



India's New PRAHAAR Doctrine and the Regional Terrorism Landscape

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By Jasminder Singh

SYNOPSIS

India's PRAHAAR doctrine, introduced in February 2026, is the country's first comprehensive counterterrorism framework, transforming India's reactive security posture into a coordinated, intelligence-led strategy. As terrorist networks increasingly exploit digital platforms, maritime routes, and transnational links, PRAHAAR positions India to play a greater role in strengthening counterterrorism cooperation across the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia.

COMMENTARY

Terrorism in Asia has long transcended national borders. Militant networks, digital propaganda ecosystems, and illicit financing channels now operate fluidly across South and Southeast Asia, linking conflict zones from Kashmir to Mindanao through maritime corridors, encrypted communications, and transnational criminal networks. Yet government responses remain fragmented, shaped more by domestic imperatives than by coordinated regional strategies. This mismatch between transnational threats and nationally bounded responses continues to create structural vulnerabilities across the Indo-Pacific.

India's newly articulated counterterrorism doctrine, [PRAHAAR](#), seeks to address this imbalance. Introduced in February 2026, PRAHAAR marks New Delhi's first comprehensive national counterterrorism framework. It is built around seven pillars – Prevention of threats, Response to the threats, Aggregation of internal capacities, Human rights and rule of law, Attenuation of conditions enabling terrorism and radicalisation, Aligning international efforts, and Recovery and resilience – and formalises previously evolving practices into a structured, forward-looking strategy.

While primarily designed to strengthen India's domestic security architecture, its implications extend well beyond the subcontinent, particularly for Southeast Asia.

The doctrine comes at a time when the regional threat environment is becoming increasingly complex. Despite the territorial defeat of ISIS in the Middle East and the formal dissolution of Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, jihadist networks remain resilient. Returning foreign fighters, the proliferation of online radicalisation pathways, and the growing convergence between terrorism and organised crime have reshaped the regional security landscape. In this context, PRAHAAR signals India's intention not only to defend against terrorism but also to play a more active role in shaping the broader counterterrorism order across the Indo-Pacific.

From Reactive Responses to Strategic Doctrine

India's counterterrorism posture has evolved in response to crises rather than through deliberate design. Major attacks, including the 2001 assault on India's Parliament, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2025 Pahalgam attack – linked to Pakistan-based terrorist outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and The Resistance Front – exposed critical vulnerabilities in intelligence sharing, crisis coordination, and investigative capacity. Institutional reforms followed, most notably in the creation of the National Investigation Agency and the expansion of intelligence coordination mechanisms. However, these efforts remained largely reactive, lacking an overarching strategic framework.

PRAHAAR seeks to address this by consolidating India's approach into a doctrine-driven system. At its core is a shift towards intelligence-led counterterrorism, anchored by institutions such as the Multi-Agency Centre and the Joint Task Force on Intelligence. By institutionalising real-time information sharing and intelligence fusion, the doctrine aims to close operational gaps that previously allowed attacks to go undetected.

Operationally, PRAHAAR adopts a layered response model. Local police serve as first responders, supported by state-level specialised units and central forces. In high-impact incidents, elite units such as the National Security Guard provide rapid intervention, while the National Investigation Agency coordinates investigations. This approach emphasises coordination over centralisation, reflecting India's federal structure while addressing long-standing bureaucratic fragmentation.

Non-State Actors and Evolving Threat Dynamics

The continued role of Pakistan-linked non-state actors remains a central driver of India's counterterrorism posture and underscores the relevance of PRAHAAR. Evidence suggests that these networks are not static but increasingly adaptive. Terrorist financing mechanisms, for instance, have evolved significantly, with a growing reliance on encrypted transactions through digital wallets and cryptocurrencies, complicating detection and enforcement.

At the organisational level, there are signs of renewed expansion and diversification. Jaish-e-Mohammad has reportedly broadened its recruitment base by creating a

dedicated female wing, “[Jamaat-ul-Mominat](#)”, signalling a shift towards wider societal penetration and ideological outreach. Meanwhile, Lashkar-e-Taiba has enhanced its operational capabilities by expanding its training modules and establishing a specialised “[Water Force](#)” focused on maritime skills – an indication of growing attention to sea-based infiltration and regional mobility.

These developments are reinforced by broader global assessments. The 2026 [Global Terrorism Index](#) ranks Pakistan as the country most affected by terrorism, while a [US Congressional Research Service](#) report continues to identify it as both a base of operations and a target for many militant groups. Together, these trends point to a more complex, multidimensional militant landscape – one that is decentralised, technologically enabled, and increasingly difficult to counter with traditional means alone.

Law, Legitimacy, and Preventing Radicalisation

Beyond operational capabilities, PRAHAAR places significant emphasis on legal legitimacy and governance. India’s Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act remains central to its counterterrorism framework, supported by broader reforms targeting terrorist financing, logistical networks, and digital propaganda.

Importantly, the doctrine explicitly integrates rule-of-law principles in counterterrorism operations. It emphasises due process, the proportional use of force, and institutional oversight, reflecting an effort to balance security imperatives with democratic accountability. This is particularly relevant in a region where heavy-handed approaches risk fuelling further radicalisation.

PRAHAAR also recognises that long-term counterterrorism effectiveness depends on addressing root causes. It emphasises the importance of community engagement, deradicalisation programmes, and targeted social interventions aimed at reducing vulnerability to extremist ideologies. This signals a shift towards a more holistic, whole-of-society approach.

Southeast Asia and the Case for Deeper Cooperation

The security environments of South and Southeast Asia are deeply interconnected. South Asia has long served as an ideological and operational hub for militant networks in Southeast Asia. For its part, Southeast Asia provides recruitment pools, logistical pathways, and maritime routes that sustain extremist ecosystems across the region. These interdependencies are further amplified by technological change.

Encrypted messaging platforms, decentralised digital networks, and cryptocurrency-based financing have enabled militant groups to coordinate operations, recruit members, and transfer resources across borders with unprecedented speed and anonymity. Radicalisation increasingly occurs online, often linking individuals and networks across multiple regions.

In this context, PRAHAAR highlights several areas for practical cooperation between India and Southeast Asian states. Intelligence sharing is a key priority, as it can

enhance early warning systems and disrupt transnational networks. Maritime security is another critical domain, particularly in the Andaman Sea and surrounding waterways, which serve as transit routes for arms, narcotics, and militants.

Digital cooperation is equally important. India's expanding cyber capabilities and technological ecosystem make it a valuable partner in countering online extremism, monitoring encrypted communications, and tracking cryptocurrency-based financing networks.

Toward a Regional Counterterrorism Architecture

At a strategic level, PRAHAAR reflects India's ambition to play a more active role in shaping Indo-Pacific security. Under its Act East Policy, New Delhi has steadily expanded defence and intelligence cooperation with ASEAN states through joint exercises, training initiatives, and institutional dialogues.

Counterterrorism is now emerging as a central pillar of this engagement. By articulating a comprehensive doctrine, India signals a shift from ad hoc bilateral cooperation to a more structured and potentially institutionalised regional framework. To ensure the success of PRAHAAR, India would need to set aside inter-agency rivalry amongst its security agencies. Another concern is ensuring that the policy can be implemented nationwide, which would require coordination between the Federal and State governments.

Conclusion

If implemented effectively, PRAHAAR could serve as the foundation for a more integrated India-Southeast Asia counterterrorism partnership. Such a framework would not only strengthen regional resilience to extremist threats but also contribute to a broader security architecture capable of addressing the increasingly interconnected and technologically driven nature of terrorism in the Indo-Pacific.

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