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India's New Counter Terrorism Approach

Adil Rasheed*

Abstract

This paper provides a basic understanding of the threat posed by terrorism to India in a fast-changing, if not rapidly unravelling, global geopolitical order, and studies the policies, legislative measures, and institutional structures the country has built and continues to upgrade to combat terrorism more effectively in light of emerging threats and challenges. The paper particularly highlights India's new counterterrorism strategy, which is built around a "whole-of-government" approach and marks a decisive shift away from the erstwhile "strategic restraint" policy to hitting back firmly against both the perpetrators and sponsors of violent extremism and terrorism, as well as focusing on countering the abuse of new-age technology in the fight against terror.



Introduction

India's *Operation Sindoor* (6/7 May 2025) in response to the Pahalgam terror attack of 22 April 2025 marked a defining moment in its counter-terrorism history. It was not merely a retaliatory or temporary military response, but remains an ongoing,

comprehensive and calibrated campaign involving synchronous kinetic and non-kinetic actions. These encompass policy measures, diplomatic outreach, counter-terror financing measures, tech-enabled intelligence and above all, a new strategic doctrine that any Pakistan-backed terrorist action shall henceforth be treated as an "act of war".¹

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During the initial phase of operation (7-10 May 2025), presently on "pause", New Delhi launched military strikes targeting the terror infrastructure in Pakistan, which long acted as the source of terrorism directed against India. Multi-agency intelligence assessments indicate that nine terror camps were struck and damaged, including major facilities in Bahawalpur and Muridke, both long associated with terrorist training and operational planning, besides killing over a hundred terrorists. Among those killed were senior terrorist leaders such as Yusuf Azhar, Abdul Malik Rauf and Mudassir Ahmad, figures linked to major attacks including the IC-814 hijacking and the Pulwama bombing. The follow-up strikes reportedly damaged or destroyed 11 Pakistani air bases.³

Alongside military operations, India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved a series of stringent non-kinetic measures, including keeping the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 in abeyance until Pakistan verifiably ends support for cross-border terrorism. Additional steps included the closure of the Attari Integrated Check Post, the suspension of travel privileges for Pakistani nationals under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES), and the declaration of Pakistan's defence, naval, and air

advisers at its New Delhi High Commission as *persona non grata*.

Despite the current pause, Operation Sindoor underscores India's recognition that Pakistan's use of terrorism as a strategic instrument persists. While immediate escalation risks may have subsided, the possibility of future attacks remains. The challenge is further complicated by China's continued diplomatic, financial, and military support to Islamabad, as well as enduring geopolitical calculations among major powers, including the US's continued fascination with Pakistan's strategic location in pursuit of its regional interests.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the evolving threat of terrorism to India and analyses the policies, legislative measures and institutional mechanisms the country has developed and continues to strengthen to counter emerging security challenges. At the outset, it is necessary first to understand the concepts of violent extremism and terrorism.

I. Terrorism: From Tactics to Strategic Doctrine

Noted political scientists and counterterrorism experts argue that terrorism has evolved from being merely a tactic of warfare into a

strategic doctrine in the 21st century.⁴ As a tactic, terrorism refers to using violence deliberately, often indiscriminately against civilians and non-combatants to create fear and instability. However, as a doctrine, it represents a broader belief that political or ideological objectives can be achieved by coercing a community, a country or the international community through violent actions.⁵ In legal terms, India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) of 1967 defines a terrorist as "whoever does any act with intent to threaten or likely to threaten the unity, integrity, security, [economic security,] or sovereignty of India or with intent to strike terror or likely to strike terror in the people or any section of the people in India or in any foreign country."⁶ yet, despite such domestic legal frameworks, there remains no universally accepted or officially recognised definition of terrorism which reflects the political and conceptual complexities surrounding it.

The related concept of 'violent extremism' is similarly fluid. According to UNESCO, it "refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals".⁷ This may include terrorism as well as other forms of politically motivated violence, such as hate

speech, indiscriminate shootings or stabbings, mob violence, vandalism of religious sites, rioting, property destruction, online harassment and the illegal use of weapons.

The threat of violent extremism and terrorism (VET) should not be viewed from a purely security-centric prism but as a multi-vector challenge covering political, economic, religious, socio-cultural, educational, psychological and economic domains, which are ever evolving and dynamic. The interplay of variables in this so-called "Rumsfeld matrix"⁸ is difficult to gauge or predict because of the multiplicity of "known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns".⁹ This indeterminate nature of VET makes it extremely difficult to develop reliable diagnostic or predictive analytics, which constrains counterterrorism experts' ability to formulate and implement a grand strategy over the medium to long term.

