

## **Analysis of the Tunisian Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon**

Natasha Quek and Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff

## **De-radicalisation of Terrorists: Theoretical Analysis and Case Studies**

Md. Didarul Islam

## **Naxalite Insurgency in India and Need for Holistic Counter Responses**

Naman Rawat



# Thematic Challenges in Terrorism: Foreign Terrorist Fighters, De-radicalisation and Far-Right Groups

Islamic State's (IS) territorial defeat reflects a shift in the epicentre of violence from Iraq and Syria to the peripheries (countries with an active presence of IS cells or other insurgent and terrorist threats). In the study of terrorism and insurgency, age-old threats can persist while new threats are always emerging, either due to policy shifts that give rise to new opportunities for insurgents to exploit, or due to changes in the political climate of societies.

As such, the May issue deals with three key thematic challenges in a post-IS threat landscape. First, it looks at returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), who after IS' territorial defeat have either traveled to or attempted to return to their home countries. According to the United Nations (UN) more than 40,000 FTFs from 110 countries had traveled to Iraq and Syria to join IS. The return of segments of the FTFs indicates escalation of threats in their home countries as they come armed with operational skills and could possibly regroup, establish local cells and engage in violence. In this case, a high number of FTFs travelled to Iraq and Syria from Tunisia despite the country's peaceful transition towards a participatory democracy, in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Second, in order to deal with the shifting threat landscape, it is necessary to develop new and strengthen existing de-radicalisation programmes. De-radicalisation is a smaller part of broader counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation efforts that focus on terrorists or returning FTFs in custody. Effective de-radicalisation programmes will provide detainees with opportunities to reintegrate back into the society by rejecting violence and promoting peaceful coexistence. This issue critically evaluates de-radicalisation as a concept and looks at specific programmes in Yemen, Pakistan, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, while extolling the need for holistic approaches for effective outcomes.

Lastly, beyond the Islamist extremist threat emanating from IS and other affiliated or local groups, other non-Islamist threats continue to persist. This includes far-right extremists gaining traction and engaging in violence in

parts of United States, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. In addition, ethno-separatist groups (Baloch Liberation Army in Pakistan) and communist groups (The New People's Army in Philippines and the Naxalites in India) also have a strong support structure and operational presence. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) or Naxalites killed 205 people in 190 different incidents across 2018. This issue specifically delves into the Naxalite insurgency in India, which has evolved from a mass-mobilisation movement to a militant insurgency over the last few decades. The article advocates for institutional reforms to address various grievances to reduce the agency to violence.

In the first article, **Natasha Quek** and **Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff** explore the causal factors behind Tunisia contributing one of the highest numbers of FTFs in theatres of conflict in the Middle East and beyond. The authors contend that the proliferation of Tunisian FTFs and surge in jihadist-linked violence domestically in recent years, poses a threat to long term stability, and could also fuel conflict in the wider region. Tunisia's strong history of secularism provides an advantage, as the government can rely on a robust civil society rather than adopt a purely security-based approach. However, additional policy responses are needed to curtail jihadist activities and safeguard the country's democratic achievements.

**Md. Didarul Islam** then assesses various definitional aspects and theoretical models of de-radicalisation programmes. The author further provides observations on the gains, limitations and local context of de-radicalisation programmes, gleaned from four country case studies, which suggest that effective de-radicalisation of individuals necessitates a holistic approach focused on three key areas: (i) re-education or ideological interventions; (ii) vocational training or financial support; (iii) and a viable reintegration environment. Isolated approaches towards de-radicalisation that discount these variables are likely to only bring short-term success and a higher likelihood of recidivism.

# Thematic Challenges in Terrorism: Foreign Terrorist Fighters, De-radicalisation and Far-Right Groups

Lastly, **Naman Rawat** examines different factors and underlying causes which have sustained the Naxalite insurgency in India for over fifty years. The author argues that since the 1960s, the lack of legitimate political institutions as well as corrupt practices of the government and bureaucracy have contributed to the Naxalites' socio-political alienation in India. Additionally, the ineffective implementation of land reform laws, which prohibit acquisition of the tribal lands by non-Adivasis, has pushed the more extreme sections of tribal and peasant people to revolt against the government. Though the insurgency has been weakened in recent years, it is far from over.

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# Analysis of the Tunisian Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon

Natasha Quek and Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff

## Synopsis

*Tunisia has contributed one of the highest numbers of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in theatres of conflict in the Middle East and beyond. Yet despite being home to a growing Jihadi movement, it is also the only Arab country to undergo a successful democratic transition in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, in contrast to the geopolitical upheaval experienced in the wider region. This article will examine aspects of Tunisian society which have contributed to the Tunisian foreign FTFs phenomenon. The elements that mitigate the threat, but which could be further elevated with the return of these fighters, following the defeat of the Islamic State's self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria.*

## Introduction

Tunisia's democratic transition following the popular uprisings of 2010-11 was widely expected to address years of public consternation over corruption, a crumbling economy and lack of social mobility which bedevilled the former Ben Ali regime. The transition, however, has failed to alleviate many of these issues, while violent extremism has also grown. Besides being home to affiliates of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Islamic State (IS) and other independent and loose networks of jihadists, Tunisia is one of the largest exporters of FTFs to Iraq, Syria and neighbouring Libya. According to reports, as many as 7,000 individuals<sup>1</sup> may have travelled to the Syria/Iraq theatre in recent years. Among them are an estimated 700 female jihadists<sup>2</sup>.

Jihadist-linked violence has also proliferated domestically since the start of democratic reforms, a trend which not only poses a threat to stability in the country, but could also fuel conflict in the wider region and beyond. The Tunisian authorities have taken a number of measures to address these challenges, yet additional policy responses are needed if Tunisia is to curtail radicalisation and safeguard the country's democratic achievements.

## The Context

As a former French colony, principles of secularism, or *laïcité*, have been a valued aspect of Tunisian society which has distinguished it from other Middle Eastern and Arab countries.<sup>3</sup> Tunisia's strong secular rule was never seriously contested until the events following the Arab Spring. At the same time, a powerful Islamist movement also emerged in the post-independence era, in response to religion in Tunisia being suppressed due to the framework of *laïcité* used to govern the country for several decades.

Following the initiation of democratic reforms in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Islamist parties began to operate freely and to govern. The Ennahdha party won Tunisia's first post-uprising election held in October 2011 and is currently the second strongest bloc in parliament. The more liberalised environment in the post-revolution era has, also allowed jihadism to spread more easily in Tunisia due to factors such as a weak religious sphere,

<sup>1</sup> "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of The Flow Of Foreign Fighters Into Syria And Iraq", *The Soufan Group*, December 2015, [http://soufangroup.com/wpcontent/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate\\_FINAL3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wpcontent/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL3.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Pearson, "Online As The New Frontline: Affect, Gender, And ISIS-Take-Down On Social

Media". *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 41 (11): 850-874. doi:10.1080/1057610x.2017.1352280., 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Goldstein, "Tunisia: Secularism, Political-Islam, And Democracy". *The World Mind*, 1 February, 2016, <https://edspace.american.edu/theworldmind/2016/02/01/tunisia-secularism-political-islam-and-democracy/>.



lack of attention to socioeconomic issues<sup>4</sup>, and failures in governance.<sup>5</sup> This has allowed ultra-conservatives to challenge more moderate Islamists, particularly with their vision for an Islamic state.

### Radicalisation Indicators

The Ben Ali regime's marginalisation of religious education and imposition of tight security controls over mosques meant that there were few moderate religious actors capable of stepping in after the revolution. This vacuum was exploited by radical groups to preach their ideas and recruit new members, particularly among disenfranchised youth, whose initial optimism following the revolution soon gave way to disenchantment amidst widespread perceptions of their exclusion from the political process.

### Socio-economic and Regional Factors

A lack of socio-economic opportunities dating back decades has also largely gone unaddressed, and may have even worsened since the uprising. This has left the expectations of the lower and middle classes largely unmet. Chronic underdevelopment of inland regions such as Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine has seen poverty, unemployment and illiteracy rates in these areas soar. In the Tunisian context, these factors seem to have increased people's vulnerability to radical ideologies.<sup>6</sup> Jihadists have gained traction by economically incentivising and instilling a sense of purpose in potential recruits. Apart from receiving as much as USD \$3000<sup>7</sup> to join militant groups in Syria, recruits may have also been indoctrinated by a sense of mission, purpose and accomplishment in joining the jihadi cause.

