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# INDIA'S COUNTER- TERRORISM AND

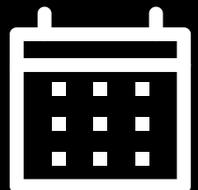
# COUNTER- RADICALISATION APPROACHES

ONLINE LECTURE SERIES  
WITH  
DR ADIL RASHEED

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SATURDAY

18 DEC

2021

11:30 AM

## SPEAKER BIO



Dr Adil Rasheed is Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Counter Terrorism Centre at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Strategic Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA). He is the author of the books 'Countering the Radical Narrative (2020)' and 'ISIS: Race to Armageddon (2015)'. He is currently working on a new book on the cross currents of Political Islam in West Asia and South Asia.

His research papers, namely 'Countering the Threat of Radicalization: Theories, Programmes and Challenges' (2016) as well as 'Jihadist Radicalization in India: Internal Challenges, External Threats' (2017) are widely read in the Indian strategic community. A student of Islamic theology and history, he writes extensively for Indian and international media organizations, participates at various national and international seminars and gives orientation lectures for officers and personnel of various Indian security agencies.

FOR FURTHER QUERIES KINDLY CONTACT: [css@jgu.edu.com](mailto:css@jgu.edu.com)



# INDIA'S COUNTER-TERRORISM AND COUNTER-RADICALISATION APPROACHES

## About the Event

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, 2021, Dr. Adil Rasheed talked over India's counterterrorism and radicalisation measures. He discussed about the various types of extremism that India faces and how it is dealing with them presently. He emphasised the need of fostering and supporting a constructive conversation among groups in order to improve community cohesiveness and prevent the risk of religious extremism.

## About the Speaker

Dr. Adil Rasheed is a Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Strategic Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) and the Coordinator of the Counter Terrorism Centre. Two of his prominent works include "Countering the Radical Narrative" (2020) and "ISIS: Race to Armageddon" (2015). He is a student of Islamic theology and history. Furthermore, he is currently working on a new book on the political Islam crosscurrents in West Asia and South Asia. His research articles "Countering the Threat of Radicalisation: Theories, Programmes, and Challenges" (2016) and "Jihadist Radicalisation in India: Internal Challenges, External Threats" (2017) are extensively read in the Indian strategic community. Additionally, he frequently writes for Indian and foreign media organisations, participates in numerous national and international seminars, and delivers orientation lectures for officers and staff of various Indian security agencies.

## Highlights and Insights

Dr Adil spoke over how terrorism and violent extremism are indications or expressions of a larger problem since when a few terrorist groups are defeated, more emerge, and consequently, the problem is now affecting non-Islamic populations as well. Radicalism is no longer merely

a security concern; it has evolved into a larger social and civilisational threat. Being a larger generational and civilizational issue, it reflects the zeitgeist. Dr Adil also brought up a school of thought that believes that the postmodern order is declining. Indeed, some of the world's most renowned political scientists and experts (even those like Fukuyama, who once predicted that liberal democracy would be the end of history) today believe that we are already living in a post-liberal world order characterised by "identity politics and new tribalism". In fact, the level of intellectual agreement regarding this assertion is astounding. This decline is related to the general decline of international organisations. Faith in international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has reached an all-time low, with lately the WHO coming under fire for sheltering China amid the ongoing COVID problem. The World Trade Organization continues to appear incapable of resolving the US-China trade conflict, while several nations continue to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC). Evidently, the public's faith in global, liberal institutions is dwindling. Uncertainty has prompted the emergence of religion as a counterweight to modernity, consumerism, and globalisation. People who are perplexed seek dogmatic certainty, which in turn, is provided by religion. Religion also provides psychological comfort, a sense of self-righteousness, and a sense of purpose. This is why fundamentalism is gaining popularity in our day, across all cultures especially in India. The masses' radicalisation evolved into a contemporary system. In reality, American revolutionaries referred to themselves as "radicals" in a positive sense, and the term "radicalism" came to be associated with communist and Leftist groups for a long time.

Jihadism, Left Wing Extremism, Northeast Insurgents, and Sikh Violent Extremism are the main terrorist threats to India. To this end, India has a three-pronged approach.

