



Jammu & Kashmir- On the Path to Nowhere: Review of Security and Political Developments



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C D Sahay, Centre Head & Senior Fellow, Neighbourhood Studies and Internal Security Studies, VIF

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From security perspective, the events in Jammu & Kashmir during the year 2016 and in the first four months of the current year, present a confusing, disturbing and challenging scenario. These also necessarily got reflected in the overall political narrative in the state, which was smoothly following the 2014 elections to the State Assembly, leading for the first time, to the formation of the PDP-BJP coalition government. An attempt is made to examine these issues with a view to understanding the evolving scenario and finding ways to deal with a manner that could restore normalcy, peace and stability in the troubled state.

For the sake of convenience, the developments leading to the current all-round stalemate are sought to be examined in three distinct phases; the post-Pathankot (Jan 2016) developments; post-Burhan Wani agitation (Jul 2016) and the post-Uri/Surgical Strike phase. Details of major incidents that occurred in these three phases are well documented and need no elucidation, it may be noted that in a manner that could restore normalcy, peace and stability in the troubled state. Pakistan remained the constant spoiler by encouraging, promoting and guiding the proceedings through cross-border ceasefire violations, launching targeted attacks through its proxies, funding the disruptive activities etc.

Phase-I: Attack on Pathankot Air Base

The terrorist attack on the Pathankot air force base in early Jan 2016 by a group of JeM terrorists infiltrated from across the borders, aimed at a physical target in J&K, was clearly designed by the Pak establishment to derail the fast pace at which Indo-Pak rapprochement was under the personal guidance of the Prime Ministers of the two countries. Their efforts had acquired a positive dynamics, giving rise to bilateral relations acquiring a new robust trajectory. Obviously, this was not in line with the long established agenda of the Pakistani military which felt compelled to terminate the ongoing engagements at different levels to quell the huge euphoria building around it in the state.

even in some segments of the political and bureaucratic circles in Pakistan. The Indo-Pak bonhomie was moving too well and too fast : ISI/military establishment.

Pathankot was not an isolated incident; it was just the beginning of a series of provocative actions such as the Jun 3 ambush attack on Bijbehara on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway in Anantnag District; Jun 16 major infiltration bid in Tanghdar sector in which four heav were killed and large quantities of arms and ammunition and war like stores were recovered; Jun 25 attack on a CRPF convoy in which killed and 20 others injured near Pampore on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway.

Besides, there were numerous other incidents including intelligence driven encounters involving militants and the security forces. There v emerging from these that Pak establishment was determined to create conditions that would eventually derail the process of political en paused, but not totally called off post-Pathankot.

Phase-II: The post-Burhan Wani Phase

This phase of agitation started after the killing of Burhan Wani, the young HM leader from Tral in an intelligence driven encounter carried forces on Jul 8, 2016 in Anantnag district. His burial procession attracted huge crowd leading to law and order problems. During tt agitators started confronting the security forces with intense stone pelting leading to police firing and deaths/injuries including blinding people. Each morning, groups of young agitators stated coming out mostly under duress, in pre-designated areas determined by a few activists acting under instructions from their handlers across the borders.

Significantly, no one disputed the fact that Burhan Wani was indeed a terrorist nor did anyone question the genuineness of the encount described by the media as an 'uprising' was completely Pak instigated and micro-managed operation, largely confined to the five rur Kashmir. Hurriyat leaders were not in control but played the role of trouble shooters. Local administration went in total disarray; pc nowhere to be seen on the ground and followed the separatist's narrative for short term political gains. In the entire phase that spanne months, according to the former DG CRPF Mr. K Durga Prasad, over 90 civilian agitators were killed and nearly 12,000 injured in nearly 2 comprising 142 of stone-pelting, 47 grenade blasts, 43 incidents of acid/petrol bomb attacks and 3 incidents of firing. The DG went on to maintained major restraint duly reflected in the fact that nearly 2580 CRPF jawans were injured in these incidents, 122 of them grievou major public outcry against use of pellet guns, a report in the Indian Express (Oct 9) around 1000 civilians received injuries, with many treatment including some cases of blinding. This was most unfortunate and the government is reviewing the options on use of less l equipment.

Phase-III: Uri Attack and the Surgical Strike

And then came the most audacious trans-border terrorist attack, again by a group of JeM fidayeens on the army's camp at Uri in the ear 2016 in which 19 army personnel were killed and many injured. The government's initial response was on the expected lines of cc incident, mobilization of international support against Pak-sponsored terrorism and an aggressive diplomatic initiative to isolate Pakistan, However, what delightfully surprised the strategic community in India was the extremely well planned, swift and effective counter at Forces (SF), aptly described as 'Surgical Strike', on Sep 28/29 in which a large number of militants awaiting infiltration at various launchi and their camps destroyed. The Special Forces contingent safely returned without suffering any losses.

