

Addressing Radicalisation in Kashmir : A *Sine Qua Non* for Governor's Rule

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Introduction

The politics is all about “doctrine of unpredictability”. In a significant development PDP and BJP in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have separated and the government has fallen. It has paved the way for Governor's rule in the state. The anti-defection law in J&K is strong enough to prevent any defection by a group of MLAs or an individual to assist in forming the government. Provisions of law even make a Member of the House lose his membership even if he votes or abstains from voting in the House contrary to any direction of the party.¹ As a consequence, the Governor's rule is the only option till state is able to conduct elections. J&K Assembly elections are due in 2020 and general elections sometime in the first or second quarter of 2019. Whether the government will take a decision to conduct general elections and assembly elections simultaneously or stagger it, will be dictated by the security situation on the ground. There are reports that hardliners including Jamaat have welcomed the breaking up of the so-called unholy alliance. Some sections of the society are pleased with the fall of the government because this government was perceived to have failed on all fronts including security, economic development, job creation, corruption and prevention of rising crime. There has been no public display of solidarity for the PDP even in South Kashmir that is considered a stronghold of the party. In large parts of the Valley, there is jubilation about the fall of the government. “It feels like Eid was today,” said a postdoctoral student in South Kashmir's Pulwama district. “This is a relief for us all. We don't want any political rule.”² There are

mixed reactions, some perceive that developmental work under the current Governor will speed up, there will be accountability of the bureaucracy to deliver in the window of next 12 months and the government is likely to adopt muscular policy against the terrorists and stone pelters. It is likely that Union Government will ensure that Governor's rule is continued till general elections to ensure that there is no outright rejection of the democratic process in the Kashmir Valley. Some sections of the society and PDP also predict greater instability and political uncertainty in Kashmir. However, Pakistan will see it as an opportunity to ferment trouble on the ground and would look to ensure that the Governor's rule is seen as a complete failure and strong arms tactics to suppress the self-determination movement in Kashmir.

Challenges to the Governor's Rule

Governor's rule in J&K should not be looked at through the prism of harsh security measures. A teacher from Kashmir University stated, "A stronger security response would not mean a major improvement in the situation. The current discourse of resentment is based on a narrative of victimhood. The more you show harshness to the people, the more it will embolden and strengthen them."³ The Governor's rule needs to be balanced that engages with the people, be sympathetic to their genuine grievances and work for creating space for dialogue and development. It will also be unrealistic to expect miraculous results from the rule that may last a year or little longer till next assembly elections are conducted. The focus of the Governor's rule should be to ensure following in the next 12 months or so:-

- (a) **Bring Calm to the Streets.** It is essential to normalise the life of common man from this muddled environment.
- (b) **Keep the Youth Away from the Streets.** It is a major challenge. To bring youth out of this disarrayed environment, there is a need to establish communication and dialogue to disengage youth from the negativity of the overall environment. Simultaneously, it would require return of the students to the education institutions and restoration of economic activities including tourism to engage the youth in constructive activities.

(c) **Dealing with the Unarmed Jihadis.** It is a challenge but methodology to deal with Jamaat and local ideologues who are responsible for mobilising crowd for protests and stone pelting needs to be worked out and if considered appropriate some of the ideologues and separatists should be booked under Public Safety Act (PSA) or appropriate law.

(d) **Disruption of the Network for Recruitment of Terrorists.** It is a major challenge and needs to be a priority because as long as the ideologues are free to operate, terror recruitment will continue. Simon Cottey says that, "Law-enforcement agents can't disrupt a motive, but with the right intelligence they may be able to disrupt a network of terrorist recruiters".⁴

(e) **Re-establishment of Communication with Public.** According to John Burton, the initial dialogue must centre on the public security, development, identity needs, youth aspirations and political access.

(f) **Improvement in Law and Order.** There is need for the government to restore faith of the people in the administration and putting in place a grievance redressal mechanism.

(g) **Fight Radicalism with Human Development**⁵. It should be done through social awareness campaign and engagement with the people.

(h) **Meeting the Aspirations of the People of Jammu and Ladakh Division.** They need to be compensated for maintaining peace.

(i) **Set a Benchmark.** Governor's rule must establish effective system to inform, influence, and persuade public to leave the path of confrontation with clearly defined objectives.⁶

(j) **Strategy to Overthrow Established Order.** Eric Brahm while quoting Metz wrote, "Broadly speaking, terrorism and insurgency is a strategy to overthrow the established order". The biggest challenge of the Governor rule will be to ensure conduct of elections. Pakistan has been working consistently

to overthrow the established order and it has targeted the grass root democracy in J&K. In fact the state government has not been able to conduct Anantnag by-election for Lok Sabha, and Panchayat elections have been deferred indefinitely due to the prevailing “security situation” in the Kashmir Valley.⁷

Idea of Jihad is Acting as Push Factor For Youth to Join Terrorism

J&K Police in its report on “Radicalisation and Terrorism in J&K - A Study” has come out with certain alarming and surprising facts. As per the report, new terror recruits are not driven by ideology as most attended government schools and come from middle class families.⁸ Hardly anyone was educated full time in madrasa and majority among the recent recruits joined terrorism because of thrill seeker attitude.⁹ The terrorism in Kashmir is an enigma where unarmed Jihadis are product of radicalisation but armed Jihadis are product of glamorisation of Jihad. One fights with the weapon in hand and the other fights to conquer cognitive domain by employing perception as a tool to expand the domains of conflict. Between armed and unarmed Jihadis there is third dimension and that is the role of Pakistan. Pakistan has managed to drive a wedge deep enough within the society to undermine the sense of shared values that form the foundation of democracy¹⁰ and enshrined values of Kashmiriyat. The situation in J&K is that state is crippled by terrorism, political and social crisis and is not in a position to put in place the necessary building blocks for development,¹¹ peace and stability.

