

Combating terrorism

Businesses should provide leadership in creating strategies to fight terrorism at a macro-level

Terrorism poses a major threat to businesses globally. Globalisation has shrunk the world into a smaller place. Businesses are out of the governmental realm and have little protection from terrorist activities. Any impact on businesses affects the society at large, and it is therefore important for the former to take an active stance in countering terror activities and advances.

The rapid use of technology in terrorist activities today also demonstrates how globalisation may occasionally prove to be self-destructing. Technology deployment, economic aspirations and cultural evolution are linked to a social maturation process, and positively impact society. It is important that globalisation is used positively to create and manage these influences within a society.

Businesses have a great role to play in managing this balance. While some businesses and commercial cities such as Mumbai are large enough to be independent economies in themselves, they are also extremely vulnerable to terrorist activities. It is therefore important that businesses provide the necessary leadership in responding to and maintaining the need for socio-economic balances at a micro level; they must also create strategies to fight and protect businesses/economies from terrorism at a macro level.

Narottam Seksaria, one of India's prominent industrialists and co-founder of cement giant Gujarat Ambuja Cements, laid the foundation for the Salaam Mumbai campaign, which still remains one of India's most inspiring advertisement campaigns. The Salaam Mumbai campaign was launched on the Monday immediately following Mumbai's 1993 serial bomb attack, which occurred on a fateful Friday night. The campaign focussed on the simple message of building resilience among Indians in the face of adverse situations like terrorist activity. As such, the aforementioned campaign saluted Mumbai city's indomitable spirit in the aftermath of the 1993 attacks and enabled the average Mumbai citizen to not only feel empowered but also strengthen their resolve to fight terrorism.

Today, the Salaam Mumbai campaign has expanded to cover a range of other social issues, but it remains a potent symbol of the city's resilience and confidence in fighting and countering crisis situations of any sort.

As head of the Tata empire, Ratan Tata provided



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exemplary leadership in the face of the crisis that struck the legendary Taj Mahal hotel, following the 26/11 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. The Taj Mahal hotel is almost a celebrated national monument, and since coming into existence in the early 1900s, it has served as a symbol of pride for India and its economic progress. When terrorists chose to attack the hotel, it was also meant to act as a blow to the nation's prosperity and growing prominence in the international scene.

As they invaded the hotel property, several staff sacrificed their lives and even their families, as they fought valiantly to protect guests and the hotel's legacy. In particular, the resilience, dedication and heroic efforts demonstrated by the hotel general manager, Karambir Singh Kang, at the time of the crisis, can not be ignored. Singh lost his wife and two sons to the terrorist attacks and yet continued to marshal resources and co-ordinate rescue efforts, protecting lives and ensuring the safety of the hotel's guests.

In the aftermath of the attack, Ratan Tata initiated unprecedented corporate support for the individuals and families that were impacted by these attacks. This included lifelong financial support for the kith and kin of staff members killed in the attacks. Affected families and dependents would also receive the last drawn salary for life. Further, financial relief and assistance were generously offered to vendors and shop owners who were attacked in other locations of the city. The relief programme also included psychiatric support services, individual mentoring and 'single window' support services that offered assistance and clearance for a range of monetary and other issues affecting individuals and families. Further, the group also instituted the Taj Public Service Welfare Trust to facilitate immediate relief assistance to all victims of the attack, including families of all victims from across the general public, security forces and group employees. This trust will continue to provide relief assistance to all victims of "sudden acts of violence, natural disasters and other tragic events that inflict damage to life and property".

In addition to all these initiatives, the Tata group aided hundreds of civilians who suffered injuries, offering them hospitalisation and subsistence allowances. What sets the Tata group apart is the extent of support offered and empathy for the common people. Several corporate

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groups globally have deeper pockets; yet, none have quite responded to a terrorist situation in the way Tata has. The initiatives undertaken by the Tata group have certainly empowered the masses and reinforced corporate solidarity in fighting and countering terrorism.

The Taj group's dedication and commitment to protecting those affected by the terrorist act and responding to an hour of crisis has now been captured in a Harvard multimedia case study, authored by professor Rohit Deshpande. The case study showcases the group's unique leadership in crisis management and the forces it rallied in the face of a terrorist attack.

As President of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has an important task at hand in hunting out and curbing Islamic terrorist activity within his country. Indonesia witnessed a dastardly terrorist act on the beautiful island of Bali in 2002, and has since taken active steps to down in counter inland terrorism. It has also come heavily on international terror networks that may have set up base within the country.

Yudhoyono is diligently working with his government to ensure that any religious radicalism does not spiral out of control and cross over into terrorist activity. The country actively encourages

democracy, working to ensure that it maintains an egalitarian society, and that other minority religious groups (Buddhists, Christians and Hindus) are not threatened. Yudhoyono perceives governmental intervention as important in ensuring religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence, all of which minimise religious tensions and differences and protect the country from terror influences in the long run. Further, his government has also initiated anti-terrorism campaigns to educate and create awareness among citizens on the need for religious tolerance and the correct interpretation of religious faith and beliefs.

While globalisation has improved lives, it has, in some instances, ignored other important aspects for social balance such as creating economic growth that is inclusive and reaches all sections of society. When prosperity is achieved within smaller groups and economic gaps widen, it sows the seeds for terrorist ideologies. And terrorism, at its core being a socio-economic issue, preys on commercial activity as a way to create far reaching social and economic impact. Business and government leadership therefore needs to be provided in this direction, enabling education and awareness, and encouraging social dialogue. This will make for a more prosperous, vibrant and peaceful global society in the long run. ♦