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Countering the Threat of Radicalisation

Theories, Programmes and Challenges

*Adil Rasheed**

In recent years, rising instances of home-grown terrorism, lone-wolf operations and growing polarisation within societies have upstaged the global military struggle against major transnational terrorist organisations. As the dissemination of radical ideas and related violence increases, over 40 governments around the world have decided to develop their own counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programmes, in keeping with their socio-political and cultural particularities. This article studies some of the counter-radicalisation theories, policies and programmes developed by various countries in recent years with the aim of facilitating further research to develop a comprehensive counter-radicalisation policy in India.

THE NEED FOR COUNTER-RADICALISATION PROGRAMMES

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and the US-led Iraq War of 2003, thousands of religious extremists and radical youths were arrested, convicted or imprisoned in various countries. As most of them could not be prosecuted for serious offences, it became problematic to keep them behind bars indefinitely and in order to mitigate the potential threat they might pose to society after their release.

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The problem became more acute after the Madrid bombings of 2004 and the London bombings of 2005, as governments found it difficult to explain how their own people had conducted acts of mass violence against fellow citizens. It was at this time that several governments launched separate 'countering violent extremism' (CVE) programmes to arrest the proliferation of radical and extremist ideologies in society by violent non-state actors. This process of an individual's transformation from a moderate, law-abiding citizen into an active anti-state extremist is referred to as 'radicalisation into violent extremism' (RVE),¹ or more commonly as 'radicalisation'.

As the global jihadist threat widened, several countries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia developed their own counter-radicalisation programmes to encourage disengagement and de-radicalisation of the vulnerable sections of their respective societies. Many radicalised people and groups were put under surveillance and, in some cases, referrals were made for their counselling and training courses.

Again, as most counter-radicalisation programmes were designed and developed to counter radical Islamist threat, they were not able to equally focus on the problem of radicalisation found in other communities. Thus, global counter-radicalisation measures have sometimes been unjustly criticised for being primarily counter-jihadist in their orientation.

Initially, there was confusion over the methodologies and terminologies used in counter-radicalisation programmes as these were developed separately in different countries and were subject to constant revision. The confusion over the terminologies was not just a matter of syntactical nuance, as each one of them had to denote specific set of concepts and measures in different stages of the lactic cycle of radicalisation, with characteristic behaviour, tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs).

Thus, there was even a lack of consensus over the meaning of 'anti-radicalisation', 'counter-radicalisation' and 'de-radicalisation', with all three terms sometimes being used interchangeably. Gradually, unanimity emerged. Now, the term 'anti-radicalisation' is mainly associated with programmes aimed to protect segments of population that have only recently come under the influence of radicalisation and also covers measures related to detection and developing deterrence.

On the other hand, 'counter-radicalisation programmes' target those radicalised elements that may have not yet joined forces of violent

extremism or terrorism and can be rescued before they attempt the dangerous transition. The measures suited to counterterrorism operations include disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.²

The third category pertains to 'de-radicalisation programmes', devised for those individuals who may have already aided, abetted or committed acts of violent extremism. Thus, these measures cover post-surrender and post-detention programmes. However, all these three sets of programmes still generically fall under 'counter-radicalisation'.

Many of these behaviour modification programmes under the above-mentioned categories cover ideological or religious counselling, vocational education, recreational and psychological rehabilitation, inter-religious or inter-communal discourse programmes, post-release surveillance and care, as well as involvement of family members and civil society to foster rehabilitation.

Although, theories on social movements and social psychology have tried to explain the causes and processes related to radicalisation since the 1960s, and various governments have intermittently employed de-radicalisation measures in the last century, the discipline of counter-radicalisation developed into a major anti-terrorism discipline only after the post-9/11 global campaign against terrorism, particularly with reference to countering the enormous and growing threat of jihadist radicalisation.

It is noteworthy that counter-radicalisation studies and programmes have extended the scope and impact of counterterrorism operations beyond conventional security and military paradigms by delving into ideological, religious, socio-political, economic and, at times, historical vectors. It is contended that this approach is far more effective than the hitherto mainly militaristic and security-centric response to terror, which has often proven inadequate and, in some cases, counterproductive.

The central premise of most counter-radicalisation programmes is that terrorism spreads in societies because of the extremely divisive and violent propaganda and indoctrination carried out by various extremist institutions and terrorist organisations. Thus, British Prime Minister David Cameron avers that the 'root cause' of terrorism is the extremist narrative and not so-called inequities of poverty or foreign policy.³

However, the over-emphasis on countering extremist ideological discourse by several contemporary counter-radicalisation programmes has been criticised by various counterterrorism experts and academicians, who have questioned the empirical basis for linking extremist ideology

with terrorist actions as well as the preoccupation of counter-radicalisation programmes with Islamist radicalisation, at the expense of extremism found in other communities.

IS 'RADICALISATION' THE RIGHT WORD?
THE DIFFICULTY WITH DEFINITION

To some academicians and anti-terrorism experts, the term 'radicalisation' in and of itself is problematic. It is contended that most revolutionaries of modern political thought, even the proponents of individual liberty and human rights (like Thomas Jefferson and Nelson Mandela), were radical leaders espousing violence to achieve their revolutionary goals. Therefore, radicalism that opposes conventional beliefs, hackneyed and oppressive societal values and state hegemony has often been a force for good and has promoted human progress. Therefore, it has been argued that the branding of obscurantist and regressive ideologies—such as those espoused by contemporary terrorist groups—as radical is misleading.

Again, it is averred that the identification of an ideology and group by any government and society as being radical or moderate is somewhat arbitrary and depends on the context leading to its emergence. Some civil society activists contend that the use of counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation programmes by some governments is outwardly an exercise directed against the menace of violent extremism, but carry a hideous agenda of curtailing civil liberties and human rights in order to exert greater state control and hegemony over various facets of individual thought, liberty and private enterprise.⁴

To some counterterrorism experts like Arun Kundnani and Alex P. Schmid, the very concept of radicalisation has gained currency because it is viewed as being directed against Islamic extremism and therefore, it has 'become a political shibboleth despite its lack of precision'.⁵ Some point out that the word 'radicalisation' came into its present use following the 7/7 terror attacks in July 2005 and that the practice of searching radicalised individuals in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) has led to so-called 'Muslim McCarthyism'.⁶

Thus, Arun Kundnani notes:

Following the neoconservative paradigm, models of radicalisation tend to assume that extremist religious ideology drives terrorism. In addition, as with the neoconservatives, they focus overwhelmingly

on acts of violence carried out by Muslims and rarely address political violence and terrorism more generally...For some radicalisation analysts, the role of extremist religious ideology in this process is akin to a 'conveyor belt' that mechanically pushes an individual into terrorism. This implies that, once someone has adopted the extremist ideology, terrorism is likely to follow sooner or later...Whatever nuances are added to the picture, the underlying assumption in radicalisation models is usually the same: that some form of religious ideology is a key element in turning a person into a terrorist. This analysis has underpinned counter-terrorism policy-making in the UK since 2006 and led to viewing certain forms of religious ideology as an early warning sign of potential terrorism.⁷

