



# ISSUE BRIEF

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## The Jammu and Kashmir Imbroglia



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### General

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has been in a state of turmoil for the past three decades plus. The Security Forces, through effective monitoring of the Line of Control, operations to check infiltration, and concerted intelligence based operations to neutralise the terrorists in the hinterland, have time and again been successful in bringing down the levels of violence to manageable limits. However, the government has not been able to cash in on the available windows to reassert their legitimacy in the eyes of the populace.<sup>1</sup> Post 2016, the neutralisation of Burhan Wani, the poster boy of the ongoing militancy, has resulted in a sudden impetus to the terrorist violence and increased radicalisation of the youth in the Kashmir valley, especially in south Kashmir.<sup>2</sup> The proxy war unleashed by Pakistan has been keeping the internal security situation in the state on the boil despite an exposure of its nefarious designs amongst the populace. It is essential that we understand the internal dynamics resulting in the disillusionment within the Kashmiri population and proactively work towards removal of the ingrained

### Key Points

1. Terrorism and insurgency co - exist in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. Over emphasis on combating terrorism appears to have resulted in ignorance of the existence of insurgency.
3. Lack of efforts at ameliorating apprehensions and the general apathy towards the people has seceded space in the cognitive domain for radicalisation.
4. The prevailing insecurity in the populace lends itself to exploitation by inimical forces within and without.
5. While diplomatic efforts at isolation of Pakistan and proactive counter terror measures must continue, the insurgency, needs address by an all of government approach.
6. The polity must desist from politicising issues and polarising them on community/ethnic lines for political gains and speak a common language.
7. Governors rule governor's rule affords the opportunity to strengthen the governmental institutions through the weeding out of the radicalised/subverted elements and re-energising the administration by instituting accountability.
8. The population will support the side perceived to have an upper hand in the ongoing conflict. A connect with the people, empathetic approach and people centric operations, a visible improvement in the administration of the state and highest levels of coordination and cooperation amongst all stakeholders needs to be the way forward.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

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apprehensions in addition to the ongoing counter-infiltration and terrorist neutralisation campaigns.

**Figure 1: Map of J&K**



The state has been placed under Governor's rule. It is perceived that this affords an opportunity to the security forces to undertake operations unhindered by political interference. However, are we ready to make the concerted efforts to ameliorate the root causes that seem to plague the populace at large? Is there a case to go back to basics for a better understanding of the ground realities and fabrication of an effective response to the prevailing situation? Is an over-emphasis on Counter-Terrorism denigrating our focus on Counter-Insurgency? These are issues that merit serious consideration to be able to stem the growth of radicalisation.

### **Terrorism or Insurgency**

“An insurgent uses ideology to target the government but a terrorist targets government to advance an ideology.”

— Anonymous

According to Thucydides, conflicts occur due to a mix of three factors, “fear,” “honour,” and “interests”.<sup>3</sup> When we transpose these into the current context of terrorism and insurgency, the relationship that stands

out is that terrorism uses violence of terror as a means of instilling fear, threat to honour and legitimate interests while undermining the legitimacy of the government to provide safeguards for the same. Insurgency, on the other hand, stems from an already existing fear and threat, perceived or otherwise, to honour and interests. Terror is but one of the means (though predominant at times) to subvert the unbelieving and the existing government institutions.

Accordingly, the response to terrorism and insurgency needs to be different. The first, counter-terrorism, focuses on the protection of the people from falling prey to the subversive attempts of the terrorists and is ideally tackled through intelligence, rule of law and proactive police-led operations. An insurgency, however, is more complex and requires an all-of-government approach to contest the insurgents. Military force will be imperative to stabilise the situation enabling the government institutions to reassert their legitimacy and control. However, operations in an insurgency afflicted area need to be people-centric, and aimed at denial of the population's support to the insurgents.

