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Internal Security Threats: Traditional, Non-Traditional and External Actors

Internal security threats no longer come only from inside a country's borders. They range from armed insurgency to cyber attacks, and outside actors play a growing role. This article sorts those threats and the different responses each needs.

> **Traditional** Insurgency, fundamentalist groups.
> **Non-traditional** Energy, water, environment, health, cyber, space.
> **External actors** Arms, funding, safe havens.
> **Home Guards** Raised 6 December 1946, Bombay.

LWE: Left-Wing Extremism.

NIA: National Investigation Agency, 2009.

NSC: National Security Council; not constitutional.

PRAHAAR: Scheme against radicalisation.

1 Chapter 1: Traditional and Non-Traditional Threats

Must Know

Traditional threats

- The National Security Council Secretariat splits internal security threats into two families.

- Traditional threats are classic, state-focused dangers.
- They include armed insurgency, cross-border infiltration and organised militancy aimed at the state.
- Insurgents seek to overthrow or challenge the state directly.
- They cluster in border or tribal areas, where the state's presence is thin.
- Left-Wing Extremism in the Red Corridor and separatist insurgencies in the North East both fall here.
- Religious fundamentalist groups are a separate strand.
- Their methods and recruitment differ sharply from class-based Naxalism.

Non-traditional threats

- These go beyond the military entirely.
- They cover energy security, water security, environmental disruption and public health.
- They hit ordinary daily life rather than the state's authority directly.
- Cyber security and space security are the newest additions.
- Neither was a serious security category two decades ago.

Why classification matters

- Exams ask whether a threat is traditional or non-traditional.
- The test is simple: is the target the state's authority, or something broader like water, energy or public health?
- The label decides which agency responds and which law applies.
- Each domain needs its own toolkit.
- A cyber attack is fought with digital forensics, not troops and checkpoints.

Remember: Traditional = aimed at the state. Non-traditional = energy, water, environment, health, cyber, space.

> **Quick check 1.** Cyber security and space security are classed as non-traditional threats. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 Chapter 2: External Actors and the Domestic Toolkit

Good to Know

Role of external actors

- Outside actors supply illegal arms and foment violence across the border.
- This gives insurgencies firepower and reach they could not build alone.
- They also give propaganda, funding and safe havens.
- A group that can retreat across a border is out of reach of Indian law enforcement.
- So it is far harder to dismantle.
- Intelligence work is central to countering such groups.
- The violence we see inside India is often the last link in a chain that starts with financing and training abroad.
- That turns a law-and-order problem into a cross-border diplomatic and intelligence one.

Home Guards

- Home Guards began on 6 December 1946 in Bombay, raised under Morarji Desai.

- They helped police control civil disturbances and communal riots before independence.
- The idea borrowed from Britain's wartime volunteer Home Guard.
- For years the force was a patchwork of state schemes.
- China's 1962 attack exposed how thin India's home-defence reserves were.
- Every state and union territory was told to merge its scheme into one all-India Home Guards organisation.
- Eight decades on, they still free up regular police for core duties.

The layered response

- State police handle routine law and order.
- Home Guards act as their trained auxiliary.
- Central paramilitary forces step in when a crisis outgrows state police.
- Cyber cells are the newest layer, built for digital threats a beat constable was never trained for.
- Each layer was added to fill a specific historical gap, not designed as one tidy system.

Remember: Police → Home Guards (auxiliary) → central forces → cyber cells. Each layer filled a gap.

> **Quick check 2.** The Home Guards were created by the Constitution. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

3 Chapter 3: The Story of a Widening Threat Picture

Great to Know

From borders to beyond

- India’s security thinking once centred on cross-border wars.
- The 1962, 1965 and 1971 conflicts shaped a generation of planning.
- Insurgency, cyber attacks and climate shocks were barely on the radar.

The 2008 turning point

- On 26 November 2008, terrorists entered Mumbai by sea and held the city under siege for three days.
- It exposed how unready India’s institutions were for a coordinated, multi-site urban assault.
- The National Investigation Agency was created the next year, in 2009, to close that gap.

The cyber era and interlinkage

- As the internet grew in the 2000s and 2010s, digital threats grew with it.
- Cyber security moved from a niche IT concern into mainstream internal security.
- A water crisis or a major cyber attack can now destabilise as much as an armed insurgency.
- Neither needs a single soldier or shot fired.
- Internal security is now a mix of policing, cyber defence and resource management.
- See Countering Extremism and Border Security: Management and Challenges.