First being pre-empt. Early identification, interception, and prevention of terrorism-related actions must take a more forceful, proactive approach. Second is to protect, which entails a stronger security presence through community participation, civil society outreach programmes, fear-mongering tactics, and so on. Finally, there are techniques to prevent surveillance, detection, and deterrent.

The new foe is not a typical foreign military soldier or a typical sub-national or anti-national insurgency. There have not been any violent left-wing revolutionaries striving for the same sense of social justice. In truth, the terrorist is not pursuing any concrete, humanitarian purpose.

This warfare involves a new type of psy-ops, focused on the populace rather than the opposing armies or security agencies, in order to convert a segment of the population against the state and security services. Terrorists attack security personnel while hiding behind civilians and exploiting civil liberties to push them into using disproportionate force against vulnerable parts of their own community in order to demonise them as brutally tyrannical. This method is commonly known as Jujitsu politics.

Dr Adil wrapped up the lecture by talking about counter terrorism. He noted that counter terrorism actions include: Strategic communication campaigns, legislative changes, prison programmes, tolerance-promoting education programmes, inter-cultural conversation forums, civil society and community outreach, measures to reduce socioeconomic inequities and action against hate speech, terror funding, and radical websites by developing political and religious counter-narratives publications. In addition to discussing the different types of counter-terrorist initiatives, he also discussed certain counter-narratives: counter-Narratives in religion, narrative of the United States, as it pertains to the Constitution, counter-Narrative in politics, counter-narratives in history, taking Advantage of doctrinal disparities in extremist ideology, counter-narratives: tactical and insidious, narrative with humour and sarcasm and the liberal counter-narrative which is a rebuttal to the mainstream media's narrative.

### Question and Answer Segment

In addition to the key lecture by Dr Adil Rasheed, he also actively participated in the question and answer section where the participants came up with queries and opinions on the same.

Here are some of the questions raised by the lecture's attendees.

*Q. I will pose three questions that your erudite presentation brought to my mind. In fact, it was a very comprehensive and expansive presentation that covered a number of issues. My first question is that: when one looks into the discourses, why does the angst narrative get more attention than the reasoning narrative? Earlier, when there was any incidence within communities there was a need to reason it, i.e., why this particular event took place. Now there seems to be a flaw in the social discourses that results in angst selling more rather than the reasoning which used to be the bedrock of Indian society and structure. So why has that happened? The second question is that, when one explores counter-radicalisation initiatives, I don't believe that neither society nor government are engaging those scholars who are*

*prudent, rational, and who might really show the glimpse of what exactly is the basic core ethos of Islamic society and jurisprudence. We have hardly seen any documents which both Hindus and Muslims will go through and I don't know why there is a reluctance to engage in that kind of a discourse. And I would say that, in terms of interfaith dialogues, India has not done particularly well; we are simply hopeless. The third question is, when one studies counter-radicalisation and terrorism and all of those aspects, I acknowledge that POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002) and TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) were draconian laws that generated anger and angst among communities and societies. The third question is, when one studies counter-radicalisation and terrorism and all of those aspects, I acknowledge that POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002) and TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) were draconian laws that generated anger and angst among communities and societies. But the thing is, in terms of reporting the coming together of communities and suggesting that this is what's going on, and please take note of it. We have seen societies resilience and resistance to that kind of a movement as when I was a kid, I used to go to all those Iftar parties and they used to make me sit down but now, that kind of interaction has completely dissipated. I just request your reflections on all of these. Thank you.*

Yes, I completely agree with you on all accounts, and I would say, this question of identity has become very important. Somehow, in terms of identity politics, to an extent, the left is also to be blamed. If you are a minority, it is right to fight for your rights if you feel discriminated, but to have it as a hang up as if you are always aggrieved, and that everyone is conspiring against you, that you have this huge problem of persecution complex of some kind. God gives in to this anguish, 'everyone is against us', that has occurred as a result of the type of success in life they were looking for. Capitalism instils in us the belief that if you have it in you, you will be extremely successful.

