

Deradicalisation as Counterterrorism Strategy: The Experience of Indian States

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ABSTRACT

Various Indian states have attempted to implement their respective deradicalisation programmes to counter radicalised thought amongst those identified as being at-risk, as well as those contemplating on joining, or are returning after having joined terror groups. Maharashtra and Kerala, for example, claim that their programmes are a success. Yet little is known regarding the structure of these deradicalisation programmes, their implementation, the layers of community engagement, and the rates of recidivism in those states which could indicate whether the programmes are indeed effective. This paper examines what Indian states aim to achieve through deradicalisation programmes; the experience of such programmes globally; and the ongoing debate amongst academics, law enforcement, intelligence and political establishments over the long-term impacts of deradicalisation and countering/preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of the “Islamic State” (IS, or ISIS) in 2014 and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s announcement of his *khilafat* (caliphate) from the historic Al Nuri mosque in Mosul (northern Iraq) triggered a shift in global counterterrorism thinking. As the ISIS began to use a mix of ideology, radicalisation and technology to recruit a completely new variety of individuals, willing to join and die for the Islamist cause, the global perceptions of terrorism threats changed drastically.

One critical aspect of the ideological and territorial rise of the ISIS was the magnitude of foreign fighters that travelled from across the world to join al-Baghdadi’s caliphate, which in 2014-15 was as large as the territory of the United Kingdom (UK), with thousands answering the ISIS’s call for arms, religion, *ummah* (the Muslim community as a whole bound by Islam) and government. This was arguably the biggest movement of non-state fighters since the Afghan war in the 1980s, in which 10,000–30,000 fighters from as far as Bosnia and the Philippines joined the mujahedeen war against the Soviets.¹ Scholar Thomas Hegghamer points out that modern Islamism came to the fore in the late 19th century, and by the 1940s, violent actors were feeding off the phenomenon. However, it was only 40 years later during the Afghan war that sympathisers began to travel into other conflict zones to ‘protect’ the Islamic way,² and one of the most critical reasons is geography. The Afghan conflict was about territory and a foreign invading power, which created global sympathy for the mujahedeen cause. While most counterterrorism studies fail to give geography its due, it has always been a “mobilising factor” in fostering ideologies, movements, or socio-political ecosystems. According to Tim Marshall, “The land on which we live has always shaped us. It has shaped the wars, the power, politics and social development of the people that now inhabit nearly every part of the Earth.”³

Table 1: Confirmed Cases of Private Global Foreign Fighter Mobilisation in the Muslim World, 1945–2010

Location	Date	Local Conflict Parties (simplified)	Foreign Fighter Entry Date	Number of Foreign Fighters	Confirmed Nationalities
Israel	1967	Arab coalition vs. Israel	1968	<100	Sudan, Syria, Egypt, Yemen
Lebanon	1975-90	PLO vs. Israel; Miscellaneous Factions	1978	<50	Egypt, Syria, Jordan
Afghanistan	1978-92	Mujahideen vs. Soviet Union /Kabul	1980-92	5,000-20,000	Most Arab countries, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, United States/Europe
Bosnia	1992-95	Bosnians vs. Serbs/Croats	1992-95	1,000-2,000	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe
Tajikistan	1992-97	Islamists vs. Communists	1992-94	100-200	Saudi Arabia, Yemen
Algeria	1991-	Islamists vs. Government	1994	<10	Saudi Arabia
Chechnya	1994-	Chechens vs. Russia	1995-2001	200-300	Most Arab countries, Turkey, United States/Europe
Philippines	1968-	Moro National Liberation Front/Moro Islamic Liberation Front vs. Manila	1997-2000	20-100	Several Arab countries
Kashmir	1989-	Pakistan vs. India	1997-2000	20-100	Several Arab countries
Somalia	1991-05	Various militias	1992	<50	Saudi Arabia, Egypt
Afghanistan	1992-2001	Masud vs. Hekmatyar, Taliban vs. Northern Alliance	1996-2001	1,000-1,500	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe, Central Asia, Pakistan, Turkey
Kosovo	1998-99	Albanians vs. Kosovars	1999	20-100	Several Arab countries, United States/Europe
Eritrea	1998-2000	Eritrea vs. Ethiopia	1998	<10	Saudi Arabia
Palestine	2000-	Palestinians vs. Israel	2000-	<10	Saudi Arabia
Afghanistan	2001-	Taliban vs. United States/NATO/Kabul	2001-	1,000-1,500	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe
Iraq	2003-	Sunnis vs. United States/Baghdad	2003-	4,000-5,000	Most Arab countries, United States/Europe
Somalia	2006-	Shabab vs. Transitional Federal Government/Ethiopia	2006-	200-400	United States/Europe, Turkey
Lebanon	2007	Fath al-Islam vs. Government	2007	<50	Several Arab countries, United States/Europe
					Saudi Arabia

Source: Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters," Belfer Center.⁴

In late 2014, the ISIS released a video titled “The End of Sykes-Picot,” referring to the 1916 agreement between Britain and France, which defined their “mutually agreed spheres of influence and control” in the Middle East, upon which are based the fraught borders of the region. The video is freely available online, although most links are blocked in India by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. In it, two ISIS fighters—both fluent in English and evidently foreigners—explain how the 1916 agreement had denied Muslims a “single Islamic land.”^{5,6} One of them says, “We’ve broken Sykes-Picott!” The spread of the ISIS brand, coupled with hundreds of instances of Muslims residing in prosperous Western countries in Europe and North America leaving behind their homes, families, and relative social and economic stability to join the terror group, posed a serious challenge for analysts, governments and policymakers, since it went against the previously held notion that terrorists originate primarily in impoverished circumstances. Traditional national security policies faced several significant challenges, such as the massive increase in foreign fighters for the first time since the Soviet–Afghan war; fighters equipped with newer concepts of online radicalisation, communications, and unilateral access to extremist propaganda (e.g. speeches, talks, pamphlets, and propaganda videos shot in 4K).

