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Urban Battle Fields of South Asia

Lessons Learned from Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan

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Summary

Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan all have extensive experience in dealing with militant groups that employ violence to achieve their objectives. Although much of this experience has been gained in rural or jungle terrain, all three states have wrestled with terrorism in urban environments as well. This research assesses several sustained campaigns of urban violence in South Asia to draw out the evolution of groups employing terrorism and to exposit the way in which each state attempted to counter the ever-changing threat.

The lessons learned from the manifestations of urban terrorism are numerous. First, this exercise illuminated numerous structural similarities among groups that use terror as an instrument within the three states considered. For example, most have developed globalized networks to support their operations and sustain their organization. Second, the United States is currently engaged with these states in the global war on terrorism in various capacities and through differing means. Understanding the internal security dynamics of Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan as well as the challenges they confront should offer insights into the types of engagement that might be useful to both parties. These observations should also inform the expectations of the United States as to the limits of the possible within the region. Third, the population terrain[1] of each of these countries is richly complex

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[1] The notion of population terrain used here reflects the work of Vijay Madan (1997). Madan writes that "Population should be considered in the same manner as terrain is in any military planning and appreciations . . . . [An] examination of the 'population terrain' factor would lead to deducing the important segments of the population which must be dominated

and marked by religious-sectarian distinctions as well as ethnic and cultural differences. Some of the methods developed to manage the urban threat may provoke thoughts about U.S.-led stability operations in countries that are similarly diverse in social structure. Some of the key findings of this report are summarized below.

Structural Similarities: Insights for the War on Terrorism

Nearly every nonstate actor discussed in this study has established transnational networks to facilitate the movement of, *inter alia,* money, information, weapons and other war materiel, as well as persons. These networks are used to raise funds as well—through both licit and illicit means. Their web of relationships also permits different groups to interact and cross-fertilize. Afghanistan, the Middle East, India, the countries of Europe, Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have all served as meeting places for these militant organizations. The cross-fertilization of militant groups underscores the importance of understanding the best practices of terror utilization, as other groups employing terror are likely to take advantage of this knowledge. These networks can also be used to encourage co-ethnics and co-religionists spread throughout the diaspora to espouse particular movements' causes. Co-ethnics and co-religionists living in the West have been able to exploit the political systems there to create environments that are favorable to their movement's objectives. One of the key institutions in these trans-state networks is the university. Universities emerge as important sources of manpower as well as technical expertise. While the international community understands the financial aspects of these networks, it is less clear how much attention other dimensions receive.

     This report also finds several common weaknesses within the states that these groups exploit, such as the lack of communication

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and which . . . could be ignored or handled in a latter time frame. The insurgents too, from the very start of their movement, endeavor to dominate the 'population terrain' and usually score over the [counterintelligence] forces, who start on the wrong foot by expending all their energies and resources on trying to dominate only the insurgents."

and intelligence sharing across jurisdictional lines of police and other authorities. Limiting terrorist groups' power projection requires a coherent state response that incorporates national and local law enforcement and intelligence entities. It requires that intelligence flow up and down between the central and local authorities as well as horizontally among and between various law enforcement and intelligence groups within the state and federal sectors. Groups also exploit the lack of language assets within the state security apparatus. The Sri Lankan army, police, and intelligence agencies have very few Tamil language interpreters. Diasporan organizations operating in the United States have the advantage of languages that are "low density" (e.g., languages for which the U.S. military and law enforcement have few assets).

Finally, all groups exploit fissures in the relationship that develops between the populace and the law enforcement authorities. As security breaks down and the people no longer have trust in the government, citizens do not cooperate with the authorities. Further, these case studies illuminate the fundamental role of local police forces and the importance of ensuring that their training and equipment is adequate to the task they face.

Security Cooperation: Implications for U.S. Engagement of Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan

The United States currently has counterterrorism and law enforcement working groups with India and Pakistan. These programs, with varying concentration, focus on the integration of intelligence, law enforcement, legal, and diplomatic aspects of the fight against terrorism. This analysis found that these efforts to fortify all aspects of these states' internal security apparatus are critical to ensuring that these states can function as effective partners in the war on terrorism.

This analysis also found that all three states demonstrate poor coordination across the myriad state and federal agencies. (The United States too faces this complex challenge.) This finding may inform the United States in its counterterrorism partnerships with

each of these countries. For instance, which U.S. entities should be engaged in security cooperation programs with India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and which agencies within these countries should be included?

Finally, it is possible that some of the operational lessons learned by these three states as they confronted their own cases of militancy may have value to the U.S. forces in their current and future urban challenges. All of these states are complex societies with richly diverse populations. Some of the empirical evidence garnered from Pakistan's Islamicized community-policing model and Sri Lanka's vigilance committees may offer some insight for U.S. police operations in similarly complex social environments.