

India's Fight Against Global Terrorism Challenges & Strategies

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Abstract

This paper critically examines India's evolving approach to countering global terrorism in the contemporary geopolitical context. It explores the multifaceted challenges faced by India, both from cross-border terrorism and emerging forms of radicalisation facilitated through digital platforms, including social media and the dark web. While terrorism is not a new phenomenon, its global networks have become more sophisticated in the age of globalisation. The rise of ideologically motivated religious extremism has further complicated national and international security frameworks. The paper analyses how India's counter-terrorism diplomacy has adapted, particularly under the current government, which has significantly altered the strategic narrative and strengthened national security mechanisms. As a liberal democracy, India faces the complex task of combating terrorism while upholding democratic values, constitutional rights, and civil liberties. The study highlights how terrorist organisations exploit open societies, manipulate media narratives, and target diverse audiences for recruitment and propaganda. Additionally, the paper investigates how shifting political dynamics in India's neighbourhood have exacerbated security threats in border regions and hinterlands alike. Special emphasis is placed on India's role in shaping global counter-terrorism norms, particularly through its engagement at the United Nations and other multilateral forums. The paper argues that India's experience offers valuable insights for strengthening international cooperation and building a more effective global counter-terrorism architecture.

Keywords: Counter- terrorism, diplomacy, United Nations, Global-Terrorism, Cyberterrorism.

INTRODUCTION: -

India is one of the oldest civilisations. Its myriad culture has been amalgamation of various civilisation without disturbing its distinct form. India is a strong votary of peace since Vedic age. We chant for peace not only among human being but for outer spaces and for all flora and fauna. India is land of peace where all the religion and communities have been living together in harmony for centuries. Where minority grows like all others. India being the harbinger of peace and tolerance one can find all the six sects of Christianity, 72 sects of Islam, Parsis and Jews living together peacefully.¹ We are also recognised for being world's second largest population but still we are unity in diversity. Troubled by history and geopolitics India has remained one of the most affected countries by terrorism. India has tolerated centuries of foreign domination but India has not lost her soul. Our primary objective remains the human development of our people, and this require a durable peace. Peace can be achieved by finding solutions to conflict, generally by deterrence and dissuasion.² Like all sovereign nations, India's national interests include safeguarding territorial integrity and national security. Today, these priorities are significantly

challenged by non-state actors operating in global terrorist networks. While some groups have local origins, many are now backed, sponsored, or strategically deployed by adversarial nation-states hostile to India. The primary hotspots driving global terrorism threats to India remain Jammu and Kashmir and parts of the North-East, where extremist ideologies are amplified by transnational networks—in particular, Pakistan-backed outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and The Resistance Front. These groups—trained, financed, and equipped across international borders—have perpetrated deadly attacks in both high-profile regions and the broader Indian mainland. Notably, the April 2025 Pahalgam massacre, which killed 26 civilians, was claimed by The Resistance Front, a proxy of Lashkar-e-Taiba, marking the deadliest civilian terror incident since Mumbai 2008. According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), deaths from terrorism fell by 13% in 2024 (**Global Terrorism Index 2025**, India ranks **14th**), yet the number of countries affected rose from 58 to 66—the highest count since 2018. India remains one of the countries experiencing a sustained impact from terrorism, with spillover effects from regional instability.

This paper investigates India's response to global terrorism through the lens of counter-terrorism diplomacy and strategic measures. It evaluates how India tackles cross-border terror threats while preserving democratic freedoms, and how it shapes and implements global counter-terror norms—especially via multilateral platforms like the United Nations. The first section contrasts competing narratives on global terrorism, setting the stage for policy analysis that follows.

Understanding Global Terrorism: -

There is difference between violence caused by war and terrorism. War is the use of lethal force to settle political conflict between two or more adversarial groups or nations. There are many forms of it. Terrorism is a tactics for violent conflict between unequal adversaries that employ shocking attacks generally on civilians or any symbolic target in order to generate terror. Terrorists are people who typically feel unable to confront their perceived enemies directly and accordingly use violence or the threat of violence usually against non-combatant to achieve political aims. Terrorism is a phenomenon of international politics that have a long history and appear in a variety of forms. Activities of terrorism is itself dynamic like one of its form cyberterrorisms presently. Intensification of ethnic conflict and religious radicalism has contributed to the proliferation of global terrorism. Democratisation and globalisation have also produced or enforced the meanings of global terrorism. Open border and increasing in commercial exchange have made it easier for terrorists to move about and to acquire new and more lethal weapons. The acceleration of computer and other forms of electronic technology have contributed to the impact of terrorism and can be expected to continue to do so into the future.