### Emergence of Salafi Jihadism

<sup>4</sup> Georges Fahmi and Hamza Meddeb, *Market for jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia*, October 2015, Carnegie Middle East Center.

<sup>5</sup> "Tunisia: Violence And The Salafi Challenge", *International Crisis Group*, 13 February, 2013. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/tunisia-violence-and-salafi-challenge>

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Watanabe and Fabien Merz, *Tunisia's Jihadi Problem And How To Deal With It*, 2017, Middle East Policy Journal, <https://www.mepc.org/journal/volume-xxiv-number-4-winter-2017>.

The rise of jihadism can also partly be attributed to the emergence of Salafi jihadism alongside its apolitical version, Salafism, in Tunisia. Salafism in general refers to a literal version of Islam that claims to follow the path of Islamic ancestors (*salaf al-salih*). The apolitical is the scripturalist (*al-salafiyya al-'ilmiyya*) while the Salafi jihadi (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*) believes in armed struggle to establish an Islamic state.<sup>8</sup> In the 1990s, the Ben Ali regime had initially permitted Salafism as an apolitical alternative to the Ennahdha party's political project. However, following a keenly fought election in 1989, he proceeded to clamp down on many religious actors. These policies inadvertently contributed to a jihadist movement taking root in Tunisia.

Salafism grew through the proliferation of private meetings, books and audio-visual materials, and religious satellite television channels that attracted many Tunisians striving for religious knowledge<sup>9</sup>. Salafism and Salafi jihadism further gained influence within Tunisian society through preaching and charitable activities. In the post-revolution era, jihadists also exploited the weak security environment in poor locales by engaging in vigilantism, social mediation and conflict resolution, purportedly on behalf of locals. Through these efforts, they were able to establish good relationships and influence not only local communities, but also establish smuggling networks that were used to procure weapons and other resources. Although not all Salafi jihadists are violent, their call for the implementation of a strict Islamic system of governance, and willingness to wage an armed struggle to achieve their aims, is innately violent in nature<sup>10</sup>, as some have argued.

### Ideology

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Zelin, "Tunisian Foreign Fighters In Iraq And Syria", 2018, *The Washington Institute*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote55-Zelin.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Fahmi and Hamza Meddeb, *Market for jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia*, October 2015, Carnegie Middle East Center.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Georges Fahmi and Hamza Meddeb, "Market for jihad: Radicalization in Tunisia," Carnegie Middle East Center, October 2015

There are several ideological motivations that resonate with Tunisian jihadists to prompt them to participate in violent activities. For example, though not necessarily advocating all of IS' methods, its idea and declaration of a caliphate, wherein principles of justice are upheld and Muslims would be able to live a pious life devoted to their faith, resonate strongly among some Tunisians. They have long been subjected to oppression under colonial rulers at first and then subsequently successive military and authoritarian regimes that pursued a secularist agenda which included clamping down strongly on religious forces in the country.

Such policies also created a prolonged religious void within Tunisian society. Many Tunisians were either religiously illiterate or had a non-scholastic understanding of various Islamic teachings.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, some were unable to differentiate between mainstream and extremist interpretations of Islamic principles.<sup>12</sup> The local militia group Ansar al-Sharia (AST) has also played a substantive role in proselytising and recruiting Tunisians through radical narratives and exploiting the social milieu in the post-2011 environment.

### Domestic Threat Environment

Several jihadist movements have emerged since the uprising in 2011. These include small militia groups and independent fighters who, although yet to conduct large-scale operations in the country, are linked to numerous violent incidents that have seen fatalities skyrocketing in Tunisia. Such violence has led the government to impose a state of emergency on several occasions, most recently on 7 March 2019 for a period of one month.<sup>13</sup> However, many armed militants have often chosen to migrate to Syria, Mali or Algeria to participate in terrorist activities, than

conduct attacks in their own country. These militants are typically ultra-conservatives who believe in the revival of the caliphate and advocate the use of any means, including violence, to achieve this end. Apart from having links with Al Qaeda, Tunisian nationals, according to reports, are also fighting and training in Libya with the Islamic State (IS) group.<sup>14</sup>

A more institutionalised variant of militia groups operating in Tunisia is the AST. The group was established by two Islamists, Tarek Maaroufi and Sayf Allah Bin Hassine, also known as Abu lyadh al-Tunisi, who had previously helped in setting up the Tunisian Combatant Group in 2000.<sup>15</sup> AST has advocated for the Islamisation of various aspects of Tunisian culture, particularly since the post-2011 revolution. Several violent incidents in the country have been attributed to the group.<sup>16</sup>

### Foreign Fighter Phenomenon

The phenomenon of Tunisian FTFs participating in overseas conflicts can be traced back to the 1990s. However, following the revolution, the number of Tunisian FTFs has risen exponentially. There are several reasons that explain this surge, as indicated in the foregoing paragraphs. Furthermore, the repression of Islamists in 1980s and early 1990s resulted in many of them being exiled to Europe. While in exile, some joined terrorist groups and partook in the Bosnian war, while others joined the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a group of jihadists operating in Algeria. These efforts created a milieu that saw links developed and a network of cells comprising Tunisians and other nationals in Europe being established, for the recruitment, logistics, and facilitation of FTFs.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Rached Ghannouchi, "From Political Islam to Muslim Democracy | Foreign Affairs," *Foreign Affairs*, October 2016,

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/tunisia/political-islam-muslim-democracy>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Foreign Travel Advice - Tunisia", Government of the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/tunisia/terrorism>, April 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan, "Tunisia Feared the Return of Militants from Abroad. The Threat Now Is Those Who Never Left," *Washington Post*, September 8, 2018,

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/tunisia-feared-the-return-of-militants-from-abroad-the-threat-now-is-those-who-never-left/2018/09/07/aafa6c84-aacf-11e8-9a7d-cd30504ff902\\_story.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/tunisia-feared-the-return-of-militants-from-abroad-the-threat-now-is-those-who-never-left/2018/09/07/aafa6c84-aacf-11e8-9a7d-cd30504ff902_story.htm).

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Zelin, "The Tunisian-Libyan Jihadi Connection". *The Washington Institute*, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-tunisian-libyan-jihadi-connection>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Bosnia & Herzegovina: Extremism & Counter-Extremism," *Counter Extremism Project*, October 11, 2016, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/bosnia-herzegovina>.

Beyond Europe, links were also established between Tunisian fighters and Iraqi terrorist networks in the 1990s, particularly under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who would later found the IS. Tunisian fighters fought in Zarqawi's Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTWJ) and its successor organisations al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (AQI), Majlis Shura al-Mujahedeen (MSM), and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), in addition to other militant groups in the country.<sup>18</sup> Thus, such networks provided a well-trodden path for Tunisians after the revolution to partake in the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011.

Also, now that IS has lost most of its territories, it is actively reaching out to young Tunisians through its recruitment propaganda, urging them to join the group's Libyan branch. According to Tunisian officials and UN investigators, Tunisian citizens are also assuming more military command roles within the IS and are operating training camps for jihadists in Libya.<sup>19</sup> Many Tunisians have also joined AQ and AQ-linked groups.

Tunisian FTFs under the IS banner have primarily been engaged in roles related to outreach and religious education as part of the group's state-building project. They have also served as intelligence operatives, trainers and commanders in Syria and Iraq, and intermediaries between Iraq and Syria and their respective external provinces and affiliates. Tunisian women have also participated in IS activities. For example, the group's infamous all-female morality police, al-Khansaa Brigade, was founded by a Tunisian woman named Umm Rayan.<sup>20,21</sup>

## State Responses

As the Salafi jihadist movement grew, the Tunisian authorities cracked down forcefully in 2013 and 2014, resulting in the relocation of

many jihadists to Libya. Libya has also provided a haven for AST's leadership, who regrouped there after it was banned in August 2013 by the Tunisian government.<sup>22</sup> The government's counter-terrorism efforts have intensified since 2016, resulting in weapons seizures, arrests and operations against armed groups throughout the country.