Several terrorism experts contend that the process of ideological indoctrination is not the main cause behind the transformation of a peace-abiding individual into a violent extremist or terrorist. Empirical evidence shows that terrorists often never receive formal indoctrination and do not undergo a process of radicalisation before joining an extremist or terrorist organisation. Many of them are usually drawn into radical organisations for a variety of other reasons, such as familial ties or criminal affiliations.⁸ Conversely, opinion polls conducted over decades reveal that even when large sections of a population claim to be supportive of radical ideologies and extremist violence, they never actively support or participate in carrying out acts of terrorism.⁹

Olivier Roy, the noted French scholar of Islamic society, states that even jihadi terrorism

shares many factors with other forms of dissent, either political or behavioral. Most radicals have broken with their families; they don't mention traditions of Islam or fatwas, but rather act on an individual basis and outside the usual bonds of family, mosque and Islamic association. Modern Islamic terrorism is an avatar of ultra-leftist radicalism—its targets are the same as the traditional targets of the ultra-left—US imperialism, symbols of globalization.¹⁰

Thus, it is contended that terrorists are often radicalised by factors like sense of political alienation and disenfranchisement, perceived persecution and discrimination and socio-cultural and psychological factors, rather than the extreme ideals of a radical ideology *per se*.¹¹ As John Horgan notes: 'The relationship between radicalisation and terrorism is poorly understood...Not every radical becomes a terrorist and not every terrorist holds radical views.'¹²

Such conceptual confusions surrounding the term 'radicalisation' and its association with terrorism has led to a critical wariness among some experts in recent times as attempts at reaching an acceptable and comprehensive definition of the term has proven unsuccessful. For example, Belgian counterterrorism expert Rik Coolsaet, part of an Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation established by the European Commission, has described the very notion of radicalisation as 'ill-defined, complex and controversial'.¹³ Again, an Australian team of analysts recently concluded that 'about the only thing that radicalisation experts agree on is that radicalisation is a process. Beyond that there is considerable variation as to make existing research incomparable.'¹⁴

In response to such criticism, it should be noted that radical ideological propaganda and indoctrination is the principal means for the justification and dissemination of violent and destructive campaigns conducted by various forces of terrorism and violent extremism. The fact remains that terrorist organisations concoct religious and ideological reasons to destabilise the global socio-political order. Clearly, this menace needs to be confronted at religious, ideological and socio-political levels, which underscores the necessity of developing and conducting effective counter-radicalisation programmes. There is obviously no denying that several factors, such as real or perceived discrimination or persecution, poverty, unemployment, corruption and sectarianism, play a part in catalysing the process of radicalisation, but it only makes sense that the rationale used by terrorist organisations to defend the indefensible needs to be countered in what is essentially an ideological war.

Still, it is under this cloud of conceptual and ideological dissonance within academic circles that governments around the world have struggled to develop cogent and effective counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation programmes, or effectively coordinate their activities in charting a coherent global campaign against the growing menace of violent extremism.

In the wake of differences over the proper meaning and definition of the term 'radicalisation', various state intelligence agencies and security services have come up with their own 'working definitions' for radicalisation and its related concepts. Thus, the Dutch Security Service (AIVD) defines radicalisation as: 'Growing readiness to pursue and/or support—if necessary by undemocratic means—far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a threat to, the democratic order.'¹⁵ Under its CONTEST counterterrorism strategy, the UK's Home Office

has referred to radicalisation simply as: ‘The process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups.’¹⁶

CAUSES AND CATALYSTS OF RADICALISATION

Since the late 1960s, academic research has grappled with the question of the causes and reasons behind a person adopting beliefs and behaviours that lead him or her to engage in subversive or terrorist activities. Several studies have attempted an answer by analysing terrorist activity at different levels: individual, group, network, organisation, mass movement, socio-cultural context and international/inter-state contexts.¹⁷

For a long time, scholars concentrated on the reasons for a person’s transformation into a violent extremist at the psychological and individual levels. However, its causes are now viewed not just at individual or psychological levels but also at social and larger geopolitical levels:¹⁸

1. *Micro level*, that is, the causes and catalysts leading to the radicalisation of an individual at the psychological level pertain to identity problems, failed integration with society, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), stigmatisation and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of (vicarious) revenge. Closely attached to these problems are problems of confusion caused by inherent crisis of splintered identity and loyalty (patriotism versus communal loyalty), the clash of values (liberal versus conservative, state philosophy versus religious/ideological indoctrination), childhood abuse/disturbed adolescence, low self and low social esteem, alienation and de-individuation, rebel identity and counterculture, cognitive readjustment of self-sanction to violence, misanthropic and sociopathic tendencies, etc.¹⁹
2. *Meso level* refers to the radical milieu in the immediate social environment (‘the supportive or even complicit social surround’) which fosters the radicalisation of individuals or groups, thereby leading to the formation of terrorist organisations.²⁰ At this communal or societal level, there is a heightened sense of religious or racial ethnocentricity, xenophobia, perceptions of injustice and discrimination, heightened sense of desperation and disenfranchisement, low personal and social esteem,

extreme historical memory and ideological indoctrination, sense of betrayal, breakdown of law and order, growing polarisation of society, the decline of scientific temper, proliferation of rabid extremist thought and tendencies in society, etc.

3. *Macro level*, that is, role of national politics and governance issues within a country or geopolitical events around the world in the radicalisation of public opinion. Such issues could include tense majority–minority relationships, the lack of socio-economic opportunities for certain class or community of people, national or international wars or conflicts involving religious or ideological issues, the growing influence of transnational terrorist radicalisation and recruitment activities, proliferation of failed states and civil strife, etc.²¹

We can add to these the usual litany of so-called ‘root causes’ behind terrorism, which would serve the process of radicalisation just as well. Some of these ‘root causes’ were enumerated by spokespersons from around 170 countries in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US. A sample is listed next:²²

1. Communities struck by *poverty*, disease, illiteracy, bitter hopelessness (Armenia).
2. Social *inequality*, marginalisation and exclusion (Benin).
3. Political oppression, extreme poverty and the *violation of basic rights* (Costa Rica).
4. *Injustices*, misery, starvation, drugs, exclusion, prejudices, despair for lack of perspectives (Dominican Republic).
5. *Oppression* of peoples in several parts of the world, particularly in Palestine (Malaysia).
6. *Alienation* of the young in situations of economic deprivation and political tension and uncertainty, sense of injustice and lack of hope (New Zealand).
7. *Rejection of the West* with all its cultural dimensions (Palestine).
8. Hunger, poverty, deprivation, fear, *despair*, absence of sense of belonging to the human family (Namibia).
9. Situations which lead to misery, exclusion, reclusion, the injustices which lead to growing *frustration*, desperation and exasperation (Senegal).