In his 2004 study, “Poverty, Political Freedom and the Roots of Terrorism,” Alberto Abadie concluded that there seemed to be no “significant association between terrorism and economic variables such as income once the effect of other country characteristics is taken into account.”^{a,7} Released one year after the US invasion of Iraq and three years after 9/11 and the start of the Afghanistan war, the study relied heavily on data, at a time when discussions on “counterterrorism” had shifted largely away from data and rationality.

a Abadie used datasets of terrorism rankings, human development indices, economic data for states affected by terrorism, political rights indices, and other metrics to

So far, operational theatres against terror groups have had only limited success, despite the deployment of multiple foreign militaries that have conducted decapitation strikes. For example, the 19-year-long US military campaign in Afghanistan is now ending without having achieved many of its goals. Instead of defeating the insurgent group, as was the initial aim, the US is now working out a compromise with the Taliban leaders and negotiating the US' exit.⁸ A similar trajectory can be observed in Iraq and parts of Syria as well, where the ISIS was declared “finished” after Baghdadi's death in October 2019, despite warnings, including from the Pentagon itself, that the insurgency was likely to re-emerge in the future.⁹ According to new data-driven research by scholars Michael Knights and Alex Almeida, the number of reported attacks conducted by ISIS in Iraq have increased steadily in the last year, from 1,470 in 2018 to 1,669 in 2019, and 566 already reported in the first half of 2020. Knights and Almeida note that ISIS has been moving away from its caliphate and back to its insurgency roots, since the latter allows more flexibility to conduct effective guerrilla warfare.¹⁰

The resilience of groups such as the ISIS, instances of resurgences in more than one theatre of the post-9/11 “war on terror” programmes, and the failure of the military operations in ending these conflicts, has pushed governments to pursue alternative methodologies in fighting extremism, moving away from a traditional military-led approach. There is now increased focus on the issue of radicalisation within communities and in society at large. Consequently, the concept of “deradicalisation programmes” has gained popularity and pushed into the mainstream. Deradicalisation programmes can be considered a fallout of military policies such as “shock and awe,” which have been co-opted by terror groups themselves.¹¹ For example, the “awe and shock” of the war on terror, e.g. in Afghanistan, has caused a change in outlook, specifically in the West.¹²

However, over the last five years, opinions on government-promoted deradicalisation programmes have been divided. While these programmes have yielded varying levels of success, which establishes them as formidable deterrents, there is debate regarding whether they can be considered a part of “counterterrorism narratives.” Deradicalisation programmes are not conceptually new, being hybrid versions of “rehabilitation” programmes for returning jihadists initiated by countries such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen after the Soviet–Afghan war. In current scholarship as well, ‘deradicalisation’ programmes and rehabilitation programmes for Islamists are often used interchangeably.¹³ However, since the rise of the ISIS and the increase of foreign fighters on Europe soil (who often possess legitimate passports), deradicalisation programmes have gained new traction.¹⁴

FROM REHABILITATION TO DERADICALISATION

At first glance, rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes appear to be quite similar. However, while the two may have a common end, the approaches they employ are often different. Moreover, the two kinds of programmes apply to different time periods and contexts.

Scholar Brian M. Jenkins, terrorism expert at RAND Corporation, explains the basics of these terminologies: “The paramount objective must be somehow to eradicate the urge to violence, absent an X-Ray to a person’s soul. Deradicalisation and rehabilitation are broadly defined and may mean different things. Are deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes aimed at transforming fundamental beliefs, instilling new values, diverting violence-prone extremists into more satisfying lives with job training and marriage, and therefore more acceptable societal norms, or submission to legitimate governmental authority and obedience to the law? Advocates of deradicalisation and rehabilitation might respond, all of the above, but these are different goals.”¹⁵

According to Jenkins, the focus on the act of violence is common to both deradicalisation and rehabilitation. However, the two programmes differ when it comes to ideology, intent, geography, politics and social development. Under rehabilitation, the challenge is to bring someone back from not only having extremist thoughts but having committed an act of terror or violence. However, the period between contemplating an act of violence and actually committing it is considered the most opportune time for law enforcement, community, deradicalisation programmes and other similar mechanisms to interfere by design. Consequently, deradicalisation programmes focus on those who have not yet committed an act of terror and is therein different from older approaches to rehabilitation. To this end, deradicalisation programmes use technology and online communications— modern tactics that have been successfully co-opted by terror groups themselves.

Despite a broad global understanding of deradicalisation, some challenges remain which pose obstacles in creating the most effective programmes. First, the terms “terrorism,” “violent extremism,” “radicalisation” and “deradicalisation” are still loosely defined; there is no universal agreement. Forums such as the United Nations have often been witness to arguments over these terms, since different countries have different views on “political violence,” based on their own geopolitical interests. For example, Middle East countries such as the UAE prefer to use the term “violent extremism” or “violent extremists” instead of “terrorism” or “terrorists.” In addition to this challenge to what Abu Dhabi considers “problematic messaging for the Islamic world,” the UAE promotes organisations such as the Hedayah Center, which work on the idea of countering violent extremism (CVE).¹⁶ At the same time, the UAE Armed Forces continues to play an active role in the US’ post-9/11 “war against terror” narrative, despite holding divergent policies and approaches against violent extremism.

Across the West, various counterterrorism designation lists have overlaps in terms of terrorist entities and activities. For example, the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, which share similar ethos based around the rule of law, international order and democratic principles, are together known as “Five Eyes” and their terror designation lists share many overlaps. However, according to Chris Meserole and Daniel Byman, the countries can still have divergent views on certain terror groups. “If the designations process was globally unbiased, one would expect to see very similar lists (elsewhere). Further, one would also expect that the number of groups with a given ideology should be roughly proportionate to the level of violence perpetrated by adherents to that ideology.”¹⁷ Any discussion on designations is often largely a futile process, pushed by regional geopolitical realities rather than a singular understanding of a ‘global order’ or multilateral institutions attempting to define actions.

Closer to home, the rehabilitation programme initiated by Sri Lanka to tackle what was possibly the world’s most violent insurgency, initiated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) offers great insight into both the successes and challenges of such a programme. The Sri Lankan civil war ended in 2009, leaving behind many combatants from the LTTE. This led to a rehabilitation regime led by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prisons.¹⁸ According to Malkanthi Hettiarachchi, who played a critical role in designing the Sri Lankan programme, the post-war approach embodied the “Sri Lankan spirit” by replacing the “classical retributive justice model” with a “restorative justice model.”¹⁹ The ‘6+1’ tenets that were designed for this were education, vocation, psychosocial and creative therapies, society, culture and family, spirituality and religion, recreation and finally, community rehabilitation. Later, the Sri Lankan model incorporated the private sector, adding critical capacity along with opacity in terms of how the programme ran. Even today, on discussions about

deradicalisation programmes in forums such as the Commonwealth Grouping, Sri Lanka has the most practical advice to offer.

The conundrums on definitions as well as the contrasting ideologies of states that run, or have previously run, deradicalisation programmes present several problems for India while deciding the kind of ideas and experiences to import for its own programmes.

DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

United Kingdom (UK)

In December 2019, 28-year-old British citizen Usman Khan, a resident of Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire in England stabbed two Cambridge University students to death on London Bridge before being shot down by the police. While London has seen similar terror attacks before, some inspired by ISIS, the London Bridge attack fuelled debate regarding counterterrorism, CVE, the efficacy of deradicalisation programmes, and how states were dealing with radicalised elements.