The country's National Counterterrorism Strategy has also been expanded to include government ministries that focus on culture, education, media, and religious affairs. The Ministries of Governmental Organizations and Human and Communications Rights are the lead ministries tasked with the critical role of developing effective counter-messaging to the recruitment propaganda used by violent extremists.

The government has also made a concerted effort to improve socioeconomic conditions in the country through economic development and education programs. Steps have also been taken to stem radicalisation activities in religious places. For example, imams deemed to espouse inflammatory rhetoric in certain mosques have been replaced by the authorities, although local populations in several cases have resisted such changes.

## Policy Recommendations

Tunisia's democratisation efforts have been successful so far. A culture of tolerance, secularism and inclusion has allowed for the incorporation of Islamist elements into the political landscape, while the country's two post-revolution elections in 2011 and 2014 were conducted fairly. Islamic political parties have also moderated their position to ensure the transition has progressed smoothly. The inclusiveness inherent in Tunisia's politics will help combat, to some extent, attempts by radical groups to exploit future instability in the country.<sup>23</sup> Maintaining peace, however, is a

<sup>18</sup> Aaron Zelin, "Tunisian Foreign Fighters In Iraq And Syria", 2018, *The Washington Institute*, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyNote55-Zelin.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Haim Malka and Margo Balboni, "Tunisia: Radicalism Abroad and At Home," *Centre For Strategic & International Studies*, June 2016, <http://foreignfighters.csis.org/tunisia/libya.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Khansaa Brigade is IS' all-female morality police formed in early 2014 to raise awareness and enforce among civilian women in its territories the

group's adherence to its pseudo-Sharia laws. For more see: Ahmad al-Bahri, "In Raqqa, an All-Female ISIS Brigade Cracks Down on Local Women", *Syria Deeply*, 15 July, 2014, <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2014/07/15/in-raqqa-an-all-female-isis-brigade-cracks-down-on-local-women>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Goldstein, "Tunisia: Secularism, Political-Islam, And Democracy". *The World Mind*, 1 February, 2016, <https://edspace.american.edu/theworldmind/2016/02>



constant balancing act. As Tunisia does not have a deradicalisation programme for returning FTFs, they can pose both security and social challenges. In addition, the prospect of future terrorist attacks and the influx of arms and violent extremists from neighbouring countries remains.

Law enforcement operations on groups such as AST and AQIM, which continue to operate in the western mountainous regions of the country where they have attacked security forces and also targeted civilians, need to be widened to include the border with Libya. The government's counterterrorism efforts also need to adapt to evolving terrorist tactics in which foreign civilians and urban areas have been increasingly targeted.

Moreover, prisons are often cited by researchers as one of the most fertile grounds for radicalisation and recruitment activities.<sup>24</sup> Due to the overcrowding situation in Tunisia's prisons,<sup>25</sup> a typically impressionable young offender awaiting sentencing for a minor crime can often be placed in the same cell as a militant, creating a situation in which they can be radicalised. The prison system also does not have a rehabilitation program to prevent recidivism. As such, a comprehensive strategy incorporating the government, civil society and religious organisations and leaders, that addresses these multi-faceted concerns is needed.

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[/01/tunisia-secularism-political-islam-and-democracy/](#).

<sup>24</sup> Greg Hannah, Jennifer Rubin, and Lindsay Clutterbuck, Radicalization or rehabilitation: Understanding the challenge of extremist and radicalized prisoners, *RAND Corporation*, March 2008.

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical\\_reports/2008/RAND\\_TR571.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2008/RAND_TR571.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> "Tunisia 2017 Human Rights Report," in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017*, United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/277511.pdf>.

# De-radicalisation of Terrorists: Theoretical Analysis and Case Studies

Md. Didarul Islam

## Synopsis

*This article argues that terrorists can be de-radicalised through holistic approaches that focus on a diverse range of factors, including disengagement and reintegration. While narrowing on individual focused de-radicalisation instead of group de-radicalisation programmes, definitional considerations and theoretical models are discussed. Through observations of programmes in Yemen, Pakistan, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, the author proposes a three-tiered de-radicalisation model: (i) re-education and ideological intervention, (ii) vocational training and financial support, (iii) and viable environment for reintegration.*

## Introduction

Individual focused de-radicalisation programmes attempt to reduce the amount of violence in a society by two means: redirecting the motives of a terrorist and facilitating his/her reintegration into the society.<sup>1</sup> De-radicalisation is a relatively new strategy, with specific programmes leading to varying degrees of success and failure. The first de-radicalisation programme was introduced in Yemen in 2002 and was closely followed by programmes in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Indonesia. In some cases, de-radicalisation programmes have been successful in ensuring that terrorists denounce violence, while in other scenarios recidivism has occurred.<sup>2</sup> Specific failures do not discount the importance of de-radicalisation as a means to combat violent extremism in different local

contexts. Overall, this article provides a definitional analysis of de-radicalisation, critical analysis of theoretical models, and an evaluation of de-radicalisation programmes in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Indonesia, promoting the need for a holistic approach.

## De-radicalisation: Definitions

The lack of consensus in defining radicalisation and violent extremism also extends to de-radicalisation with differing conceptualisations and theoretical models. Broadly, de-radicalisation can be understood as the process of changing one's internal beliefs and denouncing radical ideologies. John Horgan defines de-radicalisation as: "the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalisation is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity". In comparison, some scholars have defined de-radicalisation as the process of changing an individual's beliefs and embracing mainstream values by rejecting radical or violence-oriented ideologies.<sup>3</sup> In this case, a de-radicalised person will not only cease to provide physical support for a terrorist group, but also will abandon sympathy for said group.<sup>4</sup> Omar Ashour defines part of de-radicalisation as gradually accepting pluralist societal, political and economic discourse.<sup>5</sup>

De-radicalisation can be group-focused, where a large number of terrorists in a specific

<sup>1</sup> Peter Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries," *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 2010, <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Prisons-and-terrorism-15-countries.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Leigh Striegler, "The Deradicalisation of Terrorists," *Salus journal* 1, no.1. (2013): 29.

<sup>3</sup> A. Rabasa et al., *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*, (California: National Security Research Division,

2010), xiii.

<sup>4</sup> John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalisation Programmes," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2, (2010): 267-291.

<sup>5</sup> Omar Ashour, "Online De-Radicalisation? Countering Violent Extremist Narratives: Message, Messenger and Media Strategy," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4, no.6 (2010): 5-6.

group are targeted to denounce their violent ideology. This category of de-radicalisation is only possible in a group with a highly authoritarian leadership. In this case, the active participation of the group leader in de-radicalisation programmes is key. Algeria and Egypt implemented such a programme but the success rate was not high as it focused on ideological transformation while financial assistance, while overlooking vocational training among other important variables.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, individual-focused de-radicalisation programmes are designed based on local contexts with no-one-size-fits-all policy regardless of the terrorist organisation the individual belongs to.

### Theoretical Models of De-Radicalisation

Bertram argues that there is no standardised framework for de-radicalisation programs<sup>7</sup> and there are a broad range of proposed models available for effective de-radicalisation. In terms of individual focused de-radicalisation programmes, there is a broad understanding that they should be based on individuals' perspectives, beliefs and motivations for joining a terrorist group or engaging in violence. As such, a successful de-radicalisation initiative would be premised on active endeavours to alter an individual's radical beliefs. This does not only reflect a change of behaviour, but a shift in perspectives and ideologies.<sup>8</sup> In this case, de-radicalisation programmes must be designed based on the nature of an extremist. For instance, a former radical who left his organisation by choice should be in a different programme than one who was radicalised and then detained by the authorities.

