TERRORISM AS A GLOBAL THREAT TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Human rights are impacted by terrorism in both direct and indirect ways. Terrorism has become a major global danger to international security and human rights as it grows more pervasive and organized. Since the 1970s, terrorism has developed into more organized, financially stable, and coordinated forms that target thousands of civilians, who are frequently killed in kidnappings, murders, and sexual abuse all of which are serious violations of human rights. But even though it poses a direct threat to human rights, how some states and their agencies handle it is crucial to the effectiveness of counter-terrorism initiatives. Counter-terrorism measures that violate fundamental human rights hamper the development of effective and efficient counter-terrorism strategies. This is because most states have taken actions to fulfil their own interests at the expense of the very rights they claim to defend. Therefore, in order to create practical recommendations for protecting these rights through appropriate counterterrorism measures, a thorough investigation of how terrorism affects human rights is necessary. This article discusses how terrorism impacts human rights and offers a number of suggestive measures that might be put into place to mitigate some of these issues and safeguard human rights.

Keywords: Terrorism, Human Rights, Counter-terrorism, Development, Fundamental rights, international security.

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INTRODUCTION

The costs of terrorism are felt everyplace in the world, making it a widespread social issue. Nevertheless, no universal definition of terrorism has been established, and each state and international body is developing its own definition. The word "terrorism" was first used to refer to the Reign of Terror, the timeframe of the French Revolution from 5 September 1793 to 27 July 1794, when the Revolutionary Government implemented violence and severe actions against individuals believed to be opponents of the Revolution.[1] The difficulties of combating terrorism are not recent, and in fact, have a lengthy past. The use of terrorism by groups as a tool of politics and warfare dates back to ancient times, Falk points out that "in different forms, terrorism is as ancient as government and armed conflict, and as widespread." Terrorism is a pervasive social issue that lacks a distinct demographic profile, it aims for attention through their actions instead of seeking financial profit, which is typically the reason for conventional crime. Typically, conventional crimes occur within a country's boundaries, whereas terrorism, in contrast, often transcends borders and has an international impact, targeting regions crucial to their political and social beliefs or objectives. Modern terrorists employ various types of violence and indiscriminately attack civilians, military sites, and government officials, among others.[2]

Terrorism is a complete denial of liberty and civil liberties. It is real, prevalent, and complex, but it needs to be accurately assessed to prevent being undervalued or downplayed. The main responsibility of the state is to prevent and tackle crime while also upholding and safeguarding civil rights and fundamental freedoms. Nonetheless, there have been differences in techniques, sources, and weapons across its various forms. The detrimental impact of terrorism increases as methods to cause significant harm to society advance, and the dangers to the worldwide ecosystem escalate as weapons of mass destruction become more accessible.[3] This article, centres on terrorist violence and the dangers posed by non-State actors and the reactions of the global community, particularly States, regional bodies, and the United Nations system.

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[1] Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/18-04932_CT_Mod_01_ebook_FINALpdf.pdf (Last visited on Nov. 07, 2026).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Available at: https://studycorgi.com/human-rights-advocates-vs-terrorism-victims/ (Last visited on Nov. 07, 2026).

MEANING AND DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

The word Terrorism is derived from the Latin verb "terreo", meaning "to frighten" or "to cause terror".[4] Thus, the term Terrorism is commonly defined as the systematic use of violence and terror to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives. It is characterized by coercing or intimidating governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.[5]

In United Kingdom, section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2000, defines terrorism as the use or threat of specified actions (such as serious violence, property damage, endangering life, health/safety risks, or electronic system disruption) designed to influence government bodies or intimidate the public to advance a political, religious, racial, or ideological cause.

As per the Indian legislation,[6] terrorist act means an action committed with explosives, firearms, biological agents, or criminal force to threaten India's unity, integrity, security, or sovereignty, or to strike terror among the population. This includes acts aimed at overawing the government, causing public functionary deaths, or kidnapping individuals to compel governmental action.

Therefore, based on above definitions terrorism denotes violent or life-endangering acts, or threats, intended to compel governments or frighten populations for political, religious, or ideological reasons; India considers threats to unity, sovereignty, and economic safety.

IMPACT OF TERRORIST ACTIVITIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

A key motivation behind the significant efforts to fight terrorism is its impact on human rights. Terrorism greatly affects the right to life, individual safety, and liberty. It also weakens governments, posing a threat to security and peace, while compromising social and economic development, thus hindering individuals from fully realizing their human rights. Criminal activities conducted by terrorist groups infringe upon the human rights that every person deserves.