The globalisation of terror describes the preparations which is about the world view and the unique structure of the terror organisations and their cells which act in the name of the global jihad concept. It was perceived by Bin Laden and many like their followers. In globalised world all terrorist organisations are essentially ideological and their world view is based on the holy writings. These types of ideologies which is rooted in divine revolutions is driven by a rejection of any other ideology as later is the creation of human conception which is inherently perceived as in perfect.³ The willingness of several terrorist factions currently active in the international arena to escalate their activities and cause mass carnage without any restraints as to the applied means and operation methods is an existing reality.

Emerging Methods of Terrorist Operations:

Terrorist groups today are becoming smarter and more adaptive in the way they operate. One of the biggest challenges for authorities is the **use of complex financial systems and decentralized networks**, which make it much harder to detect and act against them⁴. Traditional techniques like **cash smuggling, hawala**, and even **the misuse of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs)** are still in use, but now they are often **mixed with newer digital methods**⁷. For example, many hawala operations have started using **cryptocurrencies** to settle balances, taking advantage of the anonymity and fast nature of digital transactions⁴.

Terrorists are also turning to informal financial tools like **mobile money apps, e-commerce websites, and crypto platforms** for fundraising and transactions⁴. Social media is being misused too—not only for propaganda and recruitment but also for **crowdfunding**, where funds can be raised quietly and quickly outside the traditional banking system⁴. India has played an active role in tracking and sharing such trends. In fact, **case studies submitted by India to global forums** have shown how terrorists have used online shopping platforms to buy materials for attacks, and how lone attackers have used online wallets and VPNs to fund and plan their operations⁷.

A more worrying trend is the **growing overlap between terrorism and organized crime**. Terrorist groups are now involved in activities like **drug trafficking, human smuggling, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom**⁴. These criminal links give them **diverse revenue streams**, making them even more difficult to shut down. A particularly hard-to-detect model is when **lone actors**—individuals operating without a formal group—**use small, legitimate income sources** (like salaries or online gigs) to fund their plans. They don't raise large amounts, but what they do raise is enough—and because these transactions look normal, **financial systems rarely flag them**. Another space being misused is the **world of online gaming and adjacent platforms**, which are being explored for both fundraising and recruitment. On top of this, many groups are improving their capabilities using new tech: **drones, encrypted messaging apps, and virtual currencies** are all being integrated into their operations⁵.

The larger picture here is clear: **terrorists are blending old methods with new technologies**, making it much harder for authorities to track and respond. Conventional systems alone aren't enough anymore. **Counter-terrorism efforts must now operate across multiple domains**, from cyber and finance to behavioral and human intelligence. This mix of **digital anonymity and traditional networks** creates a threat that is far more **resilient and elusive**. One of the toughest new challenges is the rise of **microfinancing by lone actors**, who use **normal-looking, small-scale incomes** to fund attacks. When combined with tools like **VPNs**, this makes their online activities even harder to trace. Financial surveillance systems are typically designed to catch **large, suspicious transactions**. But in these cases, the small payments look perfectly routine. To catch them without overwhelming the system or invading people's privacy on a massive scale is nearly impossible.

VPNs also **mask communication and coordination**, making it easier for attackers to plan without being noticed. Because of this, **the pre-attack phase**—when terrorists are planning and collecting materials—has become much harder to detect. Instead of looking for large groups and big money flows, **intelligence agencies now need to pick up on small behavioral clues** hidden within a sea of everyday activity. This shift means we need new tools—**better human intelligence, behavioral analysis, and advanced data tools**—to spot potential threats early. But all of this also raises **serious privacy and human rights concerns**, as increasing surveillance can lead to ethical dilemmas and misuse if not handled with care.

Terrorism in India: -

The threat posed to India by cross-border terrorism remains significant and persistent. Several jihadi organisations, primarily based in Pakistan and supported by state institutions, continue to operate with a clear anti-India agenda. **Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)** is among the most dangerous of these groups, particularly active in Jammu and Kashmir. Along with **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)**, LeT was responsible for the December 13, 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament—one of the gravest acts of terrorism against Indian democracy.

LeT was founded in the late 1980s in Afghanistan's Kunar district and initially engaged in the jihad against Soviet forces. Over time, it evolved into a principal proxy used by Pakistan in its asymmetric warfare strategy against India. The group continues to receive funding, weapons, and training from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and has also been involved in conflicts beyond South Asia, including in Chechnya and Central Asia. LeT remains a central force in the jihadist campaign against India. **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)**, meaning "Army of Mohammed," was founded in 2000 by Maulana Masood Azhar, who was released from Indian custody following the IC-814 hijacking. JeM has carried out multiple attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, including the **2016 Uri attack** and the **2019 Pulwama suicide bombing**, both of which caused major casualties and escalated tensions between India and Pakistan. JeM maintains close ties with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, reinforcing its international terrorist credentials.