### De-radicalisation versus Disengagement

Striegher's model focuses on two phases of de-radicalisation<sup>9</sup>: (i) preventing a radical from engaging in further violence or what John

Horgan calls 'disengagement' (ii) and altering the ideology of the radical.<sup>10</sup> He maintains that the former is easier than the latter as it is difficult to change an individual's belief system and ideology. Disengagement is the cessation of active and physical action of a radical. A radical can still be disengaged without denouncing radical beliefs.<sup>11</sup> According to Striegher, disengagement is more important because it serves as the foundation to de-radicalise terrorists.<sup>12</sup> In comparison, Horgan does not consider disengagement as an integral part of de-radicalisation. He argued that there is no guarantee that a successful disengagement programme will lead to de-radicalisation. A terrorist disengaged from violent activities does not necessarily mean that the terrorist has denounced his or her extremist beliefs entirely.<sup>13</sup>

Even though disengagement plays a vital role in de-radicalisation, there is a significant possibility of recidivism without a holistic de-radicalisation process. Recidivism might include the individual re-joining the same or any other terrorist group or engaging in any other violent crimes. In this sense, de-radicalisation is more difficult than disengagement.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars posit that it remains easier to convince an individual not to engage in violence, but more complicated to disassociate them from their group's specific ideology and related commitments based on what they have been taught by the leadership or fellow members.<sup>15</sup>

### Specific Approaches for Effective De-Radicalisation

De-radicalisation programmes that focus on residential camps or prisons play a significant role in the models of various scholars. Rana proposed a four-dimensional de-radicalisation approach which focused on security, ideology,

<sup>6</sup> Mostafizur Rahman, *Islamist Radicalisation: Actors, Drivers and Approaches* (Dhaka: Srabon Publications, 2018), 216-217.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?" *Journal for Deradicalisation* 5 (2015):121-122.

<sup>8</sup> A. Rabasa et al., *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Striegher, "The De-radicalisation of Terrorists," 20.

<sup>10</sup> John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 152.

<sup>11</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 122.

<sup>12</sup> Striegher, "The De-radicalisation of Terrorists", 21.

<sup>13</sup> John Horgan, "De-radicalisation or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation: Perspectives on Terrorism", *A Journal of the Terrorism Research Initiative* 2, no.4 (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 123.

<sup>15</sup> Rabasa, *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*.

society and politics.<sup>16</sup> The security approach states that threats posed by arrested detainees would be reduced if they are taken care of in a rehabilitation centre. In contrast, the ideological approach centres on religious clerics who will actively engage with detainees and promote peace. The societal perspective, on the other hand, will engage with those who are vulnerable towards extremism and those radicalised to promote moderation. Lastly, the political approach includes the workings of the society to improve the socio-economic atmosphere, in order to win the hearts of the terrorists.<sup>17</sup> While the first three approaches can be implemented in detention with a higher possibility of success, the political approach remains difficult to implement and measure. Any political shifts that promote peace, stability and co-existence are long-term in nature and cannot be achieved overnight.

On the contrary, Rabasa advocates for the Dual Focus approach, where de-radicalisation programmes would centre on the interplay between radicals and Islamic scholars. Used mainly for the terrorists who were inspired by Islamist extremism, this approach creates opportunities for Islamic scholars to have discussions with the individuals that focus on the inconsistencies and manipulations of religious teachings. Through these discussions, the scholars build on counter-narratives based on their beliefs and convictions for being radicalised. Sageman also argues that by directly challenging the validity of radical teachings and beliefs, it would be more effective approach to de-radicalise an individual.<sup>19</sup> This Dual Focus approach can be incorporated in rehabilitation programmes during detentions in prison.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Amir Rana, "Swat De-radicalisation Model: Prospects for Rehabilitating Militants," *Conflict and Peace Studies* 4, no.2, (2011): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 125.

<sup>18</sup> Rabasa et al., *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*.

<sup>19</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks In The Twenty First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 128-129.

<sup>21</sup> Alex Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *The Hague: International*

## Role of Counter-Narratives

Counter-narratives can play a major role in de-radicalisation programmes. Bertram emphasised on counter-narratives for de-radicalisation programmes to focus on the hypocrisies of the radical group leaders who manipulate religion for their gains, as well as former radicals who denounced violence and terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Briggs and Feve confirm that counter-terrorism narratives can play a significant role in mobilising public opinion against radicals. In this case, the Internet can be an effective measure in broader efforts to counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts through active counter-narrative campaigns. This would include removing online extremist contents and limiting the consumption and production of such materials. Such policies could reduce the appeal of terrorist content to those who could be radicalised and who have successfully gone through de-radicalisation programmes.<sup>21</sup>

As a proponent of the anti-force strategy, Kruglanski argues that de-radicalisation programmes should be based in residential camps to directly promote counter-narrative teachings.<sup>22</sup> Supporting this view, Bertam argued that de-radicalisation cannot be achieved only by force as it could result in resistance from the extremists.<sup>23</sup>

## Local Context and Holistic Approaches

Scholars have highlighted that for an individual-focused de-radicalisation programme a holistic approach is required.<sup>24</sup> Neumann argues that one de-radicalisation programme cannot be applied to all radicals as there are different local contexts, perspectives and reasons for joining a terrorist

Centre for Counter-Terrorism, March 2013, <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Arie Kruglanski, Michele Gelfand and Rohan Gunaratna, "Aspects of De-radicalisation," *Institute for the Study of Asymmetric Conflict*, 2015, <http://www.asymmetricconflict.org/articles/aspects-of-deradicalization/>.

<sup>23</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 131.

<sup>24</sup> Mostafizur Rahman, *Islamist Radicalisation: Actors, Drivers and Approaches*, 216-217.

group.<sup>25</sup> As such, models would differ based on local contexts and the individuals they focus on.<sup>26</sup> A holistic approach can produce significant long-term success when it is incorporated with ideological conversion, vocational training, financial assistance and security.

Push factors and pull factors should be accounted for in a holistic approach.<sup>27</sup> In terms of push factors, a terrorist becomes demoralised and loses faith in the group due to the goals and methodology of the group, the act of killing of civilian, and a lack of social interaction and its resulting uncertainty. On the other hand, pull factors point to an assurance of a new beginning for the terrorists that different opportunities and incentives such as reduced detention and imprisonment, financial support, vocational training and assistance in transiting into mainstream society. Understanding the dynamics of these factors would allow states to formulate and implement more tailored and specific de-radicalisation programmes.

In addition, one-to-one interaction, as pointed out by Stern and Porges, forms a key ingredient in holistic de-radicalisation programmes.<sup>28</sup> This is because interaction helps to identify the violence-oriented beliefs and perspectives. However, one-to-one de-radicalisation programmes are time-consuming to implement and requires significant resources. Other scholars have argued that terrorists should be given financial assistance through loans or jobs so that instances of re-engaging with terrorist groups can be reduced. This layer of social integration still remains a major challenge as former terrorists tend to feel isolated and are therefore not accepted by their communities.

## Case Studies

### Yemen

Following Al-Qaeda's (AQ) attacks on American and French interests in Yemen, the first institutionalised de-radicalisation programme, "Committee for Dialogue" was initiated in 2002. Largely focused on re-educating prison detainees, its approach was to change the radical ideological beliefs of 360 radicals.<sup>29</sup>

The individual focused de-radicalisation programme only experienced partial successes and was subsequently shut down in 2005. According to Porges, even though the programme paved the way for other countries to adopt similar measures<sup>30</sup>, it was partially successful as there were only a small number of extremists who were finally reintegrated. Therefore, this programme was not a poster example of de-radicalisation. Porges maintained that the government's lack of commitment and the absence holistic approaches resulted in a discontinuation of the programme in 2005.<sup>31</sup>

One of the factors that could have contributed to its limited success was that the authorities did not possess sufficient data on the number of detainees who had been successfully de-radicalised. As such, this ad hoc approach lacked credibility and a significant number of detainees returned to violence.<sup>32</sup> Another contributing factor, according to Rahman, was that as the Yemeni model was based on ideological re-education, the officials could not liaise and attract religious leaders who could be involved.

### Pakistan

In contrast, the endeavour of the Pakistani government to undertake a holistic approach in its Swat Valley De-Radicalisation model

<sup>25</sup> Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and Deradicalisation in 15 Countries," 57.

<sup>26</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 124.

<sup>27</sup> Striegher, "The Deradicalisation of Terrorists," 22-25; Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and Deradicalisation in 15 Countries," 48.

<sup>28</sup> Jessica Stern and Marisa Porges, "Getting De-radicalisation Right," *Foreign Affairs*, May 2010, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/persian-gulf/2010-05-01/getting-deradicalization-right>.

<sup>29</sup> Marisa Porges, "De-radicalisation, the Yemeni Way," *Survival* 52, no.2 (2010): 27-35.

<sup>30</sup> Horgan, "De-radicalisation or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation: Perspectives on Terrorism," 7.

