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India's Security: Aftermath of 26/11 attack

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Why is in news? 15 years of 26/11: How Mumbai terror attacks changed India's security infrastructure

If the 9/11 attacks woke up the West to the threat of global terrorism, the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai forced it to acknowledge and focus on India's security concerns vis-à-vis its neighbourhood. It **also exposed India's under-preparedness in combating asymmetric warfare** of such scale.

The ease with which the 10 Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) gunmen sailed across the Arabian Sea, from Karachi to Mumbai, and went on the rampage in the city for four long days, exposed the gaping holes in India's maritime security, the chinks in its internal security grid, and the inadequacy of its counter-terrorism infrastructure and local police.

Background:

In 1993, over 250 people were killed in Mumbai in a series of coordinated bomb explosions attributed to Dawood Ibrahim, reportedly as a reprisal for the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

In July 2006, bomb explosions in a number of suburban trains in Mumbai killed over 200 people and injured several more.

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).

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The 2008 Mumbai attacks

Pakistan has released on bail the suspected mastermind



Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi



Main places attacked

Chhatrapati Shivaji rail station

Hotel Oberoi Trident

Nariman House
Jewish cultural centre

**Taj Mahal
Palace Hotel**

31 killed
60 hours of fighting

Cafe Leopold

▶ Nov 26-29, 2008
166 killed

▶ A team of Islamist fighters

▶ 9 killed and one captured.
Executed in 2012

▶ 7 people charged in Pakistan including Lakhvi

26/11 Attack:

The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack was one of a kind and not a mere variant of previous instances of terrorist violence.

It was the **rarest of rare cases**, where one state's resources, viz. Pakistan's were employed to carry out a series of terror attacks in a major Indian city.

It was a case of 'war by other means', in which the authorities in Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, the Pakistani armed forces, were involved.

The Mumbai terror attack was not based on a sudden impulse. **Several years of planning and preparation** had preceded the attack, even as the peace talk was going on between India and Pakistan.

From an Indian standpoint, it was 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.

Measures undertaken after the attack:

Soon after the attacks, some key decisions on the security front were taken by the government.

These included

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the tightening of maritime security,
fixing of loopholes in the intelligence grid,
strengthening of the legal framework to deal with terrorism, and
creation of special agencies to probe terror cases.

Measures:

Maritime security revamp:

Post 26/11, the Indian navy was **given overall charge of maritime security**, and the Indian Coast Guard was given the **responsibility for territorial waters** and to coordinate with hundreds of new marine police stations that came up along India's coastline.

The government also made it **mandatory for all vessels longer than 20 metres** to have an **Automatic Identification System (AIS)** that transmits its identification and other information — in addition to the international regulation under which AIS is compulsory for any vessel heavier than 300 gross tonnage.

Today, there is a major maritime defence and surveillance architecture in place to prevent a repeat of 26/11.

Coastal infrastructure:

The most important lesson that was learnt post-26/11 was accepting the need for enhanced maritime domain awareness.

The **coastal surveillance network** has already been established along the coast with the **first phase- with 46 radars**- already completed. The **second phase of 38 radars** is in the pipeline.

India has already commissioned the **Information Management and Analysis Centre in Gurgaon** for easy collection and dissemination of shipping data for increased awareness.

Intelligence coordination:

A decision was taken to **strengthen the Intelligence Bureau's (IB's) Multi Agency Centre (MAC)**, whose primary job is to **coordinate exchange of intelligence** between central agencies, the armed forces, and the state police.

Subsidiary MACs that had gone defunct were re-invigorated. **Regular meetings** were made mandatory for real-time exchange of information and analysis.

It has also established SMACs in 30 important locations in India to share intelligence with all other security agencies.

Operation Sagar Kavach:

Post the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai, operation Sagar Kavach was put into operation to **improve the coordination between several security agencies** including the Indian Navy and Coast Guards, and the local police.

Combating Financing of Terrorism (CFT) Cell:

A special Combating Financing of Terrorism (CFT) Cell has been created in the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2011, to **coordinate with the Central Intelligence/Enforcement Agencies and the State Law Enforcement Agencies** for an integrated approach to tackle the problem of terror funding.

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Change in laws: UAPA and NIA Act:

The **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was amended** to expand the definition of terrorism, and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act was passed by Parliament to create the first truly federal investigation agency in the country.

“Had the 26/11 attacks not happened, such an Act that gives powers to a central agency to **take over any terrorism case in any state suo motu** would never get the support of all parties, since it clearly violated the existing federal structure of policing. But the pressure of public opinion was such at that time that everyone came on board,” a Home Ministry official said.

Another such project, the **National Counter Terrorism Centre**, floated by the then UPA government could never take off for precisely this reason.

Modernisation of police forces:

Given the spectacular failure of local police despite the exemplary bravery shown by some police officers and men, the Centre trained its **focus on modernisation of state police forces**.

