

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA, 1995-2020

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Years before Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda became household names, South Asia had been in the grip of diverse forms of terrorism prevalent since the 1940s. With the assassinations of the former Prime Minister of India¹ and the President of Sri Lanka² in the first half of the 1990s, Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE),³ a group that represented the deprived Tamil minority, burst into the international limelight with their pioneering methods of suicide bombings, captivating a global audience.

Three terrorist events in 1995, one with far-reaching consequences in the subregion, presaged the future of terrorism that continues to preoccupy counterterrorism practitioners across the globe today. The first was the Tokyo subway sarin attack⁴ by the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo in March 1995, which killed 12 and injured thousands, flagging the threat of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) attacks. A month later, in the United States, a U.S. Army veteran parked a rental truck packed full of explosives outside a federal office building in Oklahoma City, detonating his bomb just as the workday was starting.⁵ The attack, carried out by a homegrown terrorist motivated by extremist ideologies, killed 168 people and left hundreds more injured.⁶ Among the first messages of condolence after the bombing was one from the Tamil Tigers, offering "the American Government and the American people their sympathy and sense of distress over the senseless bombing incident of April 19 at Oklahoma City."⁷ In a parallel development, it was in this decade that far-right Hindu groups in India surged into national view with the destruction of a 16th-century mosque and prompted the first of a series of terror attacks in Mumbai.⁸

However, it was the third event, the 1995 arrest of Pakistan-born terrorist Ramzi Yousef in Islamabad after the botched Bojinka plot,⁹ which foreshadowed the transnational nature of terrorism in the ensuing decades. Six years after Yousef's arrest, al-Qaeda, an outlawed group holed up in Afghanistan, the most battle-scarred nation in South Asia, successfully plotted and executed the spectacular attacks of 9/11 to change the face of international terrorism forever. The impact of that attack spilled into the subregion and defined the shape of things to come. Among the many mass-casualty attacks the region has experienced since then have been horrific events such as the attacks on Mumbai in November 2008,¹⁰ Dhaka's Holey Artisan Bakery in 2016¹¹ and Sri Lanka's Bloody Easter in 2019.¹² In each of these cases, prevailing sociopolitical conditions have enabled the growth of terrorist groups intent on wreaking destruction.

This chapter on significant trends in political violence in South Asia over the last quarter-century offers a broad overview of developments in the subregion. The following sections trace the evolution of trends and identifies several political and social issues, and emerging threats that could shape the face of terrorism in South Asia in the years ahead. The concluding part of the paper summarizes the earlier sections to highlight insights that may minimize future threats.

REVIEW

After the departure of Britain as a colonial power in 1947 following the Second World War, simmering tensions between communities based on ethnicity, religion, and language that predated this departure erupted into various forms of violence across the subcontinent. The swift partition of the Indian subcontinent (the division of British India into the two separate states of India and Pakistan) based on these sociocultural divides laid the ground for future violence. Next door, the Afghan tribal revolts led the king to experiment with allowing greater political freedom but reversed the policy when it went further than expected. Religious and sectarian violence, tribal wars, separatist insurgencies, ethno-nationalist struggles and left-wing rebellions erupted almost immediately across the subcontinent. These continue to shape and enable current insurgent and terrorist movements. South Asia remains among the most violent regions in the world. From Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 to Benazir Bhutto in 2007, the list of high-profile political assassinations in the region is a testament to the violent expression that marks all political extremism in South Asia. A study documents that 76% of the assassinations in South Asia were executed since the mid-1980s, clearly a consequence of

the growing instability in the region.¹³

Armed hostilities between India and Pakistan¹⁴ over the disputed territory of Kashmir continue to be the fulcrum of terrorism across their borders.¹⁵ Following the Mumbai attacks of November 2008, Pakistan's untiring quest for a "friendly" government in Kabul amid reports of Afghan Taliban safe havens on Pakistani soil (seen as crucial for the mili-

tants' ability to sustain their insurgency inside Afghanistan) is viewed with suspicion and alarm across the region.¹⁶ The 2019 Easter attacks in Sri Lanka, the 2016 Bakery attack in Bangladesh, and developments in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and the Maldives, demonstrate that threats from terrorism remain as alive as they did 25 years ago. And increasingly, as is to be expected, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is stepping forward to claim credit and exert its influence in the region.¹⁷

Most of the eight countries in South Asia continue to experience some form of terrorism or insurgency—separatist, jihadist, or left-wing as a response to a range of governance issues including marginalization, exclusion, and injustices. In some cases, the active involvement of external players ("cross-border terrorism") defies resolution.

