India Needs Integrated Approach to Dismantle Conflict Trap in Kashmir

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Abstract

Former President of Pakistan General Zia-ul-Haq once said, "Proxy wars are necessary to 'keep the pot boiling". Pakistan, with the help of terror organisations and separatists, has ensured that conflict in Jammu and Kashmir becomes a conflict trap for India. Pakistan is in a position to cause relapse of the conflict to deny space for dialogue and reconciliation whenever situation appears to become near normal. It is imperative to understand that gestation period for conflict resolution under such circumstances is long and thus the objective should be to adopt structured approach to achieve enduring peace. Though there may be a debate whether we are winning this war or it has reached a stage of stalemate, but strategy certainly is not failing in its entirety. Institutions of governance and democratic process have not collapsed and the instability has been restricted to Kashmir valley by sustained military operations and administrative initiatives. Though there may be a requirement to reorient and review the overall strategy, but the bottom line is to ensure that the terror organisations are made powerless and denied public and private space. Pulwama attack has displayed how brutal terrorists can be; however, this strategy is likely to bounce back on terror organisations and sooner or later genuine resentment among the masses against the acts of extreme brutality will rise. Emergence of new political wave is a welcome step and may challenge main stream political parties. This

could be seen as the rise of youth against the dynastic politics and may bridge the gap between the youth and the State. Overall objective of the State should be to ensure that people feel empowered rather than disempowered.

Introduction

Stable peace in Kashmir cannot be delivered simply by addressing the persisting tensions, contradictions, disputes and manifestations of violence.[1] It is near impossible to seek absolute victory through military means in conflict in Kashmir which is social, political and violent in nature. The objectives should be milestones and these milestones should be to establish 'temporary peace', subsequently 'adequate peace' for day-to-day life to return to normal and finally enduring peace. Today Kashmir is an unstable plateau and there is a danger of reversal till enduring peace is achieved. David Galula posits that counter insurgency is eighty per cent political and twenty per cent military.[2] General Sir Frank Kitson posits that "there can be no such thing as a purely military solution because insurgency and terrorism are not primarily military activities."[3] Since the conflict in Kashmir is dominated by cross border terrorism, security forces perforce have to play a dominant role to keep the threshold of violence at manageable limit.

Heterogeneous intellectuals and professionals are suggesting that counter terrorism operations in Kashmir are not entirely military and the focus of the government should be to restore and recover public and private space through political and economic initiatives. But the larger issue is that as long as terrorists continue to control the public and societal space, the focus has to be military-centric initiatives. Insurgency and terrorism by contrast, are designed to diminish rule of law and create anarchical situation where non-state actors can flourish and expand their sphere of influence.

India's defensive mind set has failed to create mass movement in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) against Pakistan's step motherly treatment to the people; where they even do not have equal rights as enjoyed by the rest of the provinces of Pakistan. But Pakistan has taken an initiative and converted its vulnerability into strength by triggering instability in Kashmir to deflect internal dissension in PoK into a movement for liberation of Kashmir by gaining popular support among the people of PoK for cross border terrorism. Pakistan has created a situation where no single stakeholder is in control of conflict in Kashmir and it is near impossible to get all stakeholders at one platform to initiate conflict resolution process. One can say it is a perfect "Conflict Trap" that has been overlooked by military professionals and policy makers in India.

Who is in Control of the Conflict in Kashmir?

The conflict in Kashmir has reached a stage where local population and political leadership do not have the power to control or end the conflict.[4] Such a stage is detrimental to the national security and under such circumstances conflict takes a direction where no stakeholder is in real control of the trajectory of the conflict. The big question is that in such an environment who is in control of the conflict and who can end it or pause to create opportunities for reconciliation? Raising of multiple terror organisations with diverse ideological background and separatists with different political objectives have ensured that no single party to conflict is in control of the situation. Multiple stakeholders act as pressure groups against each other to prevent dialogue or reconciliation. Pakistan retains the freedom to create conditions for conflict to relapse, escalate, deny reconciliation and defuse if threshold assumes dangerous proportions. Pakistan has ensured that Kashmir gets into a perfect "Conflict Trap" so that no single stakeholder is in control of the situation to reconcile and engage with the government to restore peace. Under such circumstances even if the temporary peace is restored by precise military operations and proactive political initiatives, "conflict relapse" remains a probability. Kashmir witnessed "conflict relapse" in 2008 after Amarnath Land row, 2010 agitation that erupted post Sona Pindi encounter and post Burhan Wani killing in 2016.