The attacker, Usman Khan, was convicted in 2012 for being part of a gang that had planned to set up a terrorist training facility disguised as a madrassa on land owned by his family in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.²⁰ During investigations in 2013, Khan and nine other men were exposed as members of an ecosystem of Islamist radicalisation, pushed by British preacher Anjem Choudary, co-founder of the Islamist group Al-Muhajiroun, who had openly commended radicalisation and had been found guilty of supporting the ISIS and its activities in the UK.²¹ Usman Khan was only 19 when he was convicted and sentenced to life without parole, unless he was certified as “deradicalised.” He was “freed on licence” (i.e., freedom under strict conditions) in December 2018, only a

year before he committed the terror attack in London.²² At the time of the attack, Usman Khan was free on licence, considered to have been “reformed,” and was attending an offender rehabilitation conference run by Cambridge University’s Institute of Criminology, which helps offenders reintegrate into society.^b The incident exposed a chink in Britain’s deradicalisation programme, which was launched in 2003 after a spurt in homegrown British jihadists in retaliation for the country’s post-9/11 “war on terror” and its military involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. While no direct attacks had taken place since 2003, the security establishment was apprehensive about the future.

The British ‘deradicalisation’ programme is expansive and attempts to weave in both security agencies and the public, to form a cohesive defence against terrorism. The strategy to counter radicalisation is known as “Prevent” and was part of the government’s broader counterterrorism strategy called “Contest.” Contest is aided by “Pursue” (intelligence and police-led CT policy), “Prepare” (development of plans to deal with domestic terrorism) and “Protect” (protecting key infrastructure sites such as power plants).²³ Prevent is arguably the largest, most public, and most debated sections of the Contest strategy and has gone through overhauls over the years. While it deals with those already deemed radicalised, its sibling programme, Channel, works in a much more targeted one-to-one manner, to lend support to those identified to be at risk of taking up terror-related ideologies and activities.²⁴ For those who have already committed an act of terror, the UK runs the Desistance and Disengagement Programme (DDP). The DDP was introduced in 2018, in anticipation of returning fighters from Iraq and Syria, after the collapse of the ISIS’s territory.²⁵ Under the

b A different programme from the ones that inmates with extreme ideologies go through in prison, which is called Healthy Identity Intervention (HII) and is broader in scope.

larger umbrella of UK's counterterror approach, the general public is legally bound to participate, ranging from teachers to social workers. The DDP has often garnered criticism for being biased against Muslims.²⁶

Researchers Lorenzo Vidino and Jams Brandon classify Prevent's overall objectives in three steps:

- Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the terrorists who promote it;
- Prevent people from being drawn to terrorism by ensuring they are given appropriate support; and
- Approach sectors, societal spaces and institutions identified as high risk for radicalisation.²⁷

The aims of deradicalisation are straightforward on paper; however, the practical reality and the challenges on-ground are different. Usman Khan's case challenged the success rate of deradicalisation programmes, and questions were raised on how effective they were in the long run. This is not the only time that Prevent and its mechanisms have been called into question in the UK. In September 2017, 18-year-old illegal immigrant Ahmed Hassan detonated a bomb at London's Parsons Green Underground station, and confessed that he was trained by ISIS fighters in Iraq who had threatened his family.²⁸ Earlier in the same month, experts had reportedly considered removing Ahmed from their list of extremists. A report by the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) released in November 2018 underlined the failures in the 2017 attacks as well as in other cases. "Whilst Hassan had revealed in an asylum interview that he had been taken by Daesh (ISIS) and trained to kill, he had not been investigated by MI5 (UK's domestic intelligence agency) prior to launching his attack. In February 2016,

Hassan was referred by CTP, to the Channel program. He was faced with foster parents and provided with a range of social and diversionary activities as well as health (including mental health) support. Between June 2016 and November 2017, a Channel panel met to discuss Hassan's case on nine separate occasions. At the time Hassan launched his attack, the panel was in the process of considering the closure of Hassan's case."²⁹

Prevent is perhaps one of the most studied, debated, transparent and academically accessible case studies, to understand the idea of deradicalisation programmes and the numerous challenges they pose. Indian states have adopted different approaches and found that models presented by the likes of Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and others are more suited than other attempts on similar programs around the world. However, these models have introduced several challenges for state programmes, as discussed later in the paper.

Singapore

Singaporean counterterror researchers and state institutions were consulted for the rehabilitation programme of Iraq in 2006, and much later, the deradicalisation programme for Maharashtra. The small state of Singapore has never been a direct victim of terrorism, but its neighbouring states such as Indonesia and Malaysia have been subjected to violent Islamist extremism. Thus, Singapore pre-empted a programme to protect its Muslim population that came from diverse backgrounds (from South Asia, Middle East etc.). The programme, launched in 2003, focused on the banned Al-Qaeda-backed Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah, which conducted the 2002 Bali bombings that killed more than 200 people, mostly Western tourists.³⁰ In 2013, one of the first pro-ISIS cases involving an Indian citizen took place in Singapore.³¹

Singapore's approach to countering radicalisation involved the online sphere much before social-media-led radicalisation was recognised as a critical threat, and before the Al-Qaeda aligned terror group Al Shabaab became one of the first to use the internet by live-tweeting the 2013 terror attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya.³² Jemaah Islamiyah's operational mandate covered South East Asia, including cells in Singapore. From the transnational terror perspective, the group's Al-Qaeda backing was highlighted after Osama Bin Laden released an audio statement in 2002 about the Bali bombings, as a reaction to the US' and Australia's "war on terror," and Canberra's role in the liberation of East Timor.³³

Singapore's approach was well-formulated and aimed at using community engagement. The idea to set up the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in 2003 came from within the community, with minimal involvement of the government or the security establishment. In late 2001, Jemaah Islamiyah was identified as a developing problem, and in 2003, a group of *asatizah* (Muslim religious scholars), took it upon themselves to take the first steps to address this developing situation and counter the radicalised ideologically using counselling and debate. This group became the RRG. Initially, it faced pushback from radicalised individuals, who accused the RRG members of being agents of the state and government. However, over time, the group succeeded in transforming dozens of former Jemaah Islamiyah members. Since then, the RRG has extended its mandate to include radicalised youth caught in the propaganda trappings of the ISIS. The RRG website has videos, articles and other pamphlets to counter radicalised interpretations of Islam and push a narrative of 'moderation' on ideas of jihad, ummah and fatwas.³⁴ While the successes of the Singapore model and the RRG predate the ISIS, the approach is still considered useful and much more palatable than other programs across the world, since it is a

ground-up approach started by Islamic scholars themselves, with little aid from the state. This narrative is significant, since Singapore is closely aligned with the US.³⁵

Additionally, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) runs a parallel programme on dealing with radicalisation cases going beyond the theological perspective and involving psychological, transformational and societal metrics. Along with the likes of the RGG, Inter-Agency Aftercare Group (ACG), and Malay-Muslim organisation, the three main tenets of the model are psychological rehabilitation, religious rehabilitation and social rehabilitation.^{36,37} The psychology aspect of deradicalisation is emphasised in this model by both the state and the community, and thus, psychologists, not the police or the military, are in charge of the programme. While 'deradicalisation' remains a state goal, the granular upward-pyramid approach allows the state to maintain distance and support community organisations to take the lead and own the successes and failures of the same.

