

Counter Terrorism Operations in Kashmir Valley Contest for Hearts and Minds of the People

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INTRODUCTION

Soon after the partition in 1947, Pakistan launched its first war of aggression, under the garb of raiders, to annex the Kashmir Valley by force. Pakistan made a second unsuccessful attempt to seize Kashmir Valley through military means in 1965. Poor governance by J&K Government was duly exploited by Pakistan, leading to a situation whereby armed militancy made its appearance in the Valley in 1987. Calibrated stoking of the situation by Pakistan, coupled with inept and insensitive handling by the State and Central governments led to full blown militancy in 1989. Since then terrorism has hit two peaks of violence, first by indigenous terrorist groups like Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), Muslim Zambaz Force (MJF) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) etc in the early 1990s; and second by HM and foreign (Pakistani) terrorist groups from mid 1990s to 2004. By 2007, violence had subsided to slightly above normal levels. However, terrorist violence has left a deep impact on the minds of the people.

KASHMIR'S TERROR CANVAS

Details of Terror Incidents from 1989 till 2007 in Kashmir Valley (does not include other parts of J&K)

Terrorism in Kashmir commenced with independence seeking Pakistan supported indigenous JKLF which later eschewed violence. Pakistan continues to maintain that HM is not foreign sponsored; other prominent Pakistani terrorist groups are Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohamed (JeM), Al Badr, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Harkat-ul-Jihadi-e-Islami (HuJI) and Al Barq. Unarmed entities actively collude with terrorists to achieve their own goals such as freedom [APHC (M - Mirwaiz)], unification with Islamic Pakistan [APHC (G - Geelani)], and religious fundamentalism (Jamaat-e-Islami - Kashmir and Dukhtaran-e-Millat).

Societal and peer pressure, due to fear, ensures what seems to be popular support for terrorist/separatist actions. The result is a very cowed down Kashmiri society that has lost the voice of reason and sense of humanitarian justice. Alleged atrocities/unlawful actions by the Security Forces (SF)/government civil agencies are the focus of media reports and so called 'popular' protests, while even the most reprehensible actions of terrorists such as public beheading/slitting of throats/gang rapes of young teenagers and women are mutely endured and even at times condoned with the justification that the victims deserved it.

Terrorist initiated incidents (TII) include public executions, murders, kidnappings, bombings, violent attacks, religious fatwas, media statements and coverage, fanning of the self-determination passions, anti-government/SF bandh calls, public funerals of killed terrorists, etc. Analysis of incidents reported in website of South Asia Terrorism Portal¹ indicates that there were over 350 violent TII wherein civilians were in 'harm's way' resulting in civilian casualties. Summarised details of TII's from 1989 till 31 Dec 2007 in Kashmir are covered in subsequent paragraphs. (If details of other regions and attacks on/involving SF and terrorists are to be included the figure would probably cross some thousands).

Killings. There were over 100 incidents wherein civilians were targeted fatally. These include over 55 political persons, many moderate and prominent Kashmiri Muslims, over 20 prominent counter insurgents (Ikhwanis) and surrendered terrorists, three mass massacres of minorities (Hindus and Sikhs), two print media editors who commented on terrorist actions, and a senior police officer killed while exiting a mosque after prayers. As per available statistics, terrorists killed 1585 people, comprising 981 Muslims, 218 Hindus, 23 Sikhs and 363 SF personnel between June 1990 and October 1992.²

Violent Attacks. Over 55 incidents, 37 of which targeted political persons, two cases of attacks in holy places, over ten cases of attacks in/on public places resulting in civilian casualties, three attacks on women on religious grounds/non-compliance of Islamic way of female conduct.

Bomb Blasts. Over 90 blasts, 70 of which were in public places with civilians present, six targeted holy places - both Hindu and Muslim, seven political persons/events and one case targeting a cable network as non-Islamic.

Kidnapping. Over 40 terrorists were released in exchanges for kidnapped civilians till the Government adopted a policy of refusing to negotiate any exchanges in 1994; one exception being the case of hijacked Indian Airlines flight IC 814).