Another significant outfit is **Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD)**—the front organisation of LeT—which played a key role in the **2008 Mumbai attacks**. Ajmal Kasab, the only attacker captured alive, was trained at the JuD centre in Muridke, Pakistan.⁶ JuD views India's democratic and economic strength as a strategic obstacle to its objective of reclaiming "lost Muslim lands" and re-establishing an Islamic caliphate. This ideology, which calls for India's destruction, continues to enjoy ideological and infrastructural support from elements within the Pakistani state.

In **April 2025**, the town of **Pahalgam** in Jammu and Kashmir witnessed one of the deadliest civilian attacks since 2008, when militants affiliated with **The Resistance Front**—a LeT proxy—massacred 26 unarmed civilians. This attack underscores the ongoing threat posed by cross-border jihadist networks and the continued relevance of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India's internal security discourse.

These organisations remain a major challenge for India's national security, as they continue to adapt with the help of modern technologies, regional alliances, and ideological mobilisation. Their activities not only destabilise border regions but also threaten global counter-terrorism efforts.

State-Sponsored Terrorism and the Role of Proxy Groups:

The international community, including institutions like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), openly recognizes state sponsorship of terrorism as one of the gravest threats to global peace, regional stability, and financial security⁷. In line with this view, India's National Risk Assessment (NRA) 2022 on money laundering and terror financing has clearly identified Pakistan's support for terrorism as a major risk. This isn't just a political statement—it is supported by evidence and case studies. For instance, in FATF's June 2025 report on complex financing and sanctions evasion, India contributed detailed findings about Pakistan's state-owned National Development Complex, which has already been sanctioned in several jurisdictions⁷. The report continues to list Pakistan as a high-risk jurisdiction for proliferation financing⁷. A clear example of the danger posed by state-backed proxy groups is the Resistance Front (TRF), a known proxy of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT). TRF claimed responsibility for the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, which tragically took the lives of 26 civilians⁷. Following this, the United States designated TRF as both a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)—a move

strongly welcomed by India⁸. This recognition was seen as a diplomatic success, reflecting global acknowledgement of the threat posed by such groups.

In response to persistent cross-border terrorism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement after the May 2025 conflict introduced a bold new policy direction: India would no longer differentiate between state sponsors and individual masterminds of terrorist attacks. This shift—described as India's "new normal"—reflects a growing resolve to hold state actors accountable, especially when terrorism is used as a tool of foreign policy.

Cross-Border Terrorism and Geopolitical Implications:

The April–May 2025 conflict with Pakistan, which was sparked by the Pahalgam attack, marked a major turning point in India's counter-terrorism posture⁷. The government adopted a more assertive and coercive strategy, including the use of military strikes, economic measures, and diplomatic isolation. This “new normal” includes promises of pre-emptive or retaliatory strikes, zero tolerance for nuclear blackmail, and a freeze on trade and dialogue with Pakistan until cross-border terrorism ends. Future talks, if any, would be limited to issues such as the return of captured militants or Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

During this conflict, India carried out targeted strikes against militant bases in both Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and deep within Pakistan, using advanced technologies like stand-off air-to-surface missiles, smart bombs, and loitering munitions. Reportedly, even airbases and sites in Pakistan's Punjab province were among the targets. On the diplomatic front, India downgraded bilateral ties, closed the Wagah-Attari border, and banned imports from Pakistan. In a significant move, India also controlled water flows to Pakistan's Punjab by adjusting sluice gates of the Salal and Baglihar dams on the Chenab River, signaling its willingness to use economic leverage as a strategic tool. The 2025 conflict also marked a first in drone warfare between the two countries, with both sides deploying drones for offensive operations⁹. India's integrated air and missile defense system reportedly neutralized many of Pakistan's drone and short-range missile attacks, highlighting a major improvement in India's defense capabilities⁹.

However, the nuclear dimension of the India-Pakistan rivalry remains central. Despite less overt nuclear signaling in 2025 than in previous crises⁹, Pakistan's absence of a formal nuclear doctrine continues to allow strategic ambiguity, adding volatility to an already tense situation. The risk of internationalizing the Kashmir issue during such crises remains a major concern for India, which firmly supports bilateral resolution as per the Shimla Agreement. In the aftermath of the conflict, India launched an extensive diplomatic campaign, sending delegations to 32 countries to share its perspective and counter Pakistan's narrative on cross-border terrorism.

