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MITIGATING THE RISE OF TERROR IN KASHMIR

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The Kashmir Valley Conflict is one that has caught the international spotlight many times. On 5 August 2019, the BJP Government abrogated Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The article granted special status and privileges to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The government further demoted Jammu and Kashmir from a state to a Union Territory. This move has played a significant role in the wave of terror which returned to the valley recently in the form of targeted killings. The following sections of this paper will trace the history of the conflict, evaluate the recent return of terror to the valley, and attempts to provide solutions to mitigate the same.

Background: History of the Kashmir Conflict

The history of the conflict in Kashmir is a rather long one. The conflict is largely an internal issue of India, with major interference from Pakistan. The seeds of the conflict were sown back in 1947 when the Indian subcontinent got divided into India and Pakistan. Under the hasty terms of the partition, the over 550 princely states in India were given a choice to either remain independent or align with a new state. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, unlike the majority of other Princely States, decided to remain independent. The princely state had a majority Muslim population but was ruled by a Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh.

As partition-related violence broke out across both nations, the government of Pakistan started building pressure on the Maharaja to join the nation. Much of western Kashmir was seized by pro-Pakistan rebels who were supported by the government. Tribal members of the Pashtun ethnic group entered Kashmir from Pakistan in September 1947. The Maharaja sought assistance from India. Indian government agreed to offer military support on the condition that the Maharaja signs the instrument of accession, officially acceding to India. Singh agreed and aligned Kashmir with the newly independent Dominion of India.

The First Indo-Pakistan War, also known as the First Kashmir War, began in 1948 when Pakistani military forces entered the battle. Both sides in Kashmir maintained their positions at the end of 1948, a truce was reached, and the Line of Control (LoC) was formed. Pakistan held the last third of Kashmir, leaving India with the remaining two-thirds. The United Nations, which oversaw the

mediation of the cease-fire, adopted a resolution requesting that both nations get ready for a referendum to determine Kashmir's admission. Pakistan rejected the resolution, but India accepted it. This prevented both the departure of troops and the holding of a plebiscite.¹ In 1949, the Indian constituent assembly adopted Article 370 of the Indian constitution granting special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The region became the epicentre of two more wars between India and Pakistan.²

Many experts argue that one particular incident that triggered the large-scale insurgency in Kashmir was the election of 1987. Many alleged that the elections were rigged in favour of Farooq Abdullah's party. During the elections, several Islamic groups coalesced and created the Muslim United Front (MUF) which attracted a lot of young voters. The MUF won only 4 seats, leading to disgruntlement and alienation among the people of Kashmir. Many in the valley believed that the 1987 elections were rigged, causing them to lose faith in the democratic system and pick up arms instead.³

In the years that followed, the number of civilian fatalities and terrorist attacks in the area both rose. At government offices, buses, and the homes of state officials, militants, mainly those from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), detonated bombs. This ultimately resulted in a widespread boycott of the state's national legislative elections in November 1989. The kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed in December 1989 was the event that brought attention to the insurgency. The daughter of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the previous home minister, was kidnapped by JKLF

¹ Blakemore, Erin. "The Kashmir Conflict: How Did It Start?" Culture. National Geographic, May 3, 2021.

² BBC. "Kashmir: Why India and Pakistan Fight over It." BBC News. BBC, August 8, 2019.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/10537286>.

³ Outlook. "The History of Kashmir Conflict and Its Various Phases." <https://www.outlookindia.com/>, April 3, 2022.
<https://www.outlookindia.com/national/the-history-of-kashmir-conflict-news-189840>.

militants. Later, she was released in exchange for the release of five militants from Indian prisons. Around 10,000 civilians were killed between 1988 and 2000.⁴

The insurgency in Kashmir, while remaining an internal matter of India, has huge Pakistani backing. Operation Tupac was a military-intelligence contingency plan authorized and initiated in 1988 by Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq. It was intended to assist anti-India separatists and militants in Kashmir. India's conventional military dominance was demonstrated by its triumphs in three wars waged over Kashmir. This led to Pakistan avoiding direct conflict with India and resorting to the covert deployment of Jihadist organizations.

The ISI provided significant financial and military support to the outfit, enabling it to operate as a proxy for Pakistan.⁵ Following the Soviet Union's withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 1989, Pakistan dispatched numerous seasoned terrorists to the Kashmir Valley, therefore establishing a new front of conflict and terrorism. With the tumultuous political climate in Kashmir at the time, the valley was left wide open for Pakistan to exploit. Pakistan was disseminating propaganda and influencing Kashmir's disgruntled young. It promoted an armed rebellion and financed a proxy war against India across the LOC with the assistance of ISI and other Islamic organizations.

⁴ HRW. Behind the Kashmir Conflict - Summary (human rights watch report, July 1999). Accessed August 24, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/kashmir/summary.htm>.

⁵ Campose, Philip. "Operation Tupac: The Continuing Stimulus behind Pakistan Army's Anti-India Perfidy." Indian Defence Review, May 16, 2017. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/operation-tupac-the-continuing-stimulus-behind-pakistan-armys-anti-india-perfidy/>.

