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Issue Brief

Assessing PRAHAAR: India's First Counter-Terror Policy

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Summary

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy PRAHAAR policy document provides clear, concise direction for India's counter-terrorism campaign. It is a definite step forward in eliminating the threat posed by the amorphous, multi-vector nature of terrorism. It also epitomises the challenges of drafting a Counter-Terrorism policy for a vast, socio-culturally diverse country like India.

PRAHAAR in the Backdrop of Operation Sindoor

India has adopted a new, more assertive approach in fighting terrorism in recent years, which was on full display in the first burst of Operation Sindoor in May 2026, when several terror infrastructure sites across Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) were targeted and taken out by Indian armed forces using precision weapons. The punitive strikes following the Pahalgam terror attacks sent a hard-hitting message to the Pakistani establishment and its terror proxies that India would employ both kinetic and non-kinetic actions to deliver a decisive blow to the recalcitrant neighbour. Subsequently, New Delhi launched a major international diplomatic offensive, dispatching seven all-party delegations to 33 countries to expose Pakistan globally as a state sponsor of terrorism and to block Islamabad's traditional strategy of playing the victim card or turning the Kashmir dispute into a multilateral issue.[1]

PRAHAAR: 'Doctrinal Consolidation' of CT Policy

On 23 February 2026, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) unveiled 'PRAHAAR' as India's first comprehensive National Counter Terrorism Policy and Strategy, comprising a 'whole of government' and 'whole of society' approach to combat the threat of terrorism.[2] Several observers have hailed 'PRAHAAR' as marking the doctrinal consolidation of hitherto mostly decentralised Counter-Terrorism (CT) approaches, shaped by geo-spatially diverse and socio-culturally complex challenges, through years of evolving legislation, executive practices and gradual institutional coordination.[3]

In the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said PRAHAAR marked a formal shift from the country's erstwhile reactive security stance to a proactive doctrine.[4] As the first of its kind, the seven-page document draws the broad contours of India's new national policy and strategic approaches, and brings together the diverse strands of CT initiatives developed over the decades across several vectors.

In formulating this policy document, the Indian government has taken cognisance of the fact that 'the nature of (terrorism-related) threats continues to change and

[1] **"Question No. 299 Diplomatic Engagement during Operation Sindoor"**, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 8 August 2025.

[2] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 20 February 2026, page 3.

[3] Animesh Roul, **"India's 'PRAHAAR' Doctrine Addresses Evolving Terrorist Threat Landscape"**, *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 24, No. 14, 17 September 2026; Soumya Awasthi, **"PRAHAAR: India's New Counter-Terror Policy in a Hybrid Threat Era"**, Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 26 February 2026.

[4] **"Govt Committed to Phased Implementation of 'PRAHAAR' Strategy: MHA"**, *The Economic Times*, 12 August 2026.

present new challenges'.[5] In fact, terrorism remains an amorphous threat that, like any intractable pathogen or virus, mutates its form and composition and adapts to the multi-dimensional complexities of India's vast regional and socio-cultural landscape. The document correctly recognises that any rigidly detailed strategic approach would not provide the tactical freedom needed to combat terrorism's volatile character effectively. Thus, the introductory paragraph of the policy paper also asserts that India consistently opposes terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, particularly state-sponsored terrorism.

Although the document does not provide its own definition of terrorism, it implicitly refers to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) of 1967 as 'the principal legal regime to deal with terrorism in India'.[6] By doing so, the UAPA becomes its primary legal reference, which defines a terrorist under Article 15 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.[7]

While acknowledging that 'ungoverned spaces' have grown in India's immediate neighbourhood over time, which often provide safe havens to terrorist organisations, the document points out that 'a few countries in the region have used terrorism as an instrument of State Policy'.[8] The PRAHAAR policy paper also reiterates India's long-held principle that 'India does not link terrorism to any specific religion, ethnicity, nationality or civilisation'.

