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Unevenly Unsafe: Reading the Global Terrorism Index 2026

 **THE HINDU**

11 July 2026

SECURITY & DEFENCE**GS3****GS2**

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The Hindu

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THE LIFT LINE

A falling death toll can hide a rising threat, because terrorism does not always announce its strength through numbers; sometimes it announces it through where and how it strikes.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The Global Terrorism Index 2026 records a striking headline: deaths from terrorism fell by about 28 per cent in 2025, to roughly 5,582, with incidents down as well. Read carelessly, that reads like victory. Read carefully, it reveals concentration and mutation: the Sahel now accounts for more than half of all terrorism deaths, Pakistan tops the index for the first time, and the character of attacks is shifting toward decentralised, lone-actor, low-tech violence. The lesson for aspirants is analytical: a single aggregate figure can mislead, and internal security demands that you **disaggregate** (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/disaggregate/>).

GS Paper 3: challenges to internal security through communication networks and the basics of counter-terrorism; the linkages between development and the spread of extremism.

GS Paper 2: effect of policies of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighbourhood; regional and global groupings.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the Global Terrorism Index is produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace; the 2026 edition covers 2025 data; the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and neighbours) is the global epicentre; Pakistan ranked first for the first time in 2026. For **Mains**, argue that the decline in raw deaths coexists with entrenchment and geographic concentration, so counter-terror strategy must shift from body-count metrics to control-of-territory, ideology and **resilience** (<https://ujjyari.com/vocab/resilience/>) metrics.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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For several years the global trend line in terrorism deaths has moved downward, and 2025 continued that fall. Yet the same data set shows the impact of terrorism concentrating rather than dispersing. The Sahel, a band of fragile states across sub-Saharan Africa, has become the world's deadliest theatre, driven by weak governance, competition among jihadist groups, and the spillover of coups and state collapse. Meanwhile, several Western societies recorded a rise in fatalities from isolated, low-tech attacks by individuals radicalised online rather than directed by a central command.

Shashi Tharoor's framing captures the **paradox** (<https://ujjayari.com/vocab/paradox/>) precisely: the world is not safer, only unevenly unsafe. A drop in the total masks a redistribution of danger toward the weakest states and a transformation in method. Where organised groups once mounted complex, resource-heavy operations, the emerging pattern is decentralised: the lone actor, the vehicle, the knife, the improvised device, harder to detect and cheaper to mount. India, sitting in a neighbourhood that includes the top-ranked country on the 2026 index, cannot afford to read the falling global number as a reason for complacency.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The aggregate hides the concentration

A 28 per cent fall in deaths is real, but it is an average across a very unequal world. When more than half of all terrorism deaths cluster in one region, the global decline tells you little about the lived risk in the Sahel, where impact is rising even as it falls elsewhere. Averages conceal epicentres, and policy built on the average will under-resource the places that matter most.

The threat is mutating, not vanishing

Fewer deaths can reflect a change in tactics rather than a defeat of terrorist groups. Entrenched organisations that control territory may kill less spectacularly while consolidating governance, taxation and recruitment. In parallel, the decentralised, low-tech attack, executed by a self-radicalised individual, is deliberately designed to slip beneath intelligence thresholds. Both trends mean the numbers can fall while the danger deepens.

SIGNAL IN GTI 2026	SURFACE READING	DEEPER READING
Deaths down ~28% (to ~5,582)	The world is getting safer	Concentration and entrenchment, not defeat
Sahel over half of all deaths	A distant African problem	The new global epicentre of jihadism
Pakistan tops the index	A neighbour's internal crisis	Direct security spillover risk for India
Rise in low-tech Western attacks	Isolated incidents	Decentralised, hard-to-detect mutation

India's posture must read the trend, not the total

For India the relevant facts are proximate: instability on the western frontier, cross-border terror infrastructure, and the online radicalisation pipeline that produces lone actors. A counter-terror strategy calibrated (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/calibrated/>) to the falling global average would misjudge a threat that is concentrating close to home and mutating in form.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Treat the Global Terrorism Index as a lesson in disaggregation. The transferable rule: when a headline aggregate improves, ask where the improvement is located and whether the underlying phenomenon has weakened or merely relocated and changed shape. Security is not measured by a single national or global number but by the resilience of the weakest link and the adaptability of the adversary. Judge counter-terror success by control of territory, disrupted radicalisation and community resilience, not by the annual death count alone.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Global terror deaths fall ~28% (to ~5,582) -> surface reading: world safer -> disaggregate -> Sahel now over half of deaths (epicentre) + Pakistan tops index + Western low-tech lone-actor attacks rise -> concentration + mutation, not defeat -> India: proximate threat, radicalisation pipeline -> posture: territory, ideology, resilience metrics not body counts

WAY FORWARD

- ① **Disaggregate the intelligence.** Track terrorism by region, group and method rather than by headline totals, so resources follow the concentrating threat rather than the reassuring average.
- ② **Counter the decentralised attack.** Strengthen online counter-radicalisation, community policing and rapid-response capacity aimed at lone actors and low-tech methods that evade conventional detection.
- ③ **Engage the neighbourhood and the Sahel.** Sustain diplomatic and security cooperation on cross-border terror, and support [multilateral](https://ujiyari.com/vocab/multilateral/) counter-terror efforts in fragile regions before instability exports.
- ④ **Invest in development and governance.** Recognise that terrorism entrenches where governance fails, and pair kinetic responses with the development and state-capacity work that drains the recruitment pool.

PYO LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

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UPSC has asked about the spread of extremism, the role of external state and non-state actors, and the challenges of internal security. This editorial links those themes to the specific findings of the Global Terrorism Index 2026.

Practice question: “A fall in global terrorism deaths can coexist with a deepening terror threat.” Examine with reference to the Global Terrorism Index 2026 and India’s security environment. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/>), *Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2026* (<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/>)

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