TERRORISM IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY: STRATEGIC AND POLICY CHALLENGES

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1.1 Abstract

Pursuant to the research question the present paper aims to analyse and provide an understanding of the various forms of terrorism in the region of Kashmir valley, characterised by long-term existence of defiance, political violence and insurgency activities. This type of terrorism has deep historical antecedents related to past political conflicts, cross border factors, social and economic differences, and changes in the political ideologies that affect the region and continues to remain a cause of strategic and policy concern for India. This paper provides background information of the insurgency that started in early 1990s, case conversion with explanations of the events and existing and new generation terrorists groups. It also looks at how the militancy has evolved from the guerrilla warfare or mass mobilisation to complex items such as coded communication and drone use.In addition, it evaluates the impact of political measures like the scrapping of Article 370 in the state's constitution, increase in local recruitment or the shift of threat programmes from the valley to the region of Jammu. This paper assesses the Indian state's counter-terrorism actions and tactics, militarily, intelligence and infiltration, political and developmental, and political engagement. That is why, the paper focuses on the concept of the compound approach covering security, politicisation, economical interest and community participation. It is therefore imperative to go beyond containing the conflict towards its resolution so as to have long lasting peace and stability in Jammu & Kashmir.

Keywords: *Kashmir Valley, terrorism, insurgency, militancy, counter-terrorism, Article 370, radicalization, strategic policy, local recruitment, India-Pakistan conflict*

1. Introduction

The Kashmir valley is one of the most militarised conflict areas of the world where the series of insurgencies, political instabilities, cross border terrorism is witnessed. Located between India and Pakistan, the area has become one of strategic conflict since the Partition in 1947 year though the present 'velocity' of an insurgency began in the late eighties. Sparked by political discontent, particularly allegations of electoral rigging in 1987, and exacerbated by external support from Pakistan, the insurgency soon escalated into a full-fledged terrorist movement with both domestic and international implications.Initially led by indigenous groups like Hizbul Mujahideen, the insurgency later saw the infiltration of Pakistan-based outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, both of which injected a radical Islamist dimension into what was originally a political and nationalist struggle. Subsequently, have come different proxy groups like The Resistance Front (TRF) and People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF) and high-tech warfare characterised by the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (drones) and coded communication.This is accompanied by the rise in the local militancy, which is worsened by the increased radicalisation of the youths through social media and political marginalisation especially with the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. Although the governments of these countries have managed to prevent infiltration and disrupt the terror formations, the strategic as well as the policy issues are still enormous.

1.2 Historical Background

The militancy in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) state can be traced back to as early mid-1989 when the state was changed into a militant's hub. The political turmoil was a product of the disillusionment that erupted from the local political structures after the legislative assembly elections held in the year 1987 where the National Conference–Congress alliance was accused of having rigged the political polls. This electoral malpractice resulted in disillusionment and mistrusted in authorities by the youth of Kashmir valley which made them to take up arms (Bose, 2003).This can be well understood if we look at the Kidnap of Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of former Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed in year 1989 DEC. The act of the government to release the militants who were in gaol in return for her freedom and this triggered violence in the Valley by insurgent groups (Schofield, 2000). Subsequently, some groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen an Islamic militant organisation backed by Pakistan started to rise.

However, it intensified in the nineties and up to the beginning of the 2000s reaching in depth and savagery. Local intelligence of Pakistan and especially the ISI was directly involved in the training and arming of the daring insurgents and this transformed from a mere rebel group to basically a proxy war (Riedel, 2008). LoC was used as a means for infiltration, all sorts of foreign trained militants could easily infiltrate through LoC with AK-47s and establish hideouts in the Valley in order to launch attacks on Indian security forces as well as innocent people.

Furthermore, new generation militant organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) further escalate the violent factor by the introduction of geometrical increased means of terrorism and replace the primary political aspect of the description of the kashmiri separatists. The attacks on the minority groups, suicide bombings, and the assault on the national symbols stood as evidence of a clear shift from a nationalist resistance movement to a terrorist one (Horgan & fearful, 2019).The conflict has claimed more than forty thousand lives since its start and has made tens of thousands of people more or less homeless, particularly the Kashmiri Pandit community (Bose, 2003). This makes the Valley to still remain volatile with increased factionalism, political instability, outsiders' meddlesomeness and sluggish discontentment. It is imperative to comprehend such a history in order to provide proper responses to these challenges and eradicate militant's origins in the region.