Policy of Eight Point Action Plan against Terrorism

The paper reiterates India's longstanding policy of 'zero tolerance against terrorism'[9] and its Eight-Point Action Plan for Combating Terrorism globally, as enunciated by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the UNSC in 2021:

1. Summon the political will: don't justify terrorism, don't glorify terrorists.
2. No double standards: Terrorists are terrorists; distinctions (such as "good" or "bad") are made only at our own peril.

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[5] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, no. 2, p. 2.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] **"The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967"**, Chapter IV, 15 (1), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

[8] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, no. 2, p. 2.

[9] **"Terrorists are Terrorists, Musn't Glorify Them': Jaishankar's 8-point Action Plan against Terrorism"**, *News18*, 19 August 2021.

3. Do not place blocks and holds on listing requests without any reason.
4. Discourage exclusivist thinking and be on guard against new terminologies and false priorities.
5. Enlist and delist objectively, not on political or religious considerations.
6. Recognise the linkage to organised crime.
7. Support and strengthen the FATF, the global Financial Action Task Force.
8. Provide greater funding to the UN Office of Counter Terrorism.

Following the continued support for this 'zero-tolerance against terrorism' policy, the document then decodes its own acronym PRAHAAR, wherein every letter of this Hindi word represents a key pillar of India's CT strategy.

- **P**revention of terror attacks to protect Indian citizens and interests;
- **R**esponses, which are swift and proportionate to the threat posed;
- **A**ggregating internal capacities for synergy in a whole-of-government approach;
- **H**uman rights & 'Rule of Law' based processes for mitigation of threats;
- **A**ttenuating the conditions enabling terrorism, including radicalisation;
- **A**ligning and shaping the international efforts to counter terrorism; and
- **R**ecovery and resilience through a whole-of-society approach.[10]

When it comes to the first pillar in the PRAHAAR strategy, which is 'prevention of terror attacks', the paper states that its strategy for prevention is mainly intelligence-guided. To operationalise this intelligence-guided strategy, it mentions the nodal platform of the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), along with the Joint Task Force in Intelligence (JTFI) in the Intelligence Bureau (IB). It states that close partnerships have been formed for CT operations with central agencies and State Police Forces under the MAC/JTFI mechanism in the IB.

The 'Multi-Front' Threat of Terrorism

However, any national policy paper on a subject of critical strategic importance risks overstating or understating risks, and sometimes overlooking threats altogether. Given the enormity of the subject, this policy document has indeed broken new ground, but it is not entirely immune to the proverbial blind spots.

[10] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, no. 2, p. 2.

While discussing the 'Prevention of Terror Attacks' section, the text of the policy document reads 'India faces terrorist threats on all three fronts viz. water, land and air'. Surprisingly, cyberspace is not listed as a front here, although a few passages in the text partially cover the cyber-related threat. Perhaps a dedicated section on the cyber terror threat and the policy approaches in place or planned, without being too specific, could have been useful here.

The text also omits the now-recognised fifth Counter-Terrorism front: space. Violent extremists and terrorists have for decades used commercial satellite phones and terminals to coordinate attacks across wide geographical areas without detection. It is also well-known that terrorists today use cheap, black-market electronic jammers to block or degrade GPS positioning signals from space used by aviation, shipping and military vehicles. Even the attention given to this front in the document would have helped provide formal, effective policy impetus to this rapidly evolving tech domain.

Beyond these physical and digital fronts, security agencies combating terrorism worldwide are also talking about two other emerging 'fronts'. These include the cognitive domain, which the section on counter-radicalisation addresses to some extent, but the role of media and educational syllabi remains unstated. Another noticeable omission is the emerging front of bioterrorism, which, despite the 'super-spreaders' scare the nation faced during the COVID-19 crisis, does not feature here. It must be noted that the US Strategic Command has already drafted a 31-page contingency plan titled 'CONPLAN 8888' and the CDC Federal Select Agent Program 2025,[11] which seek to address threats emanating from bioterrorism and the deliberate spreading of pathogens by terrorists and rogue elements.