For its part, *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research* identifies more than 50 different alleged ‘causes’. Some of the causes mentioned are the following:²³

1. Terrorism is rooted in *political discontent*.
2. A culture of *alienation* and *humiliation* can act as a kind of growth medium in which the process of radicalisation commences and virulent extremism comes to thrive
3. A collective or individual *desire for revenge* against acts of repression may be motive enough for terrorist activity.
4. The failure to mobilise popular support for a radical political programme may trigger the decision to employ terrorism in order to engineer a violent confrontation with the authorities.
5. Modern terrorism occurs because modern circumstances make terrorist methods exceptionally easy.
6. The choice of terrorism represents the outcome of a learning process from own experiences and the experiences of others.

RADICALISATION PROCESS: THE CHARACTER ARC OF A TERRORIST

In spite of all this literature and after about 40 years of research into the study of terrorism, research into the process of ‘radicalisation’ into violent extremist action is ‘conceptual rather than empirical’ and remains ‘poorly understood’.²⁴ However, early assumptions that the ‘aberrant behaviour’ was the consequence of some mental or personality abnormality have been convincingly debunked. Although the exact mechanisms and processes of radicalisation remain a matter of debate, it is clear that a different set of pathways and circumstances affect people in different stages of life in transitioning to the dark side. Thus, radicalisation is not viewed as ‘the product of a single decision but the end result of a dialectical process that gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time.’²⁵

Again, the process of radicalisation cannot be inextricably linked to recruitment in violently extreme or terrorist organisations. For example, Marc Sageman avers that there is no recruitment per se to militant jihad or to Al-Qaeda. He presents a study that shows that nearly 90 per cent ‘join the jihad’ through friendship and kinship.²⁶ However, it is also true that terrorist organisations engage in radicalisation programmes through propaganda not only to defend their indefensible actions to themselves and others but to influence vulnerable minds towards accepting their

points of view and to draw recruits. Terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) brazenly urge Muslims around the world, through their online literature and social media websites, to migrate to territories under the group's control and 'join the jihad' as part of a so-called religious obligation.

Theories on the Radicalisation Process

Over the years, scholars have propounded various theories to explain the process of radicalization that changes a person from being an average citizen to a violent extremist, but many contemporary researchers often question the conclusions of these theoretical frameworks in the contemporary context. Still, there are some noteworthy theoretical approaches, such as those derived from the social movement theory, social psychology and conversion theory, which remain useful in exploring the processes and the drivers of radicalisation.

The Social Movement Theory (SMT)

The basic idea behind this theory, which was propounded in the 1940s, is that radical social movements rise from strained socio-political conditions which fester in a mass sentiment of discontent. People join such movements as they passively succumb to overpowering social forces. In contemporary times, a new school of SMT has come up with the so-called 'framing theory'.²⁷ According to it, the ideologues of any radical movement attempt to frame messages in ways that, to them, will best resonate with the interests, attitudes and beliefs of their potential constituency.

According to its proponents, the framing theory is useful for understanding radicalisation because it focuses on processes, not socio-demographics, and because it emphasises a mid-level analysis. Applying this framework, an important study was conducted by Quintan Wiktorowicz which looked into the way people came to join extremist Islamist groups in Western countries.²⁸ By employing the SMT framework, Wiktorowicz presented a four-component development model for radicalisation. The study found that many Westerners and educated people who become radicalised initially showed an openness to accepting new and differing worldviews (called 'cognitive opening'). Soon, they see in a religion or a particular socio-political ideology a life of significance and meaning, and eventually accept a group's narrative and ethos, which to them 'makes sense' (termed as 'frame alignment').

Eventually, through a process of greater interaction with members of an extremist group, they become fully indoctrinated into the movement. In fact, this process is quite similar to the process of any individual's conversion to any religion or socio-political group or organisation.

Social Psychology

Many theories of social psychology shed remarkable insight into how individuals become radicalised once they get associated with an extremist or terrorist organisation and commit acts which they could not have imagined committing on their own. According to these theories, the process of change into violent extremism starts after an individual joins an extremist organisation. For over two decades, Clark McCauley²⁹ has been one of the most consistent voices of social psychology in the field of terrorism studies. Scholars like McCauley have applied various tenets of social psychology to find out that 'individual opinions and attitudes tend to become more extreme in a group context. Group opinions and attitudes also tend to be more extreme than those held by its individual members, a phenomenon often referred to as "group polarization."³⁰

Again, individuals feel less responsible for 'group' actions as they diffuse accountability over the entire group. Thus, there is a greater disregard for carrying out immoral and extremely violent actions. This 'diffusion and displacement of responsibility' often leads to the so-called 'de-individuation' of a horrible act by the perpetrator and the person often points to the dubious moral justification learnt from the group and worse, by blaming the victim or by speaking of them in dehumanising terms. In psychological terms, this tendency is known as 'the cognitive readjustment of self-sanction'.³¹

In addition, radical and socially isolated groups tend to deepen 'in-group/out-group bias' and exercise greater control on the behaviour of members.³² Often people join certain radical groups because of perceived rewards or gains, acceptance and recognition within a community, and not out of any strong ideological convictions towards the philosophy of the group.

Thus, the reasons for joining extremist groups are dynamic and variable for different individuals. For some, social affiliation or personal sense of meaning and life purpose may be the reason, while others may find a sense of adventure and excitement appealing. Many young recruits may come from broken homes or a family having a criminal background. They may be taking revenge on larger society that did not accept them

and so, these people develop a rebel identity and develop a counterculture by joining the ranks of these groups.

Conversion Theory

Focusing on the psychology of the individual going through the radicalisation process and given the fact that many contemporary extremist movements follow an avowedly religious ideology or cause, many theorists have studied the process of religious conversion itself (which can happen with people converting from outside the religion or from within the religious community itself to a more radically extreme version followed by a radical group).

On the basis of decades of study into developmental or stage models in the study of religious conversions, Lewis Rambo has developed a seven-component model which has been found among most extremist converts.³³ Researchers have also found several 'conversion motifs' that lead a person to adopt a new religious ideology, with or without direct external influence. These include: 'intellectual motif' (by reading books, through the Internet, television or other media); 'mystical' (which relates to personally transformative epiphany or moment of supposed spiritual enlightenment); 'experimental' (where a seeker connects with a group to find an identity of group membership); 'affectional or romantic' (where conversion results either from strong emotional sentiment, attachment or bonding); 'revivalist' (refers to a transformative experience occurring in the context of a crowd); and 'coercive' (where people capitulate to group pressure and influences into accepting a radical viewpoint).³⁴

After several decades of intense study, terrorism experts have found no single definitive process or profile for identifying a prospective radical extremist or terrorist, in terms of his or her demographic or socio-economic background. In fact, Walter Laqueur states that the quest for a 'general theory' is misguided because: 'Many terrorisms exist and their character has changed over time and from country to country.'³⁵

This is also applicable to the radicalisation process itself. In spite of several attempts to articulate a general sequence of stages or issues that might apply across and within group types, there is no clear answer on how people come to adopt violent extremist ideologies to justify their use of terrorist violence.

