9 India's Counter-Terrorism Policy: An Overview

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Abstract

Terrorism is a persistent and growing threat, exacerbated by digital technology and global connectivity. Historically, terrorism in India has targeted civilians, state institutions, and infrastructure, especially in regions like Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Northeast, and major Metropolitan Cities. Key terror groups include Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. Many of these groups have links to Pakistan-based ISI, and some have declared affiliations with global terror networks like Islamic State. Terrorists use anonymous, encrypted communication networks, fragmented networks, and digital communication platforms for planning, reconnaissance, fundraising, propaganda, subversion, recruitment, and covert operations. Information warfare, including; misinformation, disinformation, deepfakes, fake news, is a growing national security concern.

Keywords: Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, National Security, International Relations, PRAHAAR, Cyber Radicalisation, Social Media, Armed Forces, United Nations, Prevention, Response.

Introduction

Terrorism today continues to be a major challenge across the world because of its rapidly growing nature and unending spread of digital technology. Terrorism can be viewed as it not only poses a threat to the state but also presents a greater challenge to the notion of peace and stability in the minds of people, societies, and governments. Terrorism is the strategic use of violence to achieve political and military goals. It is an asymmetric power struggle between the weaker states against a much more powerful adversary. Despite measures taken by the government and law enforcement agencies around the world, terrorism continues to persist and grapple the minds of people with fear and anxiety. One can witness this phenomenon all around the world.

In the modern era of the internet and social media, the impact of terrorism is not limited to the local or regional level but has become a global catastrophe. Terrorist groups and terrorist organisations are using computer technology and the internet to spread propaganda, commit violent acts of terror, raise funds and find new recruits. Similarly, many nation-states resort to terror tactics to safeguard their political and national interests. Terrorism involves committing acts of violence against innocent civilians and state institutions to achieve political and religious goals. These violent acts are carried out to gain public attention and pressurise governments to fulfil their demands. Thus, terrorists are a small group of bludgeons who will fight against the government with better information, advanced technology and weapons.

The United Nations General Secretary's Report of 2004 described terrorism as;

'Any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to the civilians or non-combatants to cause death or serious bodily harm to the civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act'.

History of Terrorism in India

Terrorism in India started long before it gained independence. Initially, extremist activities were aimed at generating fear amongst the British Colonial Rulers, but post-independence, terrorist's activities were aimed at killing innocent civilians. Post independence places like Kashmir, Punjab, and Northeast were deeply affected by insurgency and terrorism, and in recent, the scope of terrorism has been broadened. The regions affected by terrorism include; Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Gujarat, Central India (Naxalism) and North-East Region seeking autonomy against the Government of India. In the past, the Punjab insurgency has led to militant activities in the state of Punjab and National Capital, New Delhi.

In India, one of the key attributes of terrorism-based activities is religious terrorism. Religious terrorism is terrorism performed by groups or individuals, the motivation for which is typically rooted in the based tenets. Terrorist acts throughout the centuries have been performed on religious grounds with the hope to either spread hatred or enforce a system of belief, viewpoint or opinion. The terrorist activities in India are primarily attributed to religious and radical movements. In this current scenario, domestic and external terrorist activities are only increasing in India. After the 1980s, terrorist activities have significantly increased in India. India has fought a war against terrorism in these years and has lost over several hundreds of civilians. In addition, it has lost over nine thousand security personnel and civilians who have been hit by terrorism and have become homeless.

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Threat of Terrorism in India

Terrorism in India today poses a serious threat to both internal and external security. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, terrorism poses a tremendous challenge to the people of India. The nature and impact of terrorism are such that it cannot be quantified because of its various manifestations. Among all the terrorist attacks, which took place in India over the last decade, especially since 2008, most were carried out by SIMI and Indian Mujahideen. Out of these organizations, the Indian Mujahideen has already explicitly declared its linkage with the Islamic State. Also, along with that, they have reportedly established a branch of ISIS in India. It is known that 25-30 individuals from this organization have travelled and aligned with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Initially, the number of people inclined to join ISIS was negligible; however, with time, the number is increasing, which gives rise to an anxious atmosphere.