More funds were allocated by the MHA to state governments to make their police stations state-of-the-art, equip them with modern technology, train their policemen to deal with challenges of modern day policing that included terrorism, and to give them better weapons.

Apart from this, emphasis was given on the creation of crack commando teams among all police forces. And the **National Security Guard (NSG) established four regional hubs** across the country.

Cooperation from the West:

The biggest impact of the 26/11 attacks, however, was the willingness of the West to cooperate with India on matters of security.

According to sources in the Mumbai Police, which investigated the 26/11 attacks, and in India’s intelligence set-up, the **US not only provided real time information** during the attacks, but **also a lot of prosecutable evidence through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** that helped India nail Pakistan’s culpability and embarrass it internationally.

The real success was in organising the international community, in **isolating Pakistan, and in making counterterrorism cooperation against the LeT effective**.

India began to get unprecedented cooperation **from Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf countries, and China**, too, began to respond to requests for information on these groups.

It was also this **spirit of cooperation and global understanding** on the need to deal with Pak-sponsored terrorism that helped put Pakistan in the Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF’s) grey list in 2018, forcing the country to take action against the terror infrastructure of the LeT and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM).

Tracking fishing boats:

A system has been put in place to track all the fishing boats 24/7.

Issuances of biometric cards to the fishermen, online registrations, using Automatic Identification System (AIS) etc. are some of the steps that have been undertaken.

Force One:

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Maharashtra government has instituted an **elite commando force** called Force One and has also introduced specialised training for them on the lines of National Security Guards (NSG).

Creation of centralised database:

Post 26/11, a specialised agency, the **National Intelligence Grid or NATGRID**, was constituted to create a database of security-related information. Hubs were created for rapid response to such attacks.

Enhanced security presence at sensitive areas:

There are more metal detectors and presence of armed guards at sensitive places in the country than ever before.

Financial Intelligence Unit-IND (FIU-IND):

It is the central national agency responsible for receiving, processing, analysing and disseminating information relating to **suspect financial transactions**.

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Some lacunae remain:

Despite these successes, gaps in the security grid remain.

State police forces continue to remain **ill equipped and poorly trained** with continued political interference.

On maritime security, there are **limited options to track ships** that do not transmit AIS signals.

Also, many of India's **smaller shipping vessels have no transponders**.

An official from the security establishment said that of the 2.9 lakh fishing vessels in India, around **60% are smaller than 20 m**, and most of them are without transponders.

New forms of Terrorist Attacks and Activities:

The actual number of terror attacks may have declined in recent years, but this **does not mean that the situation is better than what existed** a decade ago.

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'** that is violence conceived and guided by a controller thousands of miles away.

Lone-Wolf Attacks - These are **radicalized individuals or 'freelancer' terrorists** with no formal affiliation or explicit linkage to well-established terrorist organizations and are now committing random acts of terrorist violence. The ghastly beheading incident at Udaipur in June 2022 represents the emergence of this amorphous nature of terrorism.

Terrorist and terror suspects have **expanded the use of The Onion Router (TOR)-enabled darknet for propaganda**, and recruitment on encrypted chat forums and platforms beyond the gaze of the security agencies.

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Besides, other advancing and emerging technologies like autonomous systems, 3D printing and deep fake now potentially offer the terrorists prospects for weaponisation.

Nowadays, **cryptocurrencies** are being exploited by **terrorist organizations to finance their operations** and currently, Cryptocurrencies are unregulated in India this is allowing the terrorist organizations to exploit this mode of financing.

Bio-terrorism: The postal department, back in 2001, received 17 suspicious letters that were **believed to be infected with anthrax spores** — bacteria that produce toxins which can cause skin, lungs and bowel diseases. As the 21st century is to be the epoch of biotechnology, it would be dangerously short-sighted to not think that these tools could be used by terrorists.

There has been a significant increase in **cyberattacks on critical infrastructure** by nation-state bad actors. India has witnessed at least seven major cyberattacks and security incidents in critical infrastructure companies in the last two years.

Way Forward:

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.

Speeding up the **fitting of automatic identification systems** in fishing boats.

All coastal states should **beef up their marine police sufficiently**.

Air and coastal sea patrols should be conducted regularly.

The sea has no checkpoints or perimeter fencing. Sanitizing it is very difficult, so the unity of command and control is essential.

Whether raids like that of ten years ago can happen again is debatable but to think that they can be ruled out will be premature. So, India needs to further tighten its preparedness to cope with such situations.

There is a **need for National Counter Terrorism Centre**. A centrally co-ordinated Terrorism Watch Centre, which could also operate as a think tank with sufficient inputs from academic and private experts

A strategy for fighting terror in India has to be evolved in the overall context of a national security strategy. To tackle the menace of terrorism, **a multi-pronged approach** is needed.