

PRAHAAR: Countering Terrorism through Unified Framework

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Introduction

India has faced persistent multiple security challenges through ages, including terrorism. While it has strong legal instruments and a robust institutional mechanism, earlier there was no integrated doctrine outlining a national counter-terror strategy. PRAHAAR, formally released by the Union Home Ministry on 23 Feb 2026¹, seeks to fill this gap. This counter-terrorism policy lays down a clear doctrine of zero tolerance towards terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The policy signals a decisive intent of the Central Government at doctrinal consolidation of India's counter-terror architecture by integrating technological upgradation, pre-emptive intelligence, and institutional coordination under a unified national framework. It aims at preventing, deterring, and responding to terrorism through enhanced mechanisms, capacity building, and international cooperation. The policy combines hard deterrence with clearly defined legal authority, signifying a shift from reactive response to proactive disruption.²

The document specifically refrains from associating terrorism with any religion, ethnicity, or nationality; differentiating terrorism as a criminal and security challenge from a communal or a cultural one. It prioritises protection of citizens, while reaffirming that all counter-terror actions will remain within preview of rule of law and constitutional safeguards. The policy is particularly significant as it reflects India's adaptation to networked, technology-enabled, and hybrid forms of terrorism, moving beyond a conventional insurgency-centric approach towards addressing digitally coordinated, transnational, and multi-domain threats.

Layout and Structure

The guidelines replace the existing siloed agency-specific approaches with a comprehensive nine-page document designed explicitly to tackle multi-domain terror threats by adopting a whole-of-government approach. The document is in three parts, with part one focusing on threat profile, part two on counter-terrorism strategy, and part three on the way forward³. PRAHAAR stands as an acronym for 'Prevention' of terror attacks, 'Responses' which are swift, 'Aggregating' internal capacities, 'Human' rights and rule of law, 'Attenuating' the conditions enabling terrorism, 'Aligning' and shaping the international efforts to counter terrorism and 'Recovery' and resilience through a whole-of-society approach.

Main Features of the Policy

PRAHAAR does not create a new anti-terror agency but strengthens the existing architecture by bringing the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and state police under a unified umbrella.⁴

- **Part 1: Identification of Threats.** PRAHAAR designates state-sponsored cross-border terrorism as a principal and enduring national security challenge. It calls for sustained vigilance and calibrated deterrence. It further recognises the widening threat landscape marked by transnational jihadist networks, organised crime syndicates, and exploitation of emerging technologies such as drones, encrypted platforms, dark web, and cryptocurrency channels for recruitment, coordination, propaganda, and financing. The policy also highlights upcoming vulnerabilities in chemical, biological, radiological, and digital domains, reflecting an enhanced understanding of terrorism as a multi-domain, networked, and technology-driven phenomenon.
- **Part 2: Counter-terrorism Strategy.** The overall framework institutionalises an intelligence-led, preventive counter-terror framework focused on early detection, real-time inter-agency coordination, and pre-emptive disruption of terror financing and extremist networks. Local police serves as first responders, supported by specialised state units and the National Security Guard (NSG), while the NIA ensures legally robust investigations and high prosecutorial outcomes. The doctrine anchors all operations within constitutional safeguards, human rights, and statutes such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), reinforcing democratic legitimacy. It also advances calibrated counter-radicalisation through community engagement and links security measures with education, skilling, and employment initiatives to strengthen long-term social resilience. The policy identifies terrorism as a transnational threat requiring coordinated global action, emphasising enhanced intelligence sharing, robust extradition frameworks, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation to disrupt terror financing, safe havens, and cross-border networks.
- **Part 3: Future Focus.** The policy seeks to modernise and streamline counter-terror architecture by enhancing inter-agency coordination, standardising state-level counter-terror capabilities, and ensuring uniform operational preparedness across jurisdictions. It also calls for continuous refinement of legal provisions and operational protocols in line with evolving threats and technological shifts.