Assassinations in South Asia

Beginning with the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in January 1948 by a member of the Hindu nationalist paramilitary organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), each of the eight South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries has been witness to the assassination of about 60 public figures for religious, political, or military motives over the past seven decades.

The methods of assassination have ranged from suicide bombings and knifings to gunshots with assassins representing all shades of violent extremism, religions, and vocations including bodyguards, active military personnel, and members of royalty.

Mumbai Attacks

The demolition of the 16th century mosque in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, by rampaging Hindu mobs marked a turning point for terrorism in India. A series of attacks on Mumbai beginning with 12 coordinated attacks in March 1993 (killing 317), reached its high point in November 2008, when 10 Pakistani men associated with the terror group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba stormed buildings in Mumbai, killing 164 people. The lone surviving gunman, Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, was executed in November 2012. Another major attack in 2006, involved the use of serial pressure cooker bomb blasts on the city's crowded local trains, killing 209 people.

Kashmir and Cross-Border Terrorism

By the turn of the century, most of the armed groups that these conflicts had spawned were now using terror as part of their strategy to achieve their goals. The Taliban's conquest of Afghanistan in 1996 following the humiliating withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989 led to the creation of several different militant groups that took root in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The most noticeable of these groups are Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM),¹⁸ populated with many former *mujahedeen* from the Afghan war aiming to wrest all of Kashmir.¹⁹ India's recent actions in Kashmir²⁰ stripping the state of autonomy after seven decades and the persistent heavy-handed approach against its citizens²¹ is set to prolong this decade's long conflict even more.²² This has already triggered a series of attacks,²³ revitalized jihadi groups like the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT)²⁴, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HuM),²⁵ and, more ominously, the formation of a new grouping, The Resistance Front (TRF).²⁶

Cross-Border Terrorism

Cross-border terrorism threatens Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Incriminating Pakistan for its lukewarm efforts to act decisively against all shades of terrorists within its borders—as well as the generally tense Afghan-Pakistan and India-Pakistan relationship—remain impediments in any effective cooperation that would be necessary to counter such cross-border terror attacks. Existing hostilities between Afghanistan and Pakistan sharpened in 1947, when Afghanistan became the only country to vote against the admission of Pakistan to the United Nations. Pakistan and India's contests over the disputed territory of Kashmir continue unabated into the seventh decade with no resolution in sight.

Afghanistan

The increase in terrorist activity in Afghanistan resulted in a 631% spike in deaths in the decade since 2008. Largely because of this, South Asia remains the region most impacted by terrorism, with the Taliban replacing ISIS as the world's deadliest terror group.²⁷ The war rages even as the coronavirus known as COVID-19 spreads, as militants stormed a crowded Sikh temple and housing complex in Kabul on March 25, killing at least 25 people in a six-hour siege. The attackers, believed to be Islamic State extremists, struck on a day when nationwide cases of the virus nearly doubled from 24 hours.²⁸ The release of 12,000 prisoners, in addition to 10,000 already in the process of being released by the Afghan government, as the pandemic spreads

