Waking Up to New Variants of Terrors - 26/11 Attack

What is the issue?

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- It is ten years since the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack carried out by Pakistan in 2008.
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- It is imperative that a relook at the Indian security establishment is taken, given the emergence of new variants of terror.
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What are the recent instances of terror?

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- India and Mumbai city are no strangers to terror.
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- In 1993, over 250 people were killed in Mumbai in a series of coordinated bomb explosions.
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- It was attributed to Dawood Ibrahim, reportedly as retaliation for the demolition of the Babri Masjid.
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- In July 2006, bomb explosions in a number of suburban trains in Mumbai killed over 200 people and injured several more.
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- The most audacious terror attack till the 26/11 Mumbai terror incident was the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001.
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- It was carried out by the Pakistan-based terror outfits, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).
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What is the 21st Century scenario?

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- Most of the 21st century terror attacks reflect a paradigmatic change in the tactics of asymmetric warfare, and the practice of violence.
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- Terror attacks are being carried out across the world by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the Islamic State, al-Shabaab, and similar terror outfits.
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- They are certainly very different from those witnessed in the previous century.
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- The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack is one of this kind and was an unprecedented exercise in violence.
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What is the case with 26/11?

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- It involved not merely a well-trained terrorist group, but also backed by the resources of a state, viz. Pakistan.
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- It was a case of 'war by other means', in which the authorities in Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, the Pakistani armed forces, were involved.
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- Seldom has any terrorist group used such highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art communications, including Voice over Internet Protocol.
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- Planning for the attack involved the use of a third country address.
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- Handlers in Pakistan were given unfettered freedom to provide instructions to the terrorists during the entire four-day siege.
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- The choice of the sea route aimed at deception and avoiding detection was again dictated by official agencies.
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- The training regimen dictated by the Pakistani Special Forces involved
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i. psychological indoctrination by highlighting atrocities on Muslims in India and other parts of the globe

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ii. basic and advanced combat training
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iii. commando training, training in weapons and explosives, swimming and sailing
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- A more unusual feature of the Mumbai attacks was the involvement of two U.S./Canadian nationals of Pakistani origin.
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- They are David Headley (who at the time was a LeT operative) and Tahawwur Hussain Rana.
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- The Mumbai terror attack went on for nearly four days, from the evening of November 26 to the morning of November 29.
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- Seldom has a terrorist incident lasted this length of time, since the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972.
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- From an Indian standpoint, it was perhaps for the first time that an operation of this nature involved
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i. Rapid Action Force personnel
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ii. Marine Commandos (MARCOS)
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iii. the National Security Guard (NSG)
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iv. the Mumbai Police
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- As is now known, the Mumbai terror attack was not based on a sudden impulse.
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- Several years of planning and preparation had preceded the attack, even as the Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, was talking peace with then Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh.
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What were the shortfalls?

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- The Indian security establishment had failed to anticipate an attack of this nature and was not adequately prepared to deal with the situation.
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- Secrecy was the very essence of this operation as plans were limited to a mere handful of persons.
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- In the LeT hierarchy, apart from Hafiz Sayeed, only a few like Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi (chief military commander), Sajid Mir and Zarar Shah (communications chief) were privy to the operational plans.
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- U.S. intelligence is said to have penetrated Zarar Shah's computer and possibly had far more details of the operation than were actually shared with Indian intelligence.
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What are the subsequent measures?

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- In the wake of the terror attack, several steps were initiated to streamline the security set-up.
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- Coastal security was given high priority, and it is with the Navy/Coast Guard/marine police.
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- A specialised agency to deal with terrorist offences, the National Investigation Agency, was set up and has been functioning from 2009.
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- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has been constituted to create an appropriate database of security related information.
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- Four new operational hubs for the NSG (National Security Guard) have been created to ensure rapid response to terror attacks.
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- The Multi Agency Centre, which functions under the Intelligence Bureau, was further strengthened and its activities expanded.
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- The Navy constituted a Joint Operations Centre to keep vigil over India's extended coastline.
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What lies ahead?

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- Newer methodologies, newer daringly-executed concepts, and deeply laid plans of terrorist groups are a ground reality.
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- So terrorism continues to be a major threat with modern refinements and terrorism mutating into a global franchise.
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- One new variant is the concept of 'enabled terror' or 'remote controlled terror', viz. violence conceived and guided by a controller thousands of miles away.
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- Internet-enabled terrorism and resort to remote plotting is thus the new threat.
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- There are no ready-made answers to this; vigilance is important, but being ahead of these new age terror is even more vital.
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Source: The Hindu

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