India's shift to a more proactive and coercive counter-terrorism policy—exemplified by operations like "Operation Sindoor"—marks a clear break from its earlier restraint. But this also comes with greater risks. In a nuclear-armed region like South Asia, even calibrated military actions can spiral out of control. While India showed some restraint during the 2025 crisis, the very act of cross-border strikes, especially when labeled as "acts of war", increases the chance of miscalculation or disproportionate retaliation. This raises the stakes dramatically and makes long-term regional stability more fragile, despite short-term deterrence gains.

Kashmir: The Core of the Conflict:

Kashmir is not just a territorial issue. It has become the epicenter of cross-border terrorism, often fueled and supported by state-sponsored groups. The frequency of terrorist attacks in the region is not accidental—it reflects a deliberate strategy by Pakistan to use terror as a proxy tool to further its claims

on Kashmir. This weaponization of terrorism is part of a broader geopolitical game that makes the issue even more complex.

What this means is that the terror threat in Kashmir is not just a domestic law-and-order issue. It is deeply tied to international relations, state strategy, and unresolved political tensions. A security-only response, without addressing the deeper roots of the conflict—like geopolitical rivalry, local grievances, and external sponsorship—runs the risk of further radicalization and violence.

Therefore, India's counter-terrorism efforts in Kashmir must be multi-pronged. While strong security operations are absolutely necessary, they must be accompanied by diplomatic engagement, international advocacy, and a deeper political resolution of the Kashmir issue. Only then can we hope for long-term peace and security in the region.

Zero Tolerance with Terrorism” Ideology and Its Impact on India’s Foreign Policy:

India's entire counter-terrorism approach is grounded in a clear and firm belief: **Zero Tolerance with Terrorism**¹⁰. This ideology means that terrorism, in any form, cannot be justified—no matter who is behind it or what the reason is. It reflects a strong resolve that those involved in terrorism must be held fully accountable. This tough and clear stance has significantly influenced our foreign policy. Over time, it has led to the **securitisation** of India's external relations, where **national security takes precedence** over other goals like diplomacy, trade, or cultural cooperation¹⁰. In many of our international dealings, we now look at countries and partnerships mainly through the lens of counter-terrorism concerns.

This shift became more visible especially after 2001. With the long history of terrorism affecting our country, India's consistent adoption of a "Zero Tolerance" policy has shaped the way we think and act globally. Security is no longer just one factor in foreign policy—it has become the guiding force that influences everything else. Sometimes, this means that trade or cultural exchange might take a back seat when security is at risk.

This approach also makes our foreign policy more **assertive**—especially when dealing with countries that are seen as supporting or ignoring terrorist activities. While this strengthens our national stance and sends a strong message, it can also make diplomacy more rigid and reduce flexibility. In many cases, **our internal security needs are directly shaping our international relations**, limiting our ability to engage with nations that don't take terrorism as seriously.

India's Counter-Terror Diplomacy: -

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first address at the United Nations in 2014 marked a strategic shift in India's global diplomatic posture on terrorism. He strongly advocated for the **early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)**, calling it a matter "that has been pending for long." Since then, the Modi government has sharply focused on projecting terrorism as the most critical threat to national and global peace. India has consistently raised the issue at multilateral platforms, including the **UN General Assembly**, where in 2017, then External Affairs Minister **Sushma Swaraj** urged member states to "accept that terrorism is an existentialist danger to humankind."

India's anti-terror narrative has become a recurring theme in bilateral engagements and is frequently reflected in joint statements. For instance, at the **Heads of State meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)** in September 2021, Prime Minister Modi stressed radicalisation as a core challenge and a key area for cooperation within Eurasia.¹¹ He highlighted the long-standing traditions of moderate and pluralistic Islam—particularly **Sufism**—in South Asia and Central Asia, presenting it as a counterforce to extremist ideologies such as **Salafism** and **Wahhabism** promoted by global terrorist

groups like **ISIS** and **Al-Qaeda**.

India firmly maintains that **no country, regardless of power or wealth, can defeat terrorism alone**. It has repeatedly argued for a **multilateral, coordinated, and cooperative approach** to combating global terrorism. India continues to expose and condemn the **use of terrorism as a tool of state policy** by some nations, and has consistently opposed narratives that distinguish between "good" and "bad" terrorists. It also challenges the defence of terrorism based on political grievances or the so-called "freedom fighter" justification, labelling such arguments as **politically motivated and counterproductive**.

Prime Minister Modi has declared that India has both the **political will** and the **strategic clarity** to act decisively against terrorism, as demonstrated in **surgical strikes** (2016) and the **Balakot air strike** (2019) in response to cross-border terror attacks. These actions sent a clear diplomatic and military signal regarding India's zero-tolerance approach.

