

# Non-traditional security threats in South Asia

## TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS: BLURRING LINES

Non-traditional security threats are challenges to the survival and well-being of states and their peoples that arise primarily from non-military sources, such as climate change, cross-border environmental degradation and resource depletion, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, people smuggling, drug trafficking, and other forms of transnational crime (Chaudhuri, n.d.). Martand Jha, an Indian scholar, describes non-traditional threats as threats that emanate from non-state actors (Jha, 2017). The threats are not considered mainstream and have been regarded by security experts as peripheral in nature. For comprehensive analysis, one can identify six broad branches of non-traditional security threats: international terrorism, transnational organized crime, environmental security, illegal migration, energy security, and human security.

The important aspect of non-traditional security threats is that they impact people, the institutions of governance, and almost all organs of the state without the use of hard power. Threats can arise from non-state actors, natural disasters, and even human failure. Although non-traditional threats may classically be defined as non-military, the lines between traditional and non-traditional threats are blurring primarily because states themselves are resorting to the use of non-traditional threats to achieve politico-military objectives.

Non-traditional security threats become more pronounced where the capacities of the state are weak and the government is unable to respond to geographic, demographic, ethnic, and socio-political problems. Traditional or conventional wars can lead to catastrophic outcomes, whereas non-tradi-

BY NARENDER KUMAR

Narender Kumar is a brigadier in the Indian Armed Forces (Retd.) and a Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3) at the United Service Institution of India (USI), New Delhi.

The important aspect of non-traditional security threats is that they impact people, the institutions of governance, and almost all organs of the state without the use of hard power.

tional threats can be abated by states and state-sponsored, non-state actors can be calibrated and controlled.

## SOUTH ASIA'S GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY ADD TO VOLATILITY

South Asia comprises 4.0 percent of the total global land mass but has 20 percent of the world's population. It has the highest population density in the world but it has limited economic and natural resources. It is a region characterized by competition for scarce resources. According to the 2013 Failed States Index, six South Asian nations—Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—are vulnerable and fall in the category of failing or failed states on various counts, including the Human Development Index (HDI) (Hossain, 2013). South Asian

nations are typically marked by large population, high poverty, low literacy, and poor indicators of human development.

## CONDUCTIVE CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS TO FLOURISH IN SOUTH ASIA

The region sandwiched between the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, with Afghanistan recognized as the largest opium producer in the world, is the nexus between non-state actors and narco-terrorism (Hodes & Sedra, 2007).

Cybercommunication and the capacity for transnational connectivity have linked transnational and transregional terror organizations and have been among the biggest contributors to the spread the jihadi ideology. Liberalism and the freedom to propagate ideology without restraint are counterproductive. Domestic fault lines and fragile institutions of governance contribute to ungoverned cyber, geographic, social, and economic domains. As a result, this space is filled by non-state actors and their proxies pursuing their self-serving agendas.

Why are people attracted to radicalization? There are no easy answers, but in many cases a flawed value system, a sense of deprivation, and an urge to impose ancestral ways of living play a role. The policy of “war and more war” through multiple platforms and domains is driving a wedge through the fractured polity and weak self-defence mechanisms among South Asian nations (Young, 2018).

A large number of non-traditional threats have the potential to cause instability in the region, which in turn may exacerbate natural and manmade crises (Memon, 2012). The following threats

Non-traditional security threats, page 10

# Non-traditional security threats continued from page 9

have the potential to cause profound impacts on the overall security environment in the region:

- Radicalization can lead to a clash of civilizations and ethnic cleansing.
- Cyber assaults, disinformation campaigns, and wars of perception can weaken democratic and state institutions of governance.
- The forced displacement of populations can result in dissension and friction among refugees and local inhabitants. The civil war in Syria, for example, may produce the greatest human tragedy we have seen since the Second World War (Young, 2018).
- Global mobility and communication have greatly facilitated the transnational reach of terrorism and have helped to make it a widespread phenomenon. For example, in the post-Cold War environment, religious extremists have been able to attract recruits from different backgrounds, professions, and countries (Joshi, 2010).

## MEASURES TO DEAL WITH NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS

A number of measures can be taken to deal with non-traditional threats (Joshi, 2010):

- Build domestic capacity by developing infrastructure, improving emergency health relief, and (re)establishing law and order. The institutions of governance must

credible, robust, and transparent in working to resolve political, economic, and social discontent.

- Recognize that the sovereignty of the state is sacrosanct (economically, politically, and culturally).
- Engage in cooperative and collective security to harmonize efforts and resources.
- Enhance border controls and eliminate grey zones.
- Disrupt lateral communications that are used to financially support threat activities such as weapons trading and drug trafficking.
- Foreign states should not support popular revolutions against standing governments. 🍁

## REFERENCES

- Chaudhuri, S. (n.d.). Defining non-traditional security threats. Global India Foundation, Kolkata. Retrieved from <https://www.globalindiafoundation.org/nontraditionalsecurity.html>
- Hodes, C., & Sedra, M. (2007). The search for security in post-Taliban Afghanistan. *The Adelphi Papers*, 43(391), 1-117.
- Hossain, D. (2013, August 17). The FSI report: Is Bangladesh a failing state? Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. Retrieved from [http://www.ipcs.org/comm\\_select.php?articleNo=4090](http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=4090)
- Jha, M. (2017, April 17). Does non-traditional security threats need to be re-defined? *Indian Defence Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.indian>

[defencereview.com/news/does-non-traditional-security-threats-need-to-be-re-defined/](http://defencereview.com/news/does-non-traditional-security-threats-need-to-be-re-defined/)

- Joshi, N. (2010). Responses to non-traditional threats & challenges. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program. Retrieved from <https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/Monographs/1004.Joshi-VI-Responses.pdf>
- Memon, N. (2012). *Disasters in South Asia—A regional perspective*. Karachi: Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research.
- Young, M. (2018, February 23). Syria in crisis: War and more war. Interview with former United States Ambassador Robert Ford. Lebanon: Carnegie Middle East Centre. Retrieved from <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/75613>



The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and

**CanadaWatch**  
PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

LEARN MORE AT:

<http://robarts.info.yorku.ca>

**Canada Watch  
is going green.**

Future issues will be available  
online only at  
[http://robarts.info.yorku.ca/  
resources-2/canada-watch/](http://robarts.info.yorku.ca/resources-2/canada-watch/)