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They Came by Boat: The 2008 Terrorist Attack on Mumbai

Soumitro Sen and Uttaran Dutta

Chapter Preview

How did the Indian government respond to the terrorist attacks that took place in November 2008 in Mumbai? This crisis had a transnational impact as it affected not only the immediate citizens of Mumbai, but also foreign nationals who were at certain venues of the attacks, including business houses, public places, a hospital, and a Jewish center that were targeted during the period of a few days. The unprecedented continuous live coverage of the crisis on mainstream television channels coupled with pressure from international and local stakeholders—among numerous other social factors—prevented the Indian government from taking prompt action which, in turn, exacerbated the crisis.

After reading the chapter, you will be able to

- *Understand the role of culture in handling of crises situations*

Culture and Crisis Communication: Transboundary Cases from Nonwestern Perspectives, First Edition.
Edited by Amiso M. George and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo.

- *Learn about a case of transnational terrorism, its scope, and how a government entity responded to it amid myriad national and international constraints*
- *Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the response of the Indian government to the crisis*
- *View the role of traditional and social media within the matrix of a crisis situation and their impact on crisis response*
- *Know that crisis communication is not a linear or a simple process, but rather multilayered, and influenced by numerous sociocultural factors, which need to be taken into account while planning any crisis response*

Background: India and Its Immediate Neighbor, Pakistan

The geopolitical landscape of Southeast Asia is dominated in particular by the presence of two—out of Asia's three—nuclear powers, who also are neighbors—and rivals. Carved out of what was once British-ruled India, mainly on the basis of religion (Pakistan and East Pakistan had a Muslim majority, while India remained a secular state with a Hindu majority), the two nation-states, since their genesis in 1947, have clashed on issues of boundaries, religious problems, and most important on the controversy surrounding the North Indian region of Kashmir, which Pakistan lays claim to. Incorporating Kashmir—with its Muslim majority—within its boundaries "is a basic national aspiration [of Pakistan] bound up in its identity as an Islamic state" [1]. For India, having Kashmir as a part of it is "vital to its identity as a secular, multiethnic state" [1].

Since the 1980s, militancy in Kashmir has been a particular source of discord between India and Pakistan [1]. According to the Council on Foreign Affairs, the three major terrorist groups active in Kashmir include Harakat ul-Mujahideen, which was held responsible for hijacking an Indian airliner in December 1999; Jaish-e-Mohammed, a group blamed for attacking the Indian Parliament in 2001; and Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group that was pointed out as having carried out the bombings on Mumbai's trains in July 2006 as well as the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

The Mumbai attacks were unique for a number of reasons: (i) collectively, as a coordinated act of terrorism, it caused a transnational crisis, claiming not only Indians but also people of various nationalities who were especially targeted in the attacks [2]; (ii) the attacks were perpetrated on multiple high profile, elite locations in Mumbai, including two renowned five-star hotels; (iii) the attacks unfolded live on television over a number of days; (iv) the attacks were carried out by terrorists under the close guidance of handlers in Pakistan who were "monitoring the situation in Mumbai through live media, and delivered specific and situational attack commands through satellite phones" [2] to the attackers; and (v) social media—especially Twitter—were leveraged by the public to share information about the attacks as the

events were unfolding. These twitter feeds in turn were providing information to the mainstream global media.

However, before we delve into the specifics of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, we first want to discuss how the culture of India influences the way the country usually responds to crisis situations in general.

Culture and Crisis Communication

Although public relations firms in India today offer crisis communication services for clients, there is limited scholarly literature on crisis communication research or practice in India. Also, within the larger purview of crisis communication research, there is a dearth of scholarship that assesses the role of culture in crisis communication practice. The closest reference one can draw is from international public relations [3] which posits that the culture of a country indeed plays a role in its public relations practice, through their examination of public relations in India, Japan, and South Korea. Given the close relationship between crisis communication and public relations—both of which deal with the communication processes between an organization and its stakeholders albeit under different circumstances—it might be worthwhile to discuss how culture then plays a role in the way a country responds to crises in general. But analyzing the history of crises response in a country of such great antiquity as India would itself demand a chapter, if not an entire book. We therefore touch upon certain cultural values that are embedded within the Indian psyche that might play a role in the way in which the country handles crises.