This stunned the Pakistani establishment as well and it quickly ran for cover, totally denying the strikes, describing it as routine tran Obviously, they did not want to admit what had hit them lest be compelled to escalate the incident by launching counter attacks. Equal stunned were the Kashmiri agitators who too ran for cover and disappeared from the streets, at least for a while. However, once again and stone-pelters are back in action in the affected districts, posing serious challenge to the security forces, even as they continue tc thereby ensuring lower casualty and injuries.

Government Assessment

The situation in J&K not only remained in media focus through all the three phases but also attracted political concerns, particularly Pakistan's support and involvement in fanning trouble. Some of these were expressed through a spate of starred and un-starred Que: couple of months from a number of MPs in the Parliament seeking government's assessment of the security situation in the state of mainly focused on the important and related aspects of ceasefire violations, infiltrations across the borders, terrorist incidents, deaths (forces and militants etc. and measures initiated by the government for political mainstreaming of the youth.

Replying to these, the Minister of State for Home Affairs cited a range of statistical details to assert that the situation was generally improving. Based on these, and the details available in the recently released Annual Report of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the follo of the security situation emerges.

Infiltration across IB/LoC

Pakistan was continuing to encourage and facilitate infiltration of trained militants and that the "levels of terrorist violence in the hinte linked to the infiltration from across the border".

Year	Attempted	Killed	Returned	Apprehended/	Estima

2010	489	112	281	1	95
2011	247	35	159	1	52
2012	264	13	130	0	121
2013	277	38	142	0	97
2014	222	52	105	0	65
2015	121	46	41	1	33
2016	364	35	217	3	112

As can be seen from the table, the number of attempted infiltrations remained high except for the dip in the year 2015 even though attempts were made that year with 46 infiltrating militants killed and 33 estimated to have managed to sneak through. The year 2016 was serious with 364 attempts at infiltration in which 35 militants were killed, 217 were pushed back and yet 112 managed to sneak in. Government focused on a "multi-pronged approach to contain cross border infiltration which, inter-alia, included strengthening of border management, deployment along the IB/LoC..." Other measures included improved intelligence and operational coordination, use of improved technology, etc. the government statement added.

Ceasefire Violations

It was also clarified in the Parliament that alongside the rise in attempted infiltration, there was also a perceptible increase in ceasefire IB/LoC as detailed in the table below. While the LoC sector was under greater pressure in 2014 & 15, last year the violations affected nearly equal measure.

No. of Ceasefire Violations

Year	Along the line control in the State of the J&K under operational control of Army	Along the International Border in the State of J&K under operational control of BSF
2014	153	430
2015	152	253
2016	228	221

Read in conjunction, the two tables on infiltration and ceasefire violation clearly establish a link between the two, substantiating the view that cross-border firing by the Pakistani SFs along the IB/LoC were actually part of the overall design to infiltrate trained militants into the State. It is clear that the Pak authorities have been using both segments of the border for infiltration purposes.

As the table below shows, the indiscriminate firing along the borders has caused more deaths and injuries to the civilian population and security personnel. Obviously, the design was to spread a sense of terror and panic in the minds of the innocent civilians residing along the border.

Casualties of Civilians and Security Personnel due to Ceasefire Violations

Year	Civilians	Army Personnel	BSF Personnel
	Killed Injured	Killed Injured	Killed Injured
2014	14 101	1 11	2 17
2015	16 71	6 17	4 9
2016	13 83	8 74	5 25

Terrorist Incidents

According to the government statement, 'situation in Kashmir was showing signs of improvement', particularly after the 'Surgical Strike' in Sep 2016. Month wise tabulation of such incidents is as under:-

Month	July 16	Aug 16	Sep 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17

No. of Incidents	820	747	535	179	73	36	05	49
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Clearly, the period from July to September 2016 that coincided with the post-Burhan Wani phase, was extremely violent with a total of 2 affected parts of the Valley. The trend started declining in Phase-III, i.e. post-Surgical Strike from October 2016 and continued in the winter months till the recent reappearance of the street agitators and stone-pelters once again.