In recent times, researchers like John Venhaus have conducted an in-depth study of the life and motivations of Al-Qaeda fighters. Based on

interviews and personal histories of 2,032 ‘foreign fighters’ who sought to affiliate with jihadi groups, Venhaus found that ‘they all were looking for something...they wanted to know who they are, why they matter, and what their role in the world should be. They have an unfulfilled need to define themselves which Al-Qaeda offers to fill.’³⁶ Thus, he categorised most radicalised jihadi recruits into four categories:

1. *The Revenge Seeker*: Highly frustrated and angry militant, seeking to commit violence against certain people, group or entity, whom he or she believes are at fault.
2. *The Status Seeker*: A social misfit seeking recognition and esteem by joining a militant organisation.
3. *The Identity Seeker*: Driven by a need to belong or be part of something meaningful, which would define the person’s identity.
4. *The Thrill Seeker*: The thrill and adventure seekers were found to be less than 5 per cent of the lot, whose main motivation in joining a terrorist group is to pursue excitement, adventure and glory.

It would be wrong to rigidly compartmentalise the types as there is often a great deal of overlap across all these categories.

For their part, McCauley and Moskalenko³⁷ have classified individual mechanisms of radicalisation in the following ways: individual radicalisation through personal grievance, through political grievance; gradual process of radicalisation through association with terrorist group (the slippery slope); radicalisation through love or emotional bond with radicals; radicalisation caused by a destabilising life event (a real or perceived injustice or being a victim of violence or oppression); and radicalisation to seek life purpose, adventure or status among outlaws.

REVERSING RADICALISATION: THE GLOBAL RESPONSE

About 40 countries in the world are currently running various indigenously developed anti-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programmes and campaigns. These can be broadly categorised into 10 key categories:³⁸

1. *Engaging and working with civil society*: As a government may not always have the resources to counter radicalisation and to stop violent extremism from spreading, civil societies and local communities can bring to bear a range of tools and informally

reach out to a wider population. In fact, working with communities and civil society enhances trust and transparency and strengthens social cohesion. Therefore, several countries have developed programmes to engage local communities in efforts to counter radicalisation processes. One such programme is Norway's Exit Project (established in 1997), which seeks to support young people who want to disengage with or leave radical racist or other violent extremist groups (for example, neo-Nazi groups).³⁹ Meanwhile, the Russian government has set up consultative organisations for enhancing cooperation with civil society groups in order to promote inter-ethnic relations and prevention of extremism, xenophobia and ethnic conflicts at regional and local levels. For its part, Singapore is fostering engagement with religious minorities to discredit and debunk the false propaganda by extremist organisations.⁴⁰

2. *Prison programmes*: The incarceration of violent extremists and terrorists in prisons has led to serious issues for various countries. Highly radicalised extremists have found ways of turning prisons into their own training camps. This has raised the issue of whether it is better to separate such extremists from other inmates or to allow them to mix freely with others. 'Allowing violent extremists to mix freely has carried serious costs in allowing them to seek out and successfully recruit fellow prisoners but evidence also shows that segregating extremists in separate blocks has allowed them to maintain an organizational hierarchy and hone their operational skills.'⁴¹

Saudi Arabia has gone to the extent of establishing new and special prisons for violent extremists, which not only separates them from regular detainees but also separates them from each other in individual cells. Several other countries have developed similar facilities that aim to prevent prisons from becoming breeding grounds for terrorism and a place for recruitment. It is to be noted that most of the top leadership of the ISIS, including Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, were incarcerated in Camp Bucca in Iraq, which had veritably turned into a training camp for the nascent terror organisation in its early days.⁴² In addition, various prisons have been running several de-radicalisation programmes, such as in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, which provide psychological counselling, religious counselling and correct religious teaching,

vocational training and other prison programmes that could help prisoners disengage themselves from radical groups and join public life as law-abiding citizens once they leave prisons.

3. *Education programmes:* Education features prominently in counter-radicalisation programmes developed by various countries, given the important role of schools and educational establishments in promoting the values of non-violence, peaceful coexistence and tolerance. In multicultural UK, for example, authorities work closely with providers of education at all levels. This has resulted in the teaching in schools of subjects that promote intercultural understanding and citizenship. Through schemes like ‘Children’s Plan’, state officials engage directly with head teachers in order to ensure their access to all forms of support needed, as well as ensuring support for young, vulnerable people who may be exposed to violent extremist influences.⁴³ In Austria, school curricula and religious education classes instruct against intolerance as part of civic education.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Belgian educational authorities have designed educational programmes to inform pupils and parents about the dangers pertaining to violent extremism and terrorism, and have also developed special educational programmes to combat violent extremist beliefs and promote tolerance and coexistence.
4. *Promoting alliance of civilisations and intercultural dialogue:* Several initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue and understanding to counter radicalisation have been launched by various countries around the world. For instance, New Zealand’s efforts to counter violent extremism has led it to co-sponsor ‘Asia-Pacific Interfaith Dialogue’ that brings together 15 representatives of the major faith and community groups in the Southeast Asian and South Pacific regions. Similarly, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with Islamic charities, launched the ‘Montreux Initiative’ in 2005⁴⁵ to help counter extreme ideologies. In Thailand, moderate Muslim organisations from abroad are being invited to exchange views and ideas with local religious leaders in order to enrich an understanding of Islam and promote true religious teaching. Thailand has also played a significant role in supporting Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation (Indonesia, 2004), the Asia–Middle East Dialogue (AMED) and the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM)

Interfaith Dialogue,⁴⁶ and it has cosponsored the Informal Meeting of Leaders on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace during the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly. Italy's Ministry for Youth and Sport, jointly with the Ministry of Interior, set up a Youth Advisory Board in 2006 for religious and cultural dialogue.

