



It's Time to Reinvent UNSC's Counterterror Architecture

In the wake of the Pahalgam terror attacks and “Operation Sindoor,” Pakistan tried to abuse the UN system to deflect from its role in sponsoring terror against India. In this article, Lakshmi Puri takes a critical look at the “infirmities of the UN’s counterterrorism arsenal” and highlights that the very framework meant to deter terrorism is riddled with loopholes, vetoes and stalling tactics. The author argues for urgent reform of the UN counter-terrorism architecture if it has to retain its relevance.

Since the Indian Parliament revoked Article 370, Jammu & Kashmir has been edging back into the sunlight. With a freshly elected J&K government – the first in years – Delhi’s promise of “peace with prosperity” is taking shape in bridges, broadband and jobs, while across the Line of Control, the chaos and misery of neglect and protests in PoK offer a stark, even embarrassing, contrast to its Pakistani occupiers.

It was this hard-won but real return to normalcy that Pakistan’s long-standing strategy of “bleeding India with a thousand cuts” sought to derail. On April 22, 2025, automatic gunfire shattered the alpine hush, killing twenty-six holidaymakers and a pony handler in the gravest attack on Kashmir’s tourism sector in a generation. Crucially, it also triggered an unusually swift and sharp international reaction.

Within hours, leaders from Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and Tokyo condemned the attack. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer warned that the killings threatened “the very

idea of shared peace,” while the EU’s foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas insisted terrorism must “never be politically shielded” – a clear rebuke to states harbouring militant proxies.

West Asia’s support was equally firm. The UAE and Qatar condemned the massacre outright. Qatar’s Amir called Prime Minister Modi to pledge “full support in the fight against terrorism.” Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority democracy, termed the incident in Pahalgam an affront to human values and reaffirmed its intelligence cooperation with India. These were not mere condolences – they reflected a growing recognition that exported terror is a global menace.

Decoding UNSC’s Reaction

Even the often-muted United Nations Security Council adopted a strikingly forceful tone. Its statement deplored the killings “in the strongest terms,” emphasising the “need to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice.”



Significantly, they underscored that such acts are “criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.”

But for all its vigour, the Council soon reverted to familiar patterns of paralysis. India had urged the UNSC to go further – not just condemn the bloodshed, but to name the perpetrator: The Resistance Front (TRF), a Lashkar-e-Taiba façade that had claimed responsibility within hours. India had previously alerted the UN’s 1267 Monitoring Team about TRF’s role as a cover for LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammed as early as December 2023.

Pakistan, using its position as a non-permanent member of UNSC, fought to keep TRF out of the UNSC statement – and then openly bragged about succeeding. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar’s declaration of Islamabad’s role in blocking the naming amounted to a confession far more revealing than any

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intelligence file. Only weeks earlier, Pakistan's Defence Minister had admitted support for "certain non-state actors" as part of the state strategy. These remarks were nothing short of waving a #Terroristan flag inside the Council chamber.

China, a permanent member with veto power, completed the farce by blocking TRF's listing under the 1267 sanctions regime, just as it has previously delayed sanctions against numerous Lashkar and Jaish commanders. The result was as outrageous as it was predictable: a terror outfit could publicly claim credit for a massacre and yet escape formal naming and indictment – because its state sponsor and a global power sought to shelter it, thus becoming accessories.

The 1267 Committee, tasked with blacklisting terrorists and their financiers, works by consensus – allowing any member, including permanent ones, to block listings via so-called “technical holds.” Originally intended as safeguards, these holds have become political weapons. China has repeatedly invoked them to shield Pakistan-based terrorists like Masood Azhar, Abdul Rehman Makki, and Sajid Mir – all linked to attacks on the Indian soil.

India, however, refused to be restrained by this procedural gridlock. In the fortnight following the Pahalgam attack, after intensive diplomatic engagement and strategic coordination, it launched “Operation Sindoor”

on the night of 6-7 May 2025. In a precise, coordinated campaign, India's Army, Navy and Air Force targeted terror infrastructure across Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, striking launch pads linked to UN-designated groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba.

These actions were measured, non-escalatory, proportionate and responsible. Civilian areas were deliberately avoided. India invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter - its inherent right to self-defence - and briefed key global partners.

When India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed the media after “Operation Sindoor,” he specifically referred to the UNSC statement's assertion on the Pahalgam terrorist attack - that there was “the need to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice” - and underlined that India's exercise of its right to respond and pre-empt, as well as deter more such cross-border attacks, needed to be seen in this context.

Pakistan's Persiflage

In the days that followed, senior Pakistani army officials and politicians were seen visiting hospitals and attending funerals of slain terrorists, while the chiefs of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba - the UN-designated terrorist organisations and terrorists - roamed freely, issuing threats and vowing retaliation for the damage inflicted by Operation Sindoor.

Pakistan made public calls for dialogue, with its Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif urging India to discuss issues such as Indus Water Treaty and the J&K and invoked UN resolutions. However, PM Modi ji, in his first statement following “Operation Sindoor,” stressed that any talks with Pakistan would be solely on terrorism - and on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. He also signalled a new security and counterterrorism doctrine: any act of terrorism on Indian soil will henceforth be treated as an act of war.

Alongside its military response, India sent



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, accompanied by India's Permanent Representative to UN P. Harish, surveys the "The Human Cost of Terrorism" exhibition at the UN Headquarters in New York.

a strong diplomatic and economic message. By suspending trade and the Indus Water Treaty, it underlined that economic ties must be grounded in national security. As India has long maintained, blood and water cannot flow together. In this context, World Bank President Ajay Banga said unequivocally that: "We have no role to play beyond a facilitator... it's all bunk," closing the door on misplaced expectations of multilateral institutions' role.