The chart below gives details of terrorist incidents and civilians and security personnel killed in Jammu and Kashmir for the corresponding after the Surgical Strikes:-

Period	Terrorist Incidents	Security Personnel Killed	Civilians Killed
01.07.2016 to 30.09.2016	110	34	7
01.10.2016 to 31.12.2016	87	19	6

Summing up the security situation, the MHA, in its Annual Report just released, has conceded that the year 2016 marked "significant violence and causality of the security forces, in comparison to last year (2015)". In fact the number of violent incidents have progress 170 (2013) to 222 (2014), 208 (2015) and 322 in 2016. Similarly the number of terrorists killed has also increased from 67 (2013) to 100 (2015) and 150 in 2016. The MHA Report adds that "the year 2016 witnessed a 54.81 percent increase (in terror incidents) and 110.25 fatalities to security forces in comparison" to 2015. There was also an 11.76 percent decrease in civilian casualty and 38.89 percent increase in terrorists killed during the year.

Likely Scenario in 2017

The statistical details apart, it is widely acknowledged that the situation in Kashmir is at its worst in the last 15 years, perhaps as bad as though the two periods are not really comparable for the very fundamental reason that the Valley had never before witnessed the kind of defiance by street agitators, stone-pelters including women and children. The MHA Annual Report acknowledges, "Change in Pak tactics of the superimposition of militancy over 'civil resistance' through radicalization by vested interest groups and social media".

So, the question is whether the trend of infiltration, violence, confrontational stone-pelting and occasional major targeted attacks would continue in the coming months too, particularly as the border passes are reopening and the seat of the government in Srinagar? Local Kashmiri's generally agree that this may be so since, in their assessment, even though the Surgical Strike had its impact on the people that the government was determined like never before, to deal effectively with the miscreants, yet there will be no letup in the support and sponsors from across the borders. Besides, they maintain, the government could have used the opportunity to engage politically with the militants to reduce their outreach to the disgruntled youth. Ideally, they feel, any move to engage Pakistan would have helped a great deal but even local efforts could have produced significant dividends. It is also pointed out that the number of Kashmiri youth joining the militant ranks is showing an upward trend as seen in the table below:-

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
No. of youth joined militancy	54	23	21	16	53	66

With fresh recruit joining the militant ranks in higher numbers, more trained militants likely to be inducted in the coming months and thus to adopt a cautious approach in dealing with the agitators, the law and order situation is likely to worsen this year compared to 2016.

As is apparent from the facts and figures on the state of militancy in J&K presented by the government, Pak-sponsorship and trans-border support has been going on in the State, has not abated nor is it likely to happen in the months ahead. Therefore, targeted acts of terror will continue, particularly against military and other establishments of the Security Forces. There is thus need for greater vigil along the borders to prevent such attempts and greater recourse to intelligence driven operations to neutralize resident militant modules. 'Seek and destroy' operations of the kind that were to be carried out in the mid-1990s could be an option worth consideration. It is assessed that on ground conditions today are more favourable to easier availability of actionable intelligence on militant hideouts and their movements.

What is different now and remains a matter of major concern is the fact that unlike in the earlier times, the local population around the valley have started counter attacking the SF contingents to physically obstruct their operations leading to unintended collateral civilian damage. This has again been witnessed in the recent operation in Durgagh (Budgam district) on March 28 when an SF contingent comprising CRPF tried to flush out HM militant Touseef Ahmad Wagey, holed up in a house. A large number of local residents started pelting stones to obstruct the operation.

In the ensuing action, according to media reports, 3 youths and the militant were killed and 25 others injured. Security forces acted jawans of CRPF and 20 police men were injured.

This was the first instance of crowds resisting and obstructing SFs' operations after the stern warning issued by the new Army Chief during the Valley stating that those indulging in such activities will be treated as equally complicit in abating militant activities. What is worrisome is likely to continue, making it so much more difficult for the security forces to operate without running the risk of heavy collateral negativities. As the weather conditions improve and more militants get inducted into operations, the law and order situation can only be met with greater challenges for the security forces.

Therefore, the questions being asked are: Whether (1) one is looking at a repeat of the pattern witnessed last year or worse; (2) only dealing with the situation as law and order issue should suffice; or (3) is it time to examine ways to suitably engage with the people politically?

There are no easy answers to these; there never was nor does one exist now. However, there can be no two views on one issue; that it is the duty of the state to ensure peace, public order and security to the lives and properties of its citizen. The rule of law must prevail at all costs. The security forces charged with these responsibilities, must be encouraged and enabled to carry out their tasks without any hindrance. At official and political levels, the government has spelt out its intent in unequivocal terms that there was no question of backing down to stone-pelters and the separatists. To back up its intent, the security forces have already started (May 4, 2017) combing operations by deploying, as per media reports, over 4000 men belonging to the army, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and the J&K police. The aim is to nip the agitators on the back foot, identify and apprehend the trouble makers, restore law and order and bring back a sense of normalcy. This approach is commendable since the situation was turning into a stalemate, giving an impression that the governments in Delhi and Srinagar were unable to do what to do.