Recent Developments

The insurgency in the valley began a new phase in the past decade, owing to particularly two incidents, the assassination of militant leader Burhan Wani in 2016, and the abrogation of article 370. The region also witnessed terrorist attacks on security personnel like the Uri Attack of 2016 and the Pulwama black in 2019.

In 2016, after the murder of Hizbul Mujahideen fighter Burhan Wani, fresh fighting broke out. He had a significant online following and was well-liked by the younger residents of the valley. Thousands of people showed up for Burhan Wani's funeral despite the restrictions. Burhan Wani was accredited with revitalising and legitimising the perception of insurgency in Kashmir. Burhan Wani, particularly his assassination, had a significant influence in revitalising the terror in the region during the years when the insurgency was on the decline. He was far more active online than other militants who preferred to remain anonymous. In Kashmir, his videos that discussed Indian injustice and urged the youth to resist persecution went viral. For many in the valley, he signified the aspirations and the passions of the new Kashmiri generation.⁶

Following the operation that killed him, Kashmir plunged into months of unrest with people organizing multiple protests and often clashing with the security forces. Burhan Wani's father said in an interview that had he been arrested instead of killed, the separatist movement would have faced a severe blow. However, his killing gave the insurgency a massive push. Calls for freedom and jihad were reignited and this pushed the cause for a homegrown insurgency, as several young Kashmiris joined terrorist organizations.⁷ In order to exploit the situation and carry out assaults on Indian security facilities, Pakistan increased the infiltration of trained terrorists. One such attack

⁶ BBC. "Why the Death of Militant Burhan Wani Has Kashmiris up in Arms." BBC News. BBC, July 11, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36762043>.

⁷ Outlook. "The History of Kashmir Conflict and Its Various Phases." <https://www.outlookindia.com/>, April 3, 2022. <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/the-history-of-kashmir-conflict-news-189840>.

occurred on September 9, 2016, in Uri, where 20 people were hurt and 17 soldiers were killed. In retaliation, India carried out surgical strikes on terrorist launch pads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The administration opted to go strong on the insurgency after adopting a number of ineffective soft measures to ease the conflict in Kashmir, which was emphasised by the adoption of policies like Operation All-Out.

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution was revoked by an Ordinance on August 5, 2019. A few days prior to the announcement of the order, telephone and internet services in the area were suspended. Tens of thousands of soldiers were dispatched, and public meetings were outlawed. Due to a threat from terrorism, tourists were advised to evacuate Kashmir. Other well-known political figures, including two former chief ministers, were put under house arrest.

Due to the counterterrorism campaign, border surveillance, and a decline in cross-border infiltration, Kashmir had a period of relative security and tranquillity. The valley was engulfed in an uneasy calm and a façade of normalcy that returned.⁸

New Phase of Militancy in Kashmir

Immediately post the abrogation of article 370, security officials started declaring several districts in Kashmir militant-free. The uneasy peace was also facilitated by the COVID-19 Pandemic induced lockdowns. However, in recent months, a new wave of targeted killings in the region was uncovered. The latest incidents signify the localization and indigenization of terror in the region. The militant groups have evolved their tactics and have started recruiting hybrid militants who are difficult to track.

⁸ Wani, Ayjaz. "Life in Kashmir after Article 370." ORF, January 29, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/life-in-kashmir-after-article-370-60785/>.

By forming new terror organisations in the area, Pakistan has been attempting to rethink its outsourcing strategy for terrorism. The Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) greylisting of Pakistan, increasing international pressure, the enlistment of several of its terrorist organisations, and increased security measures to thwart insurgency and unlawful cross-border activity are the main causes of this. Groups like the Joint Kashmir Front, the People's Anti-Fascist Force, and the Resistance Front (JKF), and certain others were established in an attempt to shield Pakistan from the FATF.⁹

The finer details of this new method of Pakistani terror financing are hidden in the numerous intricacies of such groups. To begin, the name of the organization reflects its new position. Pakistan has begun employing English-language names for its terror proxies to ensure that the groups are viewed favorably by the West, in contrast to prior Jihadi organizations. They emphasise their status as a secular, anti-jihad movement with their non-Arabic, non-sectarian, and non-religious nomenclature. In addition, due to restrictions on cross-border activities, the ISI has been forced to consolidate personnel, weapons, and the influence of proxies on a local level. The organisations have turned to soft killings because it is difficult to acquire weapons and infiltrate fighters.

