

## Vivekananda International Foundation

# Jammu and Kashmir Security Review 2018 What lies ahead?

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# Jammu and Kashmir Security Review 2018 What lies ahead?

### Year 2019 begins on a Shocking Note!

Even as strategic analysts were debating what the security situation in J&K was like in the year 2018, an annual exercise to get a statistics-driven analysis of what was happening in the militancy affected state, the shocking news of the suicide attack at Pulwama in the early hours of February 14, 2019 stunned not only the state but the entire nation.

Briefly, an unusually long road-convoy of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) carrying more than 2500 personnel on the Jammu-Srinagar highway was rammed into by an explosive laden vehicle driven by a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant, Adil Dar, a Kashmiri resident of Pulwama. The death of over 40 CRPF personnel and the arrogant ownership of the dastardly act by Pakistan based Jaish led by Masood Azhar outraged one and all including the international community.

What happened thereafter including the swift air strike (Feb. 26) on JeM's main training establishment at Balakot, Pakistan's retaliation (Feb. 27), India downing an F-16 PAF plane, capture and quick release of IAF pilot Abhinandan etc. have all been extensively commented upon nationally and internationally. VIF website too has carried a number of commentaries and articles on the subject that can be accessed for details.<sup>1</sup>

This was possibly the fourth major terror strike of its kind by JeM, including the April 2000<sup>2</sup> incident at the 15 Corps HQ, Badami Bagh, Srinagar, and J&K Legislative Assembly building attack in Srinagar 2001.<sup>3</sup> These were fidayeen attacks carried out by vehicle-born suicide attackers with intention to cause massive loss of human life and infrastructure. The December 13, 2001 attack on the iconic Parliament building in New Delhi too had 30 kg of explosives inside the car driven by the terrorists, which could have caused huge damage if it had exploded.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, all these were perpetrated by JeM, a new *tanzeem* set up by the ISI within a month of the release of its leader Masood Azhar in the IC 814 hijack deal in Kandahar on December 31, 1999.

### **Review of What Happened in 2018**

The Pulwama-Balakot attack and counter-attack have been deliberately mentioned above at the very beginning since therein, possibly, one could get a glimpse of what might lie in store in the year 2019 and beyond. On the other hand, one would also like to push the review-marker at the other end to the 'Uri Surgical Strike' by Indian Army on 28-29 September 2016, dismantling the launch pads of terrorists deep inside the Line of Control (LC) in a 'surprise' response for the Uri terrorist attack on 18 September 2016. This marked the first paradigm shift in the government's response policy against Pak sponsored trans-border terror strikes.

### The Parameters

For the purpose of this review, one would like to go by the long-established parameters for analysing the evolving pattern of terrorism/militancy in the state. These include comparative year wise statistical details of: (i) terror incidents; (ii) ceasefire violations; (iii) security forces martyred; (iv) militants/terrorists neutralised; and (v) civilian protests, attempted infiltrations etc. These are largely indicative of the level of militancy/terrorism. It would be seen that most of the statistical details have been picked up from replies tendered by the government to parliamentary questions.

In addition, recognising the new complexities in the J&K politico-security dynamics, it was felt desirable to enlarge the canvas to include some additional details to get a boarder and clearer picture. At the end of the review, an attempt will also be made to forecast in general terms, the likely trend of events in the months ahead.

### **Terror Incidents**

Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha on 05 February 2019,<sup>5</sup> Hansraj G. Ahir, Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that the number of terror incidents in the year 2018 recorded a sharp 79.5% increase over the figures for the years 2016 and 2017 as indicated in Table -1 and Graph-1 below:

	2016	2017	2018
Terrorist Incidents	322	342	614
% change	+ 6.2%		79.5%

Table 1. Terrorist incidents in J&K-2016, 2017, 2018

Graph 1. Terrorist Incidents in J&K-2016, 2017, 2018

The massive increase in the number of terror related incidents last year (2018) can be largely attributed an aggressive anti-terror campaign launched by the security forces to seek and destroy terror modules in the state through intelligence driven and well-coordinated operations carried out by composite units of the army, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and most importantly, the local police. However, if the trend is read in conjunction with some of the other indicators listed below, the contribution of trans-border factor in pushing up the terror graph on the upward trajectory is significant.

