

Foreword

In 2009, it seemed all of South Asia was aflame. According to partial data compiled by the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (SATP), 29,637 people died in the multiple insurgencies and terrorist movements in the region (this is excluding Afghanistan), and it seemed that things could only get worse. And yet, less than a decade down the line, total fatalities in these conflicts had fallen to 2,143 in 2017, and total 772 in 2018, till July 8, suggesting further declines in the annual toll [all data, SATP].

More significantly, enduring movements of violence have collapsed. Sri Lanka saw 15,565 fatalities in 2009, but, with the comprehensive defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has not recorded even a single terrorism-linked killing since 2010. In Nepal, the bloody Maoist insurgency had already arrived at a formal conclusion in 2006, but occasional fatalities in factional feuds continued for several years thereafter; however, Nepal has also recorded no insurgency-linked fatality since 2013. Bangladesh was thought by some to be the 'next Afghanistan' in the early 2000s, and there were deep apprehensions that the radicalizing politics within the country would provide fertile ground for the proliferation of extremist cadres pushed out of the Afghan theatre in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the consequent Operation Enduring Freedom launched by US-led international coalition. Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina has, however, used every power at her disposal to neutralize Islamist extremism and terrorism in her country since assuming power in 2009, and the Islamists now have little room to hide. There were 80 insurgency/terrorism

related fatalities in Bangladesh in 2017 – but an overwhelming majority of these, 65, were alleged ‘Left Wing Extremists’, who continue to be killed in significant numbers, though visible indices of their own violent activities are negligible. Bhutan has seen little terrorism, even in the most turbulent years for the region; some overflows from India’s Northeast region had come to afflict it on the margins in the 1990s and early 2000s. Even these small irritants – more a problem for India, as a result of insurgent safe havens on Bhutanese soil – have now disappeared, since the expulsion of all insurgent formations in 2004. Though occasional attacks were recorded in subsequent years, there has been no fatality since 2009.

It is principally India and Pakistan that continue to be afflicted by a multiplicity of movements of armed violence. Even these have seen sharp declines in long term trends of violence, albeit with transient variations. The Maoist insurgency along India’s eastern board has suffered massive leadership losses, and has lost its dominance in most of its erstwhile strongholds. Maoist violence peaked in 2010, with 1,180 fatalities, but has gradually diminished, bottoming out at 251 in 2015, and then rising again, to 433 in 2016 and 333 in 2017. 250 persons have already been killed in Left Wing Extremist (LWE) violence this year (SATP data till July 8). In India’s Northeast, most insurgencies have collapsed, with at least 51 armed groups in various agreements or talks with the Government, to find a ‘peaceful solution’ to their divergent troubles. The remaining active groups are principally barely surviving fragments of once-dominant insurgencies. They have little remaining political legitimacy and essentially engage in extortion and other criminal activities.

The preponderance of all continuing violence in the region is now accounted for by, or emanates from Pakistan. Pakistan itself recorded 1,260 fatalities in 2017, down from a peak of 11,704 in 2009. Terrorism and separatist violence in Jammu & Kashmir, fed by safe havens and resources provided by Pakistan, resulted in

358 fatalities in 2017, down from 4,507 in 2001, the worst year of the insurgency, but up from enormously improved conditions in 2012, when 117 lives were lost. To Islamabad's account one may also add the rising carnage in Afghanistan, again fed by explicit state support from Pakistan.

Despite the continuing harm Pakistan does – to the neighbourhood and the wider world, of course, but also to itself – the terrorist enterprise in the region appears to be unravelling. Apart from a few rogue powers, the earlier and enormous 'tolerance of terrorism' practiced by the world powers and international institutions, has largely dissipated. Pakistan's 'credible deniability' has been entirely discredited, and Islamabad now stands entirely exposed. It is a different matter that no great power has yet arrived at a workable response to a nuclear state sponsor of terrorism – beyond appeasement and an occasional and relatively mild flourish of the stick. The trajectory of history, however, is grinding slowly against the Pakistani enterprise. The country's economy is in crisis, and though much hope has been pinned on the 'all weather friendship' with China and the CPEC project, the numbers appear stacked against Pakistan. Moreover, given China's large investments not only in Pakistan, but increasingly in Afghanistan as well, Beijing will seek stability in the region. Pakistan's terrorist adventurism sits poorly with this objective.

Nevertheless, a new dynamic of destabilization is evolving. The collapse of global equations of power is at the heart of this emerging source of strife, with marginalized players as well as a few ambitious runts seeking to occupy what are perceived as vacated spaces – at least temporarily, with some success. Deeper undercurrents, the slow movement of demographic change, accumulating environmental catastrophe, an increasingly unequal and inequitable economic order, and a global crisis of leadership, ideology and, indeed, decency, threaten all order. While present movements of violence may decline, consequently, future

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discord, potentially greatly augmented by rapidly accelerating technological transformation, is an overwhelming likelihood. Given Pakistan's history, the profile of its leadership and population, and its enduring trajectory, the country will remain a probable location and source of regional instability, even as the wider region's own vulnerabilities augment.

Unsurprisingly, three papers in the current volume of *Faultlines* focus or touch upon Pakistan. There is also an effort to examine the weakening insurgencies of India's Northeast, as well as the diminishing Maoist rampage. Even as we contemplate and prepare for the turmoil of the future, the disarrays of our present must be brought to order.

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