These new terror groups target certain people, including minorities, outsiders, law enforcement and security personnel, and residents of other country who have moved to Kashmir, in contrast to other terror groups that commit massive acts of violence. These organizations employ OGWs to carry out these assassinations, allowing them to carry out strikes without disclosing the wider identity of their handlers. The outfits have used Hybrid Militancy, which makes them more difficult to track. They maintain a strategic edge by maintaining its members' anonymity, earning

⁹ Stambankadi, Rohith Sai Narayan. "Positioning the Resistance Front (TRF) in Kashmir's Militancy Landscape." ORF, January 11, 2022. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/positioning-the-resistance-front-trf-in-kashmirs-militancy-landscape/>.

it the moniker "faceless force" or "invisible outfit."¹⁰ In February 2022, the J&K police arrested four terror accomplices of the TRF who were assisting active terrorists in the Valley with logistics and support. The authorities discovered connections between TRF and Pakistan-based handlers. The terrorists were utilizing the network of OGWs that give logistical assistance and provide a safe haven for these terrorists in the valley. The outfits protect member confidentiality in order to protect Pakistan's traditional actors and give an indigenous identity to outsourced terrorism.¹¹

The targeted killings are primarily aimed at the Hindu minority in the region. Other prominent targets include security personnel, local councilors, and Sikhs.

In May 2022, a Kashmiri Pandit was killed while at work at a government office in Budgam. This incident put together with other targeted killings of minority Hindus has triggered fear and rage among the Hindus. Around 5000 Kashmiri Pandits stopped reporting to work due to fear.¹² The Pandits are Hindus from Kashmir who were killed by militants in 1989–1990 while the insurgency was just getting started. Tens of thousands of Pandits left the valley for Jammu and other regions of India as a result. The government unveiled a plan in 2008 to encourage Pandit migrants to return to the valley by offering them financial aid, jobs, and educational opportunities. Many of these pandits were forced to leave their offices and return to their homes due to the recent surge of targeted deaths.¹³

¹⁰ Stambankadi, Rohith Sai Narayan. "Faceless Force', 'Invisible Outfit': What Is TRF and Its Sinister Plan for Kashmir." News18, December 20, 2021. <https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/faceless-force-invisible-outfit-what-is-trf-and-its-sinister-plan-for-kashmir-4574888.html>.

¹¹ Hussain, Syed Khalid. "4 Terrorist Associates of the Resistance Front Arrested in Srinagar." Zee News, February 16, 2022. <https://zeenews.india.com/india/jammu-and-kashmir-4-terrorist-associates-of-the-resistance-front-arrested-in-srinagar-2437217.html>.

¹² Masoodi, Nazir. "Blog: 3 Years after Big Article 370 Move, How Kashmir Has Changed." NDTV.com. NDTV, August 5, 2022. <https://www.ndtv.com/blog/3-years-after-big-article-370-move-how-kashmir-has-changed-3227536>.

¹³ Mahendru, Ritu. "Undelivered Promises: Life in Kashmir after Article 370." – The Diplomat. for The Diplomat, July 29, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/undelivered-promises-life-in-kashmir-after-article-370/>.

Possible Solutions

The most important reason for the return of terror in Kashmir is the lack of trust the people, especially the youth, have in the central government. The government has focused solely on the security of the region and the promises of development and investment have not been delivered. Kashmiri youth still face massive unemployment. Days after the revocation of article 370, the government promised to fill 50,000 vacancies in the government departments within three months, but the promise is yet to be fulfilled. This is where the government needs to begin.¹⁴

Firstly, the government should focus on rebuilding the trust deficit and win over the confidence of the Kashmiris. One way of achieving this could be the removal of the Public Safety Act, which could help create a sense of oneness among the Kashmiris and help change the perception of New Delhi.

The government should also turn its focus toward the rural economic distress caused by unseasonal snowfall in the region. The administration should compensate all the farmers with a loan waiver.

Further, the government should stop the regular internet blackouts in the region, which only alienates the youth who are already disgruntled. The Centre should look towards establishing better quality higher education institutions in the region. The government must understand that the youth is more prone to radicalization and the key to ending the insurgency could be providing jobs and better education to the young population of the valley and stopping them from picking up arms.¹⁵

¹⁴ Masoodi, Nazir. "Blog: 3 Years after Big Article 370 Move, How Kashmir Has Changed." NDTV.com. NDTV, August 5, 2022. <https://www.ndtv.com/blog/3-years-after-big-article-370-move-how-kashmir-has-changed-3227536>.

¹⁵ Wani, Ayjaz. "Life in Kashmir after Article 370." ORF, January 29, 2020. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/life-in-kashmir-after-article-370-60785/>.

Conclusion

The history of conflict in the Kashmir Valley dates back to 1947 when the partition happened. India and Pakistan have fought several wars over the region, however, a larger armed struggle within the valley began during the late 1980s. Pakistani infiltration and intelligence played a huge role in fuelling this internal conflict. Kashmir now has again emerged as a theatre of conflict. The abrogation of article 370 and the rise of new terrorist outfits have led to the Muslim population in the valley losing their trust in the central government. The root of the current rise of terror lies in this trust deficit. The new wave of terrorism is homegrown and most of the captured terrorists are from Kashmir and not from Pakistan. The government needs to work to rebuild the trust of the citizens of the region. To counter the insurgency, the government must primarily tap into the youth of the valley and provide them with better jobs and education. The change needs to be brought to the grassroots to eradicate terrorism out of the valley.