<sup>31</sup> Porges, "De-radicalisation, the Yemeni Way," 28-29.

<sup>32</sup> Striegher, "The De-radicalisation of Terrorists," 19-40.



contributed to the success of its programme.<sup>33</sup> Introduced in 2009, the programme provided 2,500 radicals with vocational training, financial assistance and interest-free loans. These efforts were intended to serve as motivation for ideological shifts and to counter the extremist teachings of terrorist groups.<sup>34</sup>

Although Bertram could not provide sufficient data to confirm that this model had a high success rate, the programme had not only de-radicalised the terrorists, but also significantly challenged the recruitment of youth in Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Unlike other Muslim countries (Saudi Arabia and Indonesia in particular), research has highlighted that Pakistan has a complex militant landscape coupled with little support from the former radicals in the de-radicalisation programme to motivate the extremists to move away from violence.<sup>35</sup> The Swat Valley Model also lacked financial support and political commitment and was therefore not implemented nationwide, which contributed to its shortcomings and transient nature. Similar to the Yemeni example, this programme lacked credible Pakistani religious leaders who could play a vital role in de-radicalising the terrorists.<sup>36</sup>

### Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia initiated a holistic de-radicalisation programme based on the need for individual's ideological shift from violence to non-violence in 2004. The Saudi programme mainly incorporated three aspects: ideological changes, vocational training and financial support, and ensuring security of the former radicals.<sup>37</sup>

Under ideological intervention and vocational training, the programme provided peaceful teachings of Islam, motivation to give up the extremist ideology they hold strong to, and conducted religious dialogue. Specifically, the Saudi Arabian model of counter-narratives includes media campaign, national dialogue, disrupting the task of the extremists, national solidarity campaign, sponsored publications against radical teachings and online filtering.<sup>38</sup> In addition, financial support was provided to family members of detainees.<sup>39</sup> As a result, a strong relationship was eventually developed between the programme officials and the detainees aided by psychologists, teachers and security officials.<sup>40</sup>

While Yemen mainly concentrated on ideological alteration, Saudi Arabia focused on behavioural change along with ideological change. Initially, the Saudi authorities claimed that the programme had a 100 percent success rate, but later confirmed that at least 10 to 20 percent of the former detainees went back to violence.<sup>41</sup> Even though this programme was not primarily institutionalised, it was still a holistic effort to reintegrate terrorist detainees into mainstream society.<sup>42</sup>

### Indonesia

Indonesia's de-radicalisation programme was a disengagement initiative that focused on terrorists who were detained by the police.<sup>43</sup> The objective of the programme was to slow down terrorist recruitment in the long-term. From 2005 to 2007, the first phase of this programme was an active endeavour by the government to disengage terrorists from

<sup>33</sup> Bertram, "How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised?", 133.

<sup>34</sup> Zubair Azam and Sayeda Fatima, "Mishal: A Case Study Of A De-radicalisation And Emancipation Program In Swat Valley, Pakistan," *Journal of De-radicalisation*, no.11 (2017): 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rana, "Swat De-radicalisation Model: Prospects for Rehabilitating Militants," 2.

<sup>36</sup> Azam and Fatima, "Mishal: A Case Study of a de-radicalisation And Emancipation Program In Swat Valley, Pakistan," 1.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Casptack, "De-radicalisation Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study," *Middle East Institute*, June 10, 2015, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/deradicalization-programs-saudi-arabia-case-study>.

<sup>38</sup> Hussein Solomon, "Combating Islamist radicalisation in South Africa," *African Security Review* 23, no.1 (2014): 27.

<sup>39</sup> John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalisation Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2 (2010): 278.

<sup>40</sup> A. Rabasa et al., *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Horgan and Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," 278.

<sup>42</sup> Striegher, "The De-radicalisation of Terrorists," 32.

<sup>43</sup> Horgan and Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," 273.

violence.<sup>44</sup> Similar to Saudi Arabia's programme, Indonesia used a supportive approach towards detainees and provided financial and educational assistance, as well as allowed family members of the detainees to actively participate in it.<sup>45</sup>

One significant feature was the inclusion of former radicals and militants to share their past experiences with the detainees. This feature, according to Horgan and Braddock, was a key factor that led to its success, where the tragic experiences shared by former militants are able to dissuade current extremists.<sup>46</sup>

However, due to its lack of institutionalisation, irregular financial mechanisms and a lack of dedication by the officials, the success of the programme was limited. Striegher<sup>47</sup>, for example, maintains that the partial failure of the programme was due to the lack of proper education on altering or countering extremist ideologies. As a result, the programme was targeted more towards 'disengagement' from violence rather than denouncing the ideology of terrorists. On the other hand, Rabasa et al<sup>48</sup> states that the programme has achieved notable success pertaining to disengagement in particular, despite its temporary nature .

### *Comparative Evaluation and Holistic Programmes*

There are several important elements that help to determine if a de-radicalisation approach is 'holistic'. According to Neumann, these features include ideological and religious education, vocational training to facilitate societal reintegration in the mainstream society. A holistic approach would then focus on establishing networks distinct from former terrorist networks, encouraging associations with the family and community with a friendly atmosphere for the detainees to promote trust in the authorities.<sup>49</sup>

Among the four de-radicalisation programmes, Yemen focused on changing the ideology of the radicals through re-education and religious dialogue by engaging

scholars. However, this programme was not holistic as it lacked efforts for reintegration by providing vocational training and financial assistance to the extremists. Pakistan's Swat Valley model adopted more holistic approaches that included re-education, vocational training and partial financial assistance. But this programme could not be continued due to a lack of financial support with a segment of those de-radicalised also re-joining extremist groups. The Indonesian de-radicalisation programme conducted during 2005 to 2007 was mainly targeted towards disengagement instead of de-radicalisation. This approach was limited and focused on ideological shifts through religious teachings in prisons, but did not provide vocational training or financial support to allow effective reintegration.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia adopted a more holistic approach towards de-radicalisation despite cases of recidivism. They focused on three aspects, which included: (i) proper re-education for ideological shifts with the help of the religious scholars, (ii) vocational training on different skills for economic re-integration, (iii) and financial assistance to the radicals and their families. In addition, the Saudi Arabia programme did not face any financial hurdles, with officials ensuring the physical security of those de-radicalised as well. Even though the programmes in all four countries experienced cases of recidivism, the programme in Saudi Arabia showcased long-term effectiveness in terms of its approach that did not end at disengaging detainees from violence.

### **Recommendations**

Through a theoretical and case studies-based discussion, it is evident that de-radicalisation programmes are likely to experience higher rates of success if a holistic approach is being adopted. There are three features of holistic individual de-radicalisation programmes that should be met.

Firstly, a detainee should be re-educated to shift from a violent to non-violent ideological

<sup>44</sup> Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries."

<sup>45</sup> J Horgan and Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs," 274.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>47</sup> Striegher, "The De-radicalisation of Terrorists," 19-40.

<sup>48</sup> A. Rabasa et al., *De-radicalising Islamist Extremist*, 115.

<sup>49</sup> Neumann, "Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries."

perspective. In this remit, former terrorists and scholars should be roped in to share their personal experiences and moderate teachings with detainees, which have proven to be very effective. Besides former terrorists, family members of detainees can also be included in this programme to further enhance its effectiveness. Secondly, vocational training should be given detainees to help them achieve financial independence. In addition to that, states need to provide financial support and loans to build trust between the detainee and authorities. Thirdly, a terrorist should be given a viable environment to reintegrate back into the society. There would be a significant chance of reengagement in violence if the individual feels isolated. Along with the creation of a viable environment for a de-radicalised individual, it is important to ensure his or her security as well. Former terrorists should therefore be given 'post de-radicalised security' by state security agencies, as they might face security threats from their former terrorist group.