Afghanistan: Fighting on several fronts

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan's (UNAMA) latest report indicates a trend of escalating civilian casualties since the signing of a peace deal between the United States and the Taliban. Adding to the chaos is a disputed presidential election. With the outbreak of the coronavirus in Iran, thousands of Afghans crossed the border into Afghanistan, a country they once fled and a country made vulnerable by conditions that preceded the pandemic. Most of the men were in their 20s. Misinformation has added another layer of complexity to the embattled country's coronavirus response. Emboldened by the impending departure of the remaining American troops, the Taliban continues increasing its attacks across nine provinces, also among the worst hit by the infection. Seizing the opportunity in the deadly mix of war and coronavirus offered by official failures, the Taliban has stepped in to play the role of an aid agency.

across the country and prisons remain overcrowded, would set free more than 60% of the country's 36,000 inmates.²⁹ What the repercussions of this move would mean remain unclear amidst the war of words between the Taliban and the United States following the peace deal,³⁰ and the sustained attacks on al-Qaeda by ISIS.³¹ Meanwhile, even while eulogizing Mullah Mohammed Omar, the founder of the Taliban, on his seventh death anniversary for defending Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks,³² the Taliban, in a move to gain legitimacy, reached out to seek the support from the long-persecuted minority of the Hazara Shias for recruits.³³

Separatist Insurgencies

Insurgency in the relatively isolated and ethnically rich northeast of India, connected to the mainland by a strip of land as narrow as 14 miles wide, involves multiple armed separatist factions operating in India's strategic region linking South and Southeast Asia. Most of India's "Seven Sisters," as the northeastern states are known in the country, have experienced varying levels of violence since 1945 by groups favoring a separate nation or regional autonomy, with some demanding complete independence. While efforts to contain some of these insurgencies have paid varying dividends, the conflict in Nagaland, India's longest and bloodiest insurgency, continues to fester and threatens a fresh round of violent discord.³⁴ Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the decades-long violent ethno-nationalist campaign for a separate Tamil state ended with the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers by Sri Lankan troops in 2009. The movement still lives on as a political entity keeping alive the aspirations of a disenfranchised minority.

Left-Wing Extremism

While most left-wing terrorist groups, influenced by various communist and socialist currents, that had operated in the developed world disappeared by the mid-1990s, two of the three major left-wing insurgent groups in South Asia, informed by the “people’s war” strategy of Maoism, succeeded in having a profound impact on the societies of Nepal and India. The triumph of Nepal’s Maoists in overthrowing a two-century-old monarchy, in replacing a kingdom with a secular republic and winning a fair democratic election to assume office at the conclusion of the decades-long insurgency in 2006 was in contrast to the brutal defeat of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People’s Liberation Front or JVP) by 1990 in Sri Lanka. The JVP, after two violent uprisings against Colombo and its subsequent military defeat, refashioned itself as an influential player in Sri Lanka’s polity. India’s Naxalites (legatees of the Communist Party of India—Maoist faction), emerging in the late 1960s in a small corner of eastern India and ruthlessly crushed then, are now operating across large parts of the central and eastern neglected and underdeveloped regions of India since the turn of the century. Often touted as India’s largest internal security threat, the Maoists continue to draw strength from broad grass root support for their legitimate grievances, displacement from their lands due to big business projects being just one of them.

Religion and Nationalism

Two current, major drivers of terrorist activity in the region are a combination of religion and nationalism. This combination has had devastating effects by nourishing hatred and violence in a fragile, unstable, and ethnically diverse region. In large part, across the region, religious nationalism is fueled by the surge of Islamophobia.³⁵ Since 2011, Myanmar has seen an upsurge in extreme Buddhist nationalism, anti-Muslim hate speech and deadly communal violence, not only in Rakhine state but across the country.³⁶ In 2012, an outbreak of violence in Rakhine state encouraged the formation of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) by a group of Rohingya exiles.

Sri Lanka’s Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force or BBS), a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist organization, is seen to be in the forefront of attacks³⁷ and riots against the Muslims, who constitute 10% of the island nations’ population.³⁸ Months after the Easter bombings by a small group of Islamic State-inspired militants killing more than 250, Muslims faced a significant backlash.³⁹

Holey Artisan Attacks 2016, Bangladesh and Easter Bombings 2019, Sri Lanka

The 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the 2019 Easter attacks in Sri Lanka bear resemblances to each other. The attackers in both cases were home grown, young men from affluent families and well educated. Both targeted foreigners. While ISIS claimed both attacks, the two countries blamed their local groups, the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and a little known group in Sri Lanka, the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), respectively.