To be sure, the model has limitations. While it has yielded a uniquely high success rate, the number of cases of radicalisation in Singapore are fairly small, to begin with. Thus, the model's success in other countries is largely reliant on the local ecosystems of a given region and geography. Singapore has a population of only around five million, and its threat perceptions are starkly different from those faced by neighbours in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Consequently, to evaluate the potential of deradicalisation programmes based on this model, one must factor in territorial and geopolitical realities, along with the extent of regional violence. However, such data is absent in current deradicalisation programme models, which hinders the accurate evaluation of their potential to be applied in regions outside of where they were developed.

Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, home of Wahhabi Islam, radicalisation has multiple points of origin. While the Saudi programme has been in place since 2003, it has suffered some significant public setbacks. In 2009, the then deputy interior minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, survived an assassination attempt after a suicide bomber from Al-Qaeda detonated a low-level explosive near him. To carry out the attack, Abdullah al-Asiri, the militant, surrendered to the state to gain access to the palace and to Nayef. The prince allowed al-Asiri to bypass security as a sign of good faith, allowing al-Asiri to detonate the explosive hidden underneath his clothes.³⁸

The Saudi deradicalisation model, like others, has tangible gaps between theoretical aims and practical successes. After 2003, a series of attacks on Western targets and Saudis, as well as both the Afghan and Iraq wars raging simultaneously, pushed the Saudi government to set up a deradicalisation programme, which was also an unsaid extension of the US' incarceration of terrorists and suspected terrorists in the infamous Guantanamo Bay prison.³⁹ The Saudi programme is based on a strategy called "Prevention, Rehabilitation and Aftercare" (PARC) and is run by the country's Ministry of Interior. Prisons, the main breeding grounds of radicalisation and ideological indoctrination in the region, are the starting point for the Saudi strategy. It uses counselling by religious figures to counter radicalised thought.

The "prevention" part of the programme uses some controversial methods to find a middle ground between the programme and the individual in question. One of the main tenets of the approach is to deter public sympathy for extremists, to encourage the latter to withdraw from violence and extremist thought.⁴⁰ Prevention begins as early schools, using books and other literature to teach moderate Islamic practices and thinking, aiming to replace extremism with conservatism.⁴¹ Public

communication is also used aggressively, to create narratives of moderation and counternarratives that address existing extremist ideologies and propaganda. Another major goal of this part of the programme is to build stronger ties between the state and the public, bringing the latter closer to the House of Saud, which may often look as a distant entity (the attack on Prince Nayef illustrates a failure in this aspect of the strategy).

The second step, “rehabilitation,” puts counselling at the centre. The counselling does not necessarily take place in prisons or indiscrete buildings away from the public eye. The centres are also often located in prominent spaces and have modern architecture, with activities and amenities for the attendees and separate sections for women. The counselling focuses largely on religion, and involves debating the misconceptions about and misinterpretations of the Quran. The theological debates rely on the concept of *al-wala wa al-bara*, i.e. “obedience” to the Muslim community and rulers, including modern authorities such as the House of Saud or individual authorities such as ministers and accredited imams.^{42,43}

The aftercare aspect of the Saudi deradicalisation programme is aimed at facilitating the entry of detainees back into society, reintegrating them, and ensuring that they do not return to the life and ideology of extremism and terrorism. To this end, the programme employs social support; continued counselling; and access to care rehabilitation centres, which offer everything from sports facilities to art therapy and access to religious scholars at all times.⁴⁴

Successes and Failures

One of the most critical points in the debate on deradicalisation programmes is the issue of recidivism (a term borrowed from the field of

criminology) and refers to the act of a person repeating their crime. For most programmes, including the ones discussed in this paper, there is little data, if at all, in this area, which raises questions of transparency regarding their success rates. Radicalisation and terrorism are poorly defined to begin with. The idea that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter,” while a lazy sentiment, informs much of debate over terminology. This idea is often supported by scholars who support the “just war theory,” which attempts to place itself between the “realists” and the “pacifists.”⁴⁵

No deradicalisation programme can guarantee that a “deradicalised” person will never commit an act of terror thereafter. Singapore’s programme does have a high success rate. However, this is due, in part, to the comparatively low number of cases in the country, which allows for rigorous follow-ups after individuals have re-joined society. A study of all the programmes discussed here show that every model will have some degree of recidivism. Despite huge successes, one or two such cases can call into question the efficacy of the entire deradicalisation programme, especially politically, since it is a risky endeavour to justify the loss of lives as a data anomaly. Consequently, deradicalisation programmes fail to receive due resources. For example, under the British Counterterrorism and Security Act of 2015, 6,093 people were referred to the Prevent programme in 2016–17, which increased to 7,318 referrals in 2017–18. These referrals require individual attention to gauge threat perception, a financially expensive and human-resource-intensive task. Out of these, 44 percent were related to Islamist extremism while 14 percent to right-wing extremism.⁴⁶ While the budget allocated to the programme is not public, David Anderson, the former UK independent reviewer of terror legislation, has told the media that it received only one percent of the annual £3.4 billion counterterror budget. This reflects the fairly limited financial space allotted to deradicalisation programme in the UK.

Recidivism involves several elements, such as domestic terrorists, foreign fighters and sleeper cells, depending on a country's radicalisation problems. Further, deradicalisation programmes consider all the metrics of radicalisations to maintain a sustained view on when a person is considered to have “fallen back” into radicalised thoughts or actions. Unfortunately, the relevant data is only freely available for certain programmes in certain countries. Since recidivism comes from the field of criminology, its application to terrorism and radicalisation requires a different approach within the existing frameworks. In their work on the topic of deradicalisation and foreign fighters, David Malet and Richard Hayes note that the employment of single descriptors to highlight cases of radicalisation is problematic, considering the wide range of circumstances involved—family situation, peer pressure, threats. Regarding foreign fighters, Malet and Hayes state, “One individual may return to his or her own country with malicious intentions, while another may return home disaffected with the cause but ultimately join another extremist group or take action alone. The former would never have seized to be an extremist, whereas the latter fell back into anti-social behavior either through personal failings or failings of the system. The latter would be described as a recidivist, the former would not.”⁴⁷

The recidivism debate is one of the focal points between the agreements and disagreements on the efficiency of deradicalisation programmes. From a purely political perspective, a higher rate of recidivism would be considered a failure of the programme, whereas practitioners would evaluate successes and failures based on multiple factors, only one of which is the absolute number of recidivism. However, counterterrorism is primarily a political exercise. Thus, deradicalisation programmes classified under counterterrorism are bound to be treated as “counterterrorism” operations, and not be given as much autonomy as may be required.