Terrorism in India has been a serious concern, in particular to the security and integrity of the country. It originated in the 1980s and has percolated its activities beyond the boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir, including mainland India. These terrorist groups are known for attacks on Indian security forces, killing civilians, attacks on religious sites, government building, and attacks on people of other faiths or religious backgrounds, particularly the Hindu population. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, one of the oldest militant groups in India, launched an armed rebellion against the Government of India. The primary aim of this militant group was to gain independence for Jammu and Kashmir from the Union of India. Similarly, another radical militant group, Hizbul-Mujahideen, supported by the ISI of Pakistan, launched violent attacks all over the State of Jammu and Kashmir to gain independence from the Union of India and merge with Pakistan. According to S. Chopra, rising religious terrorism is primarily responsible for terrorism in West Asia, Russia, Philippines, Indonesia, and India.

The violent terror activities in Jammu and Kashmir were not constrained within the boundaries but were also extended to other parts of India, including major cities. Metropolitan cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Chennai were subject to acts of terrorism. Terrorist activities such as deadly bomb blasts that resulted in the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians, which were carried out in these cities. Similarly, other such terrorist organisations that operate in Indian territory include Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Harkut-ul-Mujahideen, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State. According to the reports of the Ministry of Home Affairs, it has been evidently established that Pakistan has been using terrorism as an instrument of state policy against India. Pakistan-based ISI agency recruits, trains, finances, arms and infiltrates terrorists into Indian territory. Repeated acts of terrorism have taken place despite attempts made by the civilians of both nations to reduce tension between the two nation-states.

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Despite international pressure, Pakistan has not dismantled the terror infrastructure in its region and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This infrastructure continues to be used and sponsored by the ISI to promote terrorism into Indian territory. Some social scientists have noted that Pakistan has been involved in state sponsored terrorism in the State of Jammu and Kashmir since 1970's. The Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Report 2014-15 states that Pakistan–ISI strategy is to intensify proxy war in areas that extend from the state of Jammu and Kashmir to the Northeast states of India. This covers the entire northern territory of India. It also aims to promote extensive use of India's neighbouring countries for executing various terror plans and destabilization strategies. Leveraging resentment, subverting and indoctrinating vulnerable sections of Indian society also forms one of the motivations in conducting terror activities across India.

It attempts to destabilise the Indian economy by promoting drug trade and drug trafficking, human trafficking, cybercrime, influx of fake currency and its mass circulation in the economy. It supports criminals and criminal groups by providing external and internal support and creates an anti-India pitch through disinformation campaigns to discredit India in international forums and international media. It engages in spreading a false narrative campaign against India and aims to discredit the Indian Armed Forces for alleged false accusations of human rights violations. Owing to continued terrorist activities in India, the government has adopted various security measures at the government level (both at Centre and State) and has introduced stringent legislation to contain such incidents.

Currently, Indian agencies dealing with terrorism include the Intelligence Bureau, which works under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and namely the National Investigation Agency, which was created after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, which functions as the apex investigation agency. The National Investigation Agency works under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs. While, the Central Bureau of Investigation and Research and Analysis Wing work under the purview of Prime Minister's Office. The National Technical Research Organisation, a technically based intelligence organisation, was created in 2004 works under the aegis of the National Security Advisor (PMO). Other organisations include; Defence Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Air Intelligence, Directorate of Naval Intelligence, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence. India has banned some terror organisations, and strictly surveys its activities to protect its national interests and national security. These following are the prominent terrorist organisations operating in India.