Prevailing socio-political conditions in both countries, growing extremism and marginalization, set the stage for what was to follow. Until 2016, the JMB was held responsible for only isolated killings, mostly of religious minorities and bloggers critical of hardline Islam. In ethnically diverse Sri Lanka, with Muslims constituting under 10% of the 21 million population, ethnic tensions between Buddhists and Muslims were on the rise during the decade prior, with a sharp increase in attacks by militant Buddhist groups, primarily the ultranationalist Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force).

INSIGHT

Several insights are inescapable. Governance that is inclusive of disenfranchised populations, affected communities, and gender is key to effective counterterrorism strategies. History is flush with examples of the short-term gains and long-term pains of a strategy that is rooted in purely military victories. Yet, this lesson seems to bypass most governments in the region. A case in point is Sri Lanka's approach to the ethnic issue. In its report on Sri Lanka, the International Crisis Group, an independent organization that aims to build support for good governance and inclusive politics, while sounding the alarm on increasing ethnic and religious tension, also highlights the growing risk to the status of Muslims in the country's politics of Buddhist nationalism.⁴² The Muslim community in Sri Lanka has long been marginalized politically, and often economically too.⁴³ In recent years there has been a sharp rise⁴⁴ in sectarian tensions, mainly a result of the emergence of militant Buddhist groups. And as a legacy of 26 years of a brutal civil war,⁴⁵ Sri Lanka has long been a deeply dysfunctional state with its security establishment riven by factions and feuds.⁴⁶

COVID-19 and Counterterrorism

A pandemic, when public attention is focused elsewhere, provides the perfect conditions for states to resort to measures that in other times would be deemed questionable by the international community. Additionally, repressive measures creep in when people are distracted by fear and uncertainty, the outcome of which, for counterterrorism, has often proven counterproductive.

In India, the pandemic has deepened intolerance and increased the ongoing violence against the country's Muslim minority.⁴⁷ A series of actions against them—the removal of Kashmir's special status and its bifurcation, discriminatory citizenship laws, the increasing number of lynchings⁴⁸ with covert or overt support of the ruling party,⁴⁹ are meant to convey to them that India is a Hindu nation in which they would be unwelcome citizens.⁵⁰ An outpouring of hateful rhetoric, describing Muslims as “corona villains” or virus spreaders and characterizing COVID-19 as a Muslim conspiracy, as even an act of biological terrorism, has intensified anti-Muslim discrimination.⁵¹

In Sri Lanka, the fundamental changes by the new administration to policies on ethnic relations and the rule of law with intent to dilute commitments⁵² on post-war reconciliation, accountability and inclusive governance made to the United Nations Human Rights Council and to the European Union, threatens to increase ethnic and religious tensions. One such move was the pardoning and release of a war crime military personnel who was on death row for killing eight Tamil civilians, including a five-year-old and two teenagers in 2000 during the civil war.⁵³

Since the death of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011, the fragile relationship between Pakistan's civilian rulers and its military leadership has come under the spotlight once again as Prime Minister Imran Khan made changes in his cabinet amid growing worries over the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, the clergy in Pakistan took the upper hand in deciding state policy against the virus, declaring it "a curse of Allah" that needed repentance from a nation that was corrupt and lascivious.⁵⁵ Two related developments that went relatively unnoticed during the pandemic were the release of the Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl's convicted killer⁵⁶ and the removal of 1,800 names from its terrorist watch list of 7,600 people.⁵⁷ Among the removed names was the suspected leader of the terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and one of the alleged masterminds of the Mumbai attacks in 2008 when at least 174 people were killed. And across the subcontinent, terrorist groups are making efforts to exploit the existing situation and fears to draw more attention to themselves in the form of development aid.⁵⁸

"Coronajihad": Islamophobia In India

Already a minority under attack – aided and abetted by powerful sections of mainstream media – the 200 million Muslims of India (dubbed "coronavirus terrorists" by sections of the media), in a Hindu-dominated land of 1.3 billion people, are now having their businesses boycotted and are facing increased attacks amid false claims that they are to blame for the epidemic.