3.1 Evolution of Militant Groups

It is pertinent to mention that the militant map of the State of Jammu and Kashmir has drastically changed within the last three decades. Once being controlled by indigenous groups like Hizbul Mujahideen, the militancy has evolved and gave birth to a new kind of more sophisticated and more extreme groups. This evolution has been due to both internal drivers related to the new perceptions of the locals and external drivers like regional geopolitics and jihadist archetypes.

3.2 Decline of Traditional Groups

Once the most dominant militant outfit in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Hizbul Mujahideen has been significantly weakening in terms of the number of its operatives. This is due to the continued counter-terrorism measures by the Indian security forces that have neutralised a number of its main leaders. However, the group has not been able to anchor local support base and local relevance as newer groups emerge which are more radical (Ganguly & Fidler, 2019). Other factors that compounded the problems experienced by the group are diminished recruitment, emergence of factions, and ideological splits. Execution of Burhan Wani in 2016 who was more of a poster boy of Hizbul ended in increased protest initially but gradually led to decline of the group due to stepped up hunting and tracking down by security forces (Kaul, 2020).

3.3 Emergence of New Entities

Two such groups include the Resistance Front (TRF) formed after the abrogation of Article 370 in the year 2019 and People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF). It was alleged that they are indigenous groups fighting for the rights of the people but most of them are believed to have links to Pakistan based organisations. TRF is a group established in 2019 that has connexions to LeT and is accused of several targeted killings and major attacks on the security forces (Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, 2021). Likewise, PAFF is supposed to be sponsored by the Jaish-e-Mohammed in terms of its ideological support. They employ coded language, social media, and cyborgs to lure the young people into radicalization and violence, under a guise of domestic terrorist organisations that do not fall under the scrutiny of the international laws.

3.4 Influence of Global Jihadist Groups

Despite this, international groups like the ISIS and the Al-Qaeda have sought to enter on the conflict in the region which is enjoying the support of Pakistan. While directly they have a very negligible impact, there is increasing fears on how they use social media to groom people. The emergence of the regional affiliate known as the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) as well as the more recent declaration of the emergence of ISIS in 'ISIS Province in Hind' demonstrates the actors' desire to leverage the conflict in Kashmir for their ideological goals (Roul, 2020). It is a group that mainly targets young people by producing propaganda videos as well as online sermons on lone wolf attacks that are difficult to counter.Analysis of militant groups in J&K shows that there is change towards militant hybrid warfare, using ideology, technology, and asymmetric warfare. To counter this dynamic threat Radicalization and acts of terrorism must therefore involve more than a focus on kinetic operations but rather should involve surveillance in cyberspace, reformation and diplomacy against state sponsors of terrorism.

3.5 Changing Tactics and Strategies

The militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir have thus always pondered over various changes in their approach to he strategies used to fight terrorism as well as the changes in technologies. Such evolutions show a transition from the traditional terrorist warfare to asymmetric and even more technologically advanced manoeuvres and thus make it difficult for law enforcers and military personnel to counter-terrorism efforts.One of the aspects that has been adopted more in the contemporary war is the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). These have turned out as a weapon through which militants can cause maximum harm to security forces with negligible direct combat. The one most lethal happened in the year 2019, when a suicide bomber using a car bomb targeted CRPF convoy and killed 40 of its personnel (Press Trust of India, 2019). Since then occasional IED attacks on patrol cars as well as military facilities have testimonial indication to its use as a tactful weapon.

Another modality in the current conflict is the targeted killings besides the Improvised Explosive Devices IEDs. These attacks mostly target the local political leaders, suspected 'informer' and security agencies personnel with the intention of instilling fear and paralysing the political administration at the grassroots level. The recent attack on Jammu Kashmir BJP leader and his family members in Kulgam in January this year indicated how militants are bent on targeting leaders hence discourage the public from participating in the democratic process (The hit and run, 2022).The emergence of terrorist acts performed by radicalised individuals is another phenomenon that has appeared recently. More often, these are conducted by amateurs, no longer members of a cata documented group but are mobilised by the Internet and radical ideas. This explained the recent gruesome act of the police personnel shooting in Srinagar in 2021, which proved that new style is followed by militants without any interruption on the way a specific local militant is moving around (Roul, 2022).