In an interview recorded around 1971, prior to India's military conflict with Pakistan, then-prime minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was asked by a television journalist if India might attack Pakistan in light of the political turmoil that was unfolding then in East Pakistan (former name of Bangladesh). Mrs. Gandhi replied: "I hope not. India has always tried to be on the side of peace and negotiations and so on. But of course we can't endanger our security in any way" [4].

Indians are generally patient people, broad-minded with a high threshold for accepting the unexpected; but at the same time, they display a preference for a more long-term, pragmatic culture.

One might argue that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's response encapsulates the Indian approach to conflict in general, which is typified by tolerance tempered with caution. According to the Hofstede Center, "India is traditionally a patient country where tolerance for the unexpected is high ... People generally do not feel driven and compelled to take action-initiatives and comfortably settle into established roles and routines without questioning" [5].

To put it simply, as most tourists from western countries visiting India would notice early in their sojourn, Indians are generally easy-going people who live life at a more relaxed pace than the people, say, in the United States, do. Scoring high on "long-term orientation"—one of the six dimensions of national culture as enunciated by Hofstede [6]—Indian society displays a preference for a more long-term, pragmatic culture [5]. "Societies that have a high score on pragmatism typically forgive lack of punctuality, a changing game-plan based on changing reality, and a general comfort with discovering the fated path as one goes along rather than playing to an exact plan" [5]. This relaxed perspective on life is perhaps why response to a crisis situation in India often takes longer than it would elsewhere. For example, "during the first hours of the [2008 Mumbai terrorist] attack the police forces were in a state of confusion ... Nobody knew what was going on, or what to make of the fragments of information they were receiving" [7].

Given the numerous occasions when Mumbai had experienced bombings in the past, one would expect that law enforcement would have been better prepared for a crisis arising from a terrorist attack.

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But when two terrorists, Ismail Khan and Ajmal Amir Kasab, entered Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus at about 9:20 p.m. on November 26 and started firing and throwing grenades into the crowds of passengers, "poorly equipped and ill-prepared police and security guards could do little other than hide behind the columns" [7]. We also know that commandos at the Oberoi Hotel—one of the five-star hotels which was attacked—were able to kill two assailants at that venue after 42 hours of siege [7]. At yet another venue of attack, Khan and Kasab—who had first massacred victims at the railway station—encountered a police vehicle and were able to kill six out of the seven policemen in the police jeep [7]. All of the above pieces of information indicate that security personnel and law enforcement agencies were not prepared well enough for a terrorist attack. This lack of alertness and preparedness for action is symptomatic of the relaxed approach to life in India, which we mentioned earlier.

In the next section, we provide an overview of the attacks and also situate them within the matrix of past terrorist attacks in Mumbai as well as terrorist attacks that had taken place in other Indian cities in 2008, before the Mumbai attack. In addition, we discuss (in subsequent sections), how India—here the main entity against whom the acts of terror were precipitated—responded to the crisis, the cultural influences on the response, the outcome, and the lessons learned from the case.

Case Study: 2008 Mumbai Terrorist Attacks

On November 23, 2008, a group of 10 Pakistani young men left the port metropolis of Karachi by boat, sailing southeast for Mumbai, the commercial capital of India on the Arabian Sea coast [8]. En route, they hijacked a fishing trawler, killing its captain and crew, and finally reached Mumbai on November 26 [8]. Once on shore, they broke up into five pairs [7] and unleashed terrorist attacks using machine guns and grenades on seven locations around Mumbai [8], killing approximately 173 people and injuring 293 [9] over the next 3 days. The locations were some of the busiest in the city of around 21 million residents [10]—including the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station—as well as some of the most elite, such as the iconic Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel overlooking the touristy Gateway of India and the Oberoi Trident Hotel, located at Nariman Point, Mumbai's central business district. Terrorist attacks also took place at the Leopold Café—a destination especially popular among international tourists, the Metro Cinema, the Cama and Albless Hospital, and Nariman House, also known as Chabad House, which was a guest house purchased by an orthodox Jewish organization called Chabad Liberation Movement of Hasidic Jews [7].