Refuge in Holy Places (Mosques)/ Public Places. There were over ten cases of terrorists taking refuge in holy places, specifically mosques; and in two cases they took civilian hostages too. These include the notorious sieges of Hazratbal Mosque in October 1993 and Charar-e-Sharif shrine in March 1995.

Suicide Attacks. Over 35 incidents - of which half were in public places, including the Srinagar Airport, Srinagar's Tourist Reception Centre and political persons/events. The other half of the suicide attacks targeted the SF in public places, both causing SF and collateral civilian casualties. (There were numerous suicide attacks on purely

SF targets not involving civilian areas which have not been included in these figures).

Threats/Intimidation. There have been over seven incidents wherein threats were issued in public by various terrorist organisations against participation in elections, broadcasting of cable TV, women joining police and for women to adhere to Islamic dress codes. Between 1986 and 1992, over 90 Hindu temples were destroyed/burnt and numerous Hindus raped/killed precipitating the Kashmiri Pandit exodus in 1990. In the early 1990s over 700 ‘secular’, mostly government, schools were destroyed denying thousands of children educational opportunities. An organisation calling itself Allah Tigers issued successful threats demanding closure of liquor bars, video parlours, cinema halls and enforcing dress codes forcing women to don burqas (hijab). Dukhtaran-e-Millat (Daughters of Islam) a womens’ organisation has also been active in trying to enforce its brand of ‘Islamic morality.’³

Violence Against Women. Terrorists directly targeted women in large numbers. In addition to the high profile kidnappings and subsequent safe releases there were three other cases targeting mainstream politicians. On May 12, 1994, in Nowhatta, Srinagar; terrorists attempted to abduct the daughter of former Minister Ali Mohd Sagar from her relative’s residence. Upon resistance from the inmates, the terrorists shot at her and inflicted serious injuries. On November 1, 1995, at Qazibad, Anantnag; terrorists abduct the daughter of senior politician Ghulam Nabi Sofi and two other inmates from his house and set the house ablaze. On August 17, 1996, at Pulwama; terrorists killed Congress-I leader Syed Shah’s daughter at their house. The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) has collated incidents of terrorist violence against women and children. While the areas South of Pir Panjal have witnessed very high levels of terrorists’ violence towards women, the table below extracts data from the SATP website and summarises terrorist violence against women in Kashmir Valley only.

TABLE FROM SATP WEBSITE

Terrorist Violence involving Women from 1990-2004 - Valley only	
Year	Number of Victims
1990	17 women abducted/raped/killed
1991	18 women attacked/abducted/raped/killed
1992	35 incidents involving attacks on over 50 women - abducted/raped/injured/killed
1993	75 women - abducted/raped/killed
1994	56 women - abducted/raped/killed
1995	72 women - abducted/raped/killed
1996	74 women - abducted/raped/killed
1997	40 women - abducted/raped/killed
1998	28 women - abducted/raped/killed
1999	30 women - abducted/raped/killed
2000	40 women - abducted/raped/killed
2001	22 women - abducted/raped/killed
2002	20 women - abducted/raped/killed
2003	47 women - abducted/killed
2004(till 27 Feb)	Seven women - killed

Violence against Democratic Institutions /Processes. Democratic institutions/ processes were targets through suicide attacks on J&K State Assembly Complex on 01 October 2001 and National Parliament in New Delhi on 13 December 2001. The State Assembly Elections in September-October 2002, Parliamentary Elections in April-May 2004 and Municipal Elections in January-February 2005, witnessed high levels of TII’s ranging from attacks on Ministers, elected representatives, candidates, party workers and meetings. The direct visible impact was low voter turnout, resignation of elected municipal councillors and cowed down civil populace.