Core Pillars of PRAHAAR

Each letter of PRAHAAR represents one of its core pillars:

- **Prevention.** PRAHAAR institutionalises an intelligence-led operational framework, including multi-agency centre and Joint Task Force on Intelligence, enabling real-time information fusion and coordinated action. It strengthens proactive disruption of terror financing channels, over-ground worker networks, and cyber-radicalisation ecosystems before they translate into physical threats.⁵ The policy also strengthens multi-domain border security across land, air, and maritime frontiers, while placing heightened emphasis on safeguarding critical infrastructure from both physical and cyber sabotage.
- **Response.** The policy reinforces a tiered response architecture in which local police is the primary responder, ensuring immediate containment and ground-level stabilisation. At the national level, the NSG functions as the specialised counter-terror force for high-risk and complex operations, while the NIA leads terror-related investigations and prosecutions. Clearly defined procedures are mandated to ensure seamless, coordinated multi-agency response and eliminate operational delays.
- **Capacity Building.** PRAHAAR emphasises sustained capacity building through modern equipment, advanced technology, and specialised training for counter-terror forces. It prioritises standardising structures and response frameworks nationwide for interoperability. Institutions like the Bureau of Police Research and Development and the NSG drive skill enhancement and advanced urban combat training to strengthen operational readiness.
- **Rule of Law and Human Rights.** PRAHAAR firmly anchors counter-terror operations within constitutional safeguards and the protection of fundamental rights, ensuring that security measures retain democratic legitimacy. The legal framework underpinning the policy includes statutes such as the UAPA, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (2023), the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, and the Arms Act, among others. The policy emphasises multi-tier judicial oversight, due process, and access to legal remedies, reinforcing accountability alongside operational effectiveness.
- **Counter-Radicalisation.** PRAHAAR advocates a preventive, society-centric counter-radicalisation strategy, based on graded, intelligence-led responses that distinguish hardened operatives from vulnerable youth. It promotes community engagement, structured de-radicalisation, and prison rehabilitation programmes, while linking security efforts with education, skilling, and employment initiatives to address socio-economic drivers of extremism.
- **International Cooperation.** PRAHAAR reaffirms counter-terrorism as inherently transnational, calling for stronger use of mutual legal assistance treaties, extradition treaties, and multilateral agreements to secure legal cooperation and fugitives' return. It emphasises enhanced intelligence sharing, coordinated terrorist designations through the United Nations

mechanisms, and active engagement in global counter-terror forums to disrupt cross-border networks and strengthen collective resilience.⁶

- **Recovery and Resilience.** PRAHAAR incorporates a recovery and resilience pillar that adopts a whole-of-society approach to post-incident stabilisation. It emphasises structured public–private partnerships to restore essential services, rebuild critical infrastructure, and ensure business continuity. The policy also prioritises community rehabilitation, psychological counselling for affected populations, and coordinated reconstruction efforts, aiming not only to recover swiftly from attacks but to strengthen societal resilience against future shocks.

Analysis, Assessment, and Implications

PRAHAAR highlights a doctrinal consolidation rather than a sudden strategic shift. For years, India’s counter-terror response evolved reactively, influenced by experiences from militancy, terrorism, and insurgency. PRAHAAR has codified these accumulated practices into a formal, declaratory framework, providing India with strategic clarity, doctrinal coherence, and signalling power to confront evolving, tech-enabled terrorism.⁷

- **Shift From Reactive to Pre-emptive.** PRAHAAR marks a doctrinal shift towards intelligence-led pre-emption, going beyond post-attack investigation to anticipatory disruption. It prioritises real-time intelligence fusion and enhanced situational awareness through multiple institutions, strengthening coordinated threat assessment across agencies. The policy enables disruption of terror financing networks, sleeper cells, and digital radicalisation pipelines before they translate into operational capability. It also signals expanded reliance on financial intelligence tracking, cyber forensics, data analytics, and drone surveillance to counter technology-enabled threats. In global terms, PRAHAAR aligns India closer to Western counter-terror doctrines, with emphasis on pre-emption and intelligence dominance while retaining a strong internal security and federal coordination tailored to India’s threat environment.