Some scholars argue that the fear of recidivism is “overblown.” In his research, Thomas Renard uses data from cases in Belgium, a country that has had pro-ISIS cases in significant numbers due to its geography and population size. He has also built his own dataset for the research, titled “Jihadi Terrorist Offenders in Belgium,” which is mostly based on terror convictions in Belgian courts.⁴⁸ According to Renard, there is a discrepancy between the frequency perception, which might be based on a single case that makes headlines, and the actual frequency, which is relatively low.

While Renard’s research is thorough and shines new light on the debates around terrorism, deradicalisation and recidivism, the case studies (limited to those from after the Syrian crisis, since the war was a major mobilising point) are few, which simplifies the larger debates over issues such as society, political thought, and sociocultural assimilation. Renard’s dataset used 557 individual cases of radicalisation and/or Islamist terror offences in Belgium from 1 January 1990 to 31 December 2019. This takes not only cases spanning over decades, but also various wars, mobilisation reasoning, the advent of online radicalisation and other such variables, and reduces them to a non-contextual numeric dataset. This lack of context makes it difficult to properly understand the success of a deradicalisation programme and its recidivism rates.

Table 2: Review of Studies on Terrorist Recidivism

Study	Time Span	Geographical Focus	N (sample size)	Recidivism rate
Bakker (2006)	2001-2006	Europe	242	2.5% (6/242)
Sageman (2004)	1990-2004	Global	172	0% (0/172)
Bovenkerk (2011)	1970-2011	Netherlands	24	0% (0/24)
Malaysia (2011)	2001-2011	Malaysia	240	5.4% (13/240)
Indonesia (2013)	n/a	Indonesia	300	8.3% (25/300)
United Kingdom (2020)	2013-2019	England and Wales	196	3% (6/196)
Silke (2014)	2001-2014	England and Wales	196	0% (0/196)
Silke (2014)	1998-2011	Northern Ireland	453	2.2% (10/453)
Hodwitz (2018)	2001-2018	United States	561	0.5% (3/561)
Wright (2019)	1990-2019	United States	189	1% (2/189)
Reinares et al. (2018)	2004-2018	Spain	199	7% (14/199)
Van der Heide et al. (2018)	2012-2018	Netherlands	189	4.2% (8/189)
			Total: 2,961	Average: 2.9% (87/2,961)

*Source: Renard's compilation of studies done on terror recidivism.*⁴⁹

INDIA'S TERRORISM AND MILITANCY LANDSCAPE

Islamist radicalisation is not the biggest threat in India today, as Indian Islam has largely rejected extremist ideologies and approaches. Moreover, the country's pluralistic beliefs, political culture and secular-democratic ethos inform most of its society. This makes India's domestic problems unique and unattached to other issues beyond its borders.⁵⁰ Indeed, over 70 years, India has witnessed only a few terror attacks or homegrown Islamist terrorists. The terrorism landscape in India is therefore different from that of other countries. While economically and politically, terrorism affects most of India, geographically, it is concentrated around the populous northern parts of the country, with the Kashmir valley acting as the nucleus.

India has been fighting Pakistan-sponsored terrorism since the Partition in 1947, which gave birth to the conflict over the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). This conflict continues to inform India–Pakistan rivalry to this day and remains the focal point of India's counterterror experience.^c This Pakistan-sponsored terror landscape comes with a globally unique challenge, since the former is not only a sponsor of terrorism in India but also a nuclear-armed state. This has limited India's options when it comes to counterterror practices.

It is important to note that deradicalisation programmes in Indian states were introduced not due to the Kashmir conflict but in retaliation for the rise and influence of the ISIS and its caliphate in Syria and Iraq. In Kerala and Maharashtra, for example, the decision to implement such programmes was driven by the Ministry of Home Affairs highlighting 155 pro-ISIS individuals (both sympathisers and members), some of whom travelled abroad and joined ISIS both in Syria and Afghanistan during the initial years.⁵¹

c The Maoist movement and the insurgencies of the Northeast add to this in a significant manner.

In India, deradicalisation programmes are not an entirely new concept. The Indian armed forces and their outreach programmes dealing with issues such as healthcare, clergies and financial stability are classified as “broad stroke deradicalisation efforts” via community outreach.⁵² In Kashmir, military-led counterterrorism and/or counterinsurgency acts as the country’s largest open-air theatre for education on terrorism and counterterrorism. For example, military leaders in Kashmir approach madrassas with bridge-building activities, such as inviting local populations for sports tournaments, and these anecdotes pepper the non-military part of the debate in the Valley.⁵³ A former Indian Army general, detailing some of his own outreach on building bridges with isolated local communities in Kashmir, observes that as soon as states get involved in CVE, the whole issue tends to get mired in geopolitics.⁵⁴ When critical sectors such as healthcare allow trust-building activities with communities as part of counter-radicalisation efforts, they frequently face challenges. For example, the US’ decision to use doctors and healthcare professionals to spy on Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden prior to his assassination in 2011 eroded much of the goodwill that health professionals and health NGOs held. In Pakistan, anti-polio health workers still face attacks from local populations.⁵⁵

Much of India’s counterterrorism experience comes from long-running theatres such as Kashmir. Thus, there is currently little evidence to show that deradicalisation programmes are valid long-term societal projects to invest in.⁵⁶ In Maharashtra, the deradicalisation programme is run under the umbrella of the state’s Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), whose core focus is “terrorism.” This negatively affects the kind of narratives a deradicalisation programme may want to create within communities and society. The Indian government, however, claims that its policies of “surrender-cum-rehabilitation” have seen

mixed success rates, i.e. the programmes have fared well in places such as erstwhile J&K and some Northeastern states of India, while less in the states afflicted by Naxalism. However, there is little public discussion regarding the policies relating to these programmes, ostensibly due to “national security” reasons. For example, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs’ public document on guidelines for the surrender programme aimed at Naxals is a mere three-page read, with minimal conceptual details and only superficial rundowns on the financial gains offered to those who want to lay down their weapons against the state.⁵⁷

The programmes discussed so far offer limited yet crucial insights into how state-run security programmes work in India, in terms of decision-making, capacity implementation, and dynamics between the Union government and the states. Scholar Sajid F. Shapoo, in his work on India’s counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies and surrender and rehabilitation policies, concluded that the success of such programmes ultimately depends on state capacity and on certain individuals who run these programmes and see them as useful tools. Political will, capacity, institutional framework and transparency play vital roles. For example, the surrender and rehabilitation policy was successful in Odisha but less so in Chhattisgarh, due to the latter’s credibility issues with security forces and fake surrenders.⁵⁸

Localised examples from Indian experiences with COIN’s non-military engagement with individuals, societies, cultures (in Kashmir’s case) and tribes (in Naxalism’s case) can help build a strong base for an ‘Indian’ approach to deradicalisation programmes. Currently, Indian programmes import much if their designs and approaches, with some states using the Saudi Arabia template, while others relying more on Britain’s Prevent.

