



Ten years after the Mumbai attack

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Ten years after the Mumbai attack-Vigilance is important against new variants of terror, remaining ahead of the curve is even more vital

- Ten years ago on Nov 26, Pakistan carried out one of the most heinous of terror attacks perpetrated anywhere in the world.
- The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, named after the date in 2008 when the attack took place, is in some respects comparable to the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the U.S. Comparisons with the Madrid train bombings in 2004 and the London bombings in 2005 are, however, misplaced.
- India, and Mumbai city, are no strangers to terror.
- The most audacious terror attack till the 26/11 Mumbai terror incident was the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 by the Pakistan-based terror outfits, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).

Into the 21st century

- Terrorism is hardly a post-modern phenomenon.
- Several of the terror attacks in the 21st century, however, reflect a paradigmatic change in the tactics of asymmetric warfare, and the practice of violence.
- The tactics employed may vary, but the objective is common, viz. achieving mass casualties and widespread destruction.
- The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack was one of a kind, and not a mere variant of previous instances of terrorist violence.
- The degree of involvement of the Pakistani deep state in the planning and preparation of the attack is evident from many aspects that have come to light subsequently.
- Seldom has any terrorist group then, or for that matter even now, used such highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art communications, including Voice over Internet Protocol.
- Planning for the attack involved the use of a third country address.
- Handlers in Pakistan were given unfettered freedom to provide

instructions to the terrorists during the entire four-day siege.

- The choice of the sea route aimed at deception and avoiding detection, was again dictated by official agencies.
- The involvement of the Pakistani Special Forces in preparing the 10-member fidayeen group was confirmed by one of the conspirators, Abu Hamza, arrested subsequent to the 26/11 terror attack.
- The training regimen dictated by the Pakistani Special Forces involved psychological indoctrination by highlighting atrocities on Muslims in India and other parts of the globe, including Chechnya and Palestine; basic and advanced combat training; commando training; training in weapons and explosives; training in swimming and sailing — all under the watchful eyes of Pakistani instructors from the Special Forces.

Horror over four days

- The targets were carefully chosen after having been reconnoitred previously by Headley for maximum impact, viz. the Taj and Oberoi Hotels, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, the Jewish centre at Nariman House, and the Leopold Cafe, since these places were frequented by Europeans, Indians and Jews.
- The Mumbai terror attack went on for nearly four days, from the evening of November 26 to the morning of November 29.
- Seldom has a terrorist incident lasted this length of time, since the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972.
- From an Indian standpoint, it was perhaps for the first time that an operation of this nature involved Rapid Action Force personnel, Marine Commandos (MARCOS), the National Security Guard (NSG) and the Mumbai Police.
- The principal charge was that the security establishment had failed to anticipate an attack of this nature, and was not adequately prepared to deal with the situation.
- Secrecy was the very essence of this operation.
- In the LeT hierarchy, apart from Hafiz Sayeed, only a few like Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, its chief military commander, Sajid Mir and Zarar Shah, its communications chief, were privy to the operational plans.
- U.S. intelligence is said to have penetrated Zarar Shah's computer, and possibly had far more details of the operation than were actually shared with Indian intelligence.

Streamlining security

- In the wake of the terror attack, several steps were initiated to streamline the security set-up.
- Coastal security was given high priority, and it is with the Navy/Coast Guard/marine police.
- A specialised agency to deal with terrorist offences, the National Investigation Agency, was set up and has been functioning from January 2009.
- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has been constituted to create an appropriate database of security related information.
- Four new operational hubs for the NSG have been created to ensure rapid response to terror attacks.
- The Multi Agency Centre, which functions under the Intelligence Bureau, was further strengthened and its activities expanded. The Navy constituted a Joint Operations Centre to keep vigil over India's extended coastline.
- Terrorism remains a major threat, and with modern refinements, new terrorist methodologies and terrorism mutating into a global franchise, the threat potential has become greater.
- One new variant is the concept of 'enabled terror' or 'remote controlled terror', viz. violence conceived and guided by a controller thousands of miles away.
- Internet-enabled terrorism and resort to remote plotting is thus the new threat.
- Vigilance is important, but remaining ahead of the curve is even more vital.

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