- **Stronger Centre–State Security Integration.** PRAHAAR formalises enhanced coordination amongst state police, Central Armed Police Forces, specialised intervention units, and investigative agencies, creating a layered and integrated counter-terror structure. This framework will help reduce operational delays during terror attacks, standardise procedures across states, and strengthen central oversight in terrorism investigations. While such centralised coordination may enhance response and investigative effectiveness, it may lead to federal sensitivities in certain states.

- **Legal Consolidation and Expanded Enforcement.** PRAHAAR reinforces the state's legal toolkit for terrorist designation, asset freezing, and preventive detention-based arrests by reinforcing the application of statutes such as the UAPA. This will enable swifter prosecution cycles, evidentiary consolidation, and enhance deterrence against terror networks and facilitators. The expanded use of stringent legal provisions may lead to debates around civil liberties, proportionality, and due process.
- **Counter-Radicalisation as National Security.** The policy recognises radicalisation not only as a law enforcement concern but as a deeper societal vulnerability requiring preventive and corrective intervention. It integrates developmental agenda with counter-terror measures to address structural weaknesses, such as marginalisation and unemployment. It also looks at monitoring of prisons, online ecosystems, and vulnerable youth segment to disrupt recruitment pipelines. The policy also enables enhanced digital surveillance and intelligence operations within encrypted and virtual spaces, thus, broadening counter-terrorism from a hard security response to a comprehensive framework of societal resilience.
- **Technological Escalation in Security.** The policy eloquently identifies emerging threat vectors, underscoring the evolving technological character of terrorism. In response, it signals enhanced investment in artificial intelligence-driven analytics and stronger regulatory oversight of online and financial platforms. These measures collectively reflect a clear recognition the new generation of technology-enabled terrorism requiring multi-domain counter-measures.
- **Geopolitical Signalling.** PRAHAAR formalises counter-terrorism as an instrument of broader strategic signalling, highlighting India's zero-tolerance doctrine within a codified national security framework that integrates domestic preparedness with external deterrence messaging. It lends doctrinal clarity and strengthens justification for calibrated pre-emptive or retaliatory measures, while encouraging deeper intelligence and security cooperation with key strategic partners.
- **Maturing of India's Security Doctrine.** The shift towards articulating a consolidated national counter-terror doctrine rather than relying on dispersed guidelines and episodic frameworks opens avenues for bringing out integrated national security doctrine models. It also embeds increased policy coherence across agencies and jurisdictions, and provides political direction. It creates measurable counter-terror benchmarks, enabling structured assessment of preparedness, coordination, and operational effectiveness over time.

- **Implications for National Security Doctrine.** PRAHAAR elevates counter-terrorism from an operational response mechanism to a sustained pillar of India's overall national security doctrine. It is a right step towards the evolution of India's national security doctrine. It sanctifies pre-emption as a core doctrinal principle, integrates central and state capabilities under a unified umbrella, and links internal security with external strategic signalling against state-sponsored terrorism. The policy expands the doctrinal canvas to include technological dominance, financial warfare, cyber operations, and societal resilience, thereby, aligning counter-terrorism with hybrid and multi-domain threat realities.

Conclusion

PRAHAAR represents a comprehensive, intelligence-driven, legally grounded, and internationally aligned counter-terrorism framework that safeguards India against the evolving terrorist threats. It integrates prevention, response, resilience, and global cooperation. Effective implementation of PRAHAAR will depend on continuous strengthening of inter-agency intelligence coordination and seamless real-time information sharing across central and state levels. Legal frameworks must periodically be updated to address emerging technological threats. State anti-terrorism squads need enhanced capacity, training, and structural uniformity to ensure nationwide operational consistency. Early integration of legal experts during investigation stages can improve evidentiary robustness and conviction rates. Simultaneously, deeper international collaboration and intelligence partnerships will be essential to counter transnational networks.⁸ Finally, sustained investment in frontier technologies will be critical to stay ahead of evolving, technology-enabled terror tactics.

Endnotes

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Article uploaded on 16-03-2026

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