### **Ceasefire Violations**

Just like the number of terror incidents, over the years, ceasefire violations along the IB and LOC have also emerged as an important indicator of the rise or tactical decline in Pakistan's efforts to promote terror activities in the state, both in terms of facilitating induction of trained militants as also in maintaining a violent environ for the local militants to operate.

In 2016, total number of ceasefire violations/cross-border firings occurred at the LC and International Border (IB) were computed at 449.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the count more than doubled to 971. This trend repeated itself in 2018, when the numbers sharply climbed up by 1149 incidents with a total 2140 ceasefire violations recorded; an increase of 120.4%.<sup>7</sup>

Year	<b>Counts of Ceasefire Violations</b>	
2016	449	
2017	971	
2018	2140	
% Change	120.4	

Table 2. Ceasefire Violations in J&K in 2017, and 2018

### **Causality suffered by the Security Forces**

As is well known, the Border Security Force (BSF) is deployed along the IB with Pakistan as the 'First Line of Defenders' whereas army units patrol the LoC part of the border. According to replies placed by the government in the Lok Sabha (Lower House), in the year 2018, casualties of the BSF and Army personnel were 14 and 12 respectively<sup>8</sup>, as compared to four BSF and 15 Army personnel martyred in 2017, and eight Army and five BSF personnel martyred during ceasefire violations and cross-border firing resorted to by the Pakistan army and Rangers in the year 2016.<sup>9</sup>

Year	Casualties of Indian Army (LoC)	Casualties of BSF (IB)	
2016	08	05	
2017	15	04	
2018	12	14	

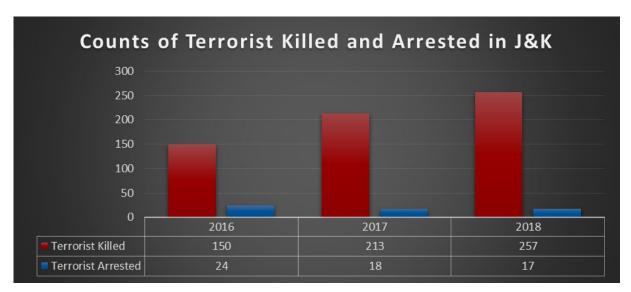
Table 3. Casualty data of Indian Army and BSF of the year 2016, 2017, and 2018

The above data suggests continuing use of both sectors of the border for exchange of fire at the IB with Pakistan. However, the Government of India has repeatedly put forward the matter of ceasefire violations by the Pakistan forces, at various international platforms. Through the established diplomatic and militarily mechanisms, the concern of ceasefire violations was taken up with Pakistan authorities at various levels.

According to Lt Gen A K Bhatt, former Commander of 15 Corps in Srinagar, in 2018 the losses of security personnel in combat scenario with terrorist has reduced considerably, with the soldier to terrorist attrition ratio being 1:8. 10

### **Terrorists Neutralised**

Pakistan's strategy to 'bleed India' with 'thousand cuts' led to the militancy in State of J&K, orchestrated by terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), and JeM. To contain the terrorist attacks and infiltration of terrorist across the border, India adopted a 'zero-tolerance' policy towards terrorism. According to reports, some sections of locals are supporting and assisting the activities of terrorists. It is estimated that around 300 terrorists are active in the State of J&K. According to the figures tabled in the Lok Sabha on 08 January and 12 February, 2019, the number of terrorists killed and arrested by our security forces during 2016, 2017, and 2018 are as follows:-

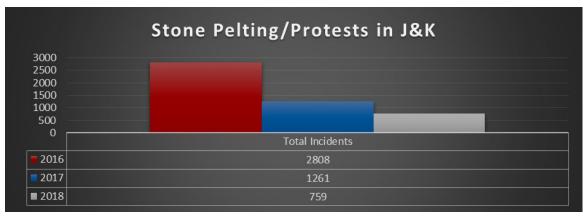


Graph 2. Terrorists killed and arrested in 2016, 2017, and 2018 in J&K.

Analysis of the counts shown in the graph above clearly marks out 2018 as one of the 'successful years' for the security forces. In comparison to 2017, the security forces neutralised 257 terrorists in total, and arrested 17 during counter-terrorism operations in J&K. As a 'good sign', since 2016 there has been decline in the arrest and rise in neutralising the terrorists in the Valley. The decline in number of arrests is attributed to the change in counter-terror operations which are getting increasingly intelligence driven. The terrorists are getting trapped in their hideouts with no options other than to surrender or get neutralised.