This, however, was not the first time terrorist attacks had been carried out in Mumbai by Islamic extremist groups. Twelve bomb attacks had taken place in and around Mumbai between 1993 and 2008, claiming 544 lives and injuring 1774 [11]. Some of the more prominent ones on the list—especially in terms of the number of casualties—included seven explosions which took place on July 11, 2006, within a period of 15 minutes on various commuter trains in Mumbai's suburban railway system—one of the busiest in the world—during evening rush hour [12]. The attacks killed nearly 200 people and injured 900, according to the National Counterterrorism Center in Washington DC. In September 2015, after an 8-year-long trial, 12 men were found guilty for their roles in the bombings [12]. Lashkar-e-Taiba, an Islamic militant group backed by Pakistan, was blamed for the attack, although Pakistan denied the allegation [12].

Earlier, on August 25, 2003, two bombs planted in taxis killed at least 44 people and injured nearly 150 [13]. Incidentally, one of the blasts took place near the Gateway of India, as one of the taxis was parked outside the Taj Mahal Hotel—the most prominent location of the 2008 attacks [13]. Two men and a woman—all of whom were members of Lashkar-e-Taiba—were sentenced to death by an Indian court in August 2009 because of their roles in the bombings [14].

The highest number of casualties, however, occurred in the terrorist attacks which rocked Mumbai on March 12, 1993 [11]. This time, Islamic terrorists detonated devices at 13 different locations around the city killing 257 people and injuring 700 [11]. One of the masterminds behind the attacks was Dawood Ibrahim, a well-known organized crime leader [11], who, India suspects, lives in Karachi [15] and is still at large. India convicted 100 of 123 suspects for their roles in the attacks [16]. Yakub Memon, one of the key players in the attacks, was hanged in July 2015 [16].

While the above incidents recall the deadliest attacks that have taken place in Mumbai since the early 1990s, it is also worth noting that in 2008 itself, prior to the Mumbai attacks in November, terrorist bombings by Islamic extremists groups had taken place in other Indian cities. On May 13, 2008, six blasts ripped through the city of Jaipur, a popular tourist destination in the western state of Rajasthan, killing more than 60 people [17]. Later, on July 25, 2008, seven explosions killed two individuals in Bengaluru in Southern India [17]. The following day, July 26, a total of 21 bomb blasts within a period of 70 minutes killed 56 and wounded 200 people in Ahmedabad in Western India [17]. Indian Mujahideen, a terrorist group, claimed responsibility for the May attacks in Jaipur and the July bombings in Ahmedabad [17].

What, however, set apart the Mumbai attacks in November 2008 from the others in the past, was the vast number of foreigners who were among the casualties—which in turn drew the attention of the international media to the attacks. The other important factor was how the attacks unfolded on live mainstream television over 3 days, and also how ordinary citizens used smartphones and social media "to post a constant stream of information to websites that were accessed by people locally and around the globe [18]. Thus, it has been claimed that for the first key hours of the attacks, Flickr rather than the New York Times or BBC World had more detailed and relevant information" [18]. While bloggers reported "first-hand information from e-mail, tweets and uploaded photos posted by people who were close to the attacks, Twitter updates fed a steady stream of live coverage of events as they occurred on the scene" [18].

At the end of the 3-day mayhem that had turned the entire city of Mumbai into "an undifferentiated 'enemy space' in which nobody could feel safe," [7] all but one of the terrorists had been killed. Ajmal Kasab, a 21-year-old terrorist, was arrested and later sentenced to death. He was hanged on November 21, 2012 in Pune, India, after his plea for clemency was rejected by the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee.

The 2008 Mumbai attack, therefore, was a terrorist-created crisis like India had never faced before. It unfolded over 3 days at multiple locations in India's financial capital, in full view of the world media, and it impacted people from multiple nations. According to Raman [2], the terrorists targeted the specific locations to fulfill a three-pronged political agenda, which was anti-India, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish, and anti-US and anti-NATO.

The 2008 Mumbai attack was a terrorist-created crisis like India had never faced before. It unfolded over 3 days at multiple locations in India's financial capital, in full view of the world media, and it impacted people from multiple nations.

The anti-India agenda was accomplished by targeting busy public places such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji railway station as well as the Taj and Oberoi Trident hotels Is

and the Leopold Cafe, which are frequented by international visitors, whose faith in the security of life and property in India would be shaken [2]. The anti-Israel and anti-Jewish agenda was served by attacking Nariman House, a Jewish center [2]. The anti-US and anti-NATO agenda was served as terrorists particularly targeted foreigners—12 out of the 25 killed—from countries which had contributed troops to the NATO in Afghanistan [2].

In the subsequent sections, we discuss the stakeholders who were impacted in the attacks as well as examine the strategies and tactics adopted by some of those stakeholders as response to the crisis.

