In recent years, tens of thousands of people in India have died in terrorist attacks, most originating from outside its borders, yet the government has traditionally sought non-confrontational solutions. The time has come for India to seek more international support, most importantly by forging closer ties to Pakistan, and to harden response mechanisms, argues terrorism researcher Saroj Kumar Rath.
India has been among the world’s major targets of terrorism — mostly cross-border, state-sponsored attacks. Despite the enormous costs in terms of lives, resources and the stability of the country, India has always opted for dialogue, democratic procedures and the rule of law rather than official high-handedness in dealing with extremism. The armed forces generally adhere to the principle of “minimum use of force.” But these humane principles also have made India a soft target, and the threat of terrorism continues. To counter terrorism more effectively, I argue, among other things, that greater international cooperation is necessary, including cooperation with Pakistan.

In the four conventional wars that India has fought since independence, including the Kargil war with Pakistan in 1999, the total number of security forces who lost their lives was 9,857. Compare this to the number of civilians in India who have lost their lives to terrorism over the past 15 years — 62,221, a figure six times greater. Since 1998, more than 2,000 Indians have died in terrorist violence, and in 2008 alone there were 64 terror attacks across the country. Nor were these attacks concentrated in one or two major cities. The high-profile Mumbai attacks on Nov. 26, 2008, were preceded by nearly a dozen attacks in numerous Indian cities, including Ahmadabad, Delhi, Jaipur, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Gandhinagar, Guwahati, Varanasi and Lucknow. Even Parliament House, a symbol of Indian democracy, was not spared, suffering a deadly assault in 2001. When Indian investigators established later that year that the attack was the handiwork of Pakistan-based terrorist organizations Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, India on Dec. 18 launched “Operation Parakram,” mobilizing 500,000 troops along the Line of Control and international border. This led to a 10-month standoff along the India-Pakistan border, including threats of nuclear attack by Pakistan, which eventually achieved nothing. The mastermind of the attack on Parliament, Afzal Guru, was caught, convicted and sentenced to death, but because of fears among some Indian political leaders of the possible fallout from his execution, a presidential ruling to proceed or to commute the death sentence is still awaited.

This wasn’t the first time that Indian governments have appeared to take a soft line on terrorists, despite the toll they have taken. The most significant compromise was in December 1989, when Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) militants kidnapped Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, the newly sworn-in Home Minister in the cabinet of V.P. Singh.
GLOBAL ASIA Feature Essay Lurking Attacks on India: Finding and Fighting Terrorists

Sayeed. Ten years later, Pakistani terrorists hijacked an Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu. The weeklong hijacking drama ended when India offered to release three terrorists on the hijackers’ wish list. Once again, the government blinked and the prisoners were personally delivered by then External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh to the terrorists in Kandahar. Since 1989, 55 terrorists were either released in exchange for hostages or given “safe passage.” These compromises by the government have, in my view, encouraged terrorists.

LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE
It is not that India is lacking laws to deal with terrorism. A comprehensive set of laws numbering as many as ten central legal infrastructures are already in place. There is also a plethora of state-regulated laws available to deal with terrorist acts.

One major problem, however, is that implementation of the laws is the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs. To get a sense of the task, the ministry has to tackle, among other things, insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states, left-wing extremism, border management, immigration, foreign funding, relations between the central government and the states, Union Territories, the Indian Police Service (IPS) and central paramilitary forces, police modernization and policy planning. Understandably, the ministry has grown to labyrinthine proportions and now finds it difficult to manage all of these tasks.

After the attacks on the US of Sept. 11, 2001, the administration of President George W. Bush created the Homeland Security Department, which the American president believed would “make America safer because our nation would have one department whose primary mission is to protect the American homeland.” Bush wanted only one department to secure US borders, transport, ports and critical infrastructure, in addition to synthesizing and analyzing intelligence from multiple sources, training and managing a federal emergency response. Indian policymakers might be wise to consider trimming the mandate of the Ministry of Home Affairs to bring it more in line with that of the US Homeland Security Department as a way to help counter terrorism.