Under such an environment, strategy to deal with each of the constituents of the conflict would be different and should not be addressed by templated methods. Terror organisations would require precise counter-terrorist operations, separatists should be discredited by a sustained campaign and their financial channels are required to be strangulated, public opinion is required to be shaped by a positive narrative by debunking the false narrative of the inimical forces.

New Wave of Violence

Kashmiri terrorists are using violence as dominant weapon to target the pro peace section of the society and create a fear psychosis to coerce the masses. Killing those who stood up against the dictates of the terrorists and those who are willing to participate in peace process have been subjected to brutality by the terror organisations. Brutal killing of suspected informers and members of the security forces has been part of the practice of Kashmiri terrorists to discourage any visible opposition to the separatist movement. However, new wave of violence is being used as a weapon to coerce and terrorise public by making videos and sharing them on social media as was done by ISIS and Al Qaeda. Suicide attacks will add new dimension to the ongoing Jihad that will impact political parties, public at large and the security forces.

Why have the terror organisations adopted this strategy of declaring and dissemination of their brand of justice? There are four obvious objectives for unleashing violence, first to retain loyalty of the public through violence and coercion, second, to retain control over masses that was seen to be slipping and third, to justify that those who are against Jihad are enemy of Islam and would meet violent end. New wave of terrorism has caused a lurking fear among terror organisations of losing public support in spite of the huge rallies at funeral processions of the killed terrorists. However, terror organisations wish to give a message that they would not hesitate to deliver instant justice to those who are accused of betraying the cause of Jihad. Fourth, is to disrupt the intelligence network to prevent flow of ground intelligence against terrorists. It is an effective measure and also creates impact on

the large section of population. However, it has caused resentment against the terror organisations and flow of information has in reality increased.

Political Churning – Winds of Change or Winds of Deeper Crisis?

Main stream political parties boycotted Municipal and Panchayat elections on the pretext that they will not contest the polls until the Centre and the Governor clarify their positions on Article 35-A, which gives special rights to the people in the State and bars outsiders from owning immovable property.[5] However, National Conference (NC), People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Communists did not realise that youth in Kashmir was ready to take on the challenge and defy terror dictates to fight elections to the Municipalities and Panchayats. The voter turnout in Municipal elections was low but in phase one of the Panchayat elections, people came out to cast their votes in large numbers. Kupwara had witnessed highest voter turnout with 71.9 per cent and Ganderbal was lowest with 11.9 per cent.[6] This is being seen as rise of third front in Kashmir driven by the youths. It has challenged the foundations of the two dynastic political parties and there seems to be enthusiasm among the youth to participate in the democratic process in Kashmir. Larger participation of the youth in political process in Kashmir can help in building bridges with disaffected section of the society and narrow the wedge between youth and the State. However, absolute reliance on this new political churning may be expecting too much from this wave, because it is still at the experimentation stage and this political force lacks dedicated cadres at grass root level. This new political entity is without name and identity so far.

The youth in Kashmir is looking for transparent governance and people are fed up with the successive corrupt regimes that are responsible for miseries of the people of Kashmir. The old guard would endeavour to create enough impediments to ensure this experiment fails. But if it fails it may push the state into deeper crisis. Notwithstanding the outcome of this initiative, the legitimacy of Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India is exercised through democratic process and NC and PDP are important

constituents of this process. Thus, any endeavour to discredit these political parties will be counterproductive. Pulwama terror attack has sent shock waves to the political leaders as well. The threat of this new wave of terror will not only be against the security forces but it could be targeted against political parties whom the terror organisations consider detrimental to Jihad.