For a geographically vast, demographically diverse and densely populated country like India, where the nature, intensity and spread of violent extremist threats vary across states, the formulation of a coherent counterterrorism policy seems a daunting proposition. Yet the grave dangers posed by VET in an increasingly fragmented global

order underscore the need for a clear strategic framework. Such a framework can guide policymakers, security agencies, community leaders and citizens alike in confronting this evolving threat.

Therefore, it becomes important to first study the evolving global scenario, with its interplay of rapidly unfolding social, political, economic, environmental, and technological transformations, to then chart the course for achieving a Violent Extremism and Terrorism-free India in the years ahead.

A. Assessing the Global Threat Environment

As international institutions like the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) struggle to address growing challenges and internal tensions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), concerns about the stability of the global order have intensified. The grim prognosis by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres that the world order is heading towards “a great fracture”¹⁰ does not bode well for global peace and security. In his September 2023 UN General Assembly remarks, he stated: “Our world is becoming unhinged. Geopolitical tensions are rising. Global challenges are

mounting. And we seem incapable of coming together to respond.”¹¹

In this uncertain environment, predicting the nature and trajectory of VET over the coming decades has become increasingly difficult. Ongoing conflicts are reshaping ideological alliances and radical networks. For instance, the Russia-Ukraine war has pitted far-right Slavic groups (like the Russian Imperial Movement) against the neo-Nazi forces like Ukraine’s paramilitary Azov Brigade. At the same time, political polarisation and anti-immigration rhetoric in parts of the West have emboldened certain white supremacist movements.

The developments in West Asia have altered the landscape of jihadist extremism. For instance, Israel’s Gaza war (2023-25) intensified ideological mobilisation across the region and beyond, strengthening radical narratives and reinforcing networks that span sectarian divides. On one hand, it encouraged Jewish far-right extremist groups like Revisionists and Religious Zionists; on the other, groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis gained renewed prominence in regional conflicts, while broader Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood continue to expand their political and social influence.

The character of jihadist extremism has also evolved. As the United States has gradually reduced its military presence in parts of West Asia and Afghanistan, terrorist groups have recalibrated their strategies. Many have sought to combine armed militancy with political engagement, information warfare and social influence campaigns. In some contexts, groups that once operated solely as insurgent movements now seek to project a more moderate image to gain legitimacy or engage with international actors.

Despite ideological differences and occasional rivalry, particularly between factions aligned with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, there are signs of tactical convergence among radical networks operating from the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to Central and South Asia. Some groups have also demonstrated increasing sophistication in their use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence-driven propaganda, disinformation campaigns and online recruitment strategies aimed at radicalising younger audiences and generating financial support.

In addition, supposedly non-violent extremist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbut Tahrir, Jamaat-e-Islami, etc., are rallying the masses by raising pro-Palestinian slogans in order to stir a new wave of political unrest across the Muslim

world as a possible 'Arab Spring 2.0-like uprising'. These developments are unfolding even as the overall number of jihadist terrorist incidents has fluctuated in recent years, suggesting that extremist networks may be undergoing a phase of strategic recalibration rather than decline.

Another emerging dimension of the global extremist landscape is the rise of far-right radicalism in parts of the Western world. The gaining of prominence by white supremacist groups and ultranationalist movements carries direct implications for India, given that millions of Indians and persons of Indian origin live and work across these regions.

Of particular concern is the tolerance or ambivalence shown in some countries toward extremist diaspora groups such as pro-Khalistan networks advocating separatist agendas. These groups stand accused of planning and funding radical religious and separatist forces in India while being closely aligned with Pakistan-backed terrorist groups in Jammu and Kashmir, and are also alleged to be backing radical groups in Bangladesh and in the Indian state of Manipur.

Given these trends, Indian needs to closely monitor the trajectory of

right-wing extremism in the Western hemisphere while strengthening diplomatic engagement and intelligence cooperation with partner nations. Parallely, New Delhi ought to be wary of influence operations, disinformation campaigns and forms of "lawfare" that seek to undermine its political leadership or institutions. In an increasingly fragmented global order, addressing these interconnected threats will require sustained vigilance and proactive strategic planning.

B. Threats Emanating from the Near Abroad

Developments in India's extended neighbourhood have created a complex and evolving security environment. In the aftermath of the Gaza war, several radical religious groups in West Asia have complicated the growing inclination of moderate Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia under Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt to normalise relations with Israel and the West under the US-brokered Abraham Accords.