5. *Tackling economic and social inequalities*: Although empirical research does not show any direct link between economic and social inequalities and the incidence of terrorism or violent extremism, with terrorists and extremists coming from all economic backgrounds, several countries have undertaken policies to tackle social and economic discrimination against minority communities. For example, the Netherlands has introduced several schemes for youths belonging to certain sections of society, susceptible to the influence of radicalisation, to have fair prospects of employment in the labour market. The government also provides language training to communities of foreign origin and is facilitating the schooling and education of the young belonging to these poor communities.⁴⁷ Algeria provides direct financial and welfare support to victims of violent extremism, whereas Saudi Arabia and Malaysia provide tuition fees, medical treatment and financial support for food and clothing. Malaysia even looks after the families of the detainees.⁴⁸ This helps in deterring other members of a radical's family from joining the ranks of extremist groups.
6. *Countering radicalisation on the Internet*: Terrorist organisations have successfully taken advantage of the great benefits of the Internet—low cost, ease of access, lack of censorship or regulations in most countries, vast audience and fast communication and flow of information—in order to disseminate their message of hate and gain more recruits.⁴⁹ Many governments have sought to intervene in this matter through censorship, monitoring and counter-propaganda programmes. The UK government is now supporting mainstream voices to articulate a moderate understanding of various religions in the country. One example is the government's active support and encouragement for the 'Radical Middle Way' project,⁵⁰ where young Muslims can access a wide range of views and opinions from all the major Muslim schools of thought. Meanwhile, Nigeria conducts forums and

conferences on combating terrorism through the Internet. The Singapore government encourages moderate religious scholars and teachers to launch websites which carry arguments that rebut violent extremist teachings and beliefs.⁵¹

7. *Legislation reforms:* Several countries have introduced legislation that prohibit the dissemination of extremist literature, the delivery of hate speeches and incitement to racism, xenophobia and violence. Canada is one of the earliest countries to have enacted a law criminalising incitement to extremist violence (1985) and hate crimes.⁵² France has also enacted laws against groups that promote discrimination, hatred and violence towards a person or a group of people based on their ethnic origin or religious, racial or ideological affiliation.⁵³ Algeria has used its legislation to create a national consensus and reconciliation programme. Thus, the president is able to pardon and/or reduce the sentences of individuals who have been convicted of committing violent extremist acts if they have not committed mass murder, rape or were involved in causing explosions in public places.
8. *Rehabilitation programmes:* Several countries around the world have initiated rehabilitation programmes that de-radicalise detainees charged with crimes of violent extremism in order to reintegrate them into society once their prison term ends. For example, Saudi Arabia has designed a special programme—Al-Ria'ya (translated as 'care')—which transfers detained extremists to specially designed facilities. This programme provides psychological counselling and correct religious education that teaches tolerance and moderation. Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia have their own set of religious counselling programmes and other de-radicalisation measures.
9. *Developing and disseminating information:* Several countries have developed close cooperation with each other in conducting counter-radicalisation programmes, and some states in Europe have developed integrated information systems on those involved in making hate speeches and incitement to terrorism, both inside and outside the European Union. Most notably, the Italian Central Directorate of Prevention Police has recently launched a project with the European Group of Six relating to the sharing and analysis of information on the movement of so-called 'itinerant preachers'.⁵⁴

10. *Training of agencies involved in counter-radicalisation policies:* Some countries have introduced training and qualification programmes for their officials and community workers involved in counter-radicalisation programmes. The US, Canada and Belgium conduct special training programmes for their police and law enforcement agencies in matters related to special aspects of their community's religious and cultural sensibilities and the way investigations against extremism should be conducted by taking members of a religious community into confidence. In 2003, Norwegian Police Security Service set out police personnel to identify activities related to the radicalisation of youth by right-wing extremists and to carry out 'preventive conversations' with youth from falling prey to violent extremism.⁵⁵

Saudi Prevention, Rehabilitation and Post-release Care (PRAC) Programme

In the aftermath of a wave of terrorist attacks beginning in 2003, Saudi Arabia launched its own indigenously developed form of counter-radicalisation campaign. The Saudi approach has been to combat intellectual and ideological justifications provided by violently extreme jihadist organisations for carrying out terrorist attacks. The Saudi strategy consists of three interconnected programmes aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and post-release care.⁵⁶ Although the jury is out over the success of the Saudi counter-radicalisation programmes, they are said to have inspired similar campaigns in other countries facing the threat, including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regards extremists as victims of an 'evil ideology', and considers many extremists as well-intentioned men who wanted to do good deeds. By focusing on a correct understanding of religion, the state aspires to help 'misguided believers' return to the right path. The Saudi approach emphasises the defeat of the ideological infrastructure that supports political violence and the Saudi campaign is directed against *takfiri* (declaring people apostates) beliefs, rehabilitation of reclaimed offenders and post-release 'care' to prevent relapses. 'It takes on these challenges through time-tested Saudi policies such as co-optation, patronage and coercion.'⁵⁷

As part of the 'prevention' component of the strategy, hundreds of government-run programmes, implemented through the 'guidance

department' in the Ministry of Interior, are aimed at educating the public about Islamic extremism and its dangers to society.⁵⁸ In schools, universities and mass media, recognised religious scholars and authorities disseminate the 'right' religious understanding to confront extremist propaganda. 'The primary audience is not extremists themselves, but the larger population that may sympathize with extremists and those who do not condemn the beliefs that lead to extremism.'⁵⁹

When it comes to de-radicalisation of extremists, the government heavily relies on the importance of religious dialogue to address a detainee's misconceptions about Islam. However, in recent years, new emphasis is being laid on modifying a detainee's behaviour and not just a change in his or her religious beliefs. Thus, the programmes have diversified and cover classes and counselling on sharia, psychology, vocational training, sociology, history, Islamic culture, art therapy and athletics. Many of these centres have updated classes on history and culture to counter the growing influence of an alternative view of history and culture presented by Al-Qaeda. As mentioned earlier, the government has built special facilities (Al-Ria'ya programme) for the incarceration and de-radicalisation of extremists, separate from ordinary criminals detained in state prisons.

As part of its post-release programmes, the government has expanded the role of a detainee's family:

In addition to visiting during the program and providing post-release support, family members now provide input on how to design specialized programs for each detainee and inform how his progress is evaluated. Center staff also use sequenced trial releases with the families to observe how each party responds to the other, assess the individual undergoing rehabilitation, and determine whether family members will be capable of supervising him after release. This last element is critical to ensure the family can help prevent a formerly violent extremist from becoming a threat again.⁶⁰

PRAC also promotes a bond between detainee and a state-sponsored cleric to establish a new ideological framework through authority and trust. Then again, in order to address the social needs of a detainee, the Saudi government provides financial assistance in the form of lost salary, family health care and children's schooling during the detainee's incarceration.

After an impressive success initially, Saudi authorities accept recent setbacks in the face of a rise in the recidivism rate among 'de-

radicalised extremists' by as much as 10–20 per cent. In January 2009, authorities made the embarrassing announcement that at least 11 former Guantanamo detainees returned to terrorist activity after graduating from the Saudi programme.⁶¹ Still, Saudi Arabia has developed a counter-radicalisation programme that has its admirers around the world and the government continues to refine the process based on experience and fresh insights. One of its salient aspects is that the programme is not punitive in nature but is rather rehabilitative for the 'victims' of radicalisation.

The UK's Preventing Violent Extremism (*Prevent*) Strategy

The 5 million pound counter-radicalisation 'Prevent' strategy constitutes one of the four Ps that make up the British government's post-9/11 counterterrorism strategy,⁶² known as 'CONTEST': 'Prepare' for attacks; 'Protect' the public; 'Pursue' the attackers; and 'Prevent' their radicalisation in the first place. The policy was not very popular to begin with, but has become even more controversial after the current government under Prime Minister David Cameron revised it, with a new and more controversial approach.

