union (Brussels)

14. Mr Sanjar Sohail, Founder and Editor of Hasht-e-Subh newspaper (Kabul)

15. Dr Marc Hecker, Director of Publications, Institut français des relations internationales (Paris)

16. Dr Harvey Whitehouse, Director of the Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology, Professorial Fellow of Magdalen College at the University of Oxford (London)

17. Air Marshal Bhushan Gokhale, former Vice Chief of Air Staff, Indian Air Force (Pune)

18. Lt Gen Dr Dattatraya Shekatkar, President of Forum for Integrated National Security and former Director General of Perspective Planning at the Indian Army Headquarters (Pune)

19. Lt Gen Ghanshyam Katoch, Founding Director of the Centre for Anti-Terrorism Studies and former Director General of Perspective Planning at the Indian Army Headquarters (New Delhi)

20. Ms Ilmas Futehally, Executive Director of Strategic Foresight Group (Mumbai)

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