A notable example of India's **counter-terror diplomacy** was its persistent effort to get **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar** designated as a **global terrorist** at the United Nations. Following the deadly **Pulwama suicide bombing in February 2019**, which killed 40 CRPF personnel, France initiated a proposal in the **UN Security Council** with strong backing from the **United States, United Kingdom, and Russia**. Initially, **China** placed a **technical hold**, but India launched an intense diplomatic campaign. After multiple rounds of negotiations, China lifted its objections, stating it had "found no objection after a careful study of revised materials."¹² The subsequent **UN blacklisting of Masood Azhar** imposed financial sanctions, an arms embargo, and a travel ban. "In our fight against terrorism, it is a big victory," Prime Minister Modi declared, hailing the decision (NDTV, 2019).

India also positions terrorism as the **grossest violation of human rights**, obstructing the fulfilment of **universal human rights** both within the country and globally (Kalitheerthan, 2017).¹³ Terrorist acts not only threaten individuals and infrastructure but also **undermine the democratic political and social order**, and in some cases, **endanger the very existence of states** (Umasankar, 2017).¹⁴ For India, terrorism is not just a national security concern but a **borderless menace** (Lal, 2017)¹⁵ and, in moral terms, a **crime against humanity** (Rao, 2016).

In highlighting the evolving nature of the terrorist threat, India's former Permanent Representative to the UN, **Syed Akbaruddin**, has observed that modern terrorist networks "use social media, cyberspace and exist in parallel worlds alongside us," yet they are "not bound by the borders, norms, legal frameworks and bureaucratic inertia" that restrict state responses (Akbaruddin, 2017a; Lal, 2017). This asymmetry continues to challenge the international system's ability to respond effectively to non-state violent actors.

Challenges in Developing and Implementing Comprehensive Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Strategies:

As of 2021, India had not adopted a unified national strategy specifically aimed at countering terrorist radicalization or recruitment¹⁶. There was no designated national CVE coordinator, and the responsibility for implementing CVE and deradicalization programs was left largely to individual state governments¹⁶. As a result, the country's CVE efforts remain uneven, fragmented, and reactive, depending largely on local priorities and resources. Only five out of India's 28 states had, by that time, developed dedicated CVE frameworks. Experts and reports have raised concerns about foreign donations from private groups in the West and the Middle East, intended for religious and social causes in India, which may unintentionally fuel radicalization. The Ministry of Home Affairs was reportedly preparing a strategic messaging plan to counter radicalization, but no formal rollout had occurred as of 2021.

Scholars agree that winning the "hearts and minds" of communities is crucial in preventing

radicalization¹⁷. Leaders must engage respectfully with group identities and grievances and address socio-economic challenges that often create fertile ground for extremist ideologies. Rhetoric that stigmatizes minority groups only worsens the divide and undermines efforts to build trust¹¹. The education sector, in particular, has become a target for both attacks and ideological recruitment by extremist groups¹¹.

One of the most effective—and least violent—ways to counter terrorism is by preventing recruitment before it happens¹¹. However, while India maintains a strong “zero tolerance” stance and emphasizes coercive counter-terrorism (CT) operations, its CVE strategies remain underdeveloped and uncoordinated at the national level. This creates a serious imbalance between hard CT and soft CT efforts.

Without a strategic focus on addressing the root causes of radicalization—such as lack of justice, rights violations, discrimination, political exclusion, and poverty—there remains a constant supply of vulnerable individuals who may be drawn to extremist narratives. This means that even if operational CT succeeds in neutralizing threats, new threats will continue to emerge, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The fact that CVE remains state-driven and fragmented, rather than a nationally guided policy, reflects a piecemeal approach to a systemic problem. For long-term CT success, India must invest as seriously in preventing radicalization as it does in responding to its consequences. Over-reliance on coercive measures without a parallel strategy for engagement, education, and community empowerment not only risks repeating past mistakes but may also contribute to alienation and deeper divides among vulnerable populations.

Human Rights and Rule of Law Dilemmas:

Effective counter-terrorism measures must respect human rights and uphold the rule of law¹⁸. However, many CT strategies around the world—including in India—struggle to strike this balance. Often, harsh or sweeping CT policies are introduced without rigorous evaluation of whether they are actually effective or proportionate¹⁹. This disconnect between legal frameworks and social science insights has slowed the development of balanced, evidence-based CT policies²⁰.

International norms are clear: human rights and CT efforts should reinforce each other, not compete. Good CT policy must address the conditions that enable terrorism to grow—like rule of law failures, human rights violations, discrimination, exclusion, and socio-economic inequality.

