



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

HOW GLOBAL IS THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR?

Ankit Kumar

Research Associate , CAPS

The United States government led by President George W. Bush and his advisors launched the global war on terror (GWOT) campaign after being attacked by al-Qaeda (an indirect creation of US foreign policy tool). The al-Qaeda attacked the US on land in 1998 (The US embassy bombings), on sea in 2000 (USS Cole bombing) and finally by air on 11 September 2001 by striking different places using hijacked aircraft. The last attack made US realise that it is fighting a sophisticated and well organised terrorist organisation, which had manage to spread its network all around the globe. Hence, a global war on terror was launched because terrorism had become a concern for the US. But thirteen years down the line what has been the outcome? The Islamic terrorism today has become a bigger challenge than it was in 2001. It raises the question that why the global campaign has not achieved the result that it was suppose to achieve.

Terrorism is Global but also Regional

While the recent attacks on a school in Peshawar and on a satirical newspaper office in Paris got a lot of coverage in the international media, the terrorist attacks in Nigeria by Boko Haram has received comparatively less attention. Perhaps it has more to do with the perception of Africa by and large as a war torn and violent continent. But when the killing of more than two thousand Nigerians (deadliest act of Boko Haram according to Amnesty International) does not garner the same response as the killing of 12 French nationals, it shows the different classification of terrorism.ⁱ The first thing that countries have understood but failed to take into account in conducting operation is that terrorist organisations are well networked and have modules in every region. The West alone should not be made synonymous with anything that is considered global. At the global level terrorism has become a fight between the West and the Islamic fundamentalists. Most of the major



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

campaigns against terrorist groups, be it al-Qaeda or the ISIS, are primarily being undertaken by the western coalitions. However, without taking the regional stakeholders along, the chances of a favourable outcome are very low. The ISIS is a case in point where the western coalitions are basically involved in an air raid campaign but unless the regional stakeholders such as Turkey and Iran are also involved in the operations, it is very difficult to eliminate the so-called caliphate.

Another caliphate has been declared in Nigeria where Islamic fundamentalists are carrying an equally brutal if not more conquest in the West African region. But so far the world has not paid much attention to these developments. Is the importance of African countries limited only to the exploitation of their natural resources? The United States led western allies may have been involved in tackling the terror campaign in Nigeria but eventual shutting of import of Nigerian oil by the USⁱⁱ has left Nigeria and its population to fend for themselves. The terrorist organisations, which include al-Qaeda, are getting increasingly powerful in Africa and because of the coverage that ISIS has received worldwide, the terror groups in Africa are getting inspired to increase the intensity and brutality of their conquest.ⁱⁱⁱ It is quite plausible that the west may not have been involved in operation against ISIS but for the video recording of beheading of western nationals by the ISIS fighters.

Selective Approach

During the SAARC Summit 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to all the countries to adopt a zero tolerance approach to terror.^{iv} Western countries, especially the United States, remain still quite selective in identifying and targeting terrorist organisations. While, the US sees the terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda as a genuine threat to its security because they have been targeted by them in the past and continue to be targeted, it has a fairly relaxed approach when it comes to the terror groups that are not targeting them. In fact, the US and the West have supported the Islamic fundamentalists against the Assad regime in Syria. The condoning of terror groups operating against China, India and Russia by the West illustrates the definition of terrorism of the West.



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

It is hard for Indians to fathom that Cuba was listed as a state-sponsor of terrorism by the US Department of State, while Pakistan has repeatedly been called one of the closest allies. It is on record that Cuba has never indulged in any terrorist activity against the US. The Country Reports on Terrorism (CRT) for 2013 by the US State Department states that *“There was no indication that the Cuban government provided weapons or paramilitary training to terrorist groups.”* The same CRT report says this about Pakistan *“The Pakistani military undertook operations against groups that conducted attacks within Pakistan such as TTP, but did not take action against other groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), which continued to operate, train, rally, and fundraise in Pakistan during the past year. Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network (HQN) leadership and facilitation networks continued to find safe haven in Pakistan, and Pakistani authorities did not take significant military or law enforcement action against these groups.”* The reason given by the State Department for identifying Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism is that the Cuban government has continued to harbor fugitives wanted in the United States.^v

When compared what the same report says about Pakistan and Cuba, America’s dual standard on terrorism is fairly evident. Interestingly the United States, in all its wisdom, has continued to support a state that sponsors terrorism and make it an ally in war against terrorism, expecting a positive outcome. Has this not happened at the expense of India’s as well as larger South Asian regional security?

Many countries fear that launching counterterrorism operation against terror groups other than those they are being targeted by, would result in increase of terror attacks as these organisation would also join in. But it appears that soon countries are going to run out of this option because of increasing networking and support between various terror groups and their intentions of making a global presence. The announcement by al-Qaeda of the formation of a wing in Indian sub-continent is worrisome, if al-Qaeda is planning for it. Al-Qaeda would most likely become a facilitator for coordination between several terror groups that are active against India as it has done elsewhere.



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Way Forward

The under representation of African countries as well as Asian countries in the global security forums such as the UNSC is a major hurdle in GWOT. Because of the clear wedge between the five permanent members of the UNSC on issues concerning their other national interests, the UNSC has been divided into two groups. The European group led by US is focused on tackling terror groups based in middle-East whereas China and Russia, the other two are simply fighting their own war against terrorism. The NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan is a challenge as well as opportunity for the regional stakeholders to take up a bigger role in combating terrorism. Countries need to operate jointly in every region against terrorism without any classification, if they wish to eliminate it.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

-----XXXXXXXX-----

ⁱ "Nine days later, bodies still litter bushes from Boko Haram's 'deadliest' massacre", CNN, 13 January 2015, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/12/africa/boko-haram-deadliest-attack/>, accessed on 14 January 2015.

ⁱⁱ "Oil Price Slide - The Real Problem", Oil Price, 6 November 2014, at <http://oilprice.com/Energy/Oil-Prices/Oil-Price-Slide-The-Real-Problem.html>, 14 January 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ "ISIS Is Inspiring Terrorist Groups In Africa", Business Insider, 28 August 2014, at <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-africas-militants-may-be-inspired-by-islamic-state-gains-officials-told-2014-8?IR=T>, accessed on 14 January 2014.

^{iv} Text of Prime Minister's speech at 2014 SAARC Summit in Nepal, *Narendramodi.in*, 26 November 2014, at <http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-ministers-speech-at-2014-saarc-summit-in-nepal/>, accessed on 14 January 2015.

^v Country Reports on Terrorism 2013, *U.S. Department of State*, at <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/>, accessed on 14 January 2015.