However, only a few people achieve success and when the economy is the only yardstick of success, people feel inadequate and left out. So, there seems to be no other measure of success, for instance, if you're a professor or a writer, you may not have made a lot of money but if you are respected in society for your contribution, that should be viewed as a mark of success. Because of so many other things, the GDP and the so-called standard of living in economic terms should not be the measure of success. I think this is where we need to work a little harder. Furthermore, regarding the idea that anybody could be successful, whenever we take anything

to the extreme, such as taking individualism to the extreme, we need to ensure that we have the time to develop a sense of community. We don't have the time to interact with people and socialise as much because of the current economic system as is evident by people individually scrolling on the web, reading by themselves. Everybody is in their own island and are thus, making their own ideology. We are becoming socially deficient and impaired in many ways. Hence, we need to get the society in order and need to comprehend these issues as a sociological issue. It is not a political issue; it may manifest itself as a security and political issue. But there's something wrong with the way we are in this rat race of earning as much money as possible and also sending our children to school so that they can earn a living. What about life, why don't we discuss it? Only academics, I believe, can provide solutions to this problem.

Additionally, the goal of political parties is to win elections and all of them choose one kind of an ideology for which they see there is a market. Then, they market that ideology and hence, it should not be expected that they would like to bring communities together as sometimes that comes in their way of dividing society, whether it is casteism, religion and so on. So, governments today hardly have the time to govern, as they are worried about the next election. Even the majority government is busy thinking about the next state election. Now, suppose if you have a counter-radicalisation programme, and if there are a few cases of dropouts which become terrorists after that. You should not regard that as a complete failure; it is similar to the goalkeeper's job; he may concede a few goals, but you should take into account the saves. So, even if there is a 20% or 30% recidivism rate, you should be willing to see that 70% of the people were saved to some extent. So I think the whole idea that we shouldn't engage in the counter narrative or counter radicalisation exercise because of instances such as one person did this training and still went and exploded himself somewhere is absurd. That should not be a deterrent, in fact we should try to make more efforts so that we further improve. We do not have the answers right now but they will come with time as we engage more in these activities.

The same logic applies to POTA and TADA, i.e., if we have made mistakes, notwithstanding that some of them were glaring mistakes, we should be open and acknowledge that but, that does not imply that we throw the baby along with the bath water. We also need action by the security forces as using only sociological means and fanciful ideas is not enough. We need security agencies to fight against terror and radical forces. Along with that, we also need the right legislation to deliver justice and there should not be a miscarriage of justice. But just because of a few cases and instances where POTA or TADA may have gone wrong, does not

mean that we should just do away with all of these initiatives. Somehow, when there are a few failures or setbacks, we just become against them, and even academics and civil liberties organisations become sceptical about them. We should refine them, and even though those who argue against these laws are often correct in their arguments, we should try to modify them rather than abolish them entirely. I will say this much.

*Q. You had mentioned while talking about madrasas that they are not really a threat in European countries, but France has also red flagged several of them so could you clarify that. Now, my question is that right now you were talking about POTA and UAPA towards the end of the section. POTA was repealed on the grounds of being known as a very draconic law, and more often than not UAPA is also considered to be very draconian so are there any reforms that you would have worked on in the past to change UAPA?*

I would say that France has its own idea of secularism which has been contested by America and other countries as well. Even when it comes to liberalism, it becomes a little radical; it actually champions liberalism, a more emphatically what they call muscular liberalism. That's the phrase they use. So, any ideology that does not speak of rationality or try to champion scientific temper is supposed to be a problem, and I agree. It is a problem, however, when a madrasa provides faith-based indoctrination and teaches all of that, as the Tablighi Jamaat, which was recently banned in Saudi Arabia, was never allowed to operate in Saudi Arabia in the first place. It was only because Tablighi Jamaat was operating on some private servers that they did so legally. In Saudi Arabia, no Islamic movement was ever permitted. Same is the case with France which is adopting a hands on approach in fighting radicalism.

Moreover, it is also questioning those ideological trends which facilitate that kind of radicalisation, which is contested. If a Sufi goes to a Sufi discourse, they will say things like, 'in my dream, I saw an old man coming and telling me you wear this amulet and charm and you will pass your exam.' Your mind will not accept it, and even that is regarded as regressive. Tablighi Jamaat, by the way, only talks about the seventh heaven or what happens in the grave, it hardly talks about politics. But that still leads to a very regressive mind-set. So, to that extent, one can say that, it is conducive to a narrower minded approach to life and the world, which then helps a person to become a fundamentalist and terrorist to some extent. But, that is a debatable issue. It is also possible that at the same time Salafi jihadi groups are operating in these places and they overtly give jihadists messages in these madrasas. Please do not take any

of my statements as being completely true or being absolute. Only extremists take statements in an absolute manner.