Stakeholders

This unprecedented terrorist-initiated crisis impacted numerous stakeholders including the common citizens of Mumbai (of various religions, age groups, socioeconomic classes, and castes), foreigners (tourists, business executives, and religious personnel) at the venues of attacks, the business houses which were targeted (the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel, Oberoi Trident Hotel, and Leopold Cafe), the Indian nation state as a whole (this included police and security officials who were killed and injured; infrastructural facilities which were damaged; and the desecration of the overall image of India as a secure nation), as well as countries and international organizations.

Responses of the Indian Government

The attacks drew multiple responses from the Indian government and certain prominent international entities such as the United Nations as well as nations like the United States. As we demonstrate below, the responses were unilateral (from India's side alone), bilateral (from India and Pakistan), multilateral (involving international organizations and nations), and nongovernmental.

Goals and Objectives of the Indian Government

- To stop the siege as soon as possible.
- To assure citizens—including affected families—of the government's commitment to subduing the crisis.
- To ensure such terrorist attacks never happen again by forming a federal investigative agency.
- To communicate India's strong anti-terrorist stance to neighboring nations.
- To display India's commitment to transnational peace building by refraining from taking hasty military action against pro-terror nations and organizations.

Unilateral Strategies and Tactics Deployed by the Indian Government

- **Indian Prime Minister's immediate reaction.** The crisis marked a particular high point in the tensions between India and Pakistan. In his address to the nation on November 27, 2008, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh addressed the worst-hit stakeholders in the attacks—the common people of Mumbai. He offered his condolences to the families of the deceased and sympathies to the injured [19] and promised that the government would "take all necessary measures to look after the well-being of the affected families, including medical treatment of the injured" [19]. But more importantly, to assure the nation, he promised that the government would take "the strongest possible measures to ensure that there is no repetition of such terrorist acts. We are determined to take whatever measures are necessary to ensure the safety and security of our citizens" [19].
- **Call to the nation and future actions.** Asserting potential actions by the Indian government, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said: "We will take up strongly with our neighbors that the use of their territory for launching attacks on us will not be tolerated, and that there would be a cost if suitable measures are not taken by them" [19]. He also proposed a number of other actions, which included tightening existing laws to ensure no terrorist could escape the law [19]; setting up a Federal Investigation Agency to investigate acts of terrorism and bring the guilty to justice [19]; strengthening the police and intelligence authorities; restricting the entry of suspects into the country; and ensuring that perpetrators, organizations, and supporters of terrorism are punished irrespective of their affiliation or religion [19]. And finally, to ensure that the attacks did not ignite communal hostilities between the Hindu and Muslim communities, he urged people to remain peaceful so that the "enemies of our country" do not succeed in their "nefarious designs."
- **Nation-level anti-terrorist initiative.** In a meeting with major political parties on November 30, 2008, the Indian Prime Minister reiterated his intention to "establish a federal investigative agency, strengthen maritime and air security, and set up a number of new bases for commando forces" [7] since the attacks were carried out in a commando style. Subsequently, on December 17, 2008, the Indian Parliament passed the National Investigation Agency Act 2008 to establish the National Investigation Agency to investigate and prosecute acts of terrorism [7].

Governmental Bilateral and Multilateral Strategies and Tactics

- **Temporary suspension of bilateral initiatives.** According to Javaid and Kamal [9], "the Mumbai mayhem on November 26, 2008 proved to be the sunset of the ongoing Indo-Pak peace dialogues" [9], which had been gaining

momentum since 2003. Once the attacks took place, all the secretary-level talks on trade, Siachen, and Sir Creek were suspended. The cricket tour of Pakistan and the meeting of Indian Pakistan Joint Commission on Environment were cancelled. In addition, the Indian visa issuance process for Pakistani nationals was restricted [9].

- **Multilateral anti-terrorist steps.** The attacks also put India and Pakistan on high alert in terms of the possibility of a war breaking out [9]. However, diplomatic pressures from the United States helped to avert the possibility of war [9]. India, nevertheless, demanded a ban on Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD)—a front organization of Lashkar-a-Taiba, which was later banned by the United States in 2014 [20]—to the UN Security Council [7]. Pakistan subsequently launched an operation against a JuD complex near Muzaffarabad and detained several people including Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, a mastermind behind the Mumbai 2008 attacks [7]. In addition, in January 2009, Pakistan officially accepted that Ajmal Kasab was its citizen and that parts of the Mumbai attacks had been planned in Pakistan [9]. Lakhvi, however, was released from Rawalpindi's high security Adiala jail on bail in April 2015 because of dearth of evidence from the Pakistani government to continue his detention [21]. His release was decried in India as an "insult" to those killed in the Mumbai attacks in 2008 [21].