- **Affecting individual's life and liberty**

Terrorism contravenes all the stipulations outlined by international human rights law and other regulations, as it denies individuals their essential rights, including the right to life. The right to life is a basic human right that is infringed upon not only by terrorist groups but also by certain government agencies in their counterterrorism initiatives. Under international law,

[4] Tomasz Watek, "Concept, origin and classification of terrorist phenomena", No. 2/2018, available at: http://www.ejournals.eu/Securitologia/ (Last visited on Nov. 07, 2026).
[5] Available at: https://www.oxfordreference.com (Last visited on Nov. 07, 2026).
[6] Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (Act no. 37 of 1967), s.15.

torture conducted by terrorist organizations constitutes a breach of international law, just as it does when states employ torture as a tactic in combating terrorism. In the same way, taking hostages as terrorist groups do strips individuals of their basic rights to freedom and liberty.[7] This constitutes a breach of international law regarding fundamental human rights.

- **Violence against women and children**

Terrorist organizations such as ISIS systematically violated human rights by subjecting thousands of women, some as young as eight, to mistreatment and sexual assault. Additional actions taken by the extremist faction that breached basic human rights involved coerced marriages, servitude, and instances of physical and sexual violence. Boko Haram terrorist group active in Nigeria kidnapped women and girls in the northern regions, compelling them into sexual slavery, coerced labour, and involuntary marriages to their members.[8] Terrorist organizations like ISIS and their associated groups have frequently exploited women and children as suicide bombers in their attacks. Furthermore, the group's actions have led to a careless chemical assault that has caused the deaths of numerous civilians. The group has infringed on the rights of women and girls regarding their freedom and liberty by limiting their clothing choices and mobility. For example, girls were prohibited from going to schools in areas controlled by ISIS and from receiving healthcare.

- **Emergence of dissatisfied groups**

The failure of state agencies to uphold basic human rights in combating terrorism has resulted in the emergence of dissatisfied groups within society whose relatives have experienced rights violations. This has greatly diminished public backing, which is crucial in creating effective anti-terrorism strategies, as they provide groups with a chance to enlist marginalized members of society, further undermining the vital public support and cohesion necessary for achieving meaningful progress in the fight against terror. The human rights watch organization reports that the actions of government forces in Iraq and Syria against ISIS have resulted in civilian casualties due to airstrikes, enforced disappearances, torture of suspected terrorist sympathizers by government troops, and even executions. Terrorism has caused significant humanitarian impacts on civilian populations, leading to the displacement of millions.[9]

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[7] Hamid Boakai Kamara, 2017, The Impact of Terrorism on Human Rights, Munich, GRIN Verlag, Available at: https://www.grin.com/document/379326 (Last visited on Nov. 08, 2026).
[8] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf (Last visited on Nov. 08, 2026).
[9] Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Factsheet32EN.pdf (Last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).

AGENCIES FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM

Counter-terrorism refers to the strategies, regulations, and actions that governments and entities use to avert, probe, and address acts of terrorism. Since terrorism transcends borders, it is addressed via international organizations and specific Indian agencies, as detailed below.

- **United Nations office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)**

It was established on 15 June 2017, through UN General Assembly Resolution 71/291. It leads on General Assembly counter-terrorism directives and synchronizes the UN system. It also provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to Member States. Aims to stop violent extremism and foster global collaboration.[10]

- **International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)**

Established in the year 1923, INTERPOL's global information-sharing networks assist nations in recognizing suspected terrorists who are crossing international boundaries, promotes collaboration between law enforcement agencies of various nations, exchanges intelligence and data regarding potential terrorists, aids inquiries related to the financing of terrorism, the trade of weapons, and transnational terrorist networks.[11]

- **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)**

It was the initiative of G7 Nations, established in the year 1989, headquartered in Paris, France. It creates global standard to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorism, provides suggestions for recognizing and stopping the movement of money to terrorist groups.[12] FATF guidelines mandates that nations create efficient framework to identify and avert the funding of terrorism.

- **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**

Established under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008. Its establishment was directly prompted by the Mumbai terror attacks on 26/11 in November 2008.[13] It serves as India's main agency for counter-terrorism law enforcement. It examines and prosecutes designated crimes, including those listed under the UAPA.[14]

- **Research & Analytical Wing (R&AW)**

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[10] Available at: https://modeldiplomat.com/learn/glossary/un-office-of-counter-terrorism (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[11] Available at: https://www.worldanvil.com/w/peacekeepers-derekheihachi/a/international-police-organization (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[12] Available at: https://www.antimoneylaunderinglaw.com/aml-law/fatf-recommendations (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[13] Available at: https://superkalam.com/upsc-mains/notes/national-investigation-agency-nia-upsc-notes (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[14] Available at:https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/nia/ (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).