The lure to join terror ranks is neither completely due to monetary gains, nor entirely due to religious indoctrination that is pushing the youth to participate in Jihad for establishing Islamic State in Kashmir or Azadi. It is a mix of radicalisation, glamorisation of Jihad, sense of adventurism and a perceived alternative method to break the *status quo* of hopelessness. Albert Bandura said that, “it requires conducive social conditions rather than monstrous people to produce terrorists. Given appropriate social conditions, decent, ordinary people can be led to do extraordinarily cruel things.”¹² The youth of Kashmir today is joining terror organisations due to social, cultural, economic,

political, and psychological factors coming together¹³ and backed by aggressive, emotional and ideological misinformation campaign. The factors that push a youth to terrorism are disillusionment with the *status quo*, failure in personal life, identity crisis and sense of hopelessness setting in the minds of the youth. As an escape from this psychological barrier, they either turn to drugs or to religion and then they get secluded from the family, friends and the education institutions. In the next stage they want to change the *status quo* and negativity and rejection from the society by picking up guns. The unarmed Jihadis are feeding the perception of victory against the perceived occupation and have been reminding the public including women and children that one day the sacrifices of their children will bear fruit and Kashmir will be a free Islamic State. The situation is further complicated when mosques become the only outlet for mass politics, the outcome is often religious dissent and motivation to the youth to join Jihadis ranks.

Role of Unarmed Jihadis in Radicalisation is a Major Pull Factor

A sense has been created by ideologues who rightly should be called unarmed Jihadis, that it is a religious duty of every Kashmiri youth to join Jihad. Some of the religious institutions controlled by Jihadist ideologues are preaching a skewed and misconstrued interpretation of religion that has the potential to capture the hearts, minds and imaginations of the young people.¹⁴ Jihadi ideologues are creating alternative narrative and pushing moral boundaries to legitimise the violence and unending miseries as a service to God. The unarmed Jihadis weave a web of misinformation campaign that promises a youth sudden identity as a soldier of God, an exalted position among his peers and local populace. He now wields authority and social media also helps him to become a local hero. There is a sense of accomplishment in him and he starts believing that he is doing Jihad for a just cause. The most unfortunate part is that if a misguided youth returns to the main stream the family suffers the stigma of having a son who is coward and scared of attaining martyrdom. Parents are caught between the misinformation campaign and violation of tenants of Islam by separatist and ideologues forcing youth to join

Jihad without sufficient reasons. The loss or killing of terrorists is celebrated, parents are congratulated and family members are made to believe that now their path to attain salvation has been cleared by their son by sacrificing his life for Islam and Jihad. The cycle of recruitment continues because ideologues of Jihad glamorise the killing of terrorists to create more recruits and as a result burial grounds become in reality a recruitment rally to attract the new Jihadis. The peril in Kashmir is that unarmed Jihadis have created conditions where objectives are non-negotiable: they want the total elimination of all who are not with them.¹⁵ To spread their ideology of hate and Jihad unarmed Jihadis are using social media to their advantage to create a terrorist from a simple innocent youth. As per Rand Corporation, internet creates more opportunities to become radicalised than any other tool. It acts as an 'echo chamber': a place where individuals find their ideas supported and echoed by other like-minded individuals. Process of radicalisation gets accelerated and it occurs without contact. The internet increases opportunities for self-radicalisation.¹⁶ Ideologues in Kashmir are using internet extensively to spread the venom of radicalisation.

While terrorists are developing strategies to target and attract the youth, counter-terrorism efforts continue to focus on hard power as the central approach in dealing with this issue.¹⁷ In fact radicalisation falls in the spectrum of potential extremist activity¹⁸ and it needs to be treated as such. Unarmed Jihadis are turning to be the catalysts and more dangerous than armed Jihadis in Kashmir. Though they do it in the name of Islam but they violate every tenet of Islam in pursuance of their perceived Jihad/ war against India. For them battleground is not Srinagar, Shopian or Pulwama it is the cognitive domain where the fire of Jihad must continue to burn at the cost of destruction of invaluable lives of innocent youths.¹⁹ Qanta Ahmed a British Author and Columnist said, "No act is singularly more un-Islamic than the destruction of human life. No assault is more offensive to Islam (which enshrines free will) than compulsory belief. No law of war in Islam is more violated than the targeting of unarmed men, women, and children. Islamists claim to represent us but in reality they are destroying us."²⁰ Ideologues have created such a void on ground that reconciliation at this stage appears impossible. The pluralist