Terrorism has also blossomed in terms of being a technologically advanced means in the new age wars especially in the troubled valley of Kashmir. The employment of the UAVs in surveillance and delivery of weapons is one of the major improvements in the capability of terrorism. However, in 2022, some drones deployed for cross border terrorism struck close to an Indian Air Force base in Jammu (The Hindu, 2022). Moreover, accusing that militants extensively use such platforms as Telegram or Signal to arrange their actions, they avoid ordinary techniques of monitoring. One such alarming behaviour is presence of under ground burrows across International Border in districts like Samba and Kathua to carry out smuggling weapons and infiltration (Times of India, 2023).

3.6 Local vs. Foreign Militants

The stated groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir have evolved markedly over the last decade more youthful and with increasing influx of locals in militant ranks. This change is not solely for the sake of operational advantage, but is an expression of socio-political Islamism arising from local concerns, socioeconomic dissatisfaction, and internet mobilisation.It was further escalated after the year 2016 after the killing of Burhan Wani, an affiliated Hizbul Mujahideen commander who was promoting militancy on social media platforms. According to MHA records, about 219 local youths joined militancy groups only in the year 2018 define the speed of various types of radicalization process in the Valley (Ministry of Home Affairs 2019). Even though they are decadal in 2022, with 87 of the locals joining the militant ranks, the phenomenon is a major concern for India security forces (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2023).

Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram specifically have been used commonly for radicalising and recruiting youth. Terrorists and their supports share CBRN, messages, documentaries, and recruitments speeches to appeal to the emotion and religious beliefs of people. Local members may have information about the target domain and social structures that the foreign fighters might not possess, and thus they can have logistical advantages over the latter (Kaul, 2020).Nevertheless, locals are replacing foreigners although foreign fighters especially Pakistanis are still in high demand. Terrorists neutralised 2022/193= 0.289 of the total terrorists were Pakistani nationals (MHA, 2023). These foreignsters officers usually associated with LeT and JeM are much better trained in handling weapons, explosives, and planning various operations. Most of them deploy in mixed cells where they lead/ specialise in the coordination and management of other local youths in the planning and execution of complex stings.In undertaking the cross-border support, foreign militants also display an important role too. Starting from the safe movement corridors to logistics of bringing in arms and ammunition, the attack is continues to assert that both the state and non-state actors from Pakistan are actively involved in stimulating terrorism in the Sri Lanka. Another evidence that has manifested such a scenario is the discovery of tunnels and the drone system drops of arms along borders to feed the insurgency (The Hindu, 2023).

3.7 Impact of Political Developments

Another significant change in the political leadership of recent years was the action of the Indian government to revoke the requirement that Jammu and Kashmir be granted a special status according to the 370 article of the Indian constitution made in August 2019. It resulted in the division of the state into two Union Territories, Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh and placing the region directly under the federal control. The government stressed that this measure would have brought legal harmonisation in law, promote investment and improve connectivity of the region with the rest of India (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020).In the period following the abrogation there were enhanced security forces, banning or limited communication and derestriction in order to avoid riots. Although there were lesser number of people response initially, the decision has made them to significant impact of militancy within the region. In some cases, such as in some parts of the Kashmir valley, the rate of

occurrence of acts of terror reduced due to improved intelligence activities and operations against the insurgents. For instance, terror incidents were 614 in 2018 and reduced to 244 in 2022 according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (2023).Nevertheless, the colour is not completely monotonous. While militant activities in the Valley came down graphically during this period, the Jammu region witnessed a heightened terrorist violence. This area that was before believed to be more secure was assaulted by new groups that were in the lookout for softer targets. According to data available the record reveals that there were 43 terror attacks in the Jammu region in the year 2023 only out of which one of the attacks was on Hindu pilgrims in Reasi district (Indian Express, 2023).