J&K is suffering from both terrorism and insurgency. The terrorists, especially the foreign terrorists being supported by Pakistan, are using terror to subvert the government establishments and aggravate the distrust of the people against the legitimate government, while simultaneously seeking recruitment of the local youth to add a home-grown flavour to the movement. The local militants in turn are resorting to acts of terror as the prime tactics due to their inability to target the security forces. However, the success being achieved by the inimical forces towards radicalisation of the populace is primarily due to the prevailing fear, trust deficit and the resultant insecurity brought about by failed governance. An over-emphasis on combating terrorism appears to have resulted in ignoring the existence of an insurgency. Thus, while the violence has frequently been brought under control by the Security Forces, a proactive engagement of the populace and strengthening the institutions of the government has

not kept pace. This lack of effort at ameliorating the apprehensions of the people and the general apathy displayed has resulted in the state seceding space in the cognitive domain for radicalisation of the population, especially the youth. This in turn appears to be one of the main causes for the sudden growth of violence in the state.

While a counter-terrorist can afford to target the terrorists through surgical operations based on specific intelligence provided by the police with relative disregard to the sensitivities of the people, a counter-insurgent must aim at eliminating the root causes of the movement. Root causes pre-exist the insurgent's arrival. This root cause is a wound, the insurgency an infection stemming from the wound. The counter-insurgent needs first to treat the infection (a military predominant approach to bring the situation under control) and then find and remove what caused the wound.<sup>4</sup> Consistent efforts of the security forces have, in the past, succeeded in treating the infection resulting in the successful conduct of elections, however, the eradication of the causes of the wound have been held hostage to partisan local politics and a disconnect between the Central and the State Government. Thus the insurgency has festered and played into the hands of the terrorists, who through their violent acts and propaganda have been able to reignite the flame of violence.

### Way Forward

In most cases, an insurgency develops due to poor governance and the inability of the elected representatives in meeting the basic needs of the people. In the case of J&K, the above may not be altogether true as fear of being denied the established rights to self-governance is the root cause which has been played upon by both the Centre and the State from time to time to meet their narrow political ends. A tendency to politicise issues as also polarise them on community/ethnic lines for political gains needs to be curbed, especially for national security issues. Our political elite and the media need to be sensitive to this

possibility. The tendency of the media to debate events with an eye on TRP must be curbed. Instead, opinions may be voiced with the choice of acceptance left to the people.

Pakistani abetment and support to the ongoing conflict in J&K is a given. Proactive diplomatic initiatives have resulted in the global community being sensitised to Pakistani involvement and the country being put on notice for abstinence. Simultaneously, the Indian Army has been able to make a dent in Pakistan's ability to induct foreign terrorists due to the effective anti-infiltration measures in vogue. We need to continue with the initiatives in place but should not abdicate responsibility towards amelioration of the root cause by subsuming to Pakistan the responsibility for the ongoing conflict.

Debate on the status of J&K and the currency of article 370 should be curbed.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the endeavour should be to provide good governance, affording quality education, employment and social and cultural well-being. A majority of the populace is hungry for a degree of certainty and balance in their lives. They will respond positively to such initiatives, this in turn will strengthen the family bonds and wean away the youth from the path of radicalisation. The state being under governor's rule affords the opportunity to strengthen the governmental institutions through the weeding out of the radicalised/subverted elements and re-energising the administration by instituting accountability.

Holding elections without a semblance of normalcy plays into the hands of the insurgents as the elected representatives or aspirants may be targeted to erode legitimacy of the government. Instead, it may be prudent to identify local community leaders/elders through whom the initiatives towards development at village/ community levels can be undertaken. This will deny an opportunity to the insurgents and should they act against such individuals, delegitimise them in the eyes of the people. The above will also facilitate the development of a fresh and younger leadership to

replace the old faces who have lost credibility amongst the people.

The government must talk to the people to generate a ground swell for a desire for peace and normalcy. However, these talks need to be supported by a visible improvement in the administration of the state. The “Say-Do” gap must be visibly removed.

