

New Age Security Threats

(Excerpts from panel discussion at CII Delhi Security Summit' 2017)



The 21st century is a different game playing field in terms of security. The threat landscape has changed significantly with the rise of terrorism, intra-state conflicts, degeneration of the environment, sweeping demographic changes and the rapidly burgeoning cyber-warfare arena emerging as the main threats to our country's security.

Rise of terrorism

Interestingly, modern conflict is no longer restricted to only wars between the military forces of states. The rise of organized crime networks and terrorist groups in the 21st century has led to a scenario wherein terrorists pose a greater threat to a state's national security than the military forces of other states.

The recent London terror attack killed at least 8 people and injured 48 others on London Bridge and in nearby Borough Market on June 2. The Manchester terror attack killed at least 22 people and injured 250 others at an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena.

These attacks in the name of religion are scary as they are neither limited by territorial boundaries, nor do they recognize the concept of sovereignty. The effective use of suicide bombers to target civilians in crowded places, the employment of sophisticated technology and tactics such as leaderless movements, sleeper cells and phantom cell networks have made it increasingly difficult for the governments to wipe off terrorist groups.

Climate change as a destabilising threat

One of the most critical issues concerning a nation's security in the 21st century is environmental degradation, and in particular, climate change and its impact. Rising population and growing energy needs, has led to the excessive depletion of natural resources, at a rate much faster than it can be replaced.

Global warming due to climate change has been predicted to have a cascading affect, wherein the increasing temperatures will facilitate more frequent formation of cyclones and storms in the tropical regions and the melting of polar ice caps, in turn leading to rising sea levels and possible submerging of low-lying areas and island nations, threatening their very existence.

Dwindling fresh water resources has led to many inter-state "water wars"; one of which was witnessed in the Cauvery row, thereby affecting thousands of livelihoods in the regions from which the water was redirected. Such endeavours may not only affect the environment but also lead to deteriorating relations with the neighbouring states.

Climate change may also affect agricultural production due to disruption of normal climate caused by increasing temperatures. Food scarcity is an issue that has been touted to be the most important problems that will be faced by the states in the future. Inflation in food prices is already a reality. In India, over 3 lakh farmers have committed suicide since 1995.

Thus, environment protection and nurturing is an urgent need of the hour, as a destabilized environment can lead to a tipping point, after which catastrophic and irreversible consequences, such as increase in the number of natural disasters, may threaten the survival of the state and its population.

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Demographic changes and their consequences

While over-population is a legitimate concern and, in some cases, already a reality in the developing and underdeveloped regions of the world. We, in India are sitting at a huge demographic dividend in terms of its 65% population is in the age group of 15-35 years of age. While it can be a huge economic advantage, if not provided with suitable opportunities can turn into a worse nightmare.

The 2017 Economic Survey of India by organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) presents a grim employment picture in the country. The report says that although the Indian economy is growing substantially, job creation and employment opportunities have not kept up with the same, and India's rate of employment has actually declined.

This demographic transition may be partially assuaged by the migrant working population from the poorer states, however, their integration into the society may not be smooth, due to the prospect of not being given employment as well entering into miscreant deeds.



Cyber-conflict and national security

The 21st century has been labelled as the Information Age, where civilians are being able to have unprecedented access to information. However, the information and communication technology (ICT) "revolution" has transformed the way information is used, transmitted and stored not only by the civilian population but also the state military and intelligence agencies. As a result, a new battlefield has opened up: Cyberspace.

Global financial and economic losses from the "WannaCry" attack that crippled computers in at least 150 countries could swell into the billions of dollars, making it one of the most damaging incidents involving so-called ransomware.

As the Internet continues to improve the lives of many all over the world, and advancements in technology break down the boundaries of what's possible, cybercriminals will continue to find flaws and vulnerabilities to use to their advantage. The rise and rise of cyber-attacks isn't set to come to a halt any time soon, so it's pivotal that businesses prepare for a new generation of cyber risks.

The panel was represented by :

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