Forced Migration. While exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 is well documented, Balraj Puri reports that over 20,000 Muslim families also migrated from Kashmir Valley due to violence.⁴

Impact of Media and Telecommunications. There has been an explosion of media, especially electronic and telecommunications both mobile and internet. Commercial SMS alerts by media companies and TV coverage hit national and local TV screens with graphic images and statements by civilians, increasing public awareness and resultant mobilisation of civil population. The media is also under constant threat by the terrorists and their supporters. So much so, the media is either blatantly pro-terrorists/separatists or spineless (in the face of fear of fatal retribution) preferring to report issues without being completely objective.

Over Ground Workers (OGWs)/Supporters of Terrorists. OGWs and other supporters such as separatist activists, religious extremists, government servants including SF personnel sympathetic to the terrorists and the separatist/self determination movement are even more feared because they are not easily identifiable by the common man resulting in societal and peer pressure that is difficult to combat. Further, the power, influence and material wealth achieved by the OGWs and others is very evident and often the object of envy of many impressionable people.

Finance for Proxy War. Pakistan’s involvement ensures funding to terrorists, separatists and their supporters. Religious funding is also available for religiously affiliated separatists and religious entities. Collusion of some

inimically minded public officials and fear of reprisals combine to channelise government contracts/funds to families of terrorists or their proxies. Terrorists and separatists provide remuneration to families of killed terrorists and to people who suffer damage in encounters between SF and terrorists.

Fuelling the Support for Self Determination/Merger with Pakistan. Multiple forces spread over spectrum of Kashmiri Muslim society are engaged in fuelling and sustaining the desire for self determination/merger with Pakistan. Separatists have made a living out of separatism but have kept their children out of the movement. Many Non Resident Kashmiris (NRKs), especially those settled in Western democratic nations, provide considerable funding and international media coverage. Religious extremists seeking merger with Islamic Pakistan contribute by fundamentalising ‘Sufi’ Kashmiri Muslim society. Even mainstream politicians make emotive demands for autonomy or pre-1953 status or a separate Kashmiri currency.

Overwhelming Obsession with Kashmir Valley. The Muslim majority of Kashmir Valley and the fact that all the separatists and most terrorists hail from the Valley, makes Valley the main component of the ‘Kashmir’ issue. The regions of Ladakh, Jammu and POK are included as an afterthought. Kashmir Valley has 11 per cent of the state’s territory and 53.99 per cent of the state’s population with Kashmiri Muslims making up 78.33 per cent of the Muslim population of J&K and 52.46 per cent of the overall state’s population⁵. The Valley dominates politics of the State as it accounts for 46 of effective 87 State Assembly seats or 52 per cent (after deducting the 24 seats set aside for POK out of grand total of 111 seats). All Chief Ministers, except for the present Chief Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and most of the State Cabinet have been and are from the Valley.

Actions by Counter-Terrorism Forces - Government / SF

Initial deployment on the Line of Control could not prevent mass movement to and from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) for budding terrorists. The onset of violence and public passion led to frenzy of pro-freedom and anti-India actions overwhelming State’s internal security apparatus. The counter-terrorism forces have adopted the twin approach of ‘stick and carrot’.

‘Stick measures’ include the military operations such as searches, arrests, restrictions on the movement of people and resources under the provisions of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Inability to prosecute terrorists under available legal processes has assisted terrorists and their supporters. In some unfortunate cases SF personnel have taken recourse to extra-judicial measures eroding public confidence in them.

‘Carrot measures’ include attempts to work out a political solution, conduct of people friendly military operations, various civic action programmes such as Operation Maitreyi (youth camps facilitating interaction between Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri youth from across the country), Operation Sadhbhavana (community oriented projects in the field of education, health, hygiene and sanitation, public utilities), participation in community events such as festivals, sports, etc; assistance in natural calamities, group tours outside Kashmir comprising students, Islamic teachers (Maulvis), elder citizens, etc.