At the same time, proclamations of support for Hamas and Hezbollah by Turkish and Iranian leadership, besides raising the issue of Kashmir, the situation in India's Near Abroad appears challenging, despite New

Delhi's adept diplomacy and good ties with Iran, Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan.

Firstly, the renewed Israel-Iran confrontation, second within a year, exposed the grave risks to regional stability as well as broader global trade and energy security, with Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) practically shutting the Strait of Hormuz and implementing a kind of unofficial toll. It has direct implications for India's vital security, economic, and energy interests, given New Delhi remains reliant on West Asian oil and gas. The involvement of militant groups such as the Yemeni Houthis, who can block the Red Sea's Bab el Mandeb, only threatens to make the situation more complicating.

Secondly, India faces the challenge of balancing the expanding influence of China and Turkey across West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia. While India has not formally recognised the Taliban regime, diplomatic engagement has been pursued primarily to support humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, which have gradually expanded to safeguard New Delhi's strategic interests, including connectivity with Central Asia, Eurasia, and Western Europe. It also helps India to wean the Afghan Taliban regime away from Pakistan, thereby nullifying any

synergy between Pakistan-based terrorists and their Afghanistan co-collaborators like the Islamic State. Moreover, the growing footprint of ISIS and Al-Qaeda jihadists in Central Asia, and a possible spurt after the coming of a radical Islamist HTS-led regime in Syria, remains a matter of concern for the rise of anti-India terrorist groups in India's Near Abroad. In this context, India's cooperative relations with these states assume significance, and accordingly, New Delhi conducted joint counterterrorism exercises with the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in December 2023 to identify and suppress the use of the Internet for terrorist, separatist, and extremist purposes. The resurgence of US-Pakistan cooperation under the Trump administration has also raised concerns in strategic circles, given historical precedents of external interventions in Afghanistan during the 1980s that contributed to the spread of transnational jihadist networks across the region.

Thirdly, on India's eastern flank, Southeast Asia presents emerging ideological challenges. In Malaysia, the government has faced pressure from radical political formations such as the Malay-nationalist coalition Perikatan Nasional, which includes the Islamic party PAS. These groups have criticised cultural practices

associated with minority communities, including those of Hindus, while portraying governing authorities as insufficiently aligned with Islamic interests.¹² In Indonesia, with which India maintains strong relations, periodic challenges from radical groups persist. It may be noted that Indian security agencies previously identified transnational linkages associated with protests and agitation during the 2020 Delhi riots, while anti-India demonstrations were reported in parts of Indonesia during that period. Similarly, insurgent and extremist groups continue to affect stability in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines, developments that warrant sustained Indian strategic attention.

C. Violent Extremist Threats from the Immediate Neighbourhood

India is surrounded by four Muslim-majority states in South Asia, namely Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Maldives and Bangladesh, of whom Pakistan has been a consistent source of terrorism directed at India. Pakistan has always been the global epicentre of terrorism and harbours more than 20 UN-listed terrorist entities, and provides state support to cross-border terrorism.¹³ With Pakistan's current military-civilian

establishment led by Army Chief Asim Munir and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, backed by US President Donald Trump and China alike, it has raised concerns about Islamabad being further emboldened to implement its policy of proxy terrorism as a state policy against India. It was as recent as 22 April 2025 when terrorists affiliated with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) killed 26 tourists in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam tourist resort which triggered Operation Sindoor.

Secondly, Kashmir theatre aside, Pakistan has actively supported pro-Khalistan groups and, in recent years, attempted to influence Bangladeshi Islamist forces following Sheikh Hasina's removal in 2024 through mass protests during the interim government's tenure, thereby threatening India's security imperatives.¹⁴ The attempts by Bangladeshi Islamists to influence the post-Hasina reform process, including seeking to remove "secularism", "socialism" and "nationalism" from the constitution,¹⁵ highlighted the changing Islamist landscape of the country, where proscribed groups like Jamat-e-Islami, its student wing Chhatra Shibir, among others, were mainstreamed by revoking their bans.¹⁶ As radical groups increase their activism in the country, incidents

of violence and harassment of minority groups, including Hindus, have increased exponentially.¹⁷ This mainstreaming of Islamists and Pakistan's engagements with these groups caused concern in New Delhi, having previously seen how Pakistan's ISI leveraged Islamists for terror acts against India. In addition, the continuing presence of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and India raises concerns of illegal immigration and Islamist terrorism in eastern India.¹⁸

Thirdly, China has a history of abetting groups which have directly threatened the security of India, such as those in the northeastern states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. It has actively shielded Pakistan at international forums, including blocking the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee from designating Masood Azhar, the founder of the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed, as a terrorist.