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# Naxalite Insurgency in India and Need for Holistic Counter Responses

Naman Rawat

## Synopsis

*Using published secondary sources, this article traces the Naxalite conflict in India from its inception in Bengal in the 1960s to its current state. The absence of legitimate political institutions coupled with the corrupt practices of the government and bureaucracy, as well as heavy handed security responses have sustained the Naxalite insurgency in India. Therefore, Indian response needs to evolve by adopting smart responses to overcome the Naxalite insurgency through a combination of hard and soft responses. Therefore, good governance, institutional reforms and the adoption of a population-centric approach will likely contribute towards resolving the Naxalite conflict.*

## Introduction

Unlike a conventional warfare, an irregular warfare is usually a struggle between the insurgents and a counterinsurgent force, where the former has limited resources whereas the latter has superior military force. Therefore, the insurgents rely on local support to carry out their activities. As Mao himself noted that “a rebel must be able to swim like a fish among the people.”<sup>1</sup> Essentially, counterinsurgency campaigns become a struggle to win over the people. This argument also found support in the new Counter Insurgency doctrines proposed by David Kilcullen and the United States (US) counterinsurgency doctrine FM 3-24.<sup>2</sup> Gaining the support of the local population is crucial for

many reasons. One, it helps to reduce the support and the legitimacy of the rebels, and enables the harnessing of ground level human intelligence. This also greatly reduces the transaction costs of governance by promoting voluntary compliance rather than coercion.<sup>3</sup>

The Naxalite insurgency in India has been ongoing since it first started in Naxalbari in March 1967. Political analysts and counterinsurgency experts have proposed various reasons for the survival of the Naxalites. These include a lack of coordination between the central and state governments, a lack of equipment and training of the security forces as well as the Naxal extortion rackets that allowed them to raise large sums of funds. While the above mentioned issues have been important factors contributing to the growth of the Naxalites, the failure of democratic institutions to address the grievances of the tribals and the ability of the Naxalites to raise support from the oppressed rural classes were critical in allowing the survival of the Naxalites.

Since India's independence in 1947, the *Adivasis* (indigenous tribal people of the forests) and other rural peasants have had various grievances. Successive governments and bureaucratic administrations have largely neglected these oppressed classes.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Indian security forces heavily relied on kinetic means as a counterinsurgency strategy rather than focussing on winning the hearts and minds of

<sup>1</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Chicago: Praeger, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Army, “Army Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency”, *United States Department of the Army*, December 2006, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=468442>; David Kilcullen, “Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency,” in *Remarks Delivered at the U.S. Government*

*Counterinsurgency Conference*, (U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Conference, Washington, D.C, 2006):1–8.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: N.J: Prentice Hall, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Dhruv Katoch, “Naxalism in India: Prognosis and Cure,” *Centre for Land Welfare Studies Journal*, Winter (2012): 10–22.

the tribal population.<sup>5</sup> Over time, these issues have casted doubts on the legitimacy of the Indian state in the eyes of the tribals. This loss of legitimacy has worked in the favour of the Naxalites who have become a tool of political expression for the rural people who are stricken with grievances.<sup>6</sup>

## Evolution of Naxalite Insurgency in India

### *Rise of the Naxalites- Bengal (1967-1973)*

The first wave of the Naxalite movement was rooted in the grievances of the Adivasis and other rural peasants. Since British colonial rule, India had a feudal system of landownership and the feudal landlords were allocated land ownership in return for collecting tax revenue for the British.<sup>7</sup> After independence, Indian government did not introduce any substantial land reforms. According to the revenue ministry of West Bengal in 1953, of the total 11,700,000 acres of cultivable land, the ruling feudal classes owned about to 93% or 10,900,000 acres of land.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the landless peasants became sharecroppers for these feudal lords. Moreover, there were no laws that guaranteed peasants a minimum share in the yield of the crops or protected them from arbitrary evictions. The peasants were also physically, socially and emotionally harassed by the feudal classes, including the practices of untouchability.<sup>9</sup>

Radical sections of the communist parties in Bengal mobilised these rural oppressed classes to resist their economic exploitation by the feudal landlords. Things took a drastic turn in May 1967, when a peasant revolt broke out against the local landlords in Naxalbari village. Peasants stormed the granaries of the

local landlords and burnt the records of their outstanding debts.<sup>10</sup> Leaders such as Jangal Santhal and Kanu Sanyal of the Maoist faction of the Communist Party of India Maoist (CPI-M) joined the uprising which lasted till July 1967. This is often termed as the birth of the Naxalite movement.<sup>11</sup>

Following the peasant uprising in Naxalbari, Charu Mazumdar and other Maoist leaders formed a new party Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPI- ML) and launched attacks against the feudal classes. However, several tactical failures by Charu Mazumdar such as a lack of focus on the “mass mobilisation” of the rural classes and excessive use of violence through their “class annihilation” line proved to be disastrous. CPI-ML struggled to fully mobilise the rural peasants and the insurgency soon collapsed in the wake of increased counterinsurgency efforts of the state.<sup>12</sup>

### *Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh (1968-1994)*

Much like in Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, which houses the largest population of Adivasis in South India, also had the problem of landlessness among the *Dalit* peasants (a caste within Hinduism) and tribals.<sup>13</sup> From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these areas witnessed increasing land encroachment from the non-tribals which resulted in growing resentment among the tribals who now possessed very little land in the rural areas despite being the majority.

In 1968, following a meeting with Charu Mazumdar and other extremist Communist leaders, the local communists of the Girijan Sangham decided to adopt the Naxalbari method.<sup>14</sup> Soon after, the CPI-ML cadres in

<sup>5</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, “From Naxalbari to Chhattisgarh,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 21 (2017): 43–47.

<sup>6</sup> K. Balagopal, “Andhra Pradesh- The End of Spring,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 34 (1990): 1883–1888; Sumanta Banerjee, “Naxalites: Time for Introspection,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 44 (2003): 4635–36; Jairus Banaji, “The Ironies of Indian Maoism,” *International Socialism* 128 (2010): 129–48.

<sup>7</sup> Dipak K. Gupta, “The Naxalites and the Maoist Movement in India: Birth, Demise, and Reincarnation,” *Democracy and Security* 3, no. 2 (2007): 157–88.

<sup>8</sup> Ratan Ghosh and K. Nagaraj, “Land Reforms in West Bengal,” *Social Scientist* 6, no. 6/7 (1978): 50–67.

<sup>9</sup> Jairus Banaji, “The Ironies of Indian Maoism,” *International Socialism* 128 (2010): 129–48.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purushotham, “Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 832–62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, “Naxalbari: Between Past and Future,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 22 (2002): 2115–2116.

<sup>13</sup> Laxman Rao, Priya Deshingkar, and John Farrington, “Tribal Land Alienation in Andhra Pradesh: Processes, Impacts and Policy Concerns,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 52 (2006): 5401–7.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy and Purushotham, “Beyond Naxalbari.”



Naxalbari mobilised the tribals and started seizing the lands in Srikakulam area that were mortgaged to the non-tribals.<sup>15</sup> This spurred the government into action and after several delays and admonition from the high court, the government finally passed the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation with further amendments in 1970. This was done to address some grievances among the rural classes and thereby also reduced the Naxalite influence in the tribal regions. The movement in Srikakulam soon collapsed in the wake of increased police pressure and the deployment of the paramilitary troops. By the mid-1970's the movement had been defeated in Srikakulam.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding the passage of the tribal land protection law in 1970, police and the bureaucracy were unwilling to implement the laws and the socio-economic situation of the tribals and the Dalit peasants hardly improved.<sup>17</sup> This created a political vacuum which the newly founded Naxalite group, People's War Group (PWG) utilised to its advantage. They distributed almost 400,000 acres of reserved forest land to the poor, successfully portraying themselves as the representatives and the liberators of the rural oppressed classes.<sup>18</sup> The rise of the PWG in the 1980's in Andhra is often termed as the second wave of the Naxalite struggle.