After India's health ministry repeatedly blamed an Islamic seminary for spreading the coronavirus — and governing party officials spoke of "human bombs" and "corona jihad" — a spree of anti-Muslim attacks has broken out across the country.

The New York Times, April 12, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, involving as it does far too many variables. While the international community is slow in dealing with countries demonstrating flagrant violations of norms, such as in India, Myanmar, Pakistan, or Sri Lanka, that appear, at least on the surface, far graver than any military threat in recent decades, what is likely to change even more dramatically are certain other aspects relating to political management and security. Both terms are set to gain new meanings.

SAARC, COVID and Counterterrorism

Recognizing that a regional strategy has a better chance of controlling the pandemic than isolated national-level efforts, all SAARC countries responded rapidly to the crisis, contributed to a special SAARC COVID-19 Emergency Fund, and joined forces towards countering it. Unfortunately, while ISIS is now a reality for South Asian governments and it is clear that regional counterterrorism cooperation needs to be strengthened, the forum remains dormant due to India's concerns over cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan-based groups. Bilateral cooperation remains the only viable alternative in each country's policy toolkit.

The Threat of ISIS

Analysts suggest that the Sri Lanka attacks may be early evidence that the Islamic State is taking an important and renewed interest in South Asia, following losses in Syria and Iraq.⁵⁹ The neighboring island nation of the Maldives has also become a hotspot for pro-ISIS activities. On a per capita basis, the Maldives has provided more recruits to ISIS⁶⁰ than any other country, with up to 450 of its citizens known to have joined.⁶¹ ISIS has claimed authorship of several terrorism-related incidents in the Maldives since 2014, including the destruction of some boats in April 2020.⁶² Besides, it is easy for local groups in the region to potentially pledge allegiance to the Islamic State in order to make a quick name for themselves.

In some ways, South Asia would be the most obvious target for an Islamic State-backed attack. The region, with its political tensions often crossing religious lines, as the Islamic State rebrands as a global insurgency, and populations vulnerable to radicalization, would be its major fishing ground. More than half of the Muslims in the Asia-Pacific region live in South Asia, which includes three of the five countries in the world with the largest Muslim populations: Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Muslims are expected to make up a third of the population of South Asia in 2030.⁶³

Seizing an opportunity, the recently announced “*Wilayat al-Hind*,” the Caliphate’s “Indian Province,” issued a poster that included the viral image of a Muslim man being beaten by a Hindu mob in Delhi in a poster justifying retaliatory violence.⁶⁴ And, as ISIS expands its use of smaller regional affiliates to carry out terrorism in its own name, a new set of challenges come into play for the entire region, demanding better intraregional cooperation to counter the same.

The Rohingyas

Over the course of the past years, the tension between Buddhist nationalists and Muslim minorities, the Rohingya in particular, has grown into a dangerous strain of racism and intolerance. Discriminatory policies of Myanmar’s government since the late 1970s have compelled a million Muslim Rohingya to flee their homes to neighboring Bangladesh, where conditions in refugee camps are a concern for radicalization experts, particularly after ISIS signaled its presence in the region, even as the fledgling militant group, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) offers no threat to Myanmar’s military. Analysts at the Center for Strategic and International Studies warn that the repression of the Rohingyas presents a potential, transnational flashpoint for jihadi-Salafi organizations, which has larger implications for the region grappling with terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Recent trends across the globe demonstrate the rise of xenophobia and that nations are turning inward with a willingness to sacrifice personal liberties in favor of greater state control. Yet the problem of terrorism is transnational and global. The compulsions of geopolitics and geoeconomics seem to guide the international community’s soft approach to countries that shirk their commitment to international norms of accountability and good governance. But this is a strategy that has potential to extract a high price as illustrated by the example of Afghanistan’s *mujabedeen* following the exit of Soviet troops. When morals and effective governance are subject to the vagaries of the geopolitical environment, whole-of-society counterterrorism strategies become vulnerable to failure.