Radicalisation or Political Disaffection Acting as Traction for Youth to Join Terror Organisations?

The causal linkage between economic aspirations oversimplifies the causes for Kashmiri youths joining terror groups. Often psychological factors such as personal grievances or the desire for personal empowerment, heroic status, or simple boredom are as or more important than political factors or the absence of economic opportunity[7] are few major reasons of youth joining terror organisations in Kashmir. It is very difficult to determine if radicalisation or disaffection (anger and frustration) is acting as traction to join terrorism. Large number of youth have joined terrorism due to personal failure, various social, economic, political and other factors, which might engender conditions in which terrorist organizations could engage in recruitment and win support.[8] Simply creating low status jobs does not address these psychological factors. Radicalisation in Kashmir is an issue but to attribute youth joining terror organisation due to radicalisation is also far from truth. More than religious radicalisation it is rampant use of social media platforms that is administering a lethal dose of radical content for the last 30 years of extremism in Kashmir,[9] and there is no potent counter narrative to deal with this menace. So intertwined are the ground realities and online campaigns that one can hardly differentiate from the other. Anti-national activities and terrorist propaganda are made to appear legitimate as the new recruits are projected as the victims of the Indian State and saviours of Kashmir.[10]

A study by Jammu and Kashmir Police suggests that one noticeable outcome of this study is that this wave of fresh recruitments is not based or driven by ideology as the surge is only seen in South Kashmir and there too in identifiable areas. If it was ideology driven, then pan-Kashmir footprints would have

been evident.[11] There is no single driver of radicalisation or disaffection and, therefore, no single profile of a terrorist can determine the reason for radicalisation. Experts have identified a number of recurring factors and dynamics that apply to Kashmir as well. These could be grievances, harassment by security forces, ideology, violence, victimisation, glamour, personal failure, loss of family member or friend and even lure of   money.

Defeat of the People should not be the Objective?

Security forces should endeavour to achieve stability and not victory over its own people. No nation has ever achieved peace by defeating its own people. Media plays an important role in conveying that victory of State is victory of people. A perception persists in Kashmir that people of Kashmir are slave to the main land politics and that is causing a sense of victimhood. State and   political leadership should not be seen as creator of "problem, reaction and solution". Endeavour should be made to defeat the idea of separatist movement and Jihad rather than defeat of the people. Ideology certainly cannot be defeated by the gun; it requires whole of the government approach and collective efforts of the State, people and the society. But if people are not likely to be empowered politically and economically then the overall objective will be lost.

There is a need for the political leadership to understand that the youth of Kashmir are children of conflict and have no experience of political process or leading a normal life. Every child has been exposed to brush with death at some point in time due to ongoing proxy war. Muscular policy against terrorists may yield result but similar policy against people would be counterproductive. Another factor that adds to the instability is communally charged environment prevailing in India. Every incident of communal violence or even rhetoric by politicians and fringe elements adds to the insecurity among the people of Kashmir. Media can play an important role in dispelling this insecurity. Liberation of people from this "conflict trap" is imperative and display of empathy, respect and sense of belonging is vital to make the people feel part of the main stream.

Have We Succeeded in J and K?

A policy or a strategy can be pursued only if the empirical examination suggests that we are succeeding in Kashmir. If terrorists control streets and can mobilise public against the State, somewhere, the strategy is not working or it is a stalemate. If terror organisations are able to create liberated zone and no go areas, in that case strategy is certainly failing. However, in spite of 30 years of persistent efforts of terror organisations and proxy war by Pakistan, State has not allowed liberated zones or no go areas. It is an achievement that State has been able to roll up the terrorism/ militancy from the South of Pir Panjal and now restricted to Kashmir Valley. Democratic institutions are functional and other institutions of governance have not collapsed completely and are functional in spite of the efforts of Pakistan to alter the established order. There may be a need to reorient and rethink certain aspects of state policy but under the circumstances the strategy certainly is not failing. Ultimate victory will be in case India is able to demystify, decode and dismantle conflict trap laid by Pakistan.

Where do we go Now?