Pakistan's attempts to elevate the issue of the Indus Water Treaty suspension as water security into international spotlight through an Arria-formula meeting of the UN Security Council titled "Freshwater Resources and Related Infrastructure under Attack," convened by Slovenia, also proved futile.

Systemic Flaws

Beyond battlefield and diplomacy, the Pahalgam tragedy has once again exposed the structural frailties of the UN's counterterrorism capabilities. Though the UN adopted a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006 - aimed at enhancing global efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and having undergone its 8th review in 2023 - its implementation remains deeply flawed. Despite being a landmark framework on paper, it suffers from political selectivity, fragmented coordination and weak enforcement.

The counterterrorism architecture, too, is blighted by the same malaise. The 1267 Committee, tasked with blacklisting terrorists

This underscores a deeper crisis: the very framework meant to deter terrorism is riddled with loopholes, vetoes and stalling tactics. India has long called for reform - transparent listing processes, written explanations for holds, and robust enforcement. The world's counterterrorism resolve is not yet backed by any legally binding treaty.

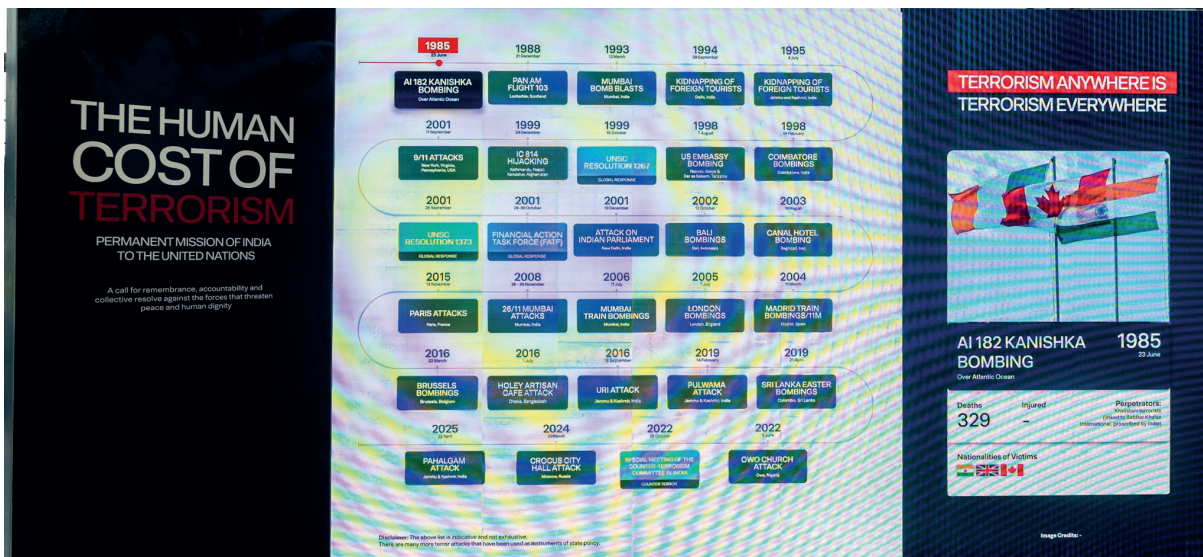
disputes about definitions - even as attacks continue. Whether in Pahalgam, Nairobi, New York or Paris, terrorism by any name demands the same condemnation and retribution.

These infirmities of the UN's counterterrorism arsenal render it ineffectual in a critical area of its mandate to maintain international peace and security. It also encourages "Terroristans" like Pakistan to seek moral equivalence between perpetrators and victims of terrorism.

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India must remain alert. In the wake of the Pahalgam attack, it sought to get the UNSC to consider the state of India–Pakistan relations but was thwarted by other members. Islamabad may again attempt to reframe the Kashmir issue and raise other Indo-Pak matters and paint itself as a victim despite its track record of proxy violence.

Never Again

For India, this moment calls for narrative clarity, diplomatic agility and unwavering global partnerships to ensure truth is not drowned in procedural fog. By acting decisively against the hydra-headed monster of terror, India has served not only its own people but the global cause of peace. It stands as a frontline warrior against international terrorism. The world on its part must now stop equivocating. It must stop drawing moral equivalence between perpetrators of terror and those who confront it, regardless of optics, short-term alignments or strategic inertia.

At a time when the UN is facing existential questions and major restructuring and reform, it must get its UNSC composition and functioning right through the inclusion of countries like India that are fighting the good fight. It must reinvent its counterterrorism capacities and institutions to reassert its relevance. Pahalgam must not fade into memory as another grim statistic. It must be remembered as a turning point – a moment when silence gave way to plain speech, and plain speech demanded action. Only when the architects of such violence find no refuge – not on battlefields, not in diplomatic chambers of the UN – will the words “never again” begin to mean something.

At last, Washington has ripped the mask off. The Resistance Front (TRF) - Lashkar-e-Taiba's slick post-370 proxy and culprit behind the

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#Pahalgammassacre - is now a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation. This landmark move confirms India's intelligence, shreds the “non-state actor” myth, and turns the heat on Pakistan's terror factory. But this must only be the beginning. Global institutions like the United Nations, FATF, and the European Union must now follow suit—blacklist TRF, sanction its handlers, and choke its funding arteries. Strategic ambivalence has no place in the face of terror.

The day of reckoning has arrived. The UN and other organisations tasked with delivering global public goods can continue to tolerate impunity and equivocation in the face of international terror only at the cost of their moral bankruptcy and irrelevance.

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