DERADICALISATION PROGRAMMES IN INDIA

At the peak of the ISIS' power in Iraq and Syria in 2015, terabytes' worth of propaganda were being released online to radicalise people, leveraging the increasing popularity of social media platforms. It was only two years later that the Indian government took notice of this new transnational threat, which required a completely new toolkit in the counterterror space.

In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appointed former Intelligence Bureau (IB) Chief Syed Asif Ibrahim as the special envoy for counterterrorism, under the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), with a charter to be a liaison for the Indian government with countries in West Asia along with Afghanistan and Pakistan, working with the National Security Adviser (NSA). Interestingly, Ibrahim was the first Muslim chief of IB, not a small feat to achieve in the Indian intelligence world.⁵⁹ Ibrahim's tenure was extended in 2018, and in October 2019, the NSCS was brought into the government's "Allocation of Business" rules, giving it constitutional and legal teeth.⁶⁰ One of the core mandates was to develop the new counter-radicalisation programme for state governments and other agencies to run. The then Home Minister Rajnath Singh had prioritised internal security in 2014, and the setting up of the new Counterterrorism and Counter-Radicalisation Division (CT-CRD) was one of the outcomes expedited by the rise of the ISIS as a global threat.

As discussed in the previous sections of this paper, various models were considered and tested. According to some reports, the Saudi Arabia and UK models were foremost in the Indian bureaucracy and security establishment.⁶¹ However, little is known about the structures, methodologies, datasets, community approaches, and localised variations and applications of these programmes from different states'

perspective. From the Union government's point of view, deradicalisation programmes became the primary focus, since it added an inclusive and non-lethal dimension to counterterrorism, which had become stigmatised since 9/11. Increased counterterrorism debates and cooperation with the likes of the European Union in the West and the UAE in West Asia could have played a significant role in this decision to find space in a traditionally CT-led security landscape.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, the deradicalisation programme is run by the state's ATS, which is part of the Mumbai Police's ranks. The programme was launched in 2016 under orders from the Union Home Ministry. The agenda includes opening *vyayam shalas* (exercise centres) in minority areas (i.e. Muslim-centric population); making National Cadet Corps (NCC), Bharat Scouts and Guides compulsory in minority schools; and setting up an independent media outlet "to deliver mainstream thoughts and values" within the youths of the minority population. These were aided by socioeconomic packages with a declared aim of bringing the "youth of the minority community back into the mainstream," by making outreach efforts using education, sports, urban planning, law and order, skill development, women and child issues, social justice and healthcare.⁶² Teaching values of democracy, and the demerits of dictatorship were also added.^d Especially in the context of Maharashtra, it adds a layer to the state's strategies in fighting ISIS-ideology-led radicalisation, since the khilafat declared in 2014 was a quasi-state run by a single man under strict sharia law.

Under the ATS, the Maharashtra programme keeps the police force at the forefront. This is a problematic design, as highlighted by the fact

d Interestingly, these are not generally part of such programmes in other countries.

that the mandates for the police force implementing the programme also includes simultaneously addressing “any feeling of communalism within the force.”⁶³ This is problematic for a programme aimed at ground-up community outreach and ‘deradicalisation’ of a community that may already feel targeted, since confidence-building is one of its basic principles. That the police force is expected to sensitise its members while implementing the programme highlights that its structure may not be that well-chalked-out, and ad-hoc approaches and fixes may be more common than they should be. Another important facet of the programme is maintaining databases that go beyond generic police databases. Technology can be leveraged to measure successes and failures, by installing recidivism as a central metric for obtaining clarity on how well a programme is working.⁶⁴ Indeed, recidivism can only be used thus when the other structures of the programme are concretely set out and (largely) transparently available for study.

The few insights available on the Maharashtra programme come largely from controlled dissemination of information by the police in the form of anecdotal success stories. In August 2019, The Indian Express carried a four-part series on the deradicalisation programme in Maharashtra, in which the ATS claimed that 114 men and six women had been “reintegrated” through the programme after being “wooded” by the ISIS. The ATS also claimed to have counselled 200 others.⁶⁵ More crucially, the series gave a quick insight into the structure and approach of the programme. While the newspaper series was littered with success stories of intervention and community engagement, it had little to say regarding the concrete, step-by-step structures of the programme, or if such a structure was even followed. Community engagement, family interventions, counselling, and psychometric tests (what these entail is largely unknown) are some of the details unavailable for public scrutiny of the programme). Anonymous police officials quoted by Indian Express do mention an existing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

developed using practical approaches, trial and error, etc. According to the report, the SOP was in place by the end of 2017.⁶⁶

Additionally, the police force was assisted by Rohan Gunaratna, who at the time headed the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at Singapore's Nanyang University. This lends some credence to the programme by way of extensive experience in developing deradicalisation programmes in countries such as Singapore and Iraq. The four stilts developed by the ATS revolving around a "candidate," as part of the SOP include family, psychologists, clergy, and the police. The cases are led by "friend officers," sensitised versions of general case officers. The period of outreach with a 'candidate' is five years, with the minimum benchmark being four weeks.⁶⁷ The final tier of the programme deals with financial stability, with offers of skill development courses, small loans, and help in setting up a basic business. The depth of financial rehabilitation is, however, not clearly defined and is showcased mostly through case examples that cannot be comparatively studied with datasets to model success and failure rates.

From the information available, the Maharashtra plan appears to be a half-hearted attempt. There is a constant conflation of deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation. Moreover, institutions such as the NCC have no direct correlation with deradicalisation from a theological and ideological perspective, and have more to do with disciplinary action. Another problematic policy directive within the programme is the failure to distinguish between those who join organisations such as ISIS driven primarily by ideology and those that are driven largely by an attraction towards violence. There are many examples in Indian where ISIS sympathisers were not interested in committing attacks on Indian soil, against Indians, but were fully motivated to make their way to Iraq or Syria to become a full-fledged

‘citizens’ of the new quasi-state.⁶⁸ This sort of complexity in people’s allegiance to extremist groups require more nuanced deradicalisation techniques, with the police and other law-enforcement agencies stepping back to allow local governmental health, safety and home departments; community elders; NGOs; and other arms of civil society to take the lead.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, one important area where the Maharashtra programme has been successful is ensuring that parents do not hesitate to contact helplines and law enforcement agencies if they find their child sharing or consuming extremist propaganda. Since the local police officials and beat officers are often hired from within the local community or region, locals consider them as one of their own. This helps create an early warning system.⁷⁰ However, the process gets complicated when central agencies get involved, with turf-battles creating a panic-driven environment. This also instils fear in communities that are otherwise receptive to police intervention, since escalation can quickly turn a deradicalisation case into a counterterrorism one.⁷¹ Therefore, it is critical that deradicalisation is not obfuscated with criminality and terrorism for cases where an act of terror has not been committed. As of now, debates and designs regarding such issues in ATS-led programme remain inaccessible.