Yet, in some cases, states have resorted to practices like torture, prolonged detention, or severe movement restrictions, often under the guise of national security. Administrative control orders, which restrict individual freedoms, have been shown to harm mental health, disrupt family life, and cause prolonged unemployment—all without proven CT effectiveness.

Even more concerning, resources meant for social development are often redirected to the security sector, undermining people’s economic, social, and cultural rights. Over time, this not only damages public trust and governance but can also weaken democratic institutions.

In India, laws like the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) have been criticized for enabling police excesses, marginalizing minority communities, and suppressing political dissent. When CT laws are too broad or misused, they can cause more harm than good.

There is also a risk of a negative feedback loop: if CT measures ignore or worsen the very conditions that lead to radicalization—such as grievances, injustice, and discrimination—they can end up fueling the problem they aim to solve. Alienated individuals, feeling targeted or excluded, may become more susceptible to extremist narratives, leading to a cycle of violence and repression.

What’s more, the lack of empirical evaluation of many CT programs means that governments may not

realize how counterproductive their actions are. Or worse—they may choose to ignore the consequences. This makes it clear that protecting human rights is not just a moral responsibility—it's a strategic necessity. When counter-terrorism violates rights, it undermines public trust, weakens intelligence gathering, and reduces long-term effectiveness. A human rights-compliant approach, on the other hand, strengthens state legitimacy, encourages community cooperation, and helps build lasting peace and security.

Hardening Stance and Decisive Military Responses:

After the conflict with Pakistan in April–May 2025, India declared a significant policy shift in its counterterrorism strategy, marking the beginning of what it termed a "new normal." This approach includes decisive retaliation against any terror attacks targeting Indian citizens, a suspension of bilateral dialogue until violence ceases, and a firm position that any future negotiations will be limited to terrorism and territorial disputes.²¹

One of the first expressions of this assertive stance was **Operation Sindoor**, launched in May 2025. This operation featured cross-border air strikes on militant hideouts in Pakistan and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, reportedly eliminating a significant number of alleged terrorists.²² The Indian Army was reportedly granted a "carte blanche" to conduct these operations, reflecting a broader delegation of authority and a shift toward a proactive military posture. These strikes demonstrated India's growing use of advanced stand-off weaponry—such as air-to-surface missiles, loitering munitions, and precision-guided smart bombs⁴—highlighting the country's technological edge in offensive military operations.

Non-Military Coercive Actions:

India's response to terrorism has not been limited to military force. Alongside kinetic operations, India has adopted several **non-military coercive measures** to pressure Pakistan. These include downgrading diplomatic relations, reducing diplomatic staff in both countries, closing the Wagah-Attari border crossing, and imposing a complete ban on imports from Pakistan. These steps were intended to intensify diplomatic isolation and economic strain.

In a more strategic move, India reportedly manipulated water flows to Pakistan's Punjab province by adjusting sluice gates at the Salal and Baglihar hydropower dams on the Chenab River. This demonstrated India's willingness to leverage vital natural resources, such as water, as tools in its broader geopolitical and counterterrorism strategy.

Role of the National Investigation Agency (NIA):

The **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** remains central to India's domestic counterterrorism efforts. It has actively pursued investigations into terror financing and extremist networks such as ISIS. Special NIA Courts have been instrumental in ensuring accountability by handing down sentences to convicted terrorists.²³

Recognizing the increasing complexity of transnational and domestic terror threats, the Union Home Secretary has emphasized the importance of assigning highly capable officers to the NIA. This reflects a growing commitment to building a specialized, professional investigative culture within the agency to enhance its efficiency and credibility.

Terrorism As Challenge to Our Liberal Democratic Values: -

Terrorism poses a fundamental challenge to the liberal democratic ethos of modern states. As **Eubank and Weinberg** have empirically demonstrated, **terrorist attacks are more likely to occur in democratic countries**.²⁴ This is because democracies, by design, are committed to civil liberties and the rule of law, which in turn **restrain them from overreacting to terrorist provocations**. Terrorist organisations exploit

this restraint to propagate fear and disorder, manipulating the **open media environment** to influence public opinion and pressure governments into altering policy decisions—often with the intent of delegitimising state authority and undermining democratic processes.

In India, this tension between liberty and security is particularly acute. The nation is **bound by its constitutional commitment to liberal democratic values**, national laws, and international obligations that frequently preclude pre-emptive or aggressive counter-terrorist measures. The result is a **core dilemma**: enhancing the state's counter-terrorism capacity may come at the cost of curbing civil freedoms, thereby threatening the very values that define Indian democracy.