Pre 1990

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** Non-violent protests till December 1989 when Dr Rubaiya Sayyed, was kidnapped. The release of jailed JKLf terrorists, in exchange for Dr Rubaiya, led to massive public demonstrations celebrating the release of terrorists. Political killings and targeting of unarmed SF (Air Force) personnel by JKLf.
- (b) Actions/Response.** State machinery became virtually defunct. Governor’s Rule declared. Central Police Organisations (CPOs) and Para Military Forces (PMF) deployed. Use of excessive force in many instances, resulting in a cycle of civil protests and violence.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** Many people assumed that freedom was imminent fuelling public passions. Many families encouraged their youth to exfiltrate to POK for arms training, often as a hedge in case freedom/self determination was achieved. Most people and leaders were actually uncertain about the future – freedom or merger with Pakistan?

1990 to early 1990s

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** All terrorists were local Kashmiris. Violence against Kashmiri Pandits and moderate Muslims.
- (b) Actions/Response.** Army initiated intense military operations with high degree of civil population and resource control under provisions AFSPA.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** Many local Kashmiri terrorists killed or surrendered in large numbers. Civil population subjected to a life of controls and restrictions making them victims in the contest between SF and terrorists. Civil support for SF was minimal while resentment of restrictions and casualties was high. Large scale exodus of Kashmiri Pandits as they became the focus of terrorist violence while Kashmiri Muslim society preferred to remain passive bystanders. Hard line Islamisation of mainly ‘Sufi’ Kashmiri Muslim society commenced.

Early 1990s to mid 1990s

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** Influx of Afghan terrorists after end of Soviet terrorist violence enlarged to South of Pir Panjal. High profile sieges in Hazratbal and Charar-e-Sharif.

- (b) Actions/Response.** CT operations continue. After initial deployment of regular Army units on CT operations; Rashtriya Rifles, police Special Operation Groups (SOG)/Special Task Forces (STF), surrendered/captured terrorists in special counter-insurgents groups (Ikhwanis) and PMF/CPOs were deployed. Violent public demonstrations against high profile sieges led to excessive use of force by SF, resulting in civilian casualties.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** Anti-SF/anti-government stance of civil population continues fuelled by terrorist supporters and political entities. Kashmiri Muslim society chooses to ignore sexual exploitation of women by foreign terrorists in a 'conspiracy of silence'.

Mid 1990s to late 2001

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** Kargil intrusions by Pakistan Army, bloodless coup by General Musharaff. Heightened and more focussed terrorist violence – suicide attacks on SF and civil targets. Hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814 in December 1999. State Assembly elections Feb-Mar 1998, followed by Parliamentary Elections.
- (b) Actions/Response.** CT operations and restrictions on civilians continue. In November 2000, Army implemented 'Non-Initiation of Combat Operations' (NICO) for short periods as a goodwill measure in response to HM's unilateral declaration of ceasefire in August (till September) 2000. Terrorist supporters (separatist and media) fuel anti-SF sentiment through protests and media reports.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** No interruptions occurred in rear area security during Operation VIJAY (eviction of Pakistan military from Kargil). Continued civilian support to terrorists and separatists, fitful participation in local governance, especially elections.

Late 2001 to 2005

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** 9/11 and US declaration of Global War on Terror, invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Kashmiri terrorist attacks on J&K State Assembly and Indian Parliament and other areas of India. Indian military mobilises under Operation Parakram. Marked shift in origins of foreign terrorist from Afghans to Punjabi and Urdu speaking Pakistanis. Assembly, parliamentary and municipal elections. Ceasefire on Line of Control.
- (b) Actions/Response.** CT operations and restrictions on civilian personal freedoms continue. Terrorist supporters (separatist and media) fuel anti-SF sentiment. Heightened election violence mainly against political activists. State machinery more effective.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** Civil resentment towards continued terrorist violence starts to show. Public shift from active collusion to passive acceptance and in some rare cases resistance to terrorists. Participation in democratic political processes increases. Anti-SF sentiment diluted but periodic adverse incidents sustains civil population resentment.