The viability of the deradicalisation programme operating in Maharashtra is also a matter of debate within the policing ecosystem. According to some officials, the idea of these programmes was proposed by the Central government, with the states taking care of the implementation.⁷² The doubts originate from fundamental questions regarding deradicalisation programmes, which have also been raised in other nations such as the UK and Belgium. Some officials believe that “deradicalisation programmes” do not work for the ‘Indian’ problem of radicalisation and extremism, and are largely based on Western

sensibilities and driven by the issue of migration.⁷³ In a public talk in June 2018, IPS Officer Shiv Sahai (senior Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat) argued that deradicalisation models are inherently based on the perspectives and experiences of other nations with different polities, histories and sociocultural dynamics. “In the UK, or the European nations, the issue is that they have got the problem with immigrant populations. The immigrant population there has an issue because of assimilation problems in their societies. The immigrant who came in wanted to retain the identity of his/her home country, which did not merge into the country of adoption. We don’t have these problems, as my Muslim is I, he just professes another religion. We don’t have divides on racial lines.”⁷⁴

Sahai also highlighted some of the concerns of the Indian police ecosystems regarding the trend of deradicalisation programmes from an international perspective. “Wherever radicalised elements are taking place, instead of what many other countries do which is have the police come in, drag the person to a deradicalisation centre and in most cases get resettled, but instead of the dynamics of a society are allowed to play out the results are much better. The society of India is very aware of the reality of radicalisation, therefore the elders of the society, the institutions of the society play a role. Therefore, there is not a requirement to go into this in a clinical kind of way where you open up institutions (deradicalisation programmes) and put out statistics at the end of it. I think this is not the time where there is a need to do this. But that does not mean we are being complacent.”^{75,76}

Sahai’s views explain why, despite the global claim, the UK’s Prevent programme and structure have found only apprehensive takers in New Delhi, and in state capitals by extension. Radicalisation occurring in migrant populations in Europe and native populations in South Asian regions have completely different optics; for instance, “assimilation” is

not a relevant metric for India. In a state such as Maharashtra, localised radicalisation cases would have more to do with local issues such as communal tensions; the legacy of communal riots (Mumbai in 1992–93); and the consequential displacement, rehabilitation and ghettoisation of communities in specific geographies within the state’s structures.

On the community level, the deradicalisation programme can often be divisive. The Muslim community residing in areas near Mumbai such as Thane and Mumbra, which have had pro-ISIS cases, find that the programme disproportionately targets them. The situation has only become exacerbated in 2020, with divisive politics, technology and disinformation on the rise.⁷⁷ While some claim that the programme can help guide unemployed youth in the right direction, in most cases, no one seems to have clarity on what it really entails.⁷⁸ These views are anecdotal due to the lack of empirical research, but a broad view can be taken of the mistrust against the programme run by the ATS. For its part, the ATS maintains that a more clandestine approach to the programme is effective for both the agency and the community. In one of the cases, it highlights that the family was happy that even their neighbours were unaware of the fact that their son went through a deradicalisation process.⁷⁹ This calls for a deeper look into the programme’s approach towards the community and the depth of the community’s role beyond the involvement of clerics.

Kerala

The state of Kerala launched a deradicalisation programme in 2016, and it has been largely successful. The state has seen a number of pro-ISIS cases, specifically in its northern districts, with several cases in regions such as Kannur, Malapuram and Kasaragod, including a few successful ISIS sympathisers who managed to travel to West Asia and Afghanistan

in their quest to join the terror group.⁸⁰ In 2016, Rashid Abdulla, the leader of a group of 21 Indians from Kerala, including women and children, travelled to Afghanistan in the hope of joining ISIS. In June 2019, reports suggested that Abdulla—along with two other men, two women and four children—was killed in a US airstrike in Afghanistan. Most of the 21 members since 2016 have been reported killed in various airstrikes and bombings, and almost none as part of combat for the ISIS.⁸¹

“Operation Pigeon,” orchestrated by the Kerala state police, claims to have saved the lives of 350 youths by approaching them before they were radicalised via social media monitoring. The contours of radicalisation in Kerala are different, with the direct connections through the two million migrants working in the Gulf region of the local population paying a critical role in shaping both the radicalisation specific to this region and the kind of tools required to “de-radicalise” someone. Reports on the Kerala programme in the Indian press from 2018 suggest that Operation Pigeon was aimed at preventing youngsters from “falling prey to the propaganda of organizations such as Islamic State, Indian Mujahideen (IM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).”⁸² While this obfuscation of various groups under the “terrorism” umbrella may be accurate in a discussion regarding acts of terror, it is not so in terms of the ideological factors driving radicalisation.

For instance, the LeT, the IM and the ISIS have many ideological disagreements and often consider each other *kafirs* (non-believers) and oppositions. This conflict amongst terror groups with different ideologies is corroborated by the findings of investigations conducted by the Indian law enforcement into ISIS sympathisers in India, specifically in the context of the Kashmir issue. In one enquiry, on being asked about the lack of ISIS presence in the Valley, the individual responded that the Kashmir conflict was a fight between the non-

believers (Indian Army) and believers (LeT, Hizbul Mujahideen and other Pakistan-backed groups), and that the ISIS' ideology was irrelevant to the conflict, being predominantly about land and not Islam.⁸³ Thus, any effective ideological intervention must differentiate between the various narratives of Islamist jihad. Currently, this is under-studied in the Indian context, bringing the issue back to the lack of a much-needed structural clarity in such programmes. It also highlights the problem of a “big tent” understanding of radicalisation and deradicalisation. Islamist radicalisation is not a monolith, and using the same approach and toolbox to deradicalise both ISIS sympathisers and LeT sympathisers is bound to fail or yield problematic results. Finally, no data is available on the topic of how (if at all) radicalisation plays out in Indian prisons, specifically in theatres such as Kashmir.