Nongovernmental Actions

Nongovernmental stakeholders in the attacks—the businesses and the Jewish center which had been attacked—all subsequently resumed functioning as usual after staying closed for varying periods of time.

- Leopold Café resiliently resumed its normal business just 4 days after the attack, on November 30, 2008 [22].
- The Taj Mahal Palace reopened its doors on August 15, 2010—India's 63rd independence day [23].
- The Nariman House reopened its doors in August 2014, where its new co-directors, Rabbi Yisroel Kozlovsky and his wife Chaya Kozlovsky, carry on the work begun by Rabbi Gabi and Rivka Holtzberg, who were slain in the Mumbai attacks [24].

Relationship Between Culture and Crisis Response

The response of the Indian people as well as that of the Indian government to the Mumbai attacks exposed certain deficiencies that exist within the fabric of the Indian society and disadvantage Indian masses. Since there is no substantial emphasis on

crisis communication pedagogy in the Indian education system, there is little awareness even among educated urban Indians—not to speak of those who are illiterate—on how to respond in a crisis situation. In addition, there is a lack of infrastructure and resources that would allow people to communicate, organize themselves, and act quickly during a crisis. For instance, the number of police personnel for 100,000 citizens is 129 in India [25]—nearly a third of the corresponding number in the United States [26]. This deficiency accentuates the communication gap between the masses and the government machinery. Further, at the time of the attack, there was no emergency response system in India that corresponds to, say, the 911 or 000 emergency call system in the United States and Australia, respectively.

The coordination between government departments also was weak and that decelerated the crisis response. This can partly be attributed to the hierarchical nature of the Indian administrative structures as well as the bureaucratic hurdles. In this particular crisis situation, there was also a massive intelligence failure in anticipating and responding to the attacks. The local law enforcement was taken unawares which exacerbated the impact of the crisis.

The sensitive bilateral political situation between India and Pakistan also might have hindered an immediate response to the attacks on the part of India. As stated earlier in this chapter, both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers which might have prompted India to handle the situation with extra caution.

Positive and Negative Lessons Learned

Long-term conflicts and prolonged tensions between India and Pakistan over the years have created an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion in the South Asian region. The Mumbai terror attacks in 2008 contributed to escalating the existing animosity between the two nation-states. While the lack of preparation and/or failure of state intelligence (on India's part) might have allowed the attacks to take place, a dearth of coordination between government officials and leaders of India and Pakistan decelerated the processes of timely and meaningful actions/rebuttal against the terrorists. Moreover, unprecedented media attention over a considerable period of time might have awakened intense emotions and expectations among the public as well as put governmental stakeholders in a dilemma.

The lessons that can be learned from the incident are subdivided into three categories, namely unilateral—the Government of India's perspective; bilateral—the context of Indo-Pakistani relationship; and multilateral—the transnational or global point of view.

Unilateral Aspects

In order to resolve conflicts and build peace in South Asia, the Government of India needs to identify its weaknesses and shortcomings, and reflect on culturally and

contextually meaningful measures to prevent reoccurrence of such incidents. We believe some of the pointers mentioned below are worth paying attention to.

a. As noted earlier, an arena of mistrust is considered a barrier to building a healthy relationship between two neighboring countries. The Government of India should pay active attention to reducing/eradicating distrust and enhancing intercultural competence among leaders and bureaucrats as well as common citizens to ensure more coordination and cooperation in combating terrorism.
b. Roles of religious intolerances/conflicts and geopolitical tensions are crucial in the Indo-Pakistan terrorism context. Paying attention to religious harmony and initiating a strategy of inclusion of religious and other minorities in counter-terrorist initiatives would be meaningful in co-creating dialogic spaces. In other words, by going beyond the binary rhetoric (i.e., us vs. them) and narrow ethnocentric discourses, the state as well as the citizens could take appropriate initiatives in strengthening peace-building activities and efforts in the South Asian region.
c. Creation of awareness about terrorism and its sinister implications, as well as communication of India's commitment to fight terrorism in the broader global platforms is an important step for the government of India to take to clarify its intentions. Such efforts would be instrumental in building consensus among leaders [27] and forming international coalitions to counter terrorism and to bolster global peace-building processes.