D. Assessment of Internal VET Threats

The roots of VET in India can be traced back to the religion-based partition of British ruled Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. Right after its creation, Pakistan launched a war against India in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), claiming it as its own on religious

grounds and has since occupied about 78,000 sq. kms of its territory¹⁹. Since the late 1980s, it has used proxy terrorism to destabilise J&K, besides also sponsoring the Khalistan movement in Punjab.

The violence in the region has, however, declined significantly in recent years, particularly after New Delhi reorganised its constitutional arrangements by revoking Article 370 on 5 August 2019.²⁰ Besides witnessing near-zero local recruitment into terrorist groups, J&K's first election after the removal of Article 370 recorded the highest voter turnout in both the 2024 Lok Sabha election and the local legislative election.²¹ Despite these gains, the terrorist ecosystem will take time to be completely uprooted because the security officials have flagged its complexities as being integrated in the social sphere of the region, operating through multiple layers, and being patronised by Pakistani intelligence operators and their sympathisers. Firstly, it is argued that extremism is perpetuated through radical literature, social media influence campaigns, and operates through a vast network of Over Ground Workers (OGWs), prisons, charities, individual donors, and hidden cadres working within state institutions (academia, civilian administration, and police forces).

Secondly, the role of religious groups like Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), Jamiyat Ahle-Hadith (JAH), besides Hurriyat secessionist political grouping, among others, have been flagged alongside Pakistan-sponsored terrorist organisations like Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), Al Badr, LeT, JeM, and local affiliates of transnational Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda (AQ), including IS-JK, Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGUH). Groups like LeT and JeM have also been involved in terrorist attacks beyond J&K across different Indian cities, including Delhi and Mumbai, and have often colluded with each other and with India-based organisations such as Indian Mujahideen in perpetuating terrorism in India. Moreover, for many years, Bangladeshi extremist groups exploited the porous Indo-Bangla border to operative along the border mainly in West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, and in the process, trying to indoctrinate and radicalise Muslims for recruitment into several terrorist groups.

In recent years, particularly after the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) in West Asia in 2014, it has also been seen that a radical Islamist phenomenon unfolded in southern Indian states, predominantly in Kerala. Though Indian Muslims proved least influenced despite

being one of the largest Muslim populations globally, of the nearly 180-200 cases recorded in the country, around 40 were registered in Kerala alone, including individuals either migrating or trying to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Likewise, of the 177 ISIS sympathisers arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) since 2014, 34 were reported Tamil Nadu residents -the highest number of such arrests from any Indian state as of February 2020. There are also several active Islamist organisations such as Jamaat-e-Islami, Kerala Navdathul Mujahiddin, Tamil Nadu's Thawheed Jamaat, and the Popular Front of India (PFI), which the Indian government has proscribed for subversive activities.

India has also battled radical Naxalite-Maoist insurgency since the early 1970s, which destabilised peace and security across several states. At its peak in the 2000s, Naxalites were operating from nearly 180 districts spread over an area of 92,000 km² (36,000 square miles) across nearly a dozen states, before the central government forces regained the initiative and made qualitative gains against them during the 2010s. It has further suffered major blows under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since 2014, with Home Minister Amit Shah pledging in early January 2025 to

eradicate this menace by March 2026.²²

Another security issue has been the insurgent landscape of the Northeastern states, festered by treacherous terrain, historical factors such as language and ethnicity, tribal rivalry, the problem of illegal immigration from bordering countries and the struggle for control over local resources, among other things. These insurgent groups have often engaged in violent terror activities and maintain cross-border links with criminal networks to procure arms, recruit and train their cadres to indulge in unlawful activities.²³ For instance, from May 2023, Manipur have endured a spate of internecine conflict between Kukis and Meiteis. The threat of such large-scale violence and acts of terrorism by extremist groups might persist in the region in the coming years, which can only be averted through a comprehensive strategic political and security-oriented policy.

In addition, groups such as Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) have attempted to renew the pro-Khalistan separatist agenda, which was earlier decimated by the Indian government in the early 1990s, by conducting a so-called referendum across various Western countries. Another radical group, Waris Punjab De, also gained prominence in mid-2022 after the

death of its founder, Deep Sidhu. In March 2023, Indian authorities started a crackdown on the group on charges of attempted murder, attacks on police personnel, and causing disharmony in Punjab and arrested its leader, Amritpal Singh, on 23 April 2023 after an extensive chase. Subsequently, Khalistan supporters attacked the Indian consulate in San Francisco, while a mob attacked the Indian High Commission office in London, where they attempted to pull down the Indian flag from a pole. Singh won the Lok Sabha election from prison in 2024. Having surreptitiously gained political influence in some Western states like Canada and the US over the years, the Khalistan separatist movement has the potential of becoming a major security threat for India ahead.

II. Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism & Terrorism (CVET)

Most Western countries, and even those in South Asia, have focused primarily on strengthening internal security to tackle terrorism. India, on the other hand, addresses violent extremism and terrorism at both domestic and foreign policy levels. While strengthening its internal security, it has in parallel sought to pursue the transnational linkages of terrorism to ensure that such groups are denied an ecosystem to fund,

train and sustain such activities within the country.

India has adopted a proactive and assertive counterterrorism (CT) strategy, shifting from traditional restraint to a doctrine of proactive deterrence and retaliation. This approach employs hard power, intelligence, diplomacy, and psychological warfare to combat both cross-border threats and internal security challenges. This revamped strategy is built around a “whole-of-government” approach and moving away from strategic restraint. According to Ajmal Sohail (2025), “India’s strategy in addressing terrorism and fostering its position in global diplomacy reflects a comprehensive approach grounded in legitimacy, restraint, and capability.”²⁴

Officially, the Indian government calls it an “Offensive-Defence Approach” with the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval stating that India adopted it to destroy terrorist infrastructure both within the country and across the border. In his words, “Defensive offence is when you attack the place where the offense originates... Once adversaries understand this shift, it becomes unaffordable for them.”²⁵

The success of Operation Sindoor (7-10 May 2025) can be considered as a prime example of an effective

approach. Indian armed forces dismantled nine prominent terrorist training camps within both Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK) and mainland Pakistan through precision air strikes. Intelligence assessments reported that over a hundred terrorists, including senior leadership of groups like LeT and JeM was neutralised. It was more than a mere military operation; a defensive offence to demonstrate a clear shift from New Delhi's erstwhile policy of strategic restraint using proactive pre-emption to dismantle terror infrastructure. It was built on earlier successful precedents of the 2016 surgical strikes and 2019 Balakot airstrikes, together exemplifying a "measured and precise responses" to terrorist strikes emanating from cross-border threats. The subsequent events also saw India employ swarms of lethal drones and long-range precision-guided munitions to target Pakistan's military installations, including as many as 11 Pakistan air force bases, such as Nur Khan in Rawalpindi's Chaklala.

New Delhi insisted that these operations were in keeping with Article 51 of the UN Charter, which recognises the inherent right of states to defend themselves against acts of aggression. It therefore amplified its narrative of a nation exercising restraint while firmly upholding its sovereignty and security interests,

and strengthened India's stance with respect to its commitment to international law and its consistency in adopting counterterrorism measures that are both responsible and legitimate.

This stance is in stark contrast with Pakistan, which has a history of military dominance over all of its government institutions, with a several decades record of nurturing terrorism and using it as a state policy that has been acknowledged internationally. It was evidenced by the killing of Al Qaeda's Osama Bin Laden in 2011 in proximity to a major Pakistan Army installation in Abbottabad.

II. Eight Principles of 'Zero Tolerance to Terror'

The principles of India's counterterrorism policy are based on a 'zero tolerance of terrorism' approach, with the government rejecting and condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. For instance, in a statement at the UNSC briefing on 'Threats to International Peace and Security caused by Terrorist Acts' on 19 August 2021, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said: "There cannot be any exception or any justification for any act of terrorism, regardless of motivations behind such acts. We also recognise that the menace of terrorism cannot be and

should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilisation or any ethnic group."²⁶

There are eight cardinal principles upon which India's counter terrorism strategy is based, which include:²⁷

- i. Summon the political will: don't justify terrorism, don't glorify terrorists*
- ii. No double standards: Terrorists are terrorists; distinctions (such as "good" or "bad") are made only at our own peril*
- iii. Do not place blocks and holds on listing requests without any reason,*
- iv. Discourage exclusivist thinking and be on guard against new terminologies and false priorities,*
- v. Enlist and delist objectively, not on political or religious considerations,*
- vi. Recognise the linkage to organised crime,*
- vii.. Support and strengthen the FATF, and*
- viii. Provide greater funding to the UN Office of Counter Terrorism.*

These principles underscore New Delhi's concern that the threat of terrorism to its security and stability emanates mainly from its neighbourhood, particularly from

Pakistan and their foreign patrons in some cases. In fact, the main source of violent extremism and terrorism in the country, be it so-called transnational jihadist groups, Khalistani militants, perpetrators of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) or other secessionist movements, have been aided and abetted by external actors. Therefore, India's Counterterrorism policies and measures involve multiple ministries, including the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as central and state agencies. Such an all-of-government approach covers all security and administrative levels in the state and federal hierarchies, including relevant ministries, departments, the military, intelligence agencies, paramilitary forces, and security agencies, as well as related financial and technological institutions, among others. It is different from several countries in the West for whom terrorism remains largely the preserve of internal or homeland security departments.

