

Foreword

South Asia has seen astonishing and contradictory developments over the past dramatic year, with some insurgencies collapsing – most significantly, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka – in the face of determined state action, while others waned, as Governments got their act together – the Pakistan-linked Islamist extremists in Bangladesh prominent among these. In other theatres, slow processes of erosion – a combination of exhaustion, changing environments, and persistent Security Force and intelligence efforts – have weakened enduring movements. The Pakistan-backed insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has certainly lost traction, and its architects have sought to re-engineer it as a popular street *intifada* with significant success in 2010. Even this, however, shows some signs of fragmenting, as moderate voices emerge for the first time in the Valley, to challenge the intimidation, both of terrorists and of the street gangs which imposed relentless shutdowns, through the threat and use of violence, with little relief, for months at end.

Indeed, total fatalities in the various insurgencies and terrorist movements in South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – virtually folded up from a surging 29,638 fatalities in 2009 to 9,431 in 2010. 2008, before this, had seen 20,733 fatalities [all data from the *South Asia Terrorism Portal*]. Even Pakistan showed some improvement on this index: 7,435 fatalities in 2010, as against 11,704 in 2009 [these figures are likely to be underestimates, since Pakistan blocks access of media and independent agencies to regions of conflict].

Despite these tremendous gains, however, there is little room for complacency. While individual movements have faded, or even disappeared, others have strengthened. Crucially, the

complex dynamic, which has made South Asia one of the most volatile regions in the world, has not undergone any significant structural transformation. The infirmity of governments, their frequent ambivalence towards, or complicity in insurgency and the politics of violence, the sheer lack of capacities for effective governance, grievance redressal, justice administration and security management, and an explosive demographic profile – these are endemic across the region. Worse, the uncertain trajectory of the Western intervention in Afghanistan, and the Damocles sword of a premature withdrawal by Western powers, holds out a threat of an unprecedented escalation of Islamist extremism and terror, even as Pakistan’s accelerating hurtle towards anarchy conjures scenarios of a progressive, and potentially total, loss of control in South Asia.

The spectre of nuclear terror is, of course, integral to such a future scenario. The assassination of Salman Taseer, the Governor of Pakistan’s Punjab Province, by a member of an elite state Security Force underlines the threat of growing radicalism within the Army and Paramilitary establishment in the country – a radicalism that, many fear, could combine with non-state actors to grab a piece of the country’s burgeoning nuclear assets.

Pakistan’s ‘descent into chaos’ not only threatens the region; it radiates waves of Islamist extremism across the world, destabilizing an increasingly fragile world order.

Through all this, terrorist formations have constantly reinvented themselves within a long-war framework, but little coherence has marked the national, regional and global responses to these complex threats. Indeed, even the assessments of diverse state and international agencies have been marred at the outset by bias, incomprehension, insufficient documentation and analysis, and a proclivity to short term political expediency.

A tremendous challenge of research now exists. It is within this context that *Faultlines*, after a few erratic years, seeks to re-establish a regular schedule of quarterly publication, in the hope of restoring its widely appreciated contributions to issues of policy, strategy and response, in the world’s byzantine conflicts.

Ajai Sahni

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