In 2011, the British government introduced the new version as an alternative to the supposed failure of the previous policy that, according to the new Home Secretary Theresa May, was unable to separate a policy of integration from that of counterterrorism. In its critique to the earlier policy, the then newly elected Tory government averred that greater integration in itself was not sufficient for countering radicalisation, but a successful strategy was needed to confront the ideologies behind extremism and terrorism head on. Thus, 'Prevent' defines extremism as a 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for different faiths and beliefs'.⁶³

However, this values-based definition of ideology has been controversial and its critics claim it to be reflective of the political discourse of right-leaning European political parties that reject the concept of multiculturalism and see it as a failure. For example, Prime Minister David Cameron is being criticised by some leaders of the British Muslim community for arguing that Britons should confront multiculturalism with 'muscular liberalism'.⁶⁴ Thus, under 'Prevent',

the main shift in the government's strategy against radicalisation has been that it is targeting violent ideologies by asserting its own ideology and by not confronting violent religious or ideological organisations within the framework of their own avowed religious or ideological paradigms.

Therefore, it is similar to the Saudi PRAC in that it has taken an ideological 'war of ideas' approach to spearhead the counter-radicalisation campaign, but is different from it in that it does not seek to reclaim extremists by advocating the true or moderate teachings of their religion or ideology, but by insisting that the radicalised do not revert to their essential religious values but to British values of democracy and human rights.

Since 2011, 'Prevent' has seen conspicuous success in its counter-radicalisation campaigns. Its team for removing online extremist content has scrapped over 75,000 pieces of 'unlawful terrorist material' from the Internet.⁶⁵ The government further claims it has worked with more than 250 mosques and 50 religious groups and has distributed over 20,000 leaflets and posters in various languages, which urge people against travelling to Syria. Through its de-radicalisation programme called 'Channel', the government uses psychologists, social activists and religious experts to advise thousands of people considered susceptible to extremist ideas.⁶⁶

However, 'Prevent' has been the most controversial 'P' of the other four in the CONTEST programme and has become highly unpopular across large sections of the British Muslim community. Its detractors criticise it for its inability to define 'radicalisation', for singling out the Muslim community in Britain at the expense of British far-right white supremacist groups, for turning the former into a 'suspect' community, for its assertion that 'radicalisation' is the main driver of violent extremism and terrorism, for monitoring and 'spying' over the population and 'arbitrarily' referring people to de-radicalisation programmes, etc.

Some critics point out that the 40 million pound annual budget allocated for the programme has not been very useful and may have further polarised British population and pushed law enforcement into the 'pre-criminal' space. Others find Orwellian underpinnings that could pose a threat to the values of democracy and civil rights in the country.

EXTREMIST FICTION AND DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE
COUNTER-NARRATIVES

Insanity in individuals is something rare—but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.

– Friedrich Nietzsche⁶⁷

The subject of radicalisation cannot be discussed in the absence of identifying some of the radical ideologies that are fuelling the problem of violent extremism and terrorism in the world. In fact, the US administration under former President George W. Bush had itself renamed the so-called ‘war on terror’ with the slogan, ‘a global struggle against violent extremism’.⁶⁸

Most extremist and terrorist organisations of today are the offshoots of certain political and/or religious revivalist/reactionary movements that came into existence in recent centuries, mostly deemed deviant by the traditional schools of their faith or political schools of origin.⁶⁹ Thus, the global campaign against extremism and terrorism is to be understood as essentially a war against certain radicalised and politically motivated socio-political or crypto-religious movements and is not directed against any community or religion.

Much like the rise of anarchism, fascism and communism in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, the biggest threat to global peace and security in the early twenty-first century has come from extreme religio-political movements (particularly global jihadism).⁷⁰ After stripping religions of much of their spiritual trappings and mythological baggage, these crypto-religious movements have sought to remodel their faiths along the lines of modern political mass movements, and seek to establish theocracies based on their religious laws and precepts as an alternative to the mainly liberal, secular and democratic order of the international community.

Prominent among these extreme religious movements is the Islamism-inspired jihadist-Salafi movement (which began in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with its violent opposition to all schools of Islamic sharia, both Sunni and Shiite),⁷¹ Zionism (supported by modern Jews and even some Evangelical Christians of recent ‘dispensationalist’ orientations;⁷² opposed by all schools of Orthodox Judaism and Christianity) and the Shiite theocratic model based on Khomeini’s expansion of the concept of *Vilayat-e-Faqih*.⁷³

The Extremist Narrative

In order to justify their mixing of religion with politics and militarism, many of these extremist movements have concocted devious religio-political narratives which need to be carefully studied and analysed in order to then develop effective counter-narratives against them.

In this context, let us understand the nature and role of an extremist narrative. Extremist narratives do not encompass the core philosophy of a radical ideology, whose minutiae remain vague to most of its followers. It is also not a fully codified canon assembled in one place, but is diffuse and woven around supposedly 'inviolable' values, associated concepts and even smaller rationally constructed arguments. More important, it highlights the 'evils' and the 'shortcomings' of the rival communities or established order. Thus, a radical narrative refers to a series of justifications and arguments in defence of the supposed principles and values of an extremist ideology, and accusations against the prevailing order which necessitates its violent destruction.

Often, radical extremists begin by exposing a real or perceived flaw in the prevailing socio-political order, one that has a high possibility of resonating with the targeted section of a population. The purpose is to create a cognitive dissonance, particularly among the young, impressionable and vulnerable members of that community. Thereafter, other radical ideas are gradually introduced and slowly the full extremist dose is administered into the bloodstream of a neophyte recruit. It is this cleverly constructed emotional and rational exposition of dubious values and concepts that forms an extremist narrative, which eventually radicalises a credulous person into a full-blown extremist.

Narratives are of various kinds. Almost all radical ideologies follow the same set of narratives and, at times, they can be easily interchanged by just removing the idiomatic expressions and phraseology belonging to one with the other. Some of these narrative strands are as follows:

1. *The persecution complex:* To begin with, almost all extremist narratives are very high on emotional content and rather short on intellectual merit or historical accuracy. They overdramatise any real or perceived insult or injury to the community's religious and cultural identity, values and heritage at the hands of a foreign aggressor and evil collaborators from within the community.⁷⁴ There is always a feeling of grand conspiracy against the community that demands the need for decisive action

from the silent and insensate majority. Incontrovertibly, decisive action becomes a euphemism for acts of violence. This so-called conspiracy is often contextualised in historic, if not primordial, terms and an entire alternate historical narrative is developed in stark black-and-white paradigms.