It is important to note that while adopting a 'Zero-Tolerance' policy against terrorism, India has already put in place the following key measures:

- Effective, continuous and sustained actions against terrorists and support structures.

- Dismantling the terror ecosystem using a whole-of-government approach.
- Preventive operations through Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), Indian Army and State Police Forces involving identification of strategic supporters of terrorism and initiating investigations through NIA to expose their mechanisms of aiding and abetting terrorism.
- Strengthening legal regimes such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, for the effective prosecution of terrorist organisations and individual terrorists.
- Use of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics and Facial Recognition Tools to detect terrorist networks and activities.
- Monitoring of social media and cyberspace to prevent online radicalisation.²⁸

III. Multi-Dimensional 'Whole of Government' Approach:

As part of its new policy orientation, India makes no distinction between terror groups, non-state organised crime operatives supporting terrorist groups, and, more critically, no distinction with even state sponsors

of terrorism, particularly the Pakistan military. This whole-of-government approach was enunciated in 2025 by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, in which he highlighted that the ministry had embarked on a 'multi-dimensional strategy' to combat internal and cross-border terrorism.²⁹

These measures include:

- Enhancement of the counterinsurgency grid
- Deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)
- Special focus on modernisation and strengthening of security equipment.
- Organising various capacity building programs for State Police Forces, Law Enforcement Agencies and Cyber Investigative Agencies.
- Augmenting intelligence capabilities, strengthening law enforcement agencies, and ensuring the sharing of intelligence inputs on a real-time basis amongst all security forces.
- Implementation of the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), incorporating sensors, cameras, ground surveillance radars and command-control systems.

- Deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Drones and Satellite Surveillance in vulnerable border areas.
- Construction of strategic roads, tunnels and bridges in border areas under the Bharatmala and Border Road Organisation initiatives.
- Day & night area domination.
- Round-the-clock 'Nakas' (posts) at strategic points
- Construction of fences, floodlighting, Border Out Posts/ Company Operating Bases, building roads, and Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at various locations on the international borders, and measures to strengthen Coastal Security.
- Regular Border Coordination meetings and joint patrolling with neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar.
- Effective, continuous and sustained actions against terrorists and support structures.
- Dismantling the terror ecosystem using a whole-of-government approach.
- Preventive operations through Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), Indian Army and State Police Forces involving identification of strategic supporters of terrorism and initiating investigations through NIA to expose their mechanisms of aiding and abetting terrorism.
- Strengthening legal regimes such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008, for the effective prosecution of terrorist organisations and individual terrorists.
- Use of Artificial Intelligence, Big Data Analytics and Facial Recognition Tools to detect terrorist networks and activities.
- Monitoring of social media and cyberspace to prevent online radicalisation.
- "Combating Financing of Terrorism (CFT) Cell" has been established in the Ministry of Home Affairs since 2011 to coordinate with various intelligence/enforcement agencies to prevent financing of terrorism.
- A Terror Funding and Fake Currency Cell (TFFC) has also been established in the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to investigate and prosecute terrorist funding and Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) cases.
- A FICN Co-ordination Centre (FCORD) is also functioning to

share the intelligence/ information amongst the different security agencies of the Centre/ States to counter the circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes

- Monitoring of suspicious financial transactions, NGOs and hawala channels through coordinated actions with financial intelligence agencies.³⁰
- Coastal Security: Enhancing surveillance in the Arabian Sea, as revealed by 2024 naval intelligence.

IV. Multilateral and Bilateral Cooperation with Foreign States, Global Institutions

Although this section might ideally fall under the “whole of government approach,” India’s foreign policy initiatives are so elaborate that they merit discussion as a separate set of new initiatives. India actively cooperates with international forums such as the UN Security Council and the UN Counterterrorism Office, contributing substantively and financially to counterterrorism initiatives globally. Over the years, it has also engaged in bilateral collaboration in intelligence sharing, establishing joint working groups, capacity building, disrupting terror financing and coordinated actions against transnational terrorist groups

like al-Qaeda and ISIS at the regional and global level. Prominent among these partnerships are those with countries such as the US, Israel, Australia, the UK, France, the GCC states, and some countries in South Asia.

