

Operation Black Tornado 2008, 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack

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Operation Black Tornado was India's large scale counter terrorism mission launched to end the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. The operation was conducted by the National Security Guard (NSG), also known as the "Black Cats". It involved clearing multiple hostage locations, eliminating terrorists, rescuing civilians and securing buildings from explosives. It remains one of the most complex urban counter terror operations undertaken in India and significantly reshaped the country's security preparedness.

What is Operation Black Tornado 2008?

Operation Black Tornado 2008 was the codename given to the NSG operation launched against the terrorists involved in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. The mission focused on neutralising the attackers, rescuing hostages with minimum casualties, capturing terrorists wherever possible and ensuring that all targeted locations were completely cleared of explosives before security forces withdrew. The operation concluded on 29 November 2008 after nearly three days of continuous combat across multiple locations.

26/11 Mumbai Terror Attack

The 26 November 2008 Mumbai Terror Attack (26/11) was a coordinated assault carried out by 10 Lashkar e Taiba terrorists who entered Mumbai through the **Arabian Sea** after departing from Karachi and hijacking an Indian fishing trawler. They targeted prominent locations including the **Taj Hotel, Nariman House, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST)** and other places. The attacks lasted from 26 to 29 November 2008, killing around 175 people, including nine terrorists, while more than 300 others were injured. Ajmal Kasab was the only terrorist captured alive.

Operation Black Tornado Background

Operation Black Tornado was launched after coordinated terrorist attacks paralysed Mumbai and created an unprecedented hostage situation across several high profile locations.

- **History of attacks:** Mumbai had witnessed several major terrorist attacks since the 1993 serial bomb blasts, including bomb explosions between 1993 and 2006 that caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.
- **Sea route infiltration:** Ten terrorists travelled from Karachi through the Arabian Sea, hijacked an Indian fishing trawler, killed its crew and reached South Mumbai using inflatable boats under the cover of darkness.
- **Multiple strategic targets:** Terrorists attacked the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, Oberoi-Trident Hotel, Nariman House, CST railway station, Leopold Cafe, Cama Hospital, Metro Cinema area and other locations almost simultaneously.
- **Hostage crisis:** Hundreds of guests, hotel staff and visitors were trapped inside luxury hotels and Nariman House, requiring specialised hostage rescue operations by elite counter terror forces.
- **Need for specialised intervention:** Mumbai Police initially responded but faced heavily armed terrorists equipped with AK 47 rifles, grenades and explosives, making **NSG** deployment essential.

Operation Black Tornado Launch 2008

Operation Black Tornado 2008 involved simultaneous operations across several unfamiliar urban locations under extremely challenging combat conditions.

- **Primary objectives:** The major objective was to neutralise every terrorist, capture any survivor if possible, minimise hostage casualties and ensure no explosives remained inside the buildings.
- **Simultaneous operations:** Teams were deployed to the Taj Hotel, Oberoi-Trident Hotel and Nariman House together.
- **Specialised support:** NSG deployed dog squads to locate bodies of neutralised terrorists, helping confirm that cleared sections no longer contained active attackers.
- **CST and city attacks:** Two terrorists attacked Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus using AK 47 rifles and grenades, killing 58 civilians before moving towards Cama Hospital and later confronting police.
- **Capture of Ajmal Kasab:** During a gun battle after the CST attack, one terrorist was killed while Ajmal Kasab was captured alive after Assistant Police Sub Inspector Tukaram Omble sacrificed his life while disarming him.
- **Mission completion:** By the evening of 28 November and final clearance on 29 November, all terrorists had been neutralised except Ajmal Kasab, bringing Operation Black Tornado to a successful conclusion.

Operation Black Tornado Outcomes and Aftermath

Operation Black Tornado transformed India's counter **terrorism** framework and led to major security, legal and institutional reforms after the attacks.

- **Operation success:** Nine terrorists were killed during the operation while Ajmal Kasab became the only surviving attacker captured alive, providing crucial information about the conspiracy.
- **Human losses:** Around 175 people lost their lives, including civilians, police personnel and NSG commandos, while more than 300 people suffered injuries during the three day attack.
- **Property damage:** Fire, explosions and gunfire caused property losses exceeding one billion US dollars, while Mumbai also suffered major economic disruption during the attacks.
- **Kasab Trial:** Ajmal Kasab faced trial on 86 charges including murder, conspiracy and waging war against India, was convicted in 2010 and executed at Yerwada Jail on 21 November 2012.
- **Further investigations:** Investigations later identified the involvement of David Headley, Tahawwur Rana, Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Hamza and other conspirators connected with the planning of the attacks.
- **Security reforms:** The attacks resulted in strengthening anti terror laws, creation of the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**, expansion of coastal security and establishment of Maharashtra's Force One.
- **International impact:** The attacks severely affected **India-Pakistan Relations**, intensified global counter terror cooperation and exposed the international network supporting Lashkar e Taiba operations.
- **Memorials and remembrance:** Annual tributes, candlelight ceremonies and memorial events continue to honour victims and security personnel, while Nariman House was developed as a memorial known as Nariman Light House.

Operation Black Tornado Leaders

Operation Black Tornado highlighted exceptional courage by security personnel whose leadership and sacrifice became defining features of the mission.

- **Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan:** The NSG officer displayed exceptional bravery during the Taj Hotel rescue while attempting to save fellow Commando Sunil Yadav. Before making his final assault, he reportedly told his team, *"Do not come up, I will handle them."* He was martyred during the operation and was posthumously awarded the Ashok Chakra for his extraordinary courage.
- **Hawaladar Gajender Singh Bisht:** He led the assault inside Nariman House, was the first commando to enter after breaching operations and laid down his life during the encounter.
- **Hemant Karkare:** The Chief of the Mumbai Anti Terrorism Squad led the response after the CST attack and was martyred while pursuing terrorists near Cama Hospital.
- **Ashok Kamte:** The Additional Commissioner of Police joined the pursuit of terrorists after receiving distress information and sacrificed his life during the gun battle.
- **Vijay Salaskar:** The renowned encounter specialist fought alongside senior police officers during the operation and was martyred while confronting the terrorists.
- **Tukaram Omble:** The Assistant Police Sub Inspector displayed extraordinary courage by physically overpowering Ajmal Kasab despite sustaining fatal injuries, making Kasab's capture possible. He was posthumously awarded the Ashoka Chakra, India's highest peacetime **gallantry award**.

- **Vishnu Dattaram Zende:** The railway announcer at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus repeatedly alerted passengers to evacuate, helping save numerous lives during the attack.

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