Prominent Terrorist Organisations Operating in India

- Lashkar-e-Taiba
- Jaish-e-Mohammed
- Hizbul Mujahideen

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- Student Islamic Movement of India
- Indian Mujahideen
- Al-Qaeda
- Islamic State

Motives of Terrorists

- Formulate Plans (Anonymous, Encrypted Communications, Fragmented Networks)
- Raise Funds (Extortion, Theft, Cyber Crime, Crypto Payments, Drugs & Human Trafficking)
- Command and Control (Handlers, Agents, Grassroot Leaders)
- Information Warfare (Propaganda, Disinformation, Misinformation, Deepfakes, Fake News)
- Recruitments (Local Agents, Disenchanted Youths)
- Communications (Anonymous, Encrypted Communication, Social Media Platforms)
- Digital Reconnaissance and Covert Information Gathering

Causes of Terrorism in India

- Ideology and Extremism
- Poverty and Illiteracy
- Exploitation of Weaker Sections of Indian Societies
- Mass Unemployment
- Poor Social Bonding
- Social, Political, and Economic Grievances
- Separatist and Nationalist Movements
- Cyber Radicalization and Digital Propaganda
- Disinformation, Fake News and Rumours

Table 1: Timeline of Major Terror Attacks in India

Dates	Terror Attacks	Sites	Deaths	Organizations
12th March 1993	Mumbai Serial Blasts	Mumbai	257	D-Company and Pakistan
1st October 2001	Jammu & Kashmir Assembly	Srinagar	27	Jaish-e-Mohammed
13th December 2001	Parliament of India	New Delhi	14	Jaish-e-Mohammed

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24th September 2002	Akshardham Temple	Gujarat	33	Lashkar-e-Taiba
25th August 2003	Mumbai Twin Bombings	Mumbai	54	Lashkar-e-Taiba
5th July 2005	Ram Janmabhoomi	Ayodhya	8	Lashkar-e-Taiba
29th October 2005	Delhi Serial Blasts	New Delhi	62	Lashkar-e-Taiba
11th July 2006	Mumbai Suburban Train Blasts	Mumbai	189	Lashkar-e-Taiba
13th May 2008	Jaipur Serial Blasts	Rajasthan	71	Indian Mujahideen
25th July 2008	Bengaluru Blasts	Bengaluru	1	Indian Mujahideen
26th July 2008	Ahmedabad Serial Blasts	Gujarat	56	Indian Mujahideen
13th September 2008	Delhi Serial Blasts	New Delhi	25	Indian Mujahideen
27th September 2008	Mehrauli Blast	New Delhi	3	Indian Mujahideen
26–29th November 2008	Mumbai (26/11)	Mumbai	175	Lashkar-e-Taiba
13th February 2010	German Bakery Blast	Pune	17	Indian Mujahideen
13th July 2011	Mumbai Blasts	Mumbai	26	Indian Mujahideen
21st February 2013	Hyderabad Blasts	Hyderabad	18	Indian Mujahideen
2nd January 2016	Pathankot Air Force Station Attack	Punjab	14	Jaish-e-Mohammed
18th September 2016	Uri Army Brigade Attack	Jammu & Kashmir	23	Jaish-e-Mohammed
10th July 2017	Amarnath Pilgrims Attack	Jammu & Kashmir	8	Lashkar-e-Taiba
14th February 2019	Pulwama Attack	Jammu & Kashmir	40	Jaish-e-Mohammed
22nd April 2025	Pahalgam Attack	Jammu & Kashmir	26	Jaish-e-Mohammed
10th November 2025	Red Fort Attack	New Delhi	15	Jaish-e-Mohammed

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India's Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Conventional)

With the rising number of terror activities and their constant threat to internal and external security, India has enacted several legislations to prosecute its perpetrators carrying out terror attacks and challenging India's territorial integrity. The following laws have been enacted to govern and regulate such processes and follow a strict approach towards terrorism and cyberterrorism-related activities, along with legal provisions for stringent punishments.

Prahaar Doctrine

Table 2: Prahaar Doctrine

Letter	Pillars	Core Mandate
P	Prevention	Prevent Terror Attacks, Protect Civilians, Intelligence, Counter Intelligence
R	Response	Swift & Proportionate Response, SOP's, Apex Level Coordination, MAC, NIA, NSG
A	Aggregating	Capacity Building, Technology, Upgraded Weapons, CT Skills & Tactics, NSG
H	Human Rights	Rule of Law, Operations Remain Constitutional, Protect FR's, HR's, BNS, BNSS
A	Attenuating	Neutralize Terrorism, De-Radicalisation, Counter Radicalisation, Employment
A	Aligning	Bilateral Cooperation, Extradition Treaties, UN Designated Terrorist Lists, FATF, CI, Block Terror Funding Networks.
R	Recovery	Recovery, Resilience, Healing, Psychologist, Lawyers, Police

Source: Compiled and Created by Author

National Security Act

It is a preventive detention law that allows the government to detain a person without formal criminal charges or trial for a limited period if it believes doing so is necessary to protect national security, public order or essential services. It intended to address serious national security threats and has broad powers with the possibility of detention without a conventional criminal trial.