For example, **the principle of free speech**, enshrined in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, guarantees every citizen the right to express opinions freely—even if they are critical of the state. Terrorist groups increasingly **exploit this freedom to disseminate ideological propaganda**, win sympathy, and recruit supporters through incitement—including indirect or sometimes overt calls for violence. This manipulation challenges the limits of permissible speech and forces the state to walk a delicate line between **protecting national security and preserving constitutional freedoms**.

Moreover, **rights such as the Right to Privacy and Freedom of Religion** also pose operational challenges to India's security apparatus. These rights often restrict the ability of intelligence and law enforcement agencies to **intercept communications**—such as telephonic conversations, emails, and social media—of individuals suspected of engaging in terrorist activities. Additionally, the **legal protections afforded to religious spaces and gatherings** can be misused by extremists who operate under the guise of spiritual or communal legitimacy. This makes it difficult for the state to **monitor, investigate, or infiltrate such groups** without facing legal, political, or public backlash.

In 2025, as global terrorism becomes more decentralised, digitally embedded, and ideologically fluid, India's challenge is not only operational but normative. The core question remains: **Can a liberal democracy like India defend itself against terrorism without eroding the foundational principles that make it a democracy in the first place?** The answer lies in developing a nuanced legal, technological, and policy framework that ensures **security without sacrificing liberty**—a task that remains central to India's counter-terrorism discourse.

Strategies to Combat Global Terrorism: -

India considers terrorism a grave concern for the international community, requiring collective and coordinated global action. The **return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August 2021** has reinvigorated international debates on terrorism, radicalisation, and regional security. This geopolitical shift prompted renewed calls for "like-minded" nations—largely democratic states—to collaborate through the **United Nations (UN)** in crafting unified responses to emerging terror threats.²⁵

In this context, India emphasises the need for comprehensive strategies that go beyond conventional military or reactive security responses. A critical element involves the **mapping of terrorist networks**, particularly focusing on **social ties and influence**, which play a central role in the **radicalisation process**. Intelligence and security agencies must shift their attention from profiling individuals solely based on **static traits** such as age, gender, or socio-economic status, and instead study the **social structures and behavioural environments** that foster extremism.

Equally important is the need to understand the **internal organisation of terrorist groups**. Many longstanding assumptions—such as hierarchical structures and centralised command—no longer hold true in the post-9/11 era. Groups like **Jemaah Islamiyah**, once tightly controlled by a central leadership, have

evolved into **decentralised, multi-nodal entities**. Similarly, **Al-Qaeda**, having recognised the risks of centralised operations, has transformed into a **diffuse network of autonomous local cells**, executing attacks from the bottom up. The **more decentralised** the terrorist threat becomes, the **harder it is to detect, disrupt, and neutralise**.

A rising concern is the trend of **homegrown terrorism**, which often involves self-radicalised individuals or micro-groups planning smaller-scale, but nonetheless impactful, attacks. These actors tend to operate below conventional intelligence radars and require new methodologies for early detection. India has already seen various **explosives and materials recovered** in different regions, underscoring the dispersed and evolving nature of this threat.

Under the current administration, **no major Islamist terrorist attack** has occurred in metropolitan areas or against the general civilian population—a credit to the strategic reforms undertaken by **security and intelligence agencies**. However, technology and tactics are changing rapidly, and **no system is stronger than the personnel who operate it**. Therefore, it is imperative to improve not only the **quantity but also the quality of intelligence and law enforcement personnel**.

To effectively counter global terrorism, India must invest in **timely, accurate, and actionable intelligence**. Enhancing **intelligence gathering infrastructure** is critical. This includes the expansion and integration of platforms like NATGRID, the full **operationalisation of NSG hubs and NIA branches**, and stronger coordination between **MAC and SMAC nodes**. Collaboration between these institutions will ensure faster information sharing, better threat assessment, and preemptive neutralisation of emerging risks.

The **internet**, though not the only medium for radicalisation, has become the **preferred space** for extremist messaging. The **availability of online extremist content**, coupled with the ability to **interact within virtual echo chambers**, creates fertile ground for radicalisation—even among individuals who might not have otherwise embraced violence. As **Neumann (2013)** observes,²⁶ developing **computational frameworks to analyse human behaviour in virtual spaces** is essential to modern counterterrorism efforts. Encouraging research and innovation in this field can significantly enhance predictive capabilities and early intervention strategies.

India's counter-terrorism framework must therefore combine **technological upgrades, structural reforms, strategic intelligence coordination**, and a **nuanced understanding of human and social behaviour**—to build resilience against the evolving threat of global terrorism in 2025 and beyond.

Multilateral Engagement:

India plays an active and committed role in multilateral efforts to counter terrorism. It has consistently raised its voice in the UN Security Council (UNSC), especially during its presidency, where counter-terrorism and reforming multilateralism were given top priority. India has also contributed to shaping global consensus through platforms like the G20, which has firmly condemned terrorism and called for stronger international cooperation.