But this can only break one of the three 'stalemates' in Kashmir-that of law and order. The second stalemate relates to the political process. It is recognized that, important as it is, the kinetic approach can only help prepare the ground for the State to initiate the required follow up actions. To address the core concerns of the people. Unless this is done, one cannot rule out the re-emergence of instability of the kind witnessed last year. It may be recalled, in the mid-1990's when the 'backbone of Pak sponsored militancy had been effectively broken and the militant movement assessed by the then Governor and the security establishment, the government in a bold move, went for parliamentary election followed by State Assembly in 1995-96, respectively. And since then, the democratic processes in the State have been well supported by the people.

Fortunately, in Kashmir we have a well stabilized democratic process and a stable government that effectively represents the will of the people. The Mahbooba Mufti led PDP-BJP coalition government, despite being accused by its political opponents as 'marriage of convenience', has acted on all fronts except in the area of maintenance of law and order where, to be fair, a larger share of responsibility has traditionally rested with the security forces acting in tandem with the State Police apparatus. It is imperative that, despite media debate and opposition demand, the democratically elected government should continue and play its rightful role in breaking the political stalemate once the security situation is firmly brought back under control. This also include the other political parties both at the state and national levels. Unfortunately, in recent times, the state level opposition leadership is not playing the role expected of them, being largely driven by perceived electoral dynamics. Regrettably, analysts find their stated positions of great vital importance, getting closely aligned with those of the separatists and anti-national elements! This must end in the overall interest of the people, sooner the better, so that on critical issue, we are seen as united and determined to set things right.

There is yet another 'stalemate' in Kashmir. This relates to the perceived fall out of Indo-Pak relations on the events in Kashmir. Since this paper is 'Kashmir Centric' evaluation of the situation, it should suffice here to say that Pakistan's strategy will remain on pushing harder towards the 'tipping point'. To this end it will continue to encourage acts of terror targeting security forces, induct more trained and battle hardened militants, organize and support heightened level of street protests and civil disobedience, internationalise the events in Kashmir as gross Human Rights violations, create 'defused leadership' of the movement in place of the separatist leaders who have lost credibility with the youth, encourage graffiti on mosques in an attempt to intensify spread of radical Islam, etc. In brief, Pakistan would like to 'take Kashmir back to the mid-1990's' and these would change since Pakistan will only tinker with its tactics and not make any fundamental shift in its anti-India strategy, the 'stalemate' on this front will continue.

What then Needs to be Done?

As stated earlier, in the short term perspective, the state and central forces including the army, have no option but to draw on all their resources to effectively counter the militancy, street protests, and stone-pelting activities, with a view to restoring the rule of law. The 'contain and seek' operation should be carried to its natural conclusion without any let. The leaders of the current wave of unrest need to be identified and placed in preventive custody and removed to distant locations. Intelligence driven targeted operations also need to be simultaneously intensified to target the backbone of the street agitation. Of course, similar stern action is also warranted against people providing sanctuary and funds to the agitators. Needless to say that these measures will have to continue over an extended period of time since perceived half-measures could be counterproductive. It is needless to stress that the lead role in these operations will have to be played by the state police, its intelligence wing and the Special Forces, duly backed by the CAPFs and the army. Obviously, these will require revival of a revamped Unified Command under the leadership of the Army, with fully coordinated operations by the SFs on a daily basis. Alongside the above outlined kinetic measures, it is imperative that the border management along the IB and LoC is once again raised to the levels attained in 1999-2001 period.

On the non-kinetic side, greater emphasis needs to be placed on perception management through the mainstream media, social media platforms, groups of intellectuals and women's groups, youth activists, main stream political parties and advocacy groups. This perhaps, deserves the

at par with the actual security operations. The general perception that the main stream political parties have totally abdicated their r these are, has got to be reversed. The ruling and opposition parties alike are perceived by the people of having 'runaway' from the scen have been playing the lead role in a public outreach programmes to convince the people and instill a sense of care and concern for their v

The final component of the overall strategy could be designed to, in the long run, say over the next six months, enable policy maker Srinagar to reach out to the people including the youth, the alienated sections of the society and the 'dispersed' leaders of the agitation achieved by the intelligence apparatus and credible interlocutors, both of who have always played an important part in 'breaking the ic right environ for resumption of dialogue under the Vajpayee enunciated doctrine of *Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat and Kashmiriat* that PM Modi assured the people of Kashmir as the basis of his policy on Kashmir. The State has to be pulled out of its current slide 'On the Path to Nc done, the better.

(The author is a former Secretary @, Cabinet Secretariat, Govt of India. The article is based on cited material, media reports, interactio Kashmiri leaders and expert commentators and statistical inputs by Ramanand Garge, VIF)

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