It is the primary foreign intelligence agency of India, with its counter-terrorism role focused on detecting, tracking, and neutralizing threats from outside India. Although it plays a significant role in counter-terrorism, it is not a national law enforcement or investigative agency. Rather, it functions as the dedicated foreign intelligence branch of the Indian intelligence community.[15]

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO COUNTER-TERRORISM

Current counter-terrorism confronts intricate issues stemming from changing threats, technological progress, global networks, and the fragile equilibrium between national security and human rights. Some of the major challenges to counter terrorism includes-

- **No Universal Definition of Terrorism**

The UN Sixth committee has consistently failed to finalize the draft comprehensive convention, with the legal definition of terrorism and the convention's scope being key unresolved matters. Some countries insist on including state-sponsored terrorism, while others oppose it, and a suggested exemption for liberation movements has faced significant opposition.[16] In the absence of unified definition, the reaction remains disjoined across various sector-specific treaties.

- **The Weaponization of Emerging Technologies (Cyber, AI, Drones)**

Contemporary terror organizations utilize readily available commercial technologies to enhance their asymmetric warfare potential. The use of AI in cyber-terrorism and their attacks has become a big threat to operations.[17] On the front line they are now waging a cyber war as the groups are using drones and targeted cyber-attacks to aggressively destroy strategic infrastructure.[18]

- **Balancing Security with Human Rights**

Forceful counter-terrorism strategies like extensive surveillance, random detentions, or military action can distance local communities, create resentments, and unintentionally hasten radicalization. Misconduct by security forces has been recognized as a "direct catalyst for

[15] Available at: https://www.nextias.com/upsc/raw-research-and-analysis-wing (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[16] Thalif Deen, "UN Remains Deadlocked on defining terrorism", The Sunday Times (Colombo), Nov. 28, 2010, available at: https://www.sundaytimes.lk/101128/Timestwo/t2_11.html (Last Visited on 09 Nov 2026).
[17] Krunoslav Antolis, Daniel Remai (2026), "Current and future challenges of Terrorism", available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/410870515_Current_and_Future_Challenges_of_Terrorism (Last visited on Nov 09, 2026).
[18] Kabir Taneja and Soumya Awasthi, Eds., "The Enduring Challenges Of Counter Terrorism: Regional Perspective From Southeast And South Asia", ORF Special Report No. 291, Observer Research Foundation, Dec 2025, available at: https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-enduring-challenges-of-counterterrorism-regional-perspectives-from-southeast-and-south-asia (Last Visted on Nov. 10, 2026).

recruitment during the final phases of the path to extremism.[19]" Consequently, security forces need to uphold human rights and must function within the law to effectively combat terrorism and attain enduring and sustainable peace. UNITAR offers training to Member States upon request to enhance the operational and tactical abilities of security forces in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law, and principles for the Protection of Civilians.[20]

- **Funding Of Terrorism and Emerging Payment Technologies**

It is the duty of state to criminalize the financing of terrorism and to freeze associated assets.[21] The FATF's 2025 report outlines various techniques such money value transfer services, digital payments, crowdfunding, virtual assets, hawala, and the exploitation of shell companies and non-profit organizations.[22] The FATF emphasizes that the majority of crowdfunding is lawful, thus regulation should be based on risk and be proportionate. Consequently, the challenge lies in identifying abuse without stifling charitable humanitarian efforts.

- **Divergence In State Capacities and Global Collaboration**

while the strategy is a global asset, its implementation is contingent on what happens in the wider global and regional environment.[23] States differ in their resources, legal systems, intelligence assets, and political incentives, as well as conflicts in inhibiting definitions and agreements on how to cooperate. UNOCT and CTED capacity-building and coordination assistance can be helpful, but they cannot replace local institutions.[24]

SUGGESTIVE MEASURES TO COMBAT TERRORISM

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) establishes a significant framework based on four main pillars: tackling the factors that foster terrorism, preventing and confronting terrorism, enhancing the capacity of states, and safeguarding human rights and the rule of law.[25] The measures outlined here are derived from international treaties,

[19] United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Report, available at: https://unitar.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace/our-portfolio/counter-terrorism (Last visited on 09 Nov 2026).
[20] Ibid.
[21] United nations security council, res.1373, s/RES/1373 (Sep. 28, 2001), available at: https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1373(2001) (last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).
[22] Financial Action Task Force, Comprehensive update on terrorist financing risks (July 2025), available at: https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/fatf-gafi/en/publications/Methodsandtrends/comprehensive-update-terrorist-financing-risks-2025.html (Last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).
[23] United nations office of counter-terrorism, "UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy", available at: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy (Last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).
[24] Ibid.
[25] UNGA, The United Nations global counter-terrorism strategy, A/RES/60/288 (8 Sept. 2006), available at: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy (Last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).

