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48. CHANGING FACE OF GLOBAL TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Systematic manifestation of terrorism did not appear until the French Revolution and became pronounced in later part of the 19th century. Since then, terrorism has been continuously changing due to social, political and technological developments. Contemporary terrorism is widely different than its forebear.

Yesterday's terrorists could be vividly identified with legendary organizations possessing distinct hierarchical structure, well-defined command and control links and clear objectives. Their motivation could be unconvincing but their ideology and intentions were comprehensible.

Today, with less cohesive organizational structure and ambiguous objectives, terrorists' interest lies in the act of terror rather than the identity of the victim, leaving investigators befuddled and governments guessing. The bombing of US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya is a case in point.

Unchecked proliferation of sophisticated weaponry, secure communication, global transport network - once domains of sovereign states - have enhanced lethality of terrorist attack manifold. Societies having ethnic, cultural or religious conflicts; poor economies; weak governance and porous borders, are becoming fertile nurseries for the growth of terrorism.

Incidents such as the World Trade Center collapse, Oklahoma bombing and Tokyo Subway incident epitomize a trend away from constrained violence. Emergence of strong extremist groups, pursuing single issues, is also noticeable. Still growing in size, their methods may be appalling but their cause is appealing.

Though technology favors contemporary terrorism, sophisticated computer network and terrorist-related databanks permit intelligence gathering. States can share intelligence and cooperate for anti-terrorist activities more effectively.

With hardened targets becoming less cost effective, terrorists' preference is shifting towards softer targets. Property, business and industry may become the main focus of international terrorism followed by the diplomatic, government and military premises.

Effective countermeasures are possible only when we understand the current threat posed by the terrorism and its probable trend in the foreseeable future. There is an urgent need to arrest the deplorable situation before the world community becomes hostage to this ever-growing menace.

KEYWORDS

Terrorism trends, counter terrorism.

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