

# How Khalistan terrorism in Canada can become a global threat if not contained

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## Opinion

**The world must contemplate the potential repercussions of fostering an environment that allows extremism to thrive, not only for the affected nations but for global peace and stability as well**

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Designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, the founder of the banned Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), was present at the gathering of the Khalistani separatists at the Guru Nanak Singh Gurudwara in Surrey. ANI

In the quiet corners of history, there exists a chilling narrative of how the seeds of Khalistan, a violent separatist movement, were sown and nurtured by those close to the political establishment. It is a tale of power, ambition, and treacherous alliances that led to the recruitment of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a charismatic preacher turned militant leader, for political gains. As the nation watched, the top echelons of the Congress party, India's political behemoth, inadvertently nurtured the very monster that would ultimately lead to Operation Blue Star in 1984 and the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The scars of those turbulent times still haunt the collective memory of a nation. But, as history's dark shadows linger, the world often remained oblivious to the extent of the Khalistani menace, dismissing it as an India-centric problem. This illusion was shattered in a fiery explosion that ripped apart an Air India flight in 1985, en route from Toronto to London, claiming 329 innocent lives. It was a chilling reminder that Khalistani terrorism knew no boundaries. Yet, the West, for the most part, failed to grasp the gravity of the threat. And now, in the present day, the specter of Khalistani extremism has once again reared its head in Canada, where the secessionist group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) organized a controversial Khalistan referendum, reigniting a smoldering issue that has haunted nations and claimed thousands of innocent lives. It is a tale of terror that deserves the world's undivided attention.

Through the annals of time, a chilling timeline emerges, tracing India's persistent efforts to make the Western world acutely aware of the looming spectre of Khalistani extremism. On Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood before his Canadian counterpart, Justin Trudeau, articulating India's deep-seated apprehensions about the burgeoning anti-India activities on Canadian soil. It was a plea for attention, delivered with a sense of urgency that had been brewing for years. And as the echoes of their diplomatic discourse reverberated, a Khalistan referendum took place at a Gurudwara in the town of Surrey, the same gurudwara that was headed by SFJ's Hardeep Singh Nijjar, who was gunned down on 18 June.

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India's repeated expressions of concern to the Canadian government echoed like a warning bell, a desperate plea for vigilance against the misuse of Canadian territory for separatist activities. But as time marched on, it became increasingly clear that immediate action was an elusive dream. Prime Minister Trudeau, during his visit to New Delhi, attending the G20 leaders' summit and engaging in a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Modi, painted a picture of reluctance in responding to India's pleas. The spectre of Khalistani extremism remained, a haunting presence that continued to test the bonds of diplomacy and the resolve of nations.

Even on 20 March 2023, the world witnessed a brazen spectacle of chaos and destruction as a mob of Khalistani radicals unleashed their fury upon the Indian High Commission in London. Barely a day later, the Indian Consulate in San Francisco fell victim to a similar assault. The spectre of terror then loomed ominously over the Indian embassy in Washington, but our vigilant secret services thwarted this nefarious plot. These shocking events serve as stark reminders that the resurgent Khalistan movement is no longer a distant, India-centric concern—it is a venomous serpent that has coiled itself around the heart of Canada. The epicenter of this radicalism, this potential tinderbox of separatism, is not Punjab; it is Canada. The world cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this perilous reality. Prime Minister Trudeau, the time for belief in us is now, for if you do not, the flames of Khalistani extremism may engulf Canada, not India. The threat is real, and it is knocking at your doorstep.

Canada's stance on pro-Khalistan elements has raised eyebrows and ignited frustration on the international stage. While Prime Minister Trudeau eloquently reiterates his commitment to defending freedom of expression, his government's soft approach towards those who openly issue threats to India and the Indian community stands in stark contrast to the brutal reality faced by victims of violence. It is a stance that, at times, appears to prioritise abstract notions of freedom of speech over the safety and security of individuals and communities. In the face of vandalised Hindu temples and the ghost of extremism, the world watches with a mixture of bewilderment and disappointment, as the Canadian government's words of reassurance do little to address the very real and pressing concerns of those affected by the menace of Khalistani extremism. The actions of a few individuals may not represent an entire community or country, but inaction in the face of such threats can certainly tarnish the reputation of a nation on the global stage.

Khalistani extremists are fringe groups constituting a very small section of the Sikh diaspora; however, they are extremely vocal, violent, and aggressive which gives the impression that they form a sizable majority of the population with an intimidating presence in social, cultural, religious, and political spaces.

In the heart of Canada, where diversity is celebrated as a cornerstone of the nation's identity, a shadowy underbelly festers. It's a place where the echoes of Khalistani extremism resound, where the memory of terror looms large. In the hallowed halls of Dashmesh Sahib Gurudwara in Surrey, a firebrand Khalistani activist, Pravakar Singh Dulai, holds sway, while a chilling image of Talwinder Singh Parmar, the mastermind behind the horrific Air India-182 flight bombing that claimed 329 innocent lives, is honored

as a martyr. The very gurudwaras that should be temples of peace are tainted with the images of Khalistani icons like Bhindranwale, casting a long shadow over the sanctity of these sacred spaces.

Yet, the menace doesn't stop there. In a brazen act of hatred, a Hindu temple in Brampton was defaced with anti-India graffiti, sending shockwaves of outrage through the Indian community. In February, the Ram Mandir in Mississauga faced a similar fate, vandalised with anti-India messages. The Consulate General of India in Toronto cried out for justice, pleading with Canadian authorities to swiftly investigate these vile acts and bring the perpetrators to justice. And just when hope was scarce, in April, the BAPS Swaminarayan temple in Windsor, Ontario, fell prey to the same venomous hatred, its walls marred by anti-India graffiti.

These incidents serve as stark reminders that within the vibrant mosaic of Canada's multicultural landscape, there lurks a disturbing undercurrent of intolerance and extremism. It is a call to action for a nation that prides itself on inclusivity and harmony, to confront the growing threat that threatens to shatter the very ideals upon which Canada was built.

In light of the recent event where Pannun, a prominent figure associated with Khalistani separatism, made a public appearance and delivered an incendiary speech at a Khalistan referendum event in Canada, it raises serious concerns about the state of affairs in the country. Canada has increasingly become a focal point for anti-India and anti-Hindu activities, as well as a sanctuary for individuals with extremist ideologies. India has repeatedly appealed to the Canadian government, led by Justin Trudeau, to take decisive action against these extremist activities. However, political considerations seem to have hindered substantive action.

The question we must ponder is this: What are the potential consequences if Khalistani elements continue to receive significant attention and support in Canada? The international community should carefully consider the implications of allowing such ideologies to flourish, as it can undermine efforts towards peace and stability in the region. Striking a balance between freedom of expression and addressing extremist elements is a complex challenge, and finding the right approach is crucial in preventing further radicalisation and violence. The world must contemplate the potential repercussions of fostering an environment that allows extremism to thrive, not only for the affected nations but for global peace and stability as well. The path forward requires a careful balance between addressing legitimate concerns and safeguarding against radicalism and violence.

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