Insurgency and terrorism are long wars and no readymade solution is available for conflict resolution. Reclaiming the support and faith of the people is a cornerstone for success. Some of the measures are as under:-

(a) It is important to understand the nature of conflict in Kashmir. It is a "conflict trap" aimed at ensuring that conflict remains inexorable and unresolved for long period. That is why multiple stakeholders with diverse objectives have been created. Thus a uni-directional approach is unlikely to succeed. It would require synergised efforts to deal with physical, cultural and structural violence.

(b) The objective of counterterrorist operations should be to render terrorists powerless; and in theory aim of military operations is to continue counter terrorist operations till terrorists are denied space and power to manipulate public perception and public space. To achieve this objective there is a need to cripple terror organisations by heavy attrition so that the network is disrupted, defeated and dismantled.

(c)   Disaffected locals gain motivation to join terror ranks if they have legitimate grievances against a corrupt government, thus success should be thought of in terms of empowering the youth.[12] More than elimination, it is important to put a strategy in place to prevent youth joining terror ranks. Engagement through skill development, education, sports, culture and economic empowerment is the way forward.

(d)   Terrorists continue to change their strategy and thus security forces and State should always be proactive and remain a step ahead of the terror organisations. The only way security forces can remain ahead is by putting on ground a potent intelligence system that has penetration among the separatists and terror organisations. Intelligence agencies have a great role in developing positive narrative by debunking the Pak propaganda being spread through social media.

(e)   Kashmir needs a tightly integrated military, political, informational, economic, intelligence, and law enforcement effort. This idea came from British pacification campaigns in Malaya, Kenya, and elsewhere, as well as from French officers who fought insurgents in Indochina and Algeria.[13] The endeavour should not be to achieve total victory that is impossible but to archive sufficient victory of objectives not through defeat of your own citizenry but through defeat of strategy of separatists and proxies of Pakistan.

(f)   There seems to be lack of understanding of concept of establishment of peace. The focus ideally should be to achieve temporary peace, adequate peace and enduring peace in this order. Conditions of temporary peace warrant that terror organisations are denied space to operate so that population is insulated from coercion by the terror organisation and recruitment to the terror ranks is reduced. While process of establishment of temporary peace is in place, state should be prepared to handle reversals and retain ability to gain control of the situation earliest. Adequate peace would

warrant normalisation of activities, control of situation and space is denied for terror ranks and radicals to destabilise the situation. Enduring peace is when government institutions are in control of the situation and State is free from instability and terror organisations are not in a position to create instability or revive terrorism.

(g)   No conflict has ever been resolved by security forces. It requires participation and proactive support of the people. Thus, people cannot be isolated or excluded from the solution.

(h)   There is a tendency of terrorists and insurgents to involve public and make it a people's war. The nuance of good counter terrorist operations is to insulate population from the ill effects of this unethical war.

Conclusion

It is important to understand that conflict in Jammu and Kashmir is being orchestrated in such a manner that it becomes a perfect "Conflict Trap" irreversible and unresolved. The characteristics of a "Conflict Trap" are – it has high recidivism rate, it indeed is continuation of a previous war (1947-48), it has the potential to spill over to other regions and it could also lead to a dominant form of armed conflict. It has relapsed multiple times in various forms from armed conflict to Intifada and separatists are making all out efforts to spread it to entire J and K including South of Pir Panjal. The "Conflcit Trap" in Kashmir becomes complex because stakeholders are not on the same page when it comes to the conflict resolution or framework for common agenda for agreement. The ideological differences are so wide that it may not be possible to achieve total peace or enduring peace in Kashmir in short period of time, however, the endeavour should be to first achieve temporary peace (end of violence) so that foundation for enduring peace can be laid. People should be made aware of the fact that terrorists are a risk to everyone. David Galula said, "The population represents this new ground. If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, he will win the war. Thus the battle for the population is a major characteristic of the revolutionary war."[14] The suicide attack should not be considered as one of the terror strikes but it

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could be a routine if not morally excluded by religious clerics, political parties, youth organisations and social organisations. Such an attack has the potential to take Kashmir conflict to a point of no return.

Endnotes

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