Bilateral Aspects

Terrorism is a transnational phenomenon; in the South Asian context, both India and Pakistan need to pay sincere attention and take meaningful steps to combat terrorists and their activities. A transboundary crisis such as the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks calls for exploring some of the following issues:

a. Notions of mistrust and reluctance to bridge communicative gaps prevent both the nation-states from combating terrorism and to come up with a mutually agreed-upon crisis communication initiative. An effort at restoring communicative avenues would be helpful in building meaningful bilateral crisis communication strategies.
b. Frequent terrorist activities have increased the sense of suspicion and lack of trust, especially among the trade and business sectors of the two nations. In an era of globalization, such negative impressions can greatly affect opportunities for economic growth between the two nations. Bilateral initiatives for restoring and sustaining trade and transportation services are important for the financial health of both nations.

c. Sincere engagement in bilateral peace-building dialogues is important in combating cross-national terrorism activities. More involvement of the two nations in conflict resolution initiatives would be beneficial for the Indo-Pakistani political relationship. For instance, high level summits can be organized, or joint declarations can be signed in this regard.

d. To combat a crisis such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks, coordination between the nations needs to be seamless both diplomatically as well as in the context of the judiciary. Joint actions against terrorism, including conducting joint search and expediting transparent judicial processes, are the needs of the hour.

e. The 2008 Mumbai attacks affected the cultural exchange processes between the two nation-states. Promotion of cross-cultural activities and exchange of ideas and artifacts would create a positive and hopeful environment. For instance, organizing sports events such as Indo-Pak cricket series would contribute to reducing tensions between the two nations.

Multilateral Aspects

As terrorism impacts the lives of multiple stakeholders, multilateral measures are often useful in combating such incidents and preventing them from recurring.

a. Scholars have argued that interventions of the developed world could have been useful to minimize terrorism in the South Asian region. They opine that third-party interventions such as imposing economic sanctions and pressurizing Pakistan to expedite judicial processes and counterterrorism activities can be instrumental in reducing terrorist activities. Markey notes that, "Washington could also prepare tools for coercing and inducing New Delhi and Islamabad away from military escalation" [28]. From an Indian perspective, such measures could potentially threaten the sovereignty of both India and Pakistan if taken unilaterally by the economically and politically powerful nations and/or international organizations such as the United Nations.

b. Transnational and multiparty interventions could be meaningful in promoting peace-building dialogues and cooperation among the South Asian countries. Such dialogic spaces need to be created both at strategic and tactical levels as long-term and short-term crisis communicative praxis, respectively. In addition, opening up track-two dialogic spaces among various stakeholders of both nation-states is necessary for meaningful communication between political leaders, military personnel, representatives of civil societies, and other key decision-makers of India, Pakistan, and other international players. Multilateral cooperation and collaboration against terrorism would strengthen various global counterterrorist and peace-building initiatives. Diplomatic ties and formulating multilateral strategies using various global platforms would also help to collaboratively counter the acts and/or politics of terrorism.

c. South Asian culture, especially its legacy of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, would potentially show us meaningful avenues to bring about peace and effectively negotiate crises created by terrorism. Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism are some of the major religions in the region; teachings of these religions inspire and influence the majority of the South Asian population. Over the years, followers of these religions (as well as the followers of Sikhism, Jainism, and Christianity) embraced the values and teachings of these religions in their everyday lives. All the aforementioned religions put heavy emphasis on peace and peace-building processes to counter crisis created by hatred and violence. For instance, Hinduism pays attention to human qualities like truthfulness (*satyagraha*) and nonviolence (*ahimsa*) [29], Islam emphasizes forgiveness, mercy, and compassion [30], while Buddhist teachings value conquering worldly desires [31].