In this context, the MHA has established the International Cooperation Division, which serves as the nodal division for matters pertaining to the finalisation/ negotiations of agreements and treaties on security cooperation, illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, and bilateral mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs).³¹ It serves the ministry by coordinating the activities of BIMSTEC, ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), etc., while also handling security clearances for all MoUs/ Agreements signed with foreign countries and facilitating bilateral dialogues/ meetings at the ministry and home secretary levels.³² Within this overarching structure, the ministry has also established bilateral dialogue/ meeting mechanisms with several countries, including the Homeland Security Dialogue (HSD) with the USA, the Home Affairs Dialogue (HAD) with the UK, and Joint Security Committees (JSC) with Israel, the UAE, Australia, and China, among others.

V. Countering New Age Terror Weapons with Cost-Effective Technologies

There are several emerging and unconventional terrorist threats that currently employ newly emerging, cost-effective, highly advanced, lethal technology to inflict large-scale damage or create widespread disruption and fear. Some of the more dangerous new technologies have been on display in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, Israel's Gaza war (2023-25) and even the Operation Sindoor showdown with Pakistan in May 2025.

Prominent among these are drones used for terror surveillance, to drop small munitions at vital installations, as well as for purposes of potential delivery of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) agents. The use of drone swarms for terrorism presents a particularly daunting challenge for militaries.

In addition, there is currently growing use of *Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs)*, *Cyber Warfare for recruitment, radicalisation, propaganda, disinformation and terror funding, and additive manufacturing known as 3D printing*. On the positive side, new technologies, such as AI and Big Data, could prove useful for monitoring

social media and predicting terrorism-related activity.

Counter-Drone Capabilities:

One technology of major concern in hybrid warfare these days is the use of drone technology for terrorism-related purposes. However, India has been making rapid advancements in drone and anti-drone technology and is promoting indigenous tech such as Indrajaal (an AI-powered defence grid), Bhargavastra (swarm-destroying missiles), and DRDO's integrated D4 system (radar, jammers, lasers).

Its focus is on employing mobile, AI-driven detection and neutralisation technologies to secure borders, critical infrastructure, and vital urban areas and infrastructure facilities against possible drone attacks and threats posed by new-age technologies.³³

Rapid advancement in drone warfare marks a strategic shift in modern warfare, as even terrorist groups have the potential to infiltrate borders and carry out strikes on vital installations and endanger the lives of both military personnel and civilians.

Recently, Ukraine has been known to have employed cheap First Person

View (FPV) drones to bomb five Russian airbases, showcasing how low-cost drones can bypass traditional air defences. In fact, drones have played an important role throughout the Ukraine-Russia conflict, with Ukrainian units using them to counter large Russian assaults, especially in the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions.³⁴

To counter drone attacks, India cannot afford to use missiles or anti-aircraft guns, as this option is both expensive and particularly inefficient against drone swarms. A more efficient technique would be to invest in automated systems like C-RAM and Phalanx gun systems, which are more effective and capable of rapid engagement.

To reduce defence costs, India is exploring new technologies, such as Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) that use lasers and microwaves to disable drones electronically. In this regard, Electronic Warfare (EW) equipment for jamming GPS/communication signals is also effective.

In fact, GPS spoofing can misdirect drone navigation and commands. In addition, cyber-hacking drones are another cost-effective and potent means of bringing down drones remotely. There is also the option of developing Interceptor Drones and Nets that could physically capture or disable hostile drones at close range.

However, there are some key challenges in this, which include:

- Inter-agency coordination as gaps between state and central agencies remain a challenge.
- Socio-political factors for addressing underlying grievances, poverty, and marginalisation.
- Border management for securing 15,000 km of diverse land borders and 7,500 km of coastline.

Yet there has been a degree of futuristic focus in the Indian policymaking. The Home Ministry released the country's first comprehensive National Counterterrorism Policy and Strategy, named PRAHAAR, in February 2026, creating a more uniform, cohesive approach to fighting the menace of terrorism in all its forms. This includes tightening laws against new technologies, such as cryptocurrency, used for financing.

B. India's Institutional Framework to Combat Terrorism

Before the launch of PRAHAAR, although not officially drafted or ratified by competent authorities, India followed counterterrorism policy guidelines (highlighted above), a strategic and institutional framework, and a variety of carefully coordinated, synergistic systems and measures that constitute an effective counterterrorism policy.

