

## **Guide to Safer India**

**By**

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How safe is India? Mumbai episode has elicited a variety of comments like “unsafe citizens in a safe country”, “Such incidents are bound to occur in big cities”. These extreme remarks reflect the concern as well as apathy and diverse perceptions of security. The general mood has brought the political class to attention. Major terrorist strikes earlier in Mumbai and elsewhere did not raise the same level of annoyance or criticism. Was it because the security situation has really worsened, or the people’s sensitivity sharpened, or was it media created? We need to ponder.

On its travel from Munich (1972 Olympics) to Mumbai, terrorism has achieved many firsts and has often reminded security experts and planners that they have not learned any lesson from history. Let not the Mumbai incident become a blame game. Best we let it remain a good case study to help in achieving better security. It is a case study which can be looked at from different levels--policy planners responsible for national security, bureaucrats and security officials overseeing security as well as police and paramilitary forces providing security on ground and dealing with related problems. Unbiased and critical view of this case will help in gleaning layers of lessons applicable at different levels.

Providing security is an arduous and complex task. It is impossible to physically guard the full land and sea borders all along. Terrorism through air also is required to be taken care of. Borders perforce will remain porous. In a highly populated liberal democratic society with beehive of economic activity where different ethnic, religious, linguistic, economic classes live and work together and more so when there is no system of a national electronically verifiable identity card, the society also becomes porous thus making the job of intruding terrorists’ work easy. Setting up of National Investigation Agency, enhancing the strength of NSG and its multipoint deployment to reduce reaction time and amendment to Unlawful Activities Act, are all welcome steps, but not enough since their contribution is mainly post terror strike. We need to enhance our strength to pre-empt or prevent a strike. Transplanting American or Israeli systems as many ardent advocates of national security may suggest, cannot work in our environment. They certainly provide many ideas and sub system models. We need to evolve our own system. We need to strengthen our capability in intelligence gathering, assessing, dissemination, cooperation & communication procedures between various security forces and an accountable & practical command and control set up. Our systems and procedures need to be revised and updated. National data bank with exhaustive information should be created and accessible to each police station and other concerned agencies on ground with facility and links to verify personnel details without any loss of time. Forces need to be equipped with modern equipment, clothing, weapons and communication systems. High level of training is equally important, lest the benefit of modern equipment would be lost. Training includes physical, handling of modern equipment, technological including IT, banking, commerce and language. Motivational

aspects and leadership training are to be accorded highest priority. Above all political interference in day to day functioning should be eliminated. Well defined responsibility, powers and accountability should be part of the revitalized system. Heads at various levels must roll when lapses and failures come to the fore. Procedures and systems should be such that scope for turf wars is eliminated.

Providing security to the Nation is a massive exercise and we need to take a Systems Approach. Even after various improvements, functioning may not be smooth unless the system integration is achieved. Individually, various departments, police in different states, central police forces, paramilitary forces, communications etc., may be brought to high levels of efficiency, but yet the overall system may not produce results, basically because of the Indian weakness of being individually bright and capable but not as a team. We must accept the reality that optimization of sub-systems do not necessarily optimize the overall system, it would often sub-optimize the whole system. While integrating the system, there may be a need to sub-optimize some sub-systems for ensuring overall system optimization even though political and regional forces may obstruct such measures. Logic has to overtake passion. It is not an easy task.

Achieving security is a slow and evolutionary process. Traditionally it has been assumed to be the responsibility of the State. In a globalised world, with high levels of technology and communication, the stake holders are many and their direct and indirect involvement are therefore, very important. Basically, there are five major players and they should work in harmony with each other--Political leadership, State security apparatus, corporate world, media & civil society organizations and finally, very importantly, the people of one India. Political leadership plays many roles, as law & policy maker, overseeing security while in power or proximate to power, interacting with the populace and integrating the other four players. Citizens have started raising doubts about this capability of political leadership and of their commitment. The leadership has to rise to the occasion. When they rise up, the cost of personal security of the whole political class taken care of by the state will not come up for discussion. What is deplorable is that even such important issues like anti terrorism and internal security, political parties have not been able to come to a consensus on policy formulation.

Much has already been said and written about security agencies, depoliticisation, police reforms, equipment, training, motivation, leadership etc. Even a fraction of all that is said is implemented, things will be in better shape. The corporate world has very much understood a concept that they need to give back something to the society and have progressively engaged themselves in health, education and other social welfare activities. It is time now to involve them in providing security also. First of all, they should enhance their own security with quality and in quantity and not be a burden on the state. The state should help in training, guidance, help with intelligence inputs and also added security cover when things are beyond the corporate capability. But the corporate should develop reasonable capability to protect themselves. Corporate expenditure on security should be seen as an investment. An observation in this connection is that the head of security normally is nowhere in corporate hierarchy and has no say, if at all, it is through the HRD or admin department who have no clue of modern security implications. The

security staff is often unorganized labour, low paid and tasked to keep an eye on trouble makers and petty thieves. The suggested step will strengthen and promote private security agencies as a major industry including export capability with all its economic gains to the society besides spreading awareness and security consciousness. The Government should also permit and issue licenses to corporate security organizations to procure appropriate weapons and communication equipment. The fear of small arms proliferation should not deter this step. It is to be noted that threat to the society is not from people holding licensed weapons but illegal holdings in a lawless society.

The power and potential of the media are enormous and they have to consider as to how best they can contribute and help other stake holders. Media and the civil society organizations, besides spreading security awareness can be a very effective watch dog and provide checks and balance. They need to exercise moderation, avoid sensationalizing and project informed news and judgments. As a good citizen, all of us individually and collectively have to contribute. We should cooperate and help the systems to take root and function effectively. We appreciate the need for high level of security and at the same time must acknowledge the fact that greater the need for security, greater would be the state intrusion into individual privacy. The tendency to object security checks should be discouraged. Giving exemptions to officials and other influential personalities set bad examples. A people friendly police can get enormous help from citizens, particularly in intelligence gathering, forewarning as well as during follow up investigation. Let us understand that without the involvement of people, the security agencies will only be half effective.

Given the state of affairs in our neighbouring countries, our security challenges will only increase. Our commitment and efforts have to match the ever increasing threats. Yet there will never be fool proof security. A terrorist has to be lucky at one time and at one place, whereas, the security apparatus has to be lucky always and at all places. This calls for eternal vigilance on everyone's part and of course their commitment. On balance, one can say with confidence that the state of our security is good with a lot of scope for improvement and such improvement is within our reach. More so, we need to ensure the improvement if we aspire to become a great power in the region which is also within our reach.