Key provisions of NSA include:

- **Preventive Detention:** Unlike punishment after a crime, the NSA prevents a person from allegedly committing acts considered harmful to national security.
- **Duration:** A person may be detained for up to 12 months, although the detention is subject to periodic review or can end earlier.
- **Grounds for Detention:** The act may be invoked if authorities believe a person is acting in a manner prejudicial to; India's Defence or National Security, India's Foreign Policy and its relations, public order or maintenance of essential supplies and services.

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- **Limited Disclosure:** The government may withhold certain facts from the detainee if it believes disclosing them would be against public interest.
- **Constitutional Basis:** India's Constitution explicitly permits preventive detention under certain conditions through Articles 22(3)–22(7).

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act

The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 dealt with an association that questioned the legitimacy of territorial integrity. The Act's design strictly meets the challenges related to the territorial integrity of India. The Act comprises a self-contained code of provisions that identifies secessionist associations as unlawful and against India's national interest. Other provisions under the act include adjudication by a tribunal, control of terror funds, places of work and unlawful association of members. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 is a holistic act and stands completely within the purview and jurisdiction of the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Considering the cross-border terrorism in India and the continued offensive behaviour by Pakistan, especially after 9/11 in the United States, followed by the global war on terror. The Indian government deliberated and brought legislation to deal with terrorist activity in India. Thus, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2002 legislation was introduced and enacted. The act clearly mentions what constitutes a terror attack under section three of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The act also ensures that its provisions are not misused while addressing human rights concerns. Necessary legal provisions are mentioned in the act to provide safeguards against any atrocity committed under the stringent anti-terror law. The Act mentions punishment for those who exercise these judicial powers maliciously or with a mala fide intent.

Key Provisions of POTA include:

- The minimum rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (ACP/ASP) can only investigate such offences under this Act.
- No Judicial Court can intervene in any offence related to this Act.
- Confessions made by a person are only to be made in front of a designated Police Officer.
- Confessions made by a person are only to be made in front of a designated Police Officers, whose minimum rank should be of Superintendent of Police (SP).
- Under admissible evidence, the culprit must be produced before the court within 48 hours after the Confession.

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Information Technology Act

IT Act 2008 (Amended) is an addition to the existing Information Technology Act of 2000. The Act was originally enacted to promote the IT industry, Promote E-commerce and Prevent Cybercrime, along with fostering security practices of global standards. The Act was amended in 2008 to further address issues of concern in Indian Cyberspace, which the original act failed to cover. The act in total has 13 chapters and 90 sections, and its legal jurisdiction applies to the whole of the country. This act also applies to cyber offences, which are committed outside Indian territory by any person affecting Indian Cyberspace.

Information Technology Guidelines in India regarding dealing with Terrorism and Cyber Terrorism;

- Implementation of Information Technology Security Guidelines 2000.
- IT (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking of Access to Information by Public) Rules, 2009.
- IT (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011.
- IT (Guidelines for Cyber Café) Rules, 2011.
- IT (Electronic Service Delivery) Rules, 2011.
- IT (National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre and Manner of Performing Functions and Duties) Rules, 2013.

Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act

The prominent crime control act of Maharashtra State, popularly known as MCOCA, is a major anti-terror law in the State of Maharashtra and Union Territory of New Delhi. The anti-terror act was enforced in April 1999. The law was especially enacted to deal with rising crime in the state of Maharashtra. The act was enforced to deal with organised crime in the city of Mumbai. As per MCOCA, a person is already presumed guilty before the trial, until and unless he can prove his innocence. MCOCA also includes the promotion of insurgency as an act of terror.