#### *Naxalism (2004-Present)*

The Naxalite groups- Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People's War (PW) combined to form a unified group called CPI-Maoist in 2004.<sup>19</sup> Since 2004, CPI-Maoist has killed more than 2,000 security force personnel and over 3,000 civilians.<sup>20</sup> Much

like the first two waves of the Naxalite insurgency, India's administrative, bureaucratic and institutional failures resulted in the marginalisation of the tribals and other oppressed classes. The Naxalites exploited this gap to fill the power vacuum in these areas. The state failed to provide healthcare, education, and other basic facilities in the tribal areas of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand. These areas were confronted with extreme poverty and unemployment.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, unlawful land seizures by the government for development projects resulted in a mass displacement of the tribals. A combination of all these factors undermined the legitimacy of the Indian state in the eyes of the tribals. Despite their coercive tactics, Naxalites maintained close relations with the tribals and created *Jantana Sarkar* (a form of local parallel government) in their stronghold areas. They carried out land reforms, provided healthcare, and elected village bodies, small development projects, local courts, people's police, and a tax system in these areas.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Current Status of Naxalite Insurgency**

Despite the fall in the operational strength of the Naxalites, they remain an extremely strong force in districts such as Dantewada, Bastar, Gadchiroli, Bijapur, and Malkangiri. The Naxalites have a very structured and tight organisational structure. Their core body, which consists of 15 members, is a Central Committee (CC) headed by Namballa Kesava Rao alias Basava Raj.<sup>23</sup> The CC is supported by polit bureau (PB) and the central military commission (CMC). The polit bureau is the think tank and the political brains of the organisation. Its previous members included Kobad Ghandy and late Cherukuri Rajkumar.<sup>24</sup> The CMC, which is the official

<sup>15</sup> Banaji, "The Ironies of Indian Maoism."

<sup>16</sup> Kennedy and Purushotham, "Beyond Naxalbari."

<sup>17</sup> K. Balagopal, "Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 29 (2006): 3183–87; Subba Reddy, "Depriving Tribals of Land: Andhra Move to Amend Land Transfer Laws," *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 29 (1988): 1458–61.

<sup>18</sup> Balagopal, "Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh."

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy and Purushotham, "Beyond Naxalbari."

<sup>20</sup> "Fatalities in Left-Wing Extremism: 2005-2018," *South Asian Terrorism Portal*, 2018, [https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data\\_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm).

<sup>21</sup> "Meeting the Naxal Challenge," *Rediff News*, October 11, 2005,

<https://www.rediff.com/news/2005/oct/11bidwai.htm>; Rajat Kumar Kujur, "Underdevelopment and Naxal Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 7 (2006): 557–559.

<sup>22</sup> Rajat Kumar Kujur, "Countering Left Wing Extremism: Need to Look Beyond Numbers," *IPCS Commentary*, January 10, 2019, <http://www.ipcs.org/focusthemesel.php?articleNo=5543>; Banerjee, "From Naxalbari to Chhattisgarh".

<sup>23</sup> G Siva, "Ganapathy, Maoist Top Gun, Steps Down," *The Times of India*, November 7, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Sumit Bhattacharjee, "The Tight and Flowing Structure of the Maoists," *The Hindu*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/background>

military division of the Naxalites, is also headed by Basava Raj.<sup>25</sup>

The Naxalites are still very strong and raise about 150 crores (US \$20 million) every year through taxing the mining operations, bribes from government and private companies, extortion from Opium trade, Public Work Department (PWD) Contractors, small businesses, and Tendu leaf contractors.<sup>26</sup>

The current operational strength of the Naxalites is at about 6,000 members<sup>27</sup>, and a change in the senior leadership from Mupalla Laxman Rao to Nambala Keshava Rao is only going to prolong the civil war. As the head of the PLGA, Keshava Rao has extensive experience in the military struggle where he is an expert in explosives and has very good links with the arms traders.<sup>28</sup> This was also evident in the recent high-profile killings of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Local Assembly (MLA) Bhima Mandavi and the blast that killed 15 C-60 Commando's (an anti Naxal force in Maharashtra) in Gadchiroli. These attacks are evidence that the Naxalites have superior intelligence capabilities and operational strength to carry out 'swarming attacks' (attacks that involve more than 50 members) and hitting the high-profile targets.<sup>29</sup>

The intensity of the violence is still very high. In 2018 alone, the conflict resulted in 413 casualties, and this includes 109 civilians, 73 Security forces personnel, and 231 Naxalites.<sup>30</sup> The attacks on security forces in Gadchiroli also shows that the Naxalites are

trying to expand into other areas, rather than just limiting their activities to the Central Indian districts. An increased reliance on the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by the Naxalites will only protract this civil war.

### India's Counterinsurgency Strategy against the Naxalite

Since 2011, India has used the "clear, hold, and build" counterinsurgency model against the Naxalites.<sup>31</sup> Under this strategy, the government uses force to take over the disputed areas from the insurgents, holds them securely, re-establishes relations with the local population, and then carries out the development.<sup>32</sup> Specifically, the Indian state had deployed the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF) as the main force against the Naxalites. From 2009 onwards, CRPF had conducted various operations such as Greenhunt and Anaconda to remove the insurgents from the Central Indian provinces. The decapitation of the senior Naxalite leadership was also conducted by the Indian security forces.<sup>33</sup>

The government also responded with legal reforms to counter the Naxalites' influence. The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, were implemented in 2013. These laws provide greater security against the forcible land acquisition, by ensuring adequate compensation and resettlement of the people to be compulsory. The government now needs the consent of 70% families before

[er-the-tight-and-flowing-structure-of-the-maoists/article24844234.ece](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> P. V. Ramana, "Maoist Finances," *Journal of Defence Studies* 12, no. 2 (2018): 59–75.

<sup>27</sup> P. V. Ramana, "Present Cadre Strength of the Naxalites," *Idsa- Ask An Expert*, June 5, 2018, <https://idsa.in/askanexpert/cadre-strength-of-the-naxalites-in-each-of-the-affected-states>.

<sup>28</sup> Rashmi Rajput, "Gadchiroli Blast: 30 Kg Explosives Used to Prepare IEDs Planted under a Culvert," *The Economic Times*, May 3, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/gadchiroli-blast-30-kg-explosives-used-to-prepare-ieds-planted-under-a-culvert/articleshow/69154514.cms>.

<sup>29</sup> Arijit Mazumdar, "Left-Wing Extremism and Counterinsurgency in India: The 'Andhra Model,'" *Strategic Analysis* 37, no. 4 (2013): 446–62.

<sup>30</sup> SATP, "Fatalities in Left-Wing Extremism: 2005-2018" (South Asian Terrorism Portal, 2018), :

[http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data\\_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Naxalism: The Insufficiency of a Force-Centric Approach," *IPCS Commentary*, May 19, 2014, <http://www.ipcs.org/focusthemsel.php?articleNo=4445>.

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<sup>32</sup> David H Ucko, "The Five Fallacies of Clear-Hold-Build: Counter-Insurgency, Governance and Development at the Local Level," *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 3 (2013): 54–61.

<sup>33</sup> Suba D Chandran, "IPCS Debate: Targeted Killings as a Counter-Naxal Strategy," *IPCS Commentary*, July 17, 2012, <http://www.ipcs.org/focusthemsel.php?articleNo=3678>.

taking over any land for government projects and 80% for private projects. Similarly, the Forest Rights Act of 2006 were implemented to give tribals rights to live in the forest and access forest produce. These acts threatened the Naxalite stronghold and the Naxalites had strongly protested against these acts.<sup>34</sup>

The government also carried out various development projects to directly tackle the issue of underdevelopment and poverty in the tribal regions. This policy of increasing the development activities in the Naxalite regions remained consistent both during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's era. The government started the backward regions grant fund to carry out development programmes at the grassroots level. By 2011, the project included 250 districts across 27 states with a budget of 1830 crores (US \$300 million).<sup>35</sup>

The collusion of the Naxalite leaders with private businesses for personal greed also weakened the insurgency. It created a huge dichotomy between the professed Naxalite ideology and their ground level practices.<sup>36</sup> In 2008, 223 districts in 20 states were affected by the Naxalite conflict. In 2019, this has come down to 90 districts in 11 states. The operational strength of the Naxalites has also been reduced from the peak of 10,000 fighters to 6,000 cadres now.<sup>37</sup>

### Gaps in the Indian Counterinsurgency Model

The current security situation in Central India is what Kilcullen termed as "unquestioned dominance." However, control in an irregular warfare does not mean imposing order through unquestioned dominance but rather, achieving voluntary collaboration from a

variety of local actors towards common objectives.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, this is missing. In the districts affected by the Naxalite conflict, locals have refrained from openly supporting the security forces. In these districts, the Naxalites conduct their local courts and carry out killings against possible police informers.<sup>39</sup>

Instead of predominantly relying on the CRPF, formation of local anti-Naxal forces (like the ones formed in Andhra Pradesh did in the late 80's and the 90's) called greyhounds could be a better alternative. After serving for few years in the greyhounds, the soldiers of this force were transferred to the main state force. This drastically strengthened the local Andhra state police force which now has a large number of vastly experienced and well-trained counter-insurgency force.<sup>40</sup> Currently, the local forces such as the District Reserve Guard (DRG's), Jharkhand Jaguars, and C-60 in Maharashtra act as anti-Naxalite quick response forces. This means that unlike in Andhra, the regular state forces are still ill-equipped, and the onus of the anti-Naxalite operations falls on these quick response forces or the CRPF.