At the city level too, India is engaging globally—Mumbai's membership in the Strong Cities Network reflects its efforts to build local-level resilience against extremism. A crucial focus area in international cooperation has been countering the misuse of emerging technologies by terrorists, an issue India has actively addressed. The 2022 UN "Delhi Declaration" on this very theme stands as a notable global framework, shaped with Indian leadership.

India also maintains close regional cooperation by sharing counter-terrorism intelligence with countries like Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, helping build a united front in South Asia. Diplomatically,

India has lobbied for Pakistan's re-listing by the FATF, raising global awareness of Pakistan's continued sheltering of terror groups. This shows how India is using global financial watchdogs to apply strategic pressure on states that support terrorism.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Initiatives:

When it comes to Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), India's approach is still evolving. While the Ministry of Home Affairs serves as the central coordinating body, the country currently lacks both a national CVE policy and a dedicated national CVE coordinator. As a result, much of the responsibility falls to individual state governments. However, only five out of India's 28 states have formal CVE strategies in place, making the national response fragmented and inconsistent.

In sensitive areas like Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Army has taken a hands-on approach. It runs schools, vocational training programs, medical camps, recruitment drives, and other community services designed to prevent radicalization by building trust and offering meaningful alternatives to youth.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has also been working on a national action plan for strategic communication aimed at countering extremist messaging, although this plan had not been released publicly as of 2021. Meanwhile, several central agencies and state police forces continue to monitor social media and online spaces, with arrests made for sharing ISIS-linked content. These steps show a growing awareness of the dangers of online radicalization and efforts to respond in real-time.

There is also increasing recognition among scholars and policymakers that "hearts and minds" campaigns—those that acknowledge the social, cultural, and economic grievances of at-risk communities—are critical for long-term CVE success.¹¹ Educational institutions, in particular, are being seen not just as learning spaces but as important sites for preventing extremist recruitment.²⁷ Strengthening the role of schools and colleges can be a vital step in breaking the cycle of radicalization before it begins.

Conclusion: -

India's counter-terrorism architecture functions through a collaborative framework involving intelligence, military, and law enforcement agencies. Key institutions like the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), responsible for external intelligence, and the Intelligence Bureau (IB), overseeing domestic surveillance under the Ministry of Home Affairs, play a vital role in identifying and neutralizing terror threats. However, legal frameworks must maintain a careful balance between effective enforcement and the protection of civil liberties, ensuring that national security does not compromise democratic values. Enhanced border and coastal security is another pressing need. Efforts such as accelerating fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, strengthening infrastructure on the India-China frontier, and developing Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) along the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders indicate meaningful progress. Yet, to truly safeguard against both external and internal threats—ranging from cross-border militancy to online radicalization and urban terror modules—a high level of coordination between central and state agencies is indispensable.

India's experience with terrorism is distinct and multifaceted. It faces state-sponsored threats from Pakistan on one hand, and ideological extremism linked to global jihadist narratives like ISIS on the other. These dangers are further complicated by the rise of lone-wolf actors, encrypted communication channels, and recruitment through digital platforms, making traditional countermeasures insufficient. Combating such complex threats requires not just military or policing efforts, but socially rooted, preemptive strategies such as de-radicalization programs, youth outreach initiatives, and community engagement

models. These efforts help challenge extremist narratives, reduce alienation, and build trust—especially in vulnerable regions like Jammu & Kashmir.

To enhance operational readiness, India must invest in modernizing intelligence fusion platforms like NETGRID, ensuring effective coordination between MAC-SMAC nodes, operationalizing all NSG hubs and NIA branches, and deploying predictive policing technologies to anticipate and prevent attacks. Technological upgrades—such as advanced surveillance tools, artificial intelligence-driven analytics, and cyber forensics—are essential to disrupt sophisticated terror financing and planning. This should be accompanied by stronger public-private partnerships with banks, fintech companies, and social media platforms to trace illicit transactions and radical content while respecting citizens' privacy and rights.

On the international front, India must continue to leverage bilateral and multilateral platforms to counter the global infrastructure of terrorism. Active participation in the UN, G20, and bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is essential to keep the pressure on states that provide safe havens or resources to terrorists. Sustained diplomatic efforts, global intelligence sharing, and participation in international CT norms further strengthen India's moral and strategic standing. Ultimately, India's counter-terrorism approach must evolve into a holistic, technology-driven, and socially grounded strategy—resilient enough to defend its national security, responsive enough to protect civil liberties, and inclusive enough to build long-term societal resistance against extremism.

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