But around the world we have found, even in some of the very high intelligence officers I have met, that most Indian Muslim radicals have had university education or modern schooling whereas only a small number of madrasa graduates indulge in violent extremism. It stems more from a sense of guilt: if we are religious enough, we should know more about Islam; why are they doing this to the Muslim world Islam has been referred to as an orthopraxy rather than an orthodoxy; Islamic people from madrasas offer namaz five times a day, and Ramadan roza is available 24 hours a day. When you're doing all of this, you don't have much time to think; it's the less practising Muslims who have all of the time to think about these issues, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami members who are always talking about political issues. Similarly, you will also find many of the political activists in the Hindu community, people like Savarkar who were actually against many of the orthodox practices in the Hindu religion such as him wanting to slaughter cows and all those things. Surprisingly less-practicing and more intellectual people create more problems when it comes to radicalisation. It is in contrast to, and the only likely exception to, the Madrasas in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which were designed to produce jihadis. I am making a bold statement here and I am not saying that it is all to be taken at face value, there will always be exceptions.

Draconian laws are implemented and sometimes they are needed as well as at times, situations are dire. One can argue that even though time may have come to repeal the 1958 AFSPA (Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act) in the Northeast, but it is arguable that there was a time when it was needed there. The other concern in this case is that if you go overboard and misuse a law then its whole purpose will be defeated. Indian security services under the government should understand that if you're implementing such a law we should use it very intelligently and should not go overboard with that. But I think that there are uses of certain laws at certain times, for instance, if a patient is given a certain drug which is very useful at that time, it is not hygienic for a healthy person and you would not give it to them, while at the same time, that little drug maybe useful to that patient.

***Q. In Indian cities, it has been noted that there is a sense of ghettoization, where a community is sort of segregated or limited to a specific locality, so, is there something the Indian government or the city planning committee could do to reduce this segregation we see in the cities.***

Yes, that is a big challenge, and the surprising thing is that even when new cities and localities are built, like Trilokpuri in Delhi where I live, it has had a lot of communal incidents. But these incidents have come up only in the last 20-30 years. At the time of building these cities, nothing was thought about, although they should have thought about not ghettoizing certain areas etc. So, we do not really think in those terms even today as there is a lack of that level of awareness when new areas are coming up. Are there enough mosques in Gurgaon? If that was the case, then the Muslims should not feel the need to go out in the open and offer namaz. This could be one of the issues of that area. Haryana never had a large Muslim population and so, the Haryana government never faced this issue of namaz, Uttar Pradesh has always had many Muslims so the ethos there is different. Thus, we need to take these issues more seriously, with town and city planning being something that we should be looking into from a sociological and communal perspective as well.

The other thing is that we should also study humanities and arts. If I don't understand Ghalib, as is the case with many other people, I am not introduced to the Muslim culture and ethos. If I don't understand Maithili Sharan Gupt and Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, and so on, the culture is completely forgotten, so much so that we are speaking in English even right now. So, that shows we are getting increasingly alienated from a very big community which does not speak the language that we speak. Considering that there are innumerable different cultures within India, this is another kind of ghettoisation, You'd be surprised to learn that it's not just a Muslim issue, as many other cultures thrive in India that we're unaware of. Different social and economic sections of society have completely different lifestyles and that is why the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. We are not that well nicked a society; we cannot be just an Indian state as we have to be an Indian society we just cannot be an Indian state. Efforts have to be made in that regard.

***Q. You mentioned that there is an increasing sense of isolation between Hindus and Muslims, so if we want to understand more of the thinking of Muslims especially Indian Muslims, where and how do we start?***

I think you should understand that Muslim does not mean Islam. We should not conflate Islam with Muslim just as we should not conflate Hindus with Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharat. There is much more to a Muslim than Islam. There is also a lot of culture, poetry and drama.

Every Muslim, good or bad, is not acting just because the religion is telling them to. If there have been good Muslims or bad Muslims, they are not good or bad Muslims because they follow Islam, it is merely a culture. If you read Hodgeson, he says the whole Islamic civilisation was an Islamicate. It was not only Islam, they took so much from other cultures around them as well. Thus, the conflation of Islam with Muslims is a problem and if we need to start, we should understand Islamic culture.