Nationalism in the name of God would further justify the cause and swell the ranks of those that sow terror in the name of God. Multiple grievances (alienation, humiliation, demographic shifts, historical wrongs, and claims over territory) that drive religious terror and vary from spiritual to temporal and from instrumental to ideological, often provide a fertile

environment for recruitment.⁶⁵ With economies floundering during the COVID crisis, and the loss of millions of jobs across all segments, the potential dividends of a youth bulge could instead turn into a dangerous disaster.⁶⁶

The growing tide of Islamophobia,⁶⁷ state-sponsored violence against minorities, claims of genocide, and the tendency for states to respond with brutality, in violation of human rights, and with little regard for international norms, further ensures that terrorism will remain an integral part of the region's security concern in the years ahead. With over one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar living in squalid camps in neighboring Bangladesh, there is concern among radicalization experts that these camps offer ideal conditions to make them potential breeding grounds for extremism.⁶⁸ Al-Qaeda was quick to release a statement of support.⁶⁹ In Pakistan, the Ahmadi, a religious sect that a rights group says suffers widespread persecution, continue to be denied a voice, status, and protection in a newly formed commission for minorities.⁷⁰ Counterterrorism efforts are further confounded by the popular practice among states to label as "terrorist" any movement that takes up arms to challenge a state's inability or indifference to the legitimate grievances of a particular community.

The international community is finally noticing the rise of Islamophobia⁷¹ that has been simmering for long in India.⁷² In its annual report of 2020, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (IRF) has recommended that the State Department designate India⁷³ as a "country of particular concern" saying the country was "engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing and egregious religious freedom violations."⁷⁴ India last received a similar rating from the watchdog in 2004, also a period of heightened concern over a Hindu nationalist government's treatment of religious minorities, especially Muslims and Christians. In 2002, more than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in three days of riots in the state of Gujarat. The Commission also recommended that the State Department redesignate both Pakistan and Myanmar⁷⁵ as Countries of Particular Concern for the treatment of their minority religious communities and assorted Muslim sects.⁷⁶ The latest report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is a move in the right direction. While, expectedly, countries being called out brush aside the report, the international community should leverage the report's findings in dealing with them.

The Naxalite movement in India, reincarnated from its crushing defeat in the 1960s after the shift of the Indian economy toward a free market model and the ensuing takeover by the state of lands that provided shelter to the poorest of the poor, indigenous tribes, and the disenfranchised, is firmly

entrenched. Only a commitment by the state to uplift the living conditions of the dispossessed could provide an opening for a lasting resolution.

If most terrorism is a local phenomenon that is networked into a bigger regional and global system, so is counterterrorism. Yet, the record of the regions' primary organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in tackling terrorism, despite an early regional consensus on counterterrorism, remains dismal. With the widening network of terrorist groups in the subcontinent and the fates of the eight countries interlinked with one another, the need for regional cooperation has never been as dire, and yet, some countries find it difficult "to overcome their proclivity to pursue political goals and limited national agendas within the regional framework."⁷⁷

Given the seemingly insurmountable challenges of governance across the region, rising Islamophobia, widening socioeconomic and sectarian divides, SAARC remains a hostage to the India-Pakistan relationship and is unable to unite the countries toward the common goal of regional prosperity and security. Bilateral cooperation, while mutually beneficial to signatories, has limited value to addressing a regional problem. With a population of nearly two billion people, South Asia is especially vulnerable to terrorism because of its high population density, insufficient government resources, and inadequate governing systems. It would require a more responsive system of governance to alleviate the legitimate grievances of the disaffected and counter the narratives of groups that are successfully able to exploit the situation in pursuit of their violent goals.

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