Beyond the Programmes

Outside of deradicalisation programmes, both Kerala and Maharashtra have different approaches to localised cases and returnees (of which there are only a few cases in both states). The returning cases, of course, have greater involvement of Central agencies, e.g. the case of Areeb Majeed from Kalyan in Maharashtra, where Majeed and two others, Shaheem Tanki and Aman Tandel, travelled to Iraq as pilgrims to join ISIS. Majeed later approached the Indian embassy in Turkey, claiming to have lost his passport (which was taken by the ISIS). He was sent back to Mumbai, where he was arrested. While both Tanki and Tandel later died in ISIS-related incidents, Majeed became the only ISIS-returnee at the time and his case was used as a counternarrative strategy. The coverage of his story went far and wide, on how he lived in poor conditions and was made to do menial labour by the terror group, while also being subjected to racism—a story that contradicted the ISIS' bravado-laden propaganda videos available online.⁸⁴

Scholar Bibhu Prasad Routray classifies two distinct approaches in India: the “hard” approach for the “radicalised,” those who have returned from abroad and may have committed crimes and acts of terror as part of terror group; and the “soft” approach for the “misled,” those who may have shown sympathy or professed support for an act of terror or an ideology promoting terror. However, Routray raises concerns over the lack of clarity in how such a distinction is made.⁸⁵

Finally, one crucial aspect of deradicalisation is the building of counternarratives and stories that can deter those considering extremist ideologies and groups. For both Maharashtra and Kerala, the successful cases of deradicalisation also serve as counternarratives. While the approach to at least some of these narratives that have made it to the media is rather simplistic, they do seem to be effective. In some articles, attempts are made to create binaries and stories are embedded within stories to create these counternarratives.

The *Indian Express* series cited earlier is a good example of the same. One of the stories explained how the cases work, using the sub-heading “He Won’t Leave Us” and exploring the anguish of the family upon discovering that the son was inclined towards ISIS. The story portrays the dismay and disappointment of the parents, which resonates heavily with most Indians. The person’s wife is quoted as saying: “The day he told me he wanted to join IS, I was shocked and scared at the same time. What if he leaves without telling us? I just told him we won’t be able to live without him. But looking at his expression I understood that he won’t leave us and go.” The family and emotion centrality of this presentation does more than just illustrate a deradicalisation programme case study; it highlights the importance of family and community. In fact, a broad survey of similar articles in the media, including general reports of those classified as “sympathisers,” use the

female family protagonist (mother, wife, sister) for emotional leverage while constructing the counternarrative.⁸⁶

There is a tangible difference between Maharashtra and Kerala in terms of how the counternarratives are set out. While Maharashtrians tend to concentrate more on family and community, Keralites have a stronger focus on the theological perspective, with clerics taking a much more central role in the counternarrative. This corroborates the point made earlier in this paper, regarding the widely varying triggers for radicalisation across states as well as across different theatres of conflict.

CONCLUSION

Significant gaps have been observed in India's deradicalisation programmes, their intent and the weight they carry as a serious policy tool against terrorism and extremism. These programmes are largely backed by the Union government, with state governments responsible only for the practical design and implementation. Despite the launch of many independent state-led initiatives from 2015 onwards, deradicalisation programmes and institutionalised rehabilitation continue to be employed in theatres such as Kashmir, as well as against Maoists and other insurgencies in the country's Northeast.


However, there are several issues in both the design of the programmes and the intent with which they are run by the state police. One fundamental issue is that in a complex social ecology such as India, allowing the police and anti-terror infrastructure to take charge of deradicalisation programmes is inherently problematic. Moreover, for these programmes to be universally beneficial against extremism, they require urgent improvements. This paper makes the following recommendations for institutionalising deradicalisation programmes.

- **Transparency:** Currently, the only information available regarding the programmes is filtered and vetted by either the government (Union or state) or the police, which obscures transparency. The success and failure of deradicalisation cases must be audited by civil society as well, considering they are part of the design. This would offer a much-needed balance.
- **Community:** The current designs of the programmes are top-down, i.e. there is disproportionate involvement of police and law enforcement, as compared to NGOs, psychologists and economic players, which are considered secondary. Deradicalisation programmes must be more nuanced than their current versions. A distinction between pre-radicalisation and post-radicalisation must be developed, wherein civil society and community could take charge of the former (under the guidance of the police) and law-enforcement could tackle the latter.
- **Data:** One of the biggest challenges to studying the effects, successes and failures of deradicalisation programmes in India is the basic lack of data available to academics, researchers and policymakers. Consequently, security programmes that intervene in societies and communities go unchallenged with regard to the narratives that they create. This can distort programme results, as there is no scope for independent reviews. Indian states must increase engagements with research organisations, NGOs, Indian universities, religious institutions, and encourage the study of recidivism in terrorism and extremism (which may be different from traditional criminology). The government must also consider increased transparency in recidivism data, especially in light of examples such as Renard's work on Belgium.
- **Institutional Clarity:** The Union government, state government

and the law-enforcement bodies involved in deradicalisation seem to have a non-committal approach towards these programmes. The suitability and efficacy of these programmes may vary across states, depending on the police force and their counterterror strategies and approach to extremism and counter-extremism. Moreover, the police's singular leadership over such programmes is further cause for concern. For example, some 12 years after the 26/11 terror attack in Mumbai in 2008, the police force is yet to fully restructure itself; serving officials and those retired during 2010-18 hold extremely divergent views regarding activities such as deradicalisation programmes.⁸⁷ The post-26/11 structural shuffles may have also created divergences between bureaucracy and politicians, which also could affect the design and implementation of these programmes.

- **Framework flaws:** Since the rise of the ISIS in 2014, the frameworks of Indian programmes have been largely reactionary, targeting Islamist fundamentalism and extremism. However, current designs do not offer dedicated state and police capacity for these programmes. Moreover, extremism other than those originating from Islamist ideologies must also be incorporated to ensure that the programmes have a holistic approach. For example, in Germany, the focus is not restricted to tackling ISIS sympathisers and terrorists; the country also runs the longstanding EXIT-Deutschland programme aimed at reforming neo-Nazi radicals. In other Western nations as well, e.g. the US, Australia and European countries, far-right terrorism is increasingly being recognised as equally damaging as Islamist extremism.⁸⁸ Indian programmes, too, must evolve to take into account right-wing terror groups from other ideological backgrounds, such as Hindutva-driven terrorism or Hindu nationalism.⁸⁹

Deradicalisation and counterterrorism are distinct topics and issues. In India, which has faced cross-border terrorism and witnessed terror attacks in major cities, it is crucial that deradicalisation programmes be designed for efficacy and success. To this end, they must incorporate social context and nuance, which in turn must be recognised by the political and bureaucratic world. Insufficient understanding or half-hearted implementations could yield damaging results and long-term negative consequences, causing a loss of trust in governments and policy.

Thought, research and dialogue between various stakeholders are key to addressing the current gaps in deradicalisation programmes. The programmes must be built, run and strengthened according to India's societal, cultural and security contexts and sensibilities, involving multiple stakeholders and a cohesive and transparent approach. Finally, the Indian government must evaluate whether deradicalisation programmes are beneficial, beyond serving as a wholesome concept in the country's larger counterterror narrative. 

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