2. *Nostalgia for an imagined past*: Most extremist narratives hearken back to an age of pristine purity when the supposedly persecuted religious community was at a presumed apogee of its spiritual and material achievements because of its proximity to the divine and its complete adherence to a sacred ethical code, in sharp contrast to the morally degenerate members of the day. To the Muslim extremists, for example, this was the time of the *Salaf* (the first three generations of Islam) from which Salafism derives its name. This nostalgia forces many of these organisations to try to reverse the course of history in order to take it back to ancient and medieval times.
3. *Myth of invincibility and bogey of martyrdom*: All extremist and terrorist organisations call members of their community to action against an existential threat to their community. They demand unquestioning loyalty to the leadership and a commitment to offer the supreme sacrifice for which they would be more than adequately compensated in the afterlife. In fact, ‘martyrdom’ is championed as the peak of a person’s spiritual ascension, a consummation devoutly to be wished. It is for this reason most violently extreme religious groups and terrorist organisations turn into death cults, even doomsday cults.⁷⁵
4. *Demonising ‘the Other’*: To all extremist organisations, truth is spelt with a capital T. They then separate the presumed untruth practised by other communities by demonising them as the ‘Other’ and by painting them with a broad black brush.⁷⁶ In waging a campaign against a so-called ‘enemy community’, they cannot afford to project the rival culture or people in 50 shades of grey as that would jeopardise their campaign against it.
5. *The supremacist and panacea construct*: Most extremist narratives envy the scientific growth and progress of the modern world and claim that their communities were the progenitors of science and civilisation. The modern world is said to have somehow stolen their pristine knowledge and technological prowess and has created a world of immorality, corruption and outright

decadence. Therefore, it is either the Aryan race, the Jewish intellect, or the Muslim faith which is projected as an invincible force which will ultimately prevail. Again, most extremists aver that they have answers to all the ills facing modern civilisation.

6. *The Armageddon and the blissful afterlife*: Many extremist groups depend on some dubious religious literature and reinterpret it to claim their own prominence in shaping their community's future. Some of them, such as the ISIS, imagine taking part in a prophesised end-of-the-world Armageddon by fancifully interpreting some Hadith literature. Again, the ultimate goal of all extremist movements is to achieve the blissful land of their dreams. For the radical Jews, it is Zion of the Mashiach; for Evangelical Christians, the 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom of Jesus; for fundamentalist Muslims, it is the Caliphate of Imam Mahdi and Eisa Maseeh; and even for the violently extreme communists, it is the utopia of a stateless society. These wonderful predictions of the future are meant to seduce the credulous into fighting for the community with overzealous optimism.

It is easy to develop convincing counter-narratives against most of these extremist ideological strands as they are usually based on weak or false religious traditions and ideological sources.

How to Develop Effective Counter-narratives

In order to develop effective counter-narratives, what is known as a 'strategic rhetoric', three components are considered useful, as enunciated by Aristotle in his great philosophical treatise, the 'Rhetoric'.⁷⁷ The first is the 'Ethos', which means the credibility of the actors or channels of communication delivering the message. For example, a government servant asking a radical to change his ways may not be as effective a communicator as a reclaimed terrorist or a religious scholar. The second component in any counter-narrative is the 'Logos', which means the message itself, its authenticity and how effective or rationally coherent it is in its claims.⁷⁸ The third aspect is 'Pathos', which refers to the deep emotional resonance and cultural connect in the language and cadence of the message in order to influence the target audience. These days, subtle ways of subliminal messaging has been developed into an art form, which extremist groups like the ISIS employ to great effect. Perhaps, it is time that anti-extremist counter-narratives also employ the art.

Clearly, any counter-narrative or public relations exercise needs to develop a variety of carefully formulated counter-narratives, developed by several experts on the subject, and needs to be disseminated through different agencies of transmission suitable for delivering the message to clearly designated sections of the target audience. For example, if we wish to spread the message against extremist organisations in the country, we would have to at least target the five usual channels of recruitment: places of worship and seminaries, centres of extremist organisations, community-dominated areas and forums, prisons, and cyberspace.

Here, let us also look into the various agencies that could be involved in delivering counter-radicalisation messages. These might include:

1. government agencies;
2. non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
3. media outlets, both print and electronic;
4. private sector organisations (particularly public relations and advertising companies);
5. Internet and social media campaigners;
6. victims of terrorism;
7. reformed extremists or reclaimed offenders;
8. religious leaders of eminence (both in India and abroad);
9. religious organisations;
10. anti-radical propaganda experts at schools, seminaries, jails, public institutions, etc; and
11. local community leaders for monitoring and informing government of any radical elements operating in the neighbourhood.

Types of Counter-narratives

Now, we come to the important types of counter-narratives that can be developed as effective tools of counter-radicalisation.⁷⁹

1. *Positive narrative*: Before developing counter-narratives to fight extremism, we need to first strengthen and reinvigorate the national narrative by propagating our core constitutional values of democracy, pluralism and secularism. We need to develop a national vision so that every citizen knows how he/she would benefit from and contribute to the country's goals so that they feel they have a stake in it.
2. *Amplify doctrinal and ideological fissures*: Some of the extremist narratives highlighted earlier reject orthodox schools of classical

religion. Therefore, their claims of religious legitimacy can be easily discredited by highlighting their doctrinal deviance.

3. *The semantics-savvy counter-narrative:* It is important that we do not use the words and terminologies of the extremists in our literature, let alone counter-narratives. For example, we better not use the word 'jihadis' for Muslim terrorists. On hearing this, the uneducated and impressionable Muslim believes that the so-called 'jihadis' are fighting a legitimate, religious war. Meanwhile, non-Muslims tend to get the idea that terrorism and jihad are synonymous and start hating Islam and Muslims. Instead of calling Muslim terrorists as jihadis, Mahmood Madani, the leader of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, calls them 'Fasadis' (seditionists). Similarly, Sheikh Tahirul Qadri calls all Muslim terrorists as the followers of the 'Khawarij', an outcast sect thrown out of the fold of Islam after its members had assassinated Caliph Ali. By dissociating the term jihadi from the description of the Muslim terrorist, we would discredit their campaign which is principally anti-Islamic. Therefore, the use of semantics is very important in any counter-radicalisation campaign.⁸⁰
4. *Strategic counter-narratives:* In times of extreme stress following a terror attack or communal violence, carefully prepared messages need to be delivered to stop large sections of the population and its communities from becoming polarised and radicalised by the incident.
5. *Ethical counter-narratives:* We need to disseminate the message that all religions are opposed to terrorism and that the Pope, the Great Sankaracharyas and the Imam of the Holy Kaaba have condemned the actions of all religious extremist and terrorist organisations.
6. *Specialised religious or ideological counter-narratives:* On specialised and controversial legal or history-related issues, top experts need to devise specific counter-narratives to be disseminated through various agencies. Some extremists speak against global economic and political systems and criticise it on scholastic grounds. Such narratives must be refuted by experts in the subject.
7. *Tactical counter-narratives:* Sometimes material that may discredit the leadership or members of extremist organisation should be used to make such groups unpopular.