As it is, the Home Ministry is often in the firing line when something goes wrong, and because of this the portfolio is also known as a graveyard for politicians. The first political casualty of the Mumbai terror attacks was then Home Minister Shivraj Patil, who was replaced by P. Chidambaram, who moved swiftly to set up a National Investigation Agency (NIA) to investigate terror cases. The NIA also ensured greater co-ordination and sharing of information among intelligence agencies by reactivating the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and making it more accountable.

Compounding the problem is that there are multiple agencies to deal with terrorism, and a complex legal framework that complicates matters further. What is worse is that there is a shortage of upper-level personnel within the Ministry of Home Affairs who have experience handling security issues. Of the eight special and additional secretaries in the ministry, and 20 joint secretaries, only two are career police officers.

These problems can easily be tackled by employing experts and police officers with experience in security and counter terrorism. Also, by ensuring co-ordination among intelligence agencies, the security forces would be better able to prevent acts of terrorism. No legal framework can be effective unless accountability is fixed on the individuals whose task it is to enforce the laws. At present, that accountability doesn’t exist sufficiently in India.

THE PERMANENT ENEMY
Having said that, many of the attacks on India had their origins outside the country, which suggests,
above all else, that India and Pakistan — which has often been accused of being directly or indirectly responsible for many attacks — must come to terms with each other. When US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Islamabad in January of this year, the Pakistani prime minister informed him that “Pakistan is itself facing Mumbai-like attacks almost every other day, and when we cannot protect our own citizens, how can we guarantee that there wouldn’t be any more terrorist hits in India?” This suggests that there are grounds for common cause between India and Pakistan in the battle against extremism.

In the last 16 years, India and Pakistan have had five major confrontations, including the one that developed over the Mumbai attacks. These confrontations have either brought them close to war or resulted in sharp border conflicts, as happened in Kargil. In 1987, the Brass Tacks military exercise by India nearly sparked a war with Pakistan. As tensions increased, the hotline between the two countries was activated. In February 1987, Pakistani President General Zia ul Haq travelled to India, under the pretense of watching a cricket match, for talks to diffuse the crisis. In 1990, India and Pakistan again found themselves in a crisis over growing terrorism in Kashmir. While Islamabad stepped up its support to militants, temperatures rose, and the Indian and Pakistani militaries were partially mobilized amid nuclear threats from Pakistan. But after intervention by the US, the two sides backed off.

In 1999, the Pakistani army intruded into Indian territory masquerading as militants and prompting India to launch Operation Vijay to drive them out. As the threat of escalation grew and clear evidence emerged that Pakistani regulars were involved, the US summoned Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Washington and asked him to withdraw the forces. After the attacks on the Indian Parliament, India mounted its biggest-ever deployment of forces against Pakistan, Operation Parakram, which ended 10 months later when the US pressured Pakistan to take some cosmetic measures to check cross-border terrorism.

Following the Mumbai attacks in 2008, tensions again rose, with Pakistani President Asif Zardari putting Pakistani armed forces on high alert. The matter was resolved when US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked to both parties and the crisis was defused.

**LIVING WITH TERROR?**

India and Pakistan must work together to target those groups on Pakistani soil who mount attacks on India. Evidence points, for example, to Lashkar-e-Toiba, or “army of the pure,” the terrorist group based in Muridke, near Lahore. The 21-year-old terrorist Ajmal Kasab, captured alive during the Mumbai attacks, told police that the
attacks were directly supervised by Lashkar’s operations chief Zakiur Rahman Lakhvi and Abu Muzammil, who controls operations in India. Likewise, India must cooperate with Pakistan to tame terrorism in Pakistan, as it is often accused by Pakistan of supporting subversive groups there to stir up trouble.

Lashkar has recruited and trained cadres to operate in India, tasking them with specific suicide operations. They have provided crash courses on terror techniques targeted at young, sometimes illiterate and impressionable minds. Among the courses they have offered:

Daur-e-Aam: Basic 21-day training camp where recruits are taught to handle light weapons and hand grenades.

Daur-e-Khas: Three-month course where recruits are trained to assemble assault rifles, use maps, and conduct guerilla actions.

Baitul Rizwan: Training in river crossing and explosives.

Daur-e-Ribat: Intelligence training including propaganda, agent handling and sabotage.

Fidayeen: Hardened and committed recruits prepare for nearly a year to be suicide bombers.9

Given the extent of Lashkar’s training programs, clearly more needs to be done by Pakistani authorities to block the group’s ability to train terrorists.