United Nations documents, institutional research, and India's national counter-terrorism strategy.

- **Strengthening International Cooperation and Legal Framework**

International collaboration is not merely advantageous but absolutely essential to effectively counter this global threat. It includes collaborative efforts by leveraging the frameworks of the United Nations, INTERPOL, and regional organizations, Promote the seamless sharing of evidence, intelligence, and data pertaining to terrorist network, full implementation of international counter-terrorism conventions alongside the pertinent resolutions adopted by the Security Council, it is imperative to ensure that State territories are not exploited as sanctuaries for terrorist operations.

- **Addressing Online Extremism and Exploitation of Technology**

Contemporary terrorist groups are progressively utilizing social media, encrypted messaging apps, and digital networks to disseminate propaganda, recruit members, gather funds, and organize operations. It shall be regulated by monitoring publicly accessible online networks for terrorist propaganda and recruitment using lawful and appropriate methods, create digital literacy initiatives to assist people in recognizing misinformation and extremist propaganda, crucially, actions taken against online extremism must not serve as a rationale for sweeping censorship or limitations on legitimate free speech.

- **Enhanced Intelligence Gathering and Sharing**

Collecting intelligence is among the most powerful strategies to prevent terrorism. Governments ought to enhance intelligence agencies and create efficient collaboration among national and international security organizations. India employs the Multi Agency Centre (MAC), functioning under the Intelligence Bureau, to promote intelligence sharing among central and State agencies. India's National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy, PRAHAAR (2026), also highlights prevention driven by intelligence.[26]

- **Advanced Infrastructure and Quick Response System**

States are required to develop advanced infrastructure as well as the ability to respond swiftly to any terrorist activity and reduce loss of life, for which state must educate specialized counter-terrorism units and regional law enforcement officers, create efficient emergency response and crisis-management frameworks, enhance collaboration among hospitals, fire departments, disaster management organizations, and security agencies, safeguard essential

[26] Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy (PRAHAAR) (23 Feb 2026), available at: https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2298334&reg=48&lang=2 (Last visited on Nov. 09, 2026).

infrastructure, such as airports, train systems, energy plants, and telecommunication networks, carry out routine emergency readiness drills and enhance post-incident inquiry processes.

- **Implementation of Rehabilitation Programmes**

Counter-terrorism efforts must extend beyond merely detaining and prosecuting individuals involved in terrorist activities. They must also create chances for people who want to leave terrorist groups and renounce violence by ensuring the basic human right. For such individuals counselling and psychological assistance programs shall be organized, providing education, skills training, and job opportunities.[27]

CONCLUSION

In summary, this research will significantly aid global legislators and human rights policymakers in understanding the intricate balance between upholding human rights obligations and executing counterterrorism efforts. To promote the human rights agenda in combating terrorism, states are required to balance the human rights and the rule of law while preparing for the counterterrorism strategies. The research will provide crucial insights into the main issues that lead to conflicts between government counterterrorism officials and human rights groups, specifically the belief that national security should override human rights, particularly for terrorist suspects.[28] There is a clear necessity to adopt more democratic measures that take essential human rights into account during counterterrorism efforts.

Elimination of terror financing, adopting modern technologies, adequate monitoring at national borders and implementation of rehabilitation mechanism for terror victims and in some cases for terrorist who deviated from the society due to extreme psychological and societal conditions are some of the essential measures every state need to consider for the prevention of terrorist activities. Furthermore, the issue of terrorism is not confined to any particular state or territory, it is transborder concern such as 09/11 attack in America (2001), 26/11 attack in Mumbai, India (2008), train bombings in Madrid, Spain (2004).[29] Thus, it calls the states for international cooperation and strengthened intelligence sharing as an effective counterterrorism strategy.

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[27] UNESCO, Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers (2017), available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764 (Last visited on Nov. 10, 2026).

[28] Available at: https://studycorgi.com/human-rights-advocates-vs-terrorism-victims/ (Last visited on Nov. 10, 2026).

[29] The Guardian, "Major terrorist attacks since 9/11", available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jul/07/terrorism.uk1 (Last visited on Nov. 10, 2026).

Consequently, the insights acquired from this research will enhance a more effective and empathetic approach to combating terrorism, promoting both national and international security while upholding the dedication to human rights.

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