Criminal Law Trilogy

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS, 2023) replaces the Indian Penal Code and introduces organized crime and terrorist act provisions that were previously scattered across multiple statutes. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS, 2023) replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure and introduces electronic evidence standards, video-conferencing for trials, and enhanced police detention powers. The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA, 2023) modernizes evidence standards to accommodate digital evidence, electronic intercepts, and forensic science.

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Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System

CCTNS is a criminal tracking project of India, which comes under the framework of National e-Governance Plan, covering all 28 States and 8 Union Territories, aims to create a nation-wide criminal networking system with the aid of IT enabled tracking system. It helps to investigate crimes and detect criminals within India. The goal of this project is to facilitate the collection, storage, retrieval, analysis, transfer, and sharing of information at police stations, between police stations and their respective headquarters, along with other Central Police Organizations. The CCTNS project aims to provide a comprehensive database of criminals and their nature of crimes committed, making it easier for law enforcement and federal agencies to track down criminals.

India's Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Non–Conventional)

- **De-Radicalisation**

De-radicalisation is often assumed to be the same as disengagement from a terrorist group and its ideology. However, de-radicalisation term refers to the cognitive rejection of certain values, attitudes, views, and opinions. While one is inclined to think that de- radicalisation comes first and disengagement behavioural distancing from the violent terrorist modus operandi comes afterwards, this is not the case. Most terrorists have not changed their cognitive framework as per their actual behaviour. Disengagement without de-radicalisation might be the rule rather than the exception. One can observe that there is simultaneous de-radicalisation and disengagement. Disengagement can take many forms: desertion, defection, or both as a collective process. Like radicalisation, disengagement on a group level has also been conceptualised as a step-by-step process which includes;

- Declarative Disengagement
- Behavioural Disengagement
- Organisational Disengagement
- De-Radicalisation

Individual-level disengagement is largely concealed, leaving people with little knowledge about it. Although disillusionment in one form or another probably plays a bigger role, as it does with those who are members of a terrorist cell. Overall, what we know for sure about radicalisation, extremism and terrorism on the individual front and at group levels is still rather limited and its generalisations across nations and cultures are still problematic. Recently, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland conducted a major study on violent extremist and how to counter it.

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- **Counter-Radicalisation**

Counter-radicalisation efforts are therefore not only for the terrorists themselves but also to strengthen and empowerment communities from where it might emerge and be deemed supportive of them. The local diaspora and minorities should be as interested as the federal government in keeping their neighbourhoods free from terrorists. To prevent terrorism and its emergence, capacity-building programs and social awareness programs are essential. These programs will make targeted communities more resilient. Advocates of counter-terrorism often recommend these steps, which include counter-radicalization programs through the following steps;

- Empower the Mainstream Voices of Minority Communities.
- Address Local, Regional, State and National grievances.
- Rejuvenate efforts to promote prosperity through: Bureaucratic Reforms, Transparency, Reduce Corruption, Practice Inclusive Democracy.
- Portray the Threat of Terrorism Realistically.
- Counter Extremism and Counter Online Radicalization in Cyberspace.
- Poverty Alleviation and National Integration Programmes.

Cyber-Radicalization Response

Today, social media and digital platforms, along with heavily encrypted communications applications, act as a primary factor for extremist propaganda, subversion, recruitment, and operational guidance. These threat vectors have two key dimensions. First, International Terror Organizations like the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda have developed sophisticated media content strategies and content distribution ecosystems that generate Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, Malayalam and Tamil content targeted towards the Indian Subcontinent. Similarly, domestic extremist networks exploit the same technology, content, and platforms to subvert, recruit, organize, and coordinate terror groups. India's response architecture to cyber radicalisation includes; Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, National Investigation Agency, State's ATS, and Information Technology Act for content takedown. Digital monitoring of online radicalization ecosystems, along with working with social media companies on content moderation and investing in counter-narrative production in multiple vernacular languages, is essential, as India has 900 million internet users.

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