Why not study the cultural aspect, the poetry, the philosophy, etc.. Why can't we study Ibn Rushd Averroes, Al-Farabi and some of these great philosophers. At present, if one wants to understand Indian Muslims, they can visit old Delhi and try to meet the people there, try to understand what they say and try to go on the Urdu blogosphere where there is a debate on “*muqallid kaun hai aur Ghalib muqallid kaun hai*”. This is, in fact, a big debate that is occurring in the Muslim world right now. So, we need to understand the Muslim mind and its functioning, for which we need to read their literature and increase our interaction with them. Same is the case with Muslims as they need to understand as well. Surprisingly, earlier religion was the pre-dominant power in the world, but when science came up, it started questioning religion. At that time, religion had very little answers for science. But now, religion, itself, is not understood and yet, religion asks a lot of questions, and the people who are from the scientific communities do not know religion and cultures. That is the reason why they are becoming less capable of combating the threats emanating from there. So, we can't just dismiss religion because liberal ideology says it's out of date; we need to understand it. It will hit you whenever there is a blind spot. So the problem is that we left many things unattended, and we need to investigate those. Have I been able to answer the questions to some extent?

***Q. Any suggestions that you have for the clear and present danger that we face in Kerala which is towing the line of Kashmir, like radicalising the youth, the youth participation in ISIS or Afghanistan or Iraq, the rampant use of madrasas in radicalisation and the increase in surfacing of the radicalized youth, drugs, Havalas money and weapons?***

I think there should be a two-pronged approach. First, there are many seminaries in Yemen and many people in Kerala have links with that seminary and also, with the one in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it can be observed that Maldives is becoming radicalised and Yameen has a good chance of coming to power. The Taliban's ascent to power has brought back the fear and Islamism will become a major threat in the area. This is because with the decline of the ISIS a couple of years ago, even the jihadis began questioning the efficiency of violence.

But the way in which America left Afghanistan and handed it over to the Taliban on a platter, without any conditions of the Doha agreement applicable right now, this can be viewed as a major encouragement by the jihadists and the Islamist forces around the world. Hence, it has become a major threat. Even for India, the onset of Taliban in Afghanistan is troublesome as if Taliban succeeds, then it is a problem and if it does not succeed, even then it is a problem since more radical groups will come up. We cannot expect that if Taliban leaves Afghanistan, a democratic system will emerge. Since America has left that country altogether; we are in for some rough times.

Now, one of the ways to tackle this problem is to take the help of the Muslim community in India to act as a bulwark against the threats that we face. We need to engage the Indian Muslim community even more rather than allowing it to fall into the hands of those who are trying to radicalise it. We need to comprehend what we can negotiate and accept in those communities and what ideas Islamic culture and Islamic values can be used for a national ethos and also, what should not be allowed. You, by yourself, cannot have all the ten points, one will just not accept; you have to accept a few things to make these people, the Muslim community, a part of you. Moreover, we also need to reach out to some of the secular elements in Pakistan, because Pakistan is also on the verge of becoming more Islamised and radicalised which may lead to its failure as a state. Consequently, if there is a failed state of Pakistan, it will be a bigger problem for us. Then, we will not have anybody to talk to. At least right now, we can blame the military or the western world can pressurise Pakistan through Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and other means. Thus, if Pakistan becomes more radicalised, we will be facing a much larger problem. We need to find new ways of engaging with the Muslim community, also to see where we can help them, what all we can redress and where we need to draw the line. But, we have to directly engage with the problem and we cannot just naively label all Muslims as a problem community or the whole of Islam as a problem community.

Moreover, when we say that Salafi is a problem, Salafi islam is a problem that is also very dangerous. But right now, the Salafi Wahhabi in Saudi Arabia is also one of our best allies. About one crore of our population is in the Gulf, not in Shia Iran. Shia Iran is no less Islamist than any other Islamist, they kill more people every day, every jummah, and these days they are being killed in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is misleading to say that a specific sect of Salafis is bad and Sufis are good; we must be more nuanced in our understanding, dealings, and the stereotypes that we create. We must always be open to seeing the situation unfold as it does

in order to overcome our own scepticism; otherwise, we will have a major problem on our hands.