### **Protests in Kashmir**

Dissolution of the coalition government in J&K on 19 June 2018 and imposition of Governor's rule in the state were important political developments during the year. It proved highly successful move from the point-of-view of tightening the grip over the security situation in the Valley. The incidents of protests that led to stone pelting were serious affronts to the security forces in their operations. As can be seen from the Graph and Table below stone pelting incidents against the security forces during counter-terror operations has been declining significantly:-



Graph 3. Stone Pelting/Protests in J&K

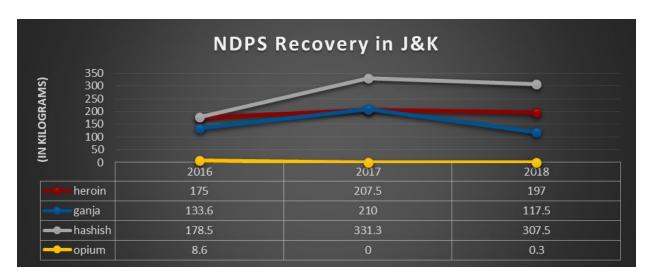
Year	2016	2017	2018
Counts of Incidents	2808	1261	759

Table 4. Stone Pelting/Protests in J&K

According to official data, there has been a continuous decline in the incidents of stone pelting. In 2016, total 2808 stone pelting incidents were recorded, whereas post-demonetisation in November 2016, it came down to 1261 in the year 2017, and further to 759 in 2018. There could be several factors that worked together, resulting in sharp decline of protests in the Valley. These could be effective collaboration between intelligence and security agencies, reduced availability of funds due to demonetisation, measures taken against the separatists and government's youth-oriented policies, to name a few. The fear of robust enforcement measures by the government agencies was palpable.

### Narco-Terrorism

Another important issue that needs at least a brief mention in this review relates to rising incidence of narco-terrorism in the state. The evil of narco-terrorism is also assessed as promoted by Pakistan as its secondary anti-India strategy to harm the youths of Kashmir. Former DGP of J&K, S. P. Vaid has highlighted it as a "bigger challenge" than terrorism as the contrabands are "pushed" into India from neighbouring Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>



*Graph 4. NDPS Recovery in J&K in 2016, 2017, and 2018.* 

	Heroin (in kg)	Ganja (in kg)	Hashish (in kg)	Opium (in kg)	CBCS (bottles)
2016	175	133.6	178.5	8.6	15,513
2017	207.5	210	331.3	0	17,799
2018	197	117.5	307.5	0.3	33,740

Table 5. Provisional data on the NDPS recovered in J&K in 2018. 16

According to the official data shown above, in 2018 the contraband recovery in J&K included Heroin, Ganja, Hashish, Opium, and CBCS (Codeine based Cough Syrups). Hashish and Heroin accounted for 307.51 kg and 197 kg respectively. A total 845 cases were registered and 1201 persons were arrested by the Narcotics Control Bureau and other drug law-enforcement agencies for their alleged involvement in smuggling of narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances. In comparison to earlier two years (2016, 2017) data recovery of CBCS bottles last year almost doubled to 33,740 bottles. In the earlier years of militancy, it may be recalled that infiltrating groups of militants from Pakistan were compulsorily asked to smuggle drugs as part of their 'terror-baggage' for the twin purpose of terror financing and of course spreading the arc of addiction. Presumably that agenda still remains valid.

Containing this menace through stringent surveillance and effective enforcement at entry and points of sale and export points, and increased international cooperation for exchange of information to control the movement of contrabands should assume higher priority.

### **Impact of NIA investigations**

In a major crackdown on terror funding network in J&K, the National Investigation Agency (NIA), on 18 January 2018, filed charge sheets against LeT chief Hafiz Saeed, HM chief Syed Salahuddin (both residing in Pakistan), along with seven separatist leaders and businessmen for their involvement in funding terrorist activities and protests following the killing of HM's commander Burhan Wani in 2016. In this case, the NIA had conducted multiple raids at around 60 locations across J&K, Delhi, and Haryana and seized 950 incriminating documents and over 600 electronic devices. The First Information Report (FIR) was filed in May 2017 in the terror funding investigation.<sup>17</sup>