REIGNING IN TERROR
Since the attacks of 9/11, countries around the world have enacted tougher laws to fight terrorism. The US enacted the Patriot Act in 2001, giving federal officials greater scope to monitor telephone calls, e-mails and medical, financial and other records. The act also eases restrictions on intelligence gathering within the US and grants powers to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities. The United Kingdom changed its liberal stand and enacted the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which allows for tough restrictions on immigration and the detention and deportation of individuals without charge. Australia also adopted the Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Act 2002, which permits increased interception of phone calls and e-mails, and the questioning and arrest of suspects, freezing of assets, powers of search and seizure of property and declaring specific groups terrorist organizations.

India, meanwhile, enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Activities Act in the aftermath of 9/11. As with other such laws worldwide, it had provisions to intercept telephone calls, arrest suspects without charge and hold people in preventive detention. The act was replaced in 2004 with the more comprehensive Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Following the Mumbai attacks, the Indian Parliament passed the National Investigation Agency Bill (2008) and amended the Unlawful

To their targets and victims, terrorists may often appear to be the incarnation of evil. But simply labeling terrorism as evil is not enough to counter the phenomenon. To do so effectively we need to understand it, identify its roots, strengths and vulnerabilities.
Activities (Prevention) Act. The latter specifically stipulates the “power of the Government of India to declare an association as unlawful.” Under the act, the government declared 35 organizations as terrorist fronts and banned them.10

Labeling organizations as terrorist groups and banning them will not in itself, of course, ensure an end to terrorism in India. These efforts must be accompanied by active counter-terrorism measures and cross-border cooperation with like-minded countries. Counter-terrorism refers to the practices, tactics and strategies that governments, the military and other institutions take to combat terrorism. It requires political will backed by strict enforcement of existing laws at the national and international level. Terrorists may act locally, but their roots and tentacles spread beyond borders. To defeat them, public support is needed along with collaboration by a host of agencies, both domestic and international. To their targets and victims, terrorists may often appear to be the incarnation of evil, deserving the utmost punishment. However, simply labeling terrorism as evil is not enough to counter the phenomenon. To do so effectively we need to understand it, identify its roots, its strengths and its vulnerabilities. And we must cooperate across borders to get at those roots, including the border between India and Pakistan.

To be sure, there may be reluctance in both countries to foster that kind of cooperation, or even more broad-based international cooperation. India itself, for example, is particularly allergic to the idea of international intervention in its domestic affairs — something that perhaps dates back to Jawaharlal Nehru’s ill-fated decision in 1948, at the urging of Lord Mountbatten, to refer the issue of Jammu and Kashmir to the United Nations.

But dealing with modern terrorism is a different ball game. National boundaries cannot secure a country from foreign networks supported by modern-day technology. India is among the first to realize this, and has reached out to cooperate with a number of countries to deal with terrorism. Since the attacks of 9/11, India has closely collaborated with the US to reduce the risks of terror attacks and signed a treaty on mutual legal assistance. When terrorists attacked Mumbai, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation was among the first to offer cooperation, along with Scotland Yard and the National Police Agency of Japan. The arrest of David Coleman Headley, one of the conspirators in the Mumbai attacks, by the FBI in Chicago — which enabled Indian authorities to unravel the so-called “Karachi Project” of planned attacks on Indian cities — is testimony to how international cooperation can help defeat terrorism. Apart from the US, it is important for both India and Pakistan to show diplomatic maturity and continue to improve relations so that they can work together to rebuild mutual trust and overcome terrorism. Although modern terror groups have increased their ability to strike at will and reach what were once thought of as impregnable or improbable targets, terrorists, in my view, can be overpowered by collaborative efforts. Though India’s war against terrorism remains largely a domestic problem, it can benefit from close cooperation with the US and other major powers.

Saroj Kumar Rath received a Ph.D. from the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and currently is a Research Associate at Hosei University in Tokyo, where he is doing work on the Mumbai terror attacks. He was previously an analyst at the political section of the Japanese Embassy in New Delhi. This article was adapted and expanded from a paper for the International European Science Foundation Conference in Naples, Italy in October 2009.