2006-07

- (a) Situation Obtaining.** Bye-elections in 2006 to three assembly seats conducted peacefully. Internal turmoil in Pakistan results in some loss of focus in conduct of proxy war in J&K and thereby some reduction in terrorist violence.
- (b) Actions/Response.** CT operations continue with increased focus on 'people friendly operations' and lifting of many restrictive measures. While 2007 records lowest level of violence most terrorist efforts to target SF in the form of blasts invariably result in civilian casualties. Terrorists continue to target suspected informers and anti-terrorists. Terrorists replace highhandedness against locals with lavish payments.
- (c) Civilian Attitude/State of Mind.** Adoption of people friendly CT operations results in lifting of many restrictions on civilians. Public requests for more relaxations exploited by political parties such as PDP's demand for 'demilitarisation' and revocation of AFSPA. Improving security situation reduces influence of separatists with little support for their strike calls. Scattered displays of support for self-determination/freedom mainly during emotionally charged situations such as funerals of terrorists. Civil concerns began shifting towards development and provision of essential facilities. In 2007, the number of civil protests for development and provision of essential facilities overwhelmingly outnumbered anti-SF protests. Civil communities support Army's Operation Sadhbhavana projects. People publicly comment on the fact about separatists' access to unlimited funds, material benefits, while keeping their own children out of the armed terrorist movement at the expense of the common man who is not only put to inconvenience but his children are misled and denied opportunities to improve their lot in an environment of peace and development.

The Way Ahead

The common man must be protected from the predations of the terrorists and their supporters. The law of the land has to cater for the over-riding requirement of protecting the common man. Suitable laws, with appropriate checks and balance, must enable the prosecution of those who endanger the lives of innocent people. Application of law must be just, equal and timely. Soft-peddling action against high profile violators of the law sends wrong signals to the environment.

The civil population have shown that they are not willing to be subjected to any kind of harassment, actual or perceived, from the SF. CT forces are continuously refining conduct of military and Welfare Humanitarian Aid Measures (WHAM) operations to alleviate the problems of the common citizen. The individual awakening and gradual articulation acknowledging the great losses suffered by Kashmiri Muslim society due to the narrow

vested interests of the terrorists, separatists and Pakistani establishment would have to transform into a larger public movement to be effective. Media has to re-assert it's social responsibility by objective and balanced reporting. In the event of further reduction of violence levels and number of terrorists, Army units deployed on CT operations can be gradually replaced by PMF and CPO units thereby reducing visibility and presence of the Army.

At the time of writing this article, J&K State Assembly elections are due to be held in the second half of 2008. The terrorists and separatists will be under pressure to evolve a strategy that suits their narrow vested interests which clashes with the interests and well being of the common man. Syed Salahuddin, self-styled HM Supreme Commander and self-styled Chairman of terrorist United Jihad Council, recently issued a public statement that weapons would not be used to discourage participation in the elections, provided there was no state coercion on people to participate. This belies statements by people seeking protection from terrorists/separatists threats through external pressures to vote - a classic case of voluntary 'counter-terror'.

The Unified HQ has to optimise its functioning and coordination between various agencies involved with a comprehensive and holistic approach. Operational data collation has to be digitised and networked to be readily available to all concerned agencies.

Conclusion

The battle for the minds of the people is an uneven one. Civilians fear terrorists, separatists and OGWs, specially the ones that they cannot identify. The terrorist and his Pakistani masters employ 'terror', lavish distribution of money and exploitation of collective Kashmiri Muslim memories to dominate the minds of the people.

The Government and SF have to combat this with their hands tied behind their backs, in the name of justice and democracy and often at the cost of blood and lives of the SF. Other pressures include high expectations from civilians, intense and often adverse media scrutiny, insidious and inimical actions by terrorists, separatists and OGWs to dominate minds of civilians. SF have to overcome their lack of adequate coordination, which fortunately, is surmounted through healthy personal relations at functional levels.

High sense of purpose and training, well supported by the legislative, executive and judiciary; along with greater and more effective interaction with civil populace will finally prevail in the long run. In this endeavour all efforts must be made to ensure that the common man is well protected and is the master of his own destiny.

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