On 06 July 2018, NIA officials arrested chief of the proscribed terrorist organisation -Dukhtaran-e-Millat and 'only woman separatist' Asiya Andrabi and two of her associates, Sofi Fehmeeda, and Naheeda Nasreen - on the charge of waging war against India. Asiya and her associates were actively involved in promoting anti-India campaign through their hate-speeches, advocated the use of violence against India, and advocated secession of J&K from the Union of India.<sup>18</sup> Video recordings of speeches featuring Asiya and her associates had been on various social-media platforms. The NIA is likely to file a supplementary charge sheet against all the three accused before a Delhi Court. However, the hearing of the matter has been postponed to 11 April 2019.<sup>19</sup>

### **Government Policies and Impact**

The terrorist outfits during the year continued to recruit misguided youths to join militant groups. According to a reply to a parliamentary question furnished by the government, 26 educated youth joined militancy in 2018. To government reply went on to add that with a view to addressing their concerns, government initiated several programmes to re-induct them back into the mainstream. The measures included providing employment opportunities, promoting sports and cultural activities and encouraging youth exchange programmes. Further, to promote development-oriented activities, a massive financial package of INR 80,068 crore was approved for the state under the PM Development Package 2015. Few of the schemes introduced also focused on the education and employment generation in the state. The government reply added that the schemes listed below were specifically designed to wean away the youths from militancy in J&K:-

- Special Industry Initiative [SII], *Udaan*, to enhance skills and employability of graduates and diploma holders for jobs in private sector.
- Skill Development and Employment Scheme, *Himayat*, to provide options and opportunities to school and college drop-outs for salaried jobs in the private sector or self-employment.
- Special Scholarship Scheme [SSS] to provide financial assistance to students with higher secondary [12<sup>th</sup>] or equivalent exams passed for studying in colleges and institutions outside the State of J&K.

These initiatives notwithstanding, the fact remains that virtually all the *tanzeems* operating in the Valley have been getting new recruits. This gets endorsed by the fact that despite the high number of militants killed each year, (see Graph-2 above), the estimated strength of militants active in the Valley is still as high as 300. According to some analysts, this number was estimated at around 250 or so in the previous year. Disappointing but not surprising, since the government schemes are designed to address economic and employment concerns of the youth. These measures do not impact the radicalised and or alienated youth who join militancy for entirely different reasons/motivations. Recognising the growing impact of radicalisation in the state, a brief para has been included in this review.

### **Non-Initiation of Combat Operations**

Another important development in the year 2018 was the announcement of 'Non-Initiation of Combat Operations' (NICO) during the month of Ramzaan (May 2018). This was at the suggestion of the by then Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, heading the PDP-BJP coalition

### President's Rule in J&K

After the lapse of six months of Governor's rule, as per constitutional requirement, President's rule was imposed in the state on December 19, 2018 and is still continuing. Usually, counter-terrorism operations in the Valley are 'summer-game', but during the Governor's rule, followed by the President's rule, by the end of 2018, there was no let-up in such operations even during the winter months.

### **Likely Situation in 2019**

Situation in Kashmir in 2019 is likely to remain extremely volatile in terms of the usual parameters of incidence of violence, trans-border activities comprising ceasefire violations and attempted infiltrations, political uncertainties, killing of militants in counter-terror operations and loss of lives of security personnel etc.

However, before attempting any forecasts, it is important to re-visit the recent Pulwama attack and the daring and precise airstrike at JeM establishment at Balakot. Have these effectively set a new benchmark in India's security policy vis-a-vis Pakistan sponsored trans-border terror? Would there be a general expectation of similar robust counter-response to every act of terror of such magnitude in the future too?

It is generally agreed that such an act of terror would not have been be undertaken without the concurrence and involvement of the Pakistani 'Deep State'. And therefore, if it is decided by them to do it again, the act must be part of a clear narrative/objective. What was then the motivation behind Pulwama? Was it meant to be a message to the Indian state that militancy had got further deep rooted in the Valley or to the new Pakistan PM not to try to do what Nawaz was trying to? Was it meant to be a message to the Pakistan army/ISI that groups like JeM and LeT cannot be restrained in their agenda beyond a point, or simply an act of revenge for the killing of Masood Azhar's son-in-law, or an attempt to vitiate the security situation to derail the upcoming elections in the state? Whatever it was, it certainly was not a politically motivated act on the part

of New Delhi to gain political advantage for the simple reason that it could have had disastrous fallout with even a minor slip up in the execution of the operation.