At the level of the central government, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) solely focuses on counterterrorism and works under MHA and is aided by other agencies and forces like Intelligence Bureau (IB), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), while the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) are linked to the Prime Minister's Office.³⁵ According to an MHA press release, police and other state-level law enforcement agencies continue to be responsible for detecting and combating the threat of terrorism. In this regard, anti-terrorism squads (ATS) have been formed to respond swiftly to any terrorist threat, with big states also availing Multi Agency Centres (MACs) to provide information to law enforcement agencies.³⁶ State and central authorities function and coordinate their actions through joint committees, task forces, subsidiary intelligence bureaus, and MACs.

To neutralise the threat of cyber-terrorism, the MHA has established the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) in New Delhi to provide a framework and ecosystem for law enforcement agencies.³⁷ There has been a spurt in cyber-terror attacks in recent times, such as the hacking of BharatPay in August 2022, followed by the hacking of The Swachhta Platform in September

2022. Even AIIMS was cyberattacked in December 2022, and RailYatri experienced a data breach in the same month.³⁸

The Indian military also generates intelligence with relevance to domestic terrorism, and a centrally controlled National Security Guard (NSG) specialises in hostage and terrorist attack situations. The Indian government amended anti-terrorism laws, such as the UAPA (1967) and the NIA Act in 2019.³⁹

Various sanctions as imposed against terrorist organisations and its members through United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1267, 1373 and section 51(A) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 include freeze, seize and attaching funds/properties; restricting flowing of funds of terrorist entities and travel restrictions on the members of a terrorist organisation and designated individual terrorists.

India has fully functional Joint Working Groups on Counterterrorism (JWG-CT) with 26 countries and 5 multi-lateral forums (ASEAN, BIMSTEC, BRICS, European Union (EU), QUAD-CTWG); and one Stand-Alone Dialogue with Tunisia. India has also been conducting joint anti-terror training exercises with partners like the US, Russia, Israel, and ASEAN nations.

Intelligence and security agencies of the Centre and the States work in tandem to keep a close watch on the elements involved in terrorist offences. This includes round the clock intelligence sharing through Multi Agency Centre (MAC) at the Central level and State Multi Agency Centre (SMAC) at the State level, setting up of Joint Command and Control Centres, strengthening of Technical and Human intelligence, better cooperation amongst the Security Forces, district police and intelligence agencies, thrust on generation of real time intelligence and creation as well as strengthening of State Intelligence Bureaus (SIBs).⁴⁰

C. Overcoming Challenges to Achieve *Amritkaal* by 2047

Despite being close to the epicentre of terrorism, which lies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and a chequered history in fighting terrorism since 1947, the BJP-led government at the Centre has been successful in effectively combating terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Left-wing extremism and insurgencies in the northeast.⁴¹ The government has also been working to further strengthen counterterrorism institutions and mechanisms, with an emphasis on greater, near-seamless integration of counterterrorism structures and intelligence gathering across

different security agencies at the central and state levels to proactively identify and disrupt terrorist plots. However, issues like bureaucratic autonomy and competition over resources,⁴² especially with state governments run by parties inimical to the government at the Centre, remain an issue. Highly fractious political narratives between political parties in central and state elections impedes in the development of a national consensus on issues concerning radicalisation, illegal immigration, majority and minority rights, etc.

Although the threat of cyberterrorism is being partially addressed, the pace and enormity of still unregulated Internet and Dark Web content creation, with the rise of deep-fake AI technologies, stealing of security-related data, socio-cognitive community hacking, fake identity frauds and forgeries, online trolling, flaming and doxing as well as the surfeit of incriminating memes and hate content need to be countered on a massive scale. This is a major security threat that is entering homes and affecting our youth, which violent extremists are exploiting to tear apart the national social fabric. Terror groups are also investing in new and emerging technologies like 3-D printing for building weapons, the use of drones and UAVs, and electronic communication systems to

recruit, fundraise, train and plan attacks. Clearly, India's counter-terrorism presence in the rapidly evolving technological domains needs major upgradation to be ahead of the VET curve.

While much progress has been made in border management across India's vast and geographically diverse frontiers, increased surveillance and security measures to prevent infiltration of terrorists will remain a concern in the coming decades. There is also a need to develop coherent and cohesive counter-radicalisation and deradicalisation programmes, national integration schemes, and community engagement and awareness programmes, which remain largely the preserve of

frequently changing state governments.

India may also have to look into unconventional threats such as influence operations, agitational politics infiltrated by radical extremist elements, the growing linkages of organised crime, drug peddlers, and terror groups with private entities, socio-political parties, and institutions, and post-attack mitigation measures to secure social, political, and financial order, etc. These issues may have to be studied and addressed practically and judiciously, which again emphasises the need to develop a comprehensive Counter Terrorism Policy that may chart the course for a resilient and terror-free *Amrit Kaal* for our country by 2047. ■

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