In fact, the policy paper mentions the full range of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive and Digital (CBRNED) threats only once (as a clause within a sentence). Their incorporation may be considered in a possible future version of the policy framework. It is important to note here that the Red Fort car blast of last year was caused by fertiliser-based explosives, specifically ammonium nitrate and fuel oil.[12] As an improvised explosive, it falls under 'E' in the CBRNED abbreviation and is commonly used by terrorists. Thus, one cannot afford to understate the dangers posed by the full range of CBRNED terror threats.

Similarly, the absence of illegal immigration as a causative or catalysing factor for spawning terrorism is 'conspicuous by absence'. This is remarkable, as the

[11] **"CDRUSSTRATCOM CONPLAN 8888-1L 'Counter-Zombie Dominance'"**, United States Strategic Command, 30 April 2011; **"Federal Select Agent Program Inspection Report Processing"**, Division of Regulatory Science and Compliance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 9 June 2026.

[12] **"Ammonium Nitrate: A Deadly Link between Delhi and Beirut Blasts"**, *NDTV*, 12 November 2025.

government is currently conducting a drive to detect and remove non-citizens and illegal migrants from electoral rolls. In fact, only one sentence in the paper addresses the migration issue: 'immigration authorities are equipped with state-of-the-art tools and technologies to secure Indian borders'. This claim sounds reassuring but seems out of tune with the government's perception of the threat, particularly on the eastern front.

Response to Terror Attacks and Capacity Building

However, the document offers a commendable policy and strategic approach to immediate and effective responses to terrorist attacks, clearly outlining the role of State and Central anti-terrorism forces, particularly the National Security Guard (NSG). The document notes that responding to any terror attack is a multi-stakeholder exercise involving various agencies at the Central, State and District levels. Still, the document does not mention the role of military and paramilitary forces in any such coordinated exercise, which is surprising given the 'whole of government' approach.

However, the policy guidelines highlight the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), as well as the importance of coordination at the apex level, including intelligence dissemination, analysis and follow-up action, through the MAC platform. The document also covers the regular deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) in states and their performance across a wide range of duties. The role of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and State Police Agencies in conducting CT investigations within the country, as well as their high prosecution rates, find special mention. In the section on 'Aggregating Capacities', the stellar role of the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) in training institutions of states and CAPFs, and in regularly conducting training courses for personnel of State Police and CAPFs, is given adequate space.

Human Rights and Rule of Law

In the subsequent section on Human Rights, the document effectively makes the point that 'India adheres to the "Rule of Law", where laws are just, applied evenly and protect fundamental rights'. In addition, it gives due attention to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, which deals with human rights cases in the country. The document affirms India's commitment to human rights by pointing out that it is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and has also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Listing India's laws to tackle terrorism-related crimes, the policy document mentions the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, supplemented by the recently passed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (2023), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (2023), which are noteworthy achievements. It highlights the multiple levels of legal redressal available to any accused through an elaborate justice-system infrastructure, from the Districts through States, up to the higher judiciary at the Central level. It discusses the wide scope accorded to the Supreme Court of India to protect citizens' rights.

In the section on Threat Profile, the plans of Jihadi terror outfits and their 'frontal' organisations engaging in cross-border terrorism are duly discussed. Still, the substantial success of the government agencies in eradicating Naxalite terror finds no mention, nor does the incipient revival of the Khalistan separatist movement or other fissiparous activities in the country's northeast, etc.

Counter-Radicalisation

The section on counter-radicalisation is quite informative and perceptive and discusses the issue in depth. Thus, an important passage reads.