It is equally important here to mention that debate around the efficacy of the airstrike at Balakot must stop now since it has caused incalculable harm by diluting the net message that the Indian security establishment wanted to convey, i.e. if Pakistan ever again crossed the 'red line', and the level of tolerance, punishment would follow. The Uri Surgical Strike was similarly treated by our political class and a section of biased group of strategic experts, and the net message was lost.

However, this time around, despite similarly fractured internal debate, three critical messages must have registered with the Pakistani establishment namely, (a) such acts of terror will not go unpunished, (b) India would not hesitate to penetrate deep inside Pakistan territory to inflict the punishment, and (c) the international community, like never before, was prepared to stand behind India in no uncertain terms in its legitimate fight against terror.

### Therefore, We should Expect

The Indian punitive response notwithstanding, Pakistan will only, as in the past, 'tinker with its tactics' without making any shift in its overall strategy of keeping 'Kashmir on the boil'. Militant violence will therefore continue unabated, despite heavy attrition in counter-terror operations. Beside escalation of violence, recruitment of militants too will not abate. One should expect greater emphasis on increased recruitment of locals, greater use of local militants of the HM variety, increasing use of IEDs and lobbing of high intensity bombs at crowded places rather than very high impact actions of Pulwama type.

According to the data tabled in Lok Sabha on 12 February 2019, more than 19 terrorists have been killed in counter-terrorism operations this year.<sup>24</sup> This trend is expected to continue and that year 2019 might witness much higher level of attrition of local and foreign terrorists during intelligence driven cordon-and-search operations. The government is unlikely to significantly change its kinetic approach unless some forward movement is made from across the borders.

Pakistan based terror groups like LeT and JeM should also be expected to depend more on local militants but even when foreign terrorists are used, no ownership claims of such acts of terror would possibly be made and no tell-tale signs of foreign involvement would be left to ensure total deniability.

One should also expect ISI to attempt to reactivate the discredited Hurriyat (APHC), give primacy to HM and restore/create alternate channels of flow of funds.

Ceasefire violations along the LC/IB targeting civilians may also witness intensification. Therefore, there should be no relent on aggressive response from our side. Obviously, these would call for enhanced vigil by the local police and the security forces as well as the intelligence community to break the backbone of externally sponsored terror, neutralize internal modules, and ensure safer and peaceful borders along LC and IB.

Under immense pressure from the international community to take stringent actions against the safe-havens of terrorist groups, Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority (NCTA) updated the list on 05 March 2018, and added Hafiz Saeed led Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and its charity wing Falah-e-Insaniat Foundation (FIF) among other 70 proscribed organisations under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>25</sup> However, it is unlikely that the establishment will place any meaningful restraint on the activities of its 'Strategic Assets'.

Internally, due to the events in Kashmir, there is likely to be increased incidents of harassments of Kashmiri students in different part of the country. According to news report, around 300 Kashmiri students enrolled in various educational institutions across India have returned to J&K apprehending attacks/harassments. Apart from clear and firm directives issued by the central government, J&K administration to is in constant touch with respective state authorities to ensure safety and security cover to the Kashmiri students. <sup>26</sup> The government will have to focus on re-gaining the trust of the Kashmiri youth in different parts of the country through a pro-active approach.

On the political front, one should expect mounting pressure on the government to hold early elections to the State Assembly. It is important that efforts to find a political solution in J&K should go side by side with robust counter-terrorism operations.

Considering the current security situation in the Valley, the administration did rush the electoral processes in the state by holding simultaneous parliamentary and assembly elections. Election Commission (EC) is expected to have a fresh look on the security assessments before taking a final call on the elections in the State of J&K.<sup>27</sup>

### **Countering Radicalisation**

Before concluding, as mentioned earlier, a brief mention of the growing level of radicalisation in the state, by all available accounts, is assuming serious proportions in the Valley. Obviously one cannot quantify the number of youth exposed to the radicalisation, it may be noted that 'Islam' is fast replacing the earlier twin narratives of 'Azadi' and merger with Pakistan. The spread of radical Islamic ideology through print and social media platforms need to be countered on priority.

The subject of growing radicalisation, its causes, and groups involved, target areas, impact on the youth, means and methods used and the changing narratives, constitute a vast field for separate study. Recognising its critical importance, the VIF has recently posted two study papers: "Militancy in Kashmir - A Study" on 14 March 2019, and "Islamic State (IS) Activities in India- A *Trend Analysis*" on 20 March 2019. These can be accessed through