8. *The humour and sarcasm narrative*: At times, the use of humour and sarcasm to make fun of extremist leaders, their mannerisms and their speeches could prove an effective way to bring down their popularity.
9. *Subliminal messaging*: Advertising agencies and filmmakers are experts in communicating subliminal messages to their audience. Their expertise should be used in disseminating counter-narratives.⁸¹

INDIA'S EFFORTS AT DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE COUNTER-RADICALISATION MEASURES

Although India has confronted insurgencies and terrorist campaigns by various radicalised regional and religious organisations in several parts of the country for decades, a comprehensive policy for combating such problems at the ideological and operational levels has not been developed, possibly as the causes of such threats have largely been socio-political in nature, and not driven by purely religious or ideological motivations. With the rise of militant Islamism, which seeks to project its own version of Islam as a revolutionary socio-economic and political antithesis to the modern geopolitical global world, the threat of radicalisation has gained utmost importance.

In this respect, India is 'working out a cohesive strategy to counter attempts at radicalization and recruitment', suitable in the Indian context.⁸² Various measures like counselling of 'vulnerable and radicalized' youths as well as their families and propagating 'moderate' interpretations of Islam to counter the Islamic State (IS) ideology of violent extremism are being developed. Various measures like an 'extremist counseling hotline', set up recently by Austria, has reportedly drawn the interest of Indian authorities.⁸³ The viability of the US' counter-radicalisation programmes focused on community outreach and the UK's Prevent and Channel programmes in the Indian context is being considered. It seems Indian authorities have been wary of introducing highly intrusive and controversial forms of surveillance and de-radicalisation measures, as they have recently proven quite controversial in countries like the UK.

At present, if the law enforcement agencies in India find an individual to be a highly radicalised person, they determine whether the person can be referred for de-radicalisation. The person receives counselling either by the police or scholars of the ideological or religious affiliation

to which the individual belongs. The person's activities are monitored to prevent recidivism. These measures are currently in place in the states of Maharashtra and Telangana.⁸⁴

Currently, the centre and state governments in India are building their own set of counsellors and religious experts, community leaders and elders, as well as civil society members to be engaged in the de-radicalisation process. Community outreach programmes by security agencies reaching out to schools and colleges, as well as the setting up of helplines, are being developed.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Based on the study, this article recommends the following contours for an effective and comprehensive counter-radicalisation programme for Indian administrative authorities:

1. The role of civil society can prove crucial in fighting the growing threat of radicalisation in India. The wider reach and informal approach of its programmes can prove more effective and garner greater trust among vulnerable communities than government-sponsored programmes. Civil society's role in countering radicalisation can foster a sense of belonging and shared identity and reduce real and perceived isolation among members of vulnerable communities and bridge internal community divisions. Thus, its role is vital in law enforcement, citizenship teaching, interfaith dialogue, cohesion activities, language tuition, anti-discrimination projects, myth busting, housing and integration policies, improving educational attainment, mentoring and developing role models.⁸⁶
2. There is a need to empower the moderate voice among all communities in order to separate radicals from the general population through effective home-grown community outreach programmes. Even-handedness in taking strict action against extremist organisations of all denominations is the need of the hour, even if they do not overtly engage in violent activities. Such organisations often function as fronts or breeding grounds for raising radical cadres.
3. Again, the singling out of any community for counter-radicalisation or de-radicalisation referrals would only prove counterproductive as it would lead to greater divisiveness and

radicalisation, something the programmes are supposed to confront in the first place. Extremism often feeds itself off on both sides of the spectrum and gradually squeezes out the moderate voice in an escalating standoff. Therefore, counter-radicalisation strategies should encompass all vulnerable communities in the country, unlike some aforementioned programmes in the West that have become highly controversial.

4. There is also the need to track down the channels for the funding of certain religious organisations that may be spreading the poison of radicalisation and the use of other forms of legal measures to curtail their actions aimed at fomenting communal discord or facilitating acts of violent extremism and terrorism.
5. At the administrative level, there is a need to check growing politicisation of religion across the political spectrum by stringent implementation of existing laws and strict compliance of the code of conduct during elections.
6. Instances of communal violence should not be taken lightly or dismissed as incidents typical to a united but dysfunctional family. India already has a highly radicalised population divided along communal and casteist lines. Serious thought must be given to preventing violent outbreaks, in times when foreign non-state actors are increasing their seditious activities in the country.
7. Public perception across various communities regarding fairness and impartiality of security agencies and the judicial system in times of communal violence needs to improve. When members of any community start losing faith in the country's law enforcement agencies, the community becomes more radicalised and some of its members start attacking state institutions itself and join foreign extremist groups.
8. In addressing the problems faced by the minority communities, one cannot neglect the legitimate concerns and problems faced by the so-called majority community. Political parties should thus be wary of giving precedence to national interest before indulging in so-called minority appeasement or majoritarian populism.
9. Anti-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation programmes should be developed based on the country's socio-cultural conditions and requirements. In this respect, more specialised wings in think tanks and relevant government

departments have to be developed and competent personnel and facilities have to be groomed for implementing the programmes in our prisons, religious seminaries, schools, colleges, etc., as far as possible.

10. There is a need to introduce religious studies as a secular academic discipline in our universities, so that the false religious indoctrination of foreign extremist groups through the Internet can be countered and authorities may not have to depend on biased, opinionated and quack religious scholars to frame the country's counter-narratives and de-radicalisation policies.
11. The importance of developing a strong counter-radicalisation presence in the cyberworld cannot be understated, particularly in the country's regional languages in which ISIS and Al-Qaeda are gradually spreading their message.
12. Smart, non-controversial policies to reverse the process of communal segregation in our cities and towns are in order. Again, community elders and leaders need to be involved for purposes of monitoring, surveillance and guidance of the young and impressionable members from falling into the trap of extremism.
13. There is a need to incorporate the subject of ethics in our school syllabi, which could teach universal values, such as respect for people of different religions or ways of life, the respect for women in society, the avoidance of indecent language and conduct (which is now becoming all too common in our social and political discourse), the importance of honesty against the evil of corruption and obviously, the dangers and horrors of violence and destruction. The problem is that there are too many socially challenged information technology nerds, engineering geeks and outright criminals joining the ranks of extremists these days, which perhaps needed proper ethical schooling to begin with.
14. At a general level, the country seems to be struggling to come up with a new national vision, a modern syncretism and cultural renaissance, a new composite identity that could define its character in the twenty-first century and beyond. As the materialistic angst caused by the modern world is forcing people to seek intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual solace, they are increasingly falling into the trap of fake god-men and terrorists. In the face of cultural challenges, incidents of extreme violence and bestiality are increasing, a problem that the British poet

W.H. Auden put succinctly: ‘When words lose their meaning, physical forces take over.’⁸⁷

As the threat of home-grown radicalisation in India increases, the country should remain prepared with carefully calibrated counter-radicalisation policy and programmes. The development of a carefully and comprehensively charted blueprint for an overarching counter-radicalisation policy—with the involvement of all central and state governments, important think tanks and experts related to the field, as well as influential leaders of all communities—specifically suited in the context of Indian socio-political and cultural realities would help in warding off a growing and intractable threat to India’s national security interests.

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