> **Think it through: Think it through: whose job is a water crisis?**
> A water shortage can spark riots, migration and unrest. But no soldier can fix it. So internal security now needs water engineers, health officers and cyber experts, not just police and troops.

4 Chapter 4: Past Papers

Exam Point of View

UPSC 2023: Home Guards

- Home Guards are raised under state laws.
- They act as an auxiliary to the police.
- Their role is to assist the regular police.
- (Source: UPSC CSP 2023, Q91.)
- Also see the question on the primary role of Home Guards.

NDA 2017: a state internal security act

- The question asked which state proposed an Internal Security Act to tackle terrorism, insurgency, communalism and caste violence.
- The answer is Uttar Pradesh.
- (Source: NDA I 2017, Q76.)

UPSC 2025: the National Security Council

- The question asked which bodies were established per the Constitution.
- The National Security Council is not one of them.
- It is set up by executive decision, not by the Constitution.
- (Source: UPSC CSP 2025, Q53.)

> **Quick check 3.** The National Security Council is not a constitutional body. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

5 Chapter 5: Current Affairs

Current Affairs

9th National Security Strategies Conference, August 2026

- On 24–25 August 2026, Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the 9th National Security Strategies Conference in New Delhi.
- It was a hybrid event with over 850 participants.
- It covered counter-terrorism, cyber-crime, narcotics, illegal migration and proxy warfare.
- The agenda mapped almost exactly onto this article’s categories.

- Biosecurity and space-related threats represented the newer non-traditional domains.
- Pakistan-linked proxy warfare and infiltration represented the traditional and external-actor side.
- Shah directed agencies to apply AI-based analysis to intelligence from the Multi Agency Centre.
- He also pushed implementation of the PRAHAAR scheme against radicalisation.
- (Source: Akashvani News.)

> **Quick check 4.** The 9th National Security Strategies Conference was inaugurated by Home Minister Amit Shah. *(True or False?)*
>
> See answer ↓

Quick Q&A

- **Home Guards raised?** 6 December 1946.
- **NIA created?** 2009.
- **Is the NSC constitutional?** No.
- **UP proposed what?** An Internal Security Act.
- **Mumbai siege lasted?** Three days.

Practice MCQs

1. How are internal security threats broadly classified?

A. Only as traditional threats, since non-traditional threats do not exist

B. Traditional threats (politico-military) and non-traditional threats (energy, water, environment, space, cyber, and similar domains)

C. Only as economic threats, with no other category

D. Only as threats from within a country's own borders

See answer ↓

2. How can foreign actors contribute to internal security threats within a country?

A. By providing illegal arms and ammunition, or by fomenting violence within the country

B. Foreign actors have no way to contribute to internal security threats

C. Only through official diplomatic channels with full transparency

D. Only by providing legal, publicly disclosed military aid

See answer ↓

3. What does effectively tackling internal security threats require, beyond conventional policing?

A. Only larger police budgets, with no training changes needed

B. No specialized approach at all, since conventional policing is always sufficient

C. Specialized training for security personnel and effective intelligence operations

D. Only stronger border fences, with no other measures

See answer ↓

4. What forms can external support for internal extremism take, beyond direct arms supply?

A. Only direct arms supply, with no other possible form

B. External actors can only provide support through official state visits

C. Propaganda, funding channels, or safe havens across a border

D. External support can only ever be financial, never logistical

See answer ↓

5. Why does specialized training matter especially for handling non-traditional security threats?

A. Non-traditional threats are not a genuine security concern

B. Skills built for traditional counter-insurgency don't transfer automatically to something like cyber security

C. Non-traditional threats require no training at all, since they resolve automatically

D. Traditional counter-insurgency skills apply perfectly to all non-traditional threats

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** Internal security threats fall into two broad classes. Traditional threats are politico-military, like armed insurgency. Non-traditional threats cover domains like energy, water, environment, space, and cyber. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** Foreign actors can contribute to internal security threats in specific ways. They can provide illegal arms and ammunition. They can also foment violence within a country, with India citing examples involving neighbouring countries. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** Effectively tackling internal security threats requires specific capabilities. It requires specialized training for security personnel. It also requires effective intelligence operations, not just conventional policing. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** External support for internal extremism can take indirect forms. This includes propaganda and funding channels. It also includes safe havens across a border, not just direct arms supply. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** Specialized training matters especially for non-traditional threats. Skills built for traditional counter-insurgency do not transfer automatically. Cyber security is one clear example of this gap. ↑ Q5

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3
4. **True.** ↑ 4

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