Gandhi, one of India's greatest political leaders, followed the principles of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* in his life and work. His commitment to embracing the truth and practices of nonviolence was inspired by the teachings of the Upanishads. For example, according to Ishavasya Upanishad, "when a person sees the self in all people and all people in the self, then he hates no one" [36]. Similarly, in the teachings of Islam, "forgiveness and mercy are recommended as virtues of the true faithful" [30]; principal texts of Islam such as the Quran and the Hadith emphasize brotherhood, social justice, tolerance, and compassion, thereby actively encouraging its followers to engage in peace-building processes [30]. Again, the teachings of Buddha, one of the greatest religious teachers of ancient India, taught the principles of the eightfold middle path, which emphasizes right thoughts, right speech, right action to conquer human greed and desires [37]. The aforementioned religious teachings are therefore relevant in fighting crises caused by terrorism as we see in contemporary societies. Reflexively engaging with the principles and praxis of South Asian religions is important for creating contextually and culturally appropriate crisis communication strategies to combat acts of terror in the long run.

Grounded in the above discussion, we might consider a few future-centric culturally meaningful action plans.

- Scholars have argued that awakening of critical collective consciousness is essential for fighting against acts of violence, including cultural violence [32]. Accordingly, culturally appropriate long-term initiatives can be initiated and promoted in the South Asian region through policy formulation and implementation as well as through preparing communities to respond effectively in crisis situations.
- While explaining the essence of dialogic processes, Sorrells noted, "the process of dialogue invites us to stretch ourselves—to reach across—to imagine, experience, and creatively engage with points of view, ways of thinking

and being and beliefs different from our own..." [33]. Such critical dialogic interactions among various stakeholders are important in the context of crisis communicative praxis. Therefore, bilateral and multilateral peace-building dialogues among and within various stakeholder groups are necessary for creating a more positive and nonviolent South Asia.

- A meaningful and effective coordination and collaboration among regional and international stakeholders such as nation-states, international organizations (including nongovernmental organizations and media organizations), transnational corporations, and civil societies in developing new strategies for promoting peace and bolstering counterterrorist alliances to combat terrorism in South Asia (and around the world). Such efforts would help stakeholders build more effective crisis communication strategies, well-coordinated intelligence, as well as effective technologies (both hardware and software) in combating terrorism.
- As a long-term measure, educational initiatives would be meaningful for creating awareness and enhancing preparedness among citizens of both countries. So, critical and reflective counterterrorism education starting from the primary level through to adult-education level would be helpful in shaping public opinion, increasing alertness, and encouraging citizen-level vigilance to fight terrorism.

Practical Suggestions

1. As demonstrated in the above case study, crisis communication is influenced by the culture and contexts of the country where the crisis has unfolded. Therefore, to understand how Indians respond to a crisis—which is crucial when one is conducting business in India—it is essential to comprehend the Indian psyche and worldview.
2. India is a country with ancient traditions that co-exist seamlessly with a rapidly modernizing society. It also is a diverse country with 780 different languages [34], 705 ethnic groups [35], and multiple religions—all of which leave their impressions on the Indian worldview. Any crisis management strategy should take the above-mentioned nuances into consideration for it to have any measure of success.
3. India has one of the largest number of Internet users in the world who actively participate on social media platforms; any crisis management initiative needs to take this into account. A crisis response in the Indian context, therefore, needs to be timely as well as reflective and mindful of various sociocultural factors. In the case of the Mumbai attacks, for instance, we discussed how people at the venues of the attacks were constantly sharing information via Twitter. This constant engagement with social media is typical of urban Indians.

Discussion Questions

7.1 India has experienced terrorism several times in the last few decades. So far, the country has not been able to devise a crisis communication framework/ strategy to combat terrorism. To address the existing gaps, develop a crisis communication plan which is meaningful in the Indian and South Asian context, keeping in mind the social, cultural, and political factors.

7.2 In order to prepare citizens against terrorist attacks, what are some suggestions that you can offer to do the following:

a. Provide peace-building education at the interpersonal level;

b. Create awareness about terrorism at the community level;

c. Building trust at the national and international levels.

7.3 Lack of coordination and synergy among various stakeholders—specifically between the Indian and Pakistani governments—significantly affected counterterrorist measures (in a timely fashion) during the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Suggest a plan to enhance bilateral cooperation and coordination between nations to combat terrorism effectively.

7.4 In a diverse country such as India where there are numerous local languages, different religions and ethnicities, what are some challenges that one is likely to face while putting together a crisis communication plan? What suggestions would you offer to address those challenges?

7.5 As a student of communication or a PR practitioner, what steps would you take to implement a crisis communication plan that integrates the three layers of social communication, namely face-to-face interaction, traditional mass media (such as TV, radio, and newspapers) and new media?

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