A continued focus on counter-terrorist operations with initiatives to check infiltration are a must. However, while the Indian Army is proud of its counter-insurgency strategy of “an iron fist in a velvet glove,” the glove seems to have frayed over time, probably due to an over-impetus to counter terrorism and the dislocation of the erstwhile army camps within population centres to operation work habitats offset from them. This has made it difficult for the people to associate with the security forces due to fear of being identified and stigmatised. There is a need to re-energise the centrality of the people in our operational orientation. A display of empathy in our day-to-day conduct will once again elicit a positive response from the populace and be an important contributor towards the restoration of legitimacy of the government.

Ability to conduct people-friendly operations whilst simultaneously degrading the insurgent ranks, calls for good intelligence. Obtaining contact intelligence, or rather developing contact intelligence, calls for synergy in all intelligence agencies, especially the police who, if not totally subverted, will continue to be in the know of things through sources and contacts within the population. A thorough study of background, collation of all information, however innocuous, and a frequent revisit of the collation is important to be able to identify the threats needing further investigation. The general apathy towards follow-up investigation consequent to successful operations needs to be curbed.

Behaviour in all societies, regardless of religion, class or culture is dictated by a desire to seek own benefits or advantages. The population will decide to support the insurgency or government forces based on a calculation

of which side on balance meets their basic needs of physical security, economic well-being, and social identity. Today, the populace is accommodating to the dictates of the terrorists due to fear and apprehension. An all-of-government approach aimed at effective administration of the state with concomitant pressure on the terrorists will ensure that the majority within the population support the government initiatives and is weaned away from extending support to the insurgents. Thus, it is imperative that while the security forces continue their focus on counter-terrorist operations, governmental agencies take up the mantle of ameliorating the apprehensions in the minds of the people.

The near daily questioning of the veracity of security forces operations by the political elite, media and self-anointed intellectuals and human rights experts, in addition to inhibiting the efficacy and morale of the forces, plays into the hands of the terrorists and their mentors who, through the proactive use of social media, give substance to the arguments by propagation of fabricated and false stories. Whether the last bastion and the most visible arm of the government will be able to deliver on the tasks bestowed upon them in such a charged environment needs to be considered. A meaningful response to all government endeavours will only be possible if the polity speaks a common language. This in no way detracts from holding the security forces accountable for any excesses in their functioning.

### **Conclusion**

It is said that the insurgents are like fish in water, where water is synonymous with the population of the area. If the fish and water can be separated, the insurgents and consequently the insurgency can be destroyed. Going a step further, the water needs to have volume for supporting the fish, and this volume is made available if the water is confined by boundaries, such as the banks of the river/lake or the walls of a container. In the case of an insurgency affected area, the walls of the container

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can be compared with the dominant narrative or ideology that binds the people in support of the insurgents. In such a scenario, the Security Forces can reduce the insurgent component by catching the fish in ones and twos and through population control measures, but the fish will continue to breed and the insurgency to fester. A better and more permanent way to rid the water of the fish would be by breaking the container, thus dissipating the water. However, while the counter-insurgency forces strive to do so, the inimical forces within (Over Ground Workers, Politicians with parochial interests, the subverted government officials) and without (in the instant case, Pakistan) will persist with their efforts to continuously strengthen the container walls through moral and material support supplemented by a psychological conditioning through religious indoctrination and exploitation of social media. It is

imperative therefore that the counter-insurgency is an all-of-government approach, preferably under a single overarching agency developing policies and accountable for their implementation.

Countermeasures to terror, while simultaneously maintaining social harmony and economic development, will always be a challenge for the government as the terrorist organisations and their mentors continuously attempt to create and exploit numerous faultlines. A thorough understanding of ideology and motivation of the terrorists/insurgents, capacity and capability building of the counter-terror forces and achieving highest levels of coordination and cooperation amongst all stakeholders is an imperative for success in conflict resolution in J&K.

**“Learning from one’s mistakes rather than achievements should be the mantra for success.”**

### Notes

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