Muslims need to introspect and expose this façade of terror organisations and separatists and let the people know that such an ideology is self-destructive. There is a need to break this cycle of terror factory in the name of religion. Thus it is vital that instead of fighting terrorism, state must find ways and means to 'fight radicalism with human development'.²¹

Strategy to Eliminate Idea of Jihad

Counterterrorism is a holistic process that should focus on elimination of terrorism and not only terrorists. However, there seems to be some dichotomy in our strategy and conceptual understanding of dealing with armed and unarmed Jihadis. The critical conceptual point for formulation of response strategies lies in the recognition of the factors that give impetus to the idea of Jihad. It is evident that important factors in Jihad are the ideologues and unarmed Jihadis who more often remain beyond the reach of the law, because they wear the mask of religious preachers and at times religious/social reformers. As a result, the law is unable to reach them unless they cross the red line. Apart from legal recourse, this issue needs to be looked at from a strategic perspective. Following few options must be exercised to deal with terrorism:-

(a) **Engage to Disengage.** Disengaging might suggest critical cognitive and social changes, in terms of leaving behind the shared social norms, values, attitudes and aspirations so carefully forged while the individual was still a member of a terror network.²² Disengagement is not possible unless there is engagement with armed and unarmed Jihadis. One must remember that the individual is moulded by a way of life or misconception that he may continue to adhere due to the belief of so-called enshrined values or way of ancestors drilled by indoctrination. Once a recruit joins terror organisation he is trained simultaneously for violence and psychologically believing that, he is following the path of Allah. Thus disengagement is not only from violence but also from some continued adherence that are part of terror code of conduct, perceived values and attitudes. Engagement should be socially relevant 'support' so that individual is not stigmatised. Disengagement from terrorism may be, broadly

speaking, the efforts of an individual or collective process (or combination of both). We can identify both psychological and physical dimensions of disengagement,²³ through society, parents and religious teachers who can debate and discuss the true interpretation and teachings of Islam and meaning of Jihad. One must remember that disengagement may not always result in de-radicalisation or counter radicalisation.

(b) Distinguish between Near Enemy and Far Enemy.

The focus of counter terrorism initiative is directed against the near enemy. In this case near enemy is terrorist who is seen on ground as the face of terrorism. But little is being done to bring to book the far enemy and that is unarmed Jihadis. There is a need to adopt an approach to deal with near and far enemy simultaneously through a process or law, social awakening, theological interpretation of true values of Islam and removal of misconception that has been articulated by terror ideologues. This engagement is not sequential; it should be attempted simultaneously.

(c) Radicalisation or Rehabilitation. The word de-radicalisation and radicalisation have become buzz words and very loosely referred to. If there is nothing wrong with 'radicalisation', then it is offensive and misleading to speak of 'de-radicalisation'.²⁴ No individual will accept that he has been radicalised or he was manipulated and willingly chose a wrong path. It should be left to him to introspect this aspect later but he should never be told that he has been radicalised. Rather psychological and social rehabilitation should be attempted. Some Arabian countries are using the term 'reforming' instead of de-radicalisation and is being done through correct interpretation of the teachings of Islam that proscribe violence against innocent and unarmed subjects.

(d) Transition and Transformation. The central aim to set the stage for transition and transformation is to ensure active participation of all stakeholders to the conflict including armed and unarmed terrorists. It is an inclusive process first to recommence the transition back to the society and then transform him to be accepted in the society without any

stigma or baggage of his past. It would require conditional amnesty (legal and social). It is a process that cannot be executed by the state alone but through a holistic approach of state and society.

(e) **Strategy Must be Enduring.** There cannot be a change of strategy on daily basis. The results of above strategy may start fructifying after a few years. Unlike the tactical operations where terrorists are eliminated and counter terrorism strategy appears to be working, the strategy to deal with terrorism and unarmed Jihadis need long gestation period. Patience, perseverance and pursuance are the keys to succeed in this complex psychological, and information war.

Conclusion

In Jammu and Kashmir today it is time to engage and it does not matter with whom. It could be with young people in remote areas, it could be religious preachers and it could be a man on the street. Governor's rule should be seen as an opportunity to ensure course correction and break the *status quo* of public disorder. State should not be seen as oppressor but as benevolent and committed to the genuine welfare of the people of J&K without any biases.

Mr Ram Madhav in his interview to the Economic Times had said, "Many governments across the world have only one approach towards terrorism – eliminate the terrorists to eliminate terrorism."²⁵ It is true that elimination of terrorists is important but not holistic to completely annihilate terrorism. Thus, it is high time that instead of targeting terrorists, state should work out methodology to deal with terrorism in a holistic manner. To bring calm to the streets, unarmed Jihadis are required to be dealt with appropriately and they cannot be allowed to run a parallel system of Intifada.

Apart from the military and non-military operations most important challenge at this stage is ensuring survival of democratic institutions in J&K. India cannot afford outright rejection of democratic process in the state through coercion and

subversion. Should that happen it will be a dangerous trend that could slip the state further into anarchy.

Endnotes

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