



Burhan Wani's Killing and Its Aftermath



11 Jul, 2016 [Lt General S A Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM \(Bar\), VSM \(Bar\), Distinguished Fellow, VIF](#) [View1653](#) [Comments 0](#)

Kokarnag in the southernmost part of South Kashmir, is a sleepy little township. It once was the bastion of militancy due to the presence of the Panjal range in whose shadow it lies and the forested tracts of the lower hills; the terrain was tailor made for militancy. Through the first millennium one of the Indian Army's famous units, 36 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) (Garhwal Rifles), cleaned the area out leaving few signs of its presence. It earned as many four COAS Unit Citations and many more awards for this feat.

On 8 Jul 2016, at approximately 6 PM gun fire reverberated in Kokarnag again. I received my first call within minutes which indicated an extraordinary encounter. The caller told me that ninety percent it was Burhan Wani who was inside the small cordon. For those who may be unaware, Burhan Wani is the most wanted terrorist in the Kashmir Valley, credited with having created a wave of what is called New Militancy in South Kashmir. It was before inspiration from him would travel to the badlands of North Kashmir. His Robin Hood image managed an inspiration which saw a large number of the attempted protection of terrorists by local mobs at encounter sites and large scale eulogizing of even neutralized Pakistani terrorists. Burhan Wani managed in five years, to create a band of 60-70 young locally recruited terrorists. Many were well educated and tech savvy who exploit social media for their cause.

Their photographs in combat fatigues with weapons went viral on Facebook and Whatsapp. Many of the flash mobs they instigated at encounter sites were mobilized using social media. Burhan's entry into terrorism was triggered by ill treatment at the hands of a couple of police officers in Tral, a small township in the middle of a broad sub valley on the east of the National Highway, near Avantipura. Tral is notorious for its history of violence over the last 26 years. The Wagad ridge to its West and the Dachigam Forest to the North afford excellent hideouts. Despite the presence of a police unit here along with CRPF the area has only been passingly under control. Burhan belonged to Tral and last year in April his brother was killed in an encounter when he was mistakenly taken to be Burhan even as he had gone to the forest to meet his renegade brother.

At 7.30 PM on 8 Jul 2016 the caller rang again to confirm that it was indeed Burhan Wani. He had been killed at the hands of one of Army but efficient units, 19 RR (Sikh LI). It is learnt that to his credit Burhan, once cornered, came out in an attempt to break the cordon and This prevented the ignominy of being burnt to death once the house he was holed up in, caught fire due to the effect of rockets and other

As I tweeted the information I had a deluge of calls coming in on my mobile. No doubt Burhan's neutralization was making big news. assessment which I shared immediately was first that the authorities had to be careful in handling the post encounter effects. In light Hurriyat would attempt to make much of the event and use it to motivate the youth; passionate crowds should be expected at the funeral to witness 30,000 at a funeral of a Pakistani terrorist late last year. It will need to be a fine decision for the political and security authorities a public funeral or give a quiet burial by the Police with the family attending. In the past the authorities have mostly given the freedom funerals and have faced the consequences rather well. Only in the case of Afzal Guru the body was not handed over to the family and conducted at Delhi. However, that had different connotations and comparisons need not be drawn. It is not as if bigger names than Burhan been neutralized in counter terror operations in the past. In the very same area we had Shabir Baduri who operated for almost nine years Mujahideen's activities in Anantnag. Abdullah Uri (LeT) was killed at Sopore in 2011. I do not recall how the mortal remains were handled the major difference today even from the situation five years ago is the widespread use of social media to iconize neutralized terrorist flash mobs. The authorities know best how to handle the situation and politically this is a challenge for the coalition government.

The Amarnath Yatra is entering its second week. The vulnerability of the Yatra is always a problem for the authorities and especially after ambushes on the National Highway it is causing even more concern. A reprisal strike against the Yatra will be perilous although I do feel the security forces securing the Yatra and its various facilities will remain the targets. Kokernag, incidentally is very close to the National Qazigund. The Lidder Valley from Anantnag to Pahalgam has been quiet for some years despite the presence of New Militancy but it has of revival of turbulence. My earlier article in Swarajya on the revival of terror around Anantnag brings out the challenges quite clearly.

My second thought immediately after the information came in was related to the need to undertake such a campaign as to deny the iconic youth leader. No doubt, the replacement can never be as charismatic as the original. It is not as if the Army and the Police did not appeal to Burhan Wani to surrender honorably. It is the 'honorably' part which needs to be projected adequately. Militants cannot easily do this. A campaign on social media and also through outreach contact can help in engaging the youth. What has to be guarded against is fervor which will pitch more youth into militancy on the power of the image created in the eyes of the population. It is the imagination and information power of the State against that of a few locals and the

Separatists. It hasn't exactly been a strong point with the State and needs to be thought through quickly and efficiently. The Center must of assistance on this as a test case. Unfortunately no institution or body exists to undertake this responsibility. The media must be guarded because over projection of the events and the situation will surely play to the advantage of the anti-India elements. An announcement of the New Militancy should be expected any time and many of the splinter groups not in sync with each other may use the moment to why the information side has to be handled carefully and pro-actively.

Internet has been switched off in the Valley since last night as has much of the mobile connectivity. This is fine for a short duration to prevent going into terrorist hands making use of the trigger available. Thereafter it will all have to come back and that's the time when the information commence.

For the moment the challenge is to withstand the emotions of the moment and ensure no 'martyr effect'. The Separatists have no qualms men dying and a repeat of 2010 is possible. The agencies dealing with security need to be on the same page and leave aside the unnecessary immediate past. I would consider this an opportunity to go well beyond and achieve something positive but equally the wily Separatists keep the initiative. The maturity of the leadership (both political and the security related) will decide which way the cookie crumbles.

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