The strategy of clear, hold, and build is also problematic, as Ucko also argued that the most difficult part of this strategy is the "building" part.<sup>41</sup> The bureaucracy operating in the Naxal infested districts has been largely reluctant to carry out proposed development plans. This was evident in the Saranda Development Plan of the UPA government, where despite the retreat of the Naxalites, the local administration failed to carry out the proposed development plan. There have also been serious corruption incidents in the various development schemes, as seen in the incidences of the public distribution system (PDS) scam<sup>42</sup> and the recent Tendu Patta

<sup>34</sup> Vivek Deshpande, "Forest Rights Movement Bothers Naxals," *The Indian Express*, August 9, 2012, <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/forest-rights-movement-bothers-naxals/985655/>.

<sup>35</sup> Government of India, "Backward Regions Grant Fund" (2007), <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/efeatures.aspx?relid=79312>.

<sup>36</sup> Prem Mahadevan, "The Maoist Insurgency in India: Between Crime and Revolution," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 23, no. 2 (2012): 203–20.

<sup>37</sup> Ramana, "Present Cadre Strength of the Naxalites."

<sup>38</sup> Kilcullen, "Three Pillars of Counterinsurgency."

<sup>39</sup> Rashmi Rajput, "Men 'Fearful' of Maoists, Police 'Desert' Gadchiroli Village," *The Economic Times*, May 7, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y2q2299n>.

<sup>40</sup> Ajai Sahni, "Fighting the Maoists with Mantras," *South Asia Intelligence Review Weekly Assessments & Briefings*, July 21, 2008, [http://old.satp.org/satporqtp/sair/Archives/7\\_2.htm](http://old.satp.org/satporqtp/sair/Archives/7_2.htm).

<sup>41</sup> Ucko, "The Five Fallacies of Clear-Hold-Build."

<sup>42</sup> Dibankar Ghose, "PDS Scam: Chhattisgarh Govt Sets up Probe Team Headed by Kalluri," *The Indian Express*, January 9, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pds-scam-chhattisgarh-govt-sets-up-probe-team-headed-by-kalluri-5529283/>.

scam.<sup>43</sup> Traditionally, these are the issues around which the Naxalites have rallied the tribals, and it has resulted in these liberated areas once again falling into the hands of the Naxalite.

In 2017, the NDA government announced a new *Operation Samadhan* (final solution) to end the Naxalite conflict. The doctrine is a result of NDA's election promise to implement a nationwide single policy to deal with the Naxalites.<sup>44</sup> However, the doctrine did not contribute anything new, but instead merely borrowed most of the concepts such as the usage of high technology equipment and better military tactics from UPA's *Integrated Action Plan*. A more important condition that will further affect the conflict will be the upcoming Parliamentary elections in May.

Traditionally, there has been a 'dependency syndrome' from the state governments towards the central government to counter the Naxalites whenever the conflict gets out of control.<sup>45</sup> This makes the coordination between the centre and the state government a crucial dimension of the conflict. Historically, whenever there have been different political parties at the state and the central level, it has resulted in a lack of coordination between the central and the state governments. This was particularly true around the UPA government's era.<sup>46</sup> This lack of coordination was somewhat reduced after 2014, when the BJP assumed power at the centre, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and until recently in Chhattisgarh.<sup>47</sup> The Congress party recently defeated the BJP in the state elections in Chhattisgarh and one of the main reasons has been BJP's failure to implement the Forest Rights Act.<sup>48</sup> Naturally, the upcoming

Parliament elections will further challenge this coordination.

## Conclusion

The Naxalite insurgency in India is a classic case where the instruments of state, civil administration and bureaucracy engaged in further exploitation and suppression of the tribals, instead of upholding the various laws to protect them. Naxalites have utilised these political openings to their advantage and have strategically mobilised these repressed rural classes around their grievances to create their own support base. The conflict presents a recurring pattern right from the 1969 laws in Andhra, 1977 land reforms in Bengal to the nationwide land acquisition acts of 2013, where the government brought in reforms only as a counter-measure to reduce the Naxalite influence.

Presently, the Naxalite movement has lost its idealism of the 1980's and their strong local networks are losing the support from the ground level. Instead of utilising this as an opportunity to build its own legitimacy, the Indian state has relied largely on strong arm tactics. Thus, the tribals who are stuck between the two parties have indeed suffered the most. Any future counterinsurgency doctrine therefore, must adopt a people-centric approach to increase the collaboration from the local population. In the recent general elections, Chhattisgarh officials have enlisted the local tribal youth as volunteers, serving as a link between the villagers and the police. This has resulted in a 66% voter turnout, which was much higher than the 59% turnout in the 2014 elections.<sup>49</sup> Still, it is equally important to focus efforts on good governance, as well as to curb corruption.

<sup>43</sup> Saurabh Sharma, "Chhattisgarh Tendu Leaf Pluckers Caught Between Corruption and Cartelisation," *News Click*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/chhattisgarh-tendu-leaf-pluckers-caught-between-corruption-and-cartelisation-0>.

<sup>44</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Dealing with Left Wing Extremism: No Permanent Solution?" *IPCS Commentary*, June 16, 2017, <http://www.ipcs.org/focusthemesel.php?articleNo=5298>.

<sup>45</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "India: Fleeting Attachment to the Counterinsurgency Grand Strategy," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, no. 1 (2017): 57–80.

<sup>46</sup> PTI, "No Difference with Centre on Fighting Naxals: Soren," *The Hindu*, January 28, 2010, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/No-difference-with-Centre-on-fighting-Naxals-Soren/article16839993.ece>.

[states/No-difference-with-Centre-on-fighting-Naxals-Soren/article16839993.ece](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/No-difference-with-Centre-on-fighting-Naxals-Soren/article16839993.ece).

<sup>47</sup> PTI, "Home Minister, CMs of 10 Naxal-Affected States to Brainstorm Today," *Money Contol*, May 8, 2017,

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/No-difference-with-Centre-on-fighting-Naxals-Soren/article16839993.ece>.

<sup>48</sup> Jacob Koshy, "Aliens in Their Own Lands: When Chhattisgarh's Tribals Were Turned into Encroachers," *The Hindu*, April 6, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/encroachers-on-their-own-lands/article26749821.ece>.

<sup>49</sup> ET Bureau, "High Bastar Turnout Due to Secret Deployment of Tribal Youths," *The Economic Times*, April 16, 2019.

Presently, Jharkhand is emerging as a good example of how good governance can help curb Naxalism. Incidents of violence in the state have dropped from 2,213 incidents in 2010, to 851 in 2017.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that it is not the military weakness that has kept the Naxalites alive but rather, the perceived lack of legitimacy that the Indian state holds in the tribal regions. Therefore, it is equally important for the state to improve its human rights track record. If the state itself violates the basic human rights of the tribals, there is thus little to separate it from the Naxalites that it is currently fighting.

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<sup>50</sup> PTI, "Steady Decline in Naxal Violence since 2010: Govt," *The Economic Times*, January 11, 2018, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/62463380.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

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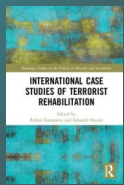
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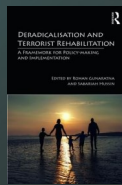


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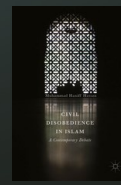
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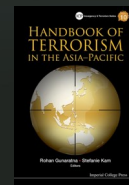
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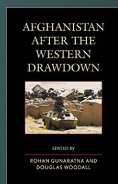
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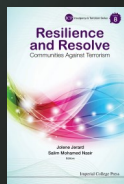
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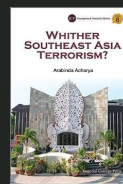
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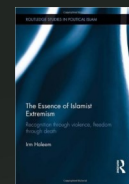
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