> Once identified, youths undergo a graded police response, aimed at comprehensively addressing the problem of radicalisation and violent extremism in a multi-stakeholder setting. Legal action is initiated against the individual based on their level of radicalisation. Community and religious leaders, moderate preachers and NGOs are engaged to spread awareness about the adverse consequences of radicalisation and extremist violence … Deradicalisation programmes are also undertaken.[13]

Perhaps the possibility of initiating government-driven counter-narrative campaigns could also be considered as a recommendation in a subsequent policy pronouncement. Again, the typical profile of the radical seems to have altered somewhat following the 2025 Red Fort blast. Investigations by the Delhi Police and counter-terror agencies reveal that the attack marks a transition towards highly educated, self-radicalised and urban operatives, which breaks the earlier pattern of the poor, madrassa-educated jihadi. The threat posed by Nihilistic Violent Extremism (NVE) is rising in Western countries, and some semblance of the threats can be equated to disruptive elements in the country as well. These issues could also have been flagged in the paper.

[13] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, no. 2, p. 6.

'Whole-of-Society Approach'

Still, it is refreshing to find a full section devoted to the 'Whole-of-Society Approach' in countering terrorism. In this respect, the paper focuses on public–private partnerships, a key component of India's fight against terrorism. This partnership helps enable faster recovery and resilience in the event of a terror attack. The government engages a team of doctors, psychologists, lawyers, and other members of civil society, including NGOs and religious and community leaders, to sensitise and re-integrate the affected community.

On a broader level, government initiatives to address poverty and unemployment among vulnerable communities are carried out through various schemes and initiatives to prevent inimical elements from misusing these conditions to their advantage. A section in the policy document details access to quality education, affordable housing and stable jobs in vulnerable communities.

The section on Aligning and Shaping the International Efforts shows how Agency-to-Agency engagements between India and foreign countries for intelligence sharing have made remarkable progress, wherein India has entered into agreements with various countries, particularly through Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAT), Extradition Treaty/Extradition Arrangements, Joint Working Group (JWG) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with foreign partners for information/evidence sharing and other legal cooperation. Law Enforcement Agencies have also succeeded in getting wanted fugitives through their extradition treaties with major powers, as was recently illustrated by the US extraditing to India the 26/11 Mumbai attack co-conspirator Tahawwur Rana.[14]

Conclusion: The Way Forward

However, the paper does not shed much light on the subject of terror financing, which is limited to short sentences like 'denying access to funds, weapons and safe havens to the terrorists' and unexplained references like 'crypto-wallets' and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002.[15] One would have also liked to read at least a word about narco-terrorism. However, the use of drones in facilitating terror-related activities and attacks in Punjab and J&K and their nexus with organised criminal networks is highlighted.

The paper does raise concerns about the exploitation of new technologies by terrorists, including unmanned aerial vehicles, social media platforms, 'instant

[14] **"Question No-5553 Tahawwur Ranas Extradition"**, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 4 April 2025.

[15] **"National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy"**, no. 2, p. 3.

messaging applications', the dark web and 'encryption', but it provides little detail of government initiatives to curtail the threats now or in the future. At a time when tech giants are themselves raising alarm over the AI threat to human existence, references to AI-backed hacking of vital financial and civil infrastructure websites or databases, AI-developed dangerous deepfake messages, use of autonomous weapons and AI-enhanced operational planning in a faster, cheaper, and more accessible form are not found in the paper.

In the section titled 'Way Forward', the policy paper makes several recommendations. It states there remains scope for further cooperation and collaboration among various agencies for intelligence collection and investigation. It makes a convincing case for amending the domestic counter-terrorism legal regime from time to time in response to emerging terrorism-related challenges. In addition, it highlights the continual need for capacity-building of the Counter Terrorism units/Anti-Terror Squads of States/UTs and for uniformity in their structure, resources, training and investigation methodologies. The clause 'denying weapons to terrorists' also appears only once in this final section of the Counter-Terrorism document. Barring a few oversights, the PRAHAAR policy document provides clear, concise direction for India's counter-terrorism campaign. It is a definite step forward in eliminating the threat posed by terrorism's amorphous, multi-vector nature.

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