There is an inconclusive reception of it within the local area since Article 370 was abrogated. While some of them saw an opportunity to advance on economic development and governance, many others – particularly in the Valley – saw this change as the loss of historical independence and cultural identity (Kaul, 2020). This disillusionment has been taken advantage of by terrorist organisations, which have employed it with a view of recruiting the youth to join their teams. The Resistance Front and such like organisations have portrayed the abrogation as a strategy of occupiers, thus encouraging other segments in the local population to turn against it.Actually, the consequences of the abrogation of the Article 370 over a long-term period in relation to terrorism have not been fully ascertained yet. Although the issue of administration and security has been to some extent partially solved, the problem remains of how to deal with the local population and avoid its radicalization. In that regard, political incorporation, socio-economic integration, and policing security have to be used as strategies to translate this political risk into a peacebuilding asset.

3.8 Strategic and Policy Challenges

Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir needs not only a step by step solution but it also poses multi-dimensional question of law and order situation of the state. Thus, the Indian authorities are to reconcile national security imperatives with constitutional and humanitarian responsibilities, as well as to respond to both internal and external factors that contribute to the conflict.A crucial concern that has been raised earlier and up to the present time is the question on how to safeguard security and simultaneously preserve human rights. The mobilisation of manpower and the restriction measure have sometimes been condemned for limiting the civil liberties, and sowing insecurity among the would-be citizens. Although security measures are crucial to combating terror threats, its brutal force and long detentions make people turn into extremists and vulnerable citizens become jihadists' targets (Human Rights Watch, 2021). It is therefore important to encourage transparency, accountability and observance of human rights norms in order to foster a long lasting relationship between the government and the governed.

Another fundamental issue that has to be dealt with is the question of militancy sources. Some of the areas that owners of kafala-style labour migration regimes are associated with include high levels of unemployment, corruption, political exclusion, and perceived unfairness. That militancy in Kashmir is more than these factors is a reality but can not be separated from these socio-economic problems. Education, skill development, and healthcare facility along with local government, can act as possible options for Youth which could otherwise make them get involve in militant activities (Bose, 2003).Therefore why regional diplomacy has continued to be important in containing cross border terrorism. More about the level of interaction has been high with Pakistan directly involved in the fighting and using its proxy groups. Although there have been diplomatic measures like backchannel diplomacy, ceasefire agreements to somewhat stabilise the situation, it however requires constant and open contact to attend to issues such as infiltration and support of terrorism infrastructures across the border (Riedel, 2008). Thus the continuing cooperation with

countries such as United States which has declared LeT and JeM as foreign terrorist organisations would go a long way in helping India build its cases in the international forums.Participation is without a doubt the least unutilized yet most potent weapon against terrorism. This offered the militants an initial way to win hearts and mind through governance, respect to the cultural differences and community policing which could help in demystifying the use of militancy. Commendably, measures such as counter-radicalization measures and psychology interventions, and religious engagement can assist in the reintegration of such vulnerable groups to the populace (Ganguly & Fidler, 2019).

3.9 Conclusion

Thus, terrorism in the Kashmir Valley is one of the most severe internal security threats India faces today. This paper has identified and described the history of the insurgency, groups involved and a transition of tactics and local and international diversified militant groups. Thus, the withdrawal of Article 370 from the Indian constitution was a significant moment in the process of the region administration and in the dynamics of militancy. And although the levels of infiltration have decreased and the number of terrorist attacks in certain sections of the valley has reduced, new threats have surfaced over the period, particularly the shifting of the militants to the Jammu region and the use of hi-tech gadgets by the militants.The increase in localised recruitment mainly in form of socio-political grievances and radicalization through media then depicts a new way of insurgency in terms of sustenance and expansion. Meanwhile, the foreign players also are funding, planning, advising and supplying various logistical needs across the border and therefore the actual Worth for diplomacy and borders is apparent.Consequently, countering terrorism in the territory of Kashmir cannot be just along one-dimensional approach. Despite the necessity of the counter-terrorism operations, they should also be accompanied with the processes that would help to gain the trust of the people. These are civil liberties preservation, encouraging political tolerance, fighting unemployment especially among the youth and creating trust through public relations.Thus, to conclude, it is unlikely that sustainable peace in the valley shall be attained through the Forceoption alone. Security, political liberalisation, socio-economic development and regional integration will have to meet at this point. Unless the cause of conflict is resolved and attempts are made to remodel the region inclusive of all provincial elites Pakistan will fail to resolve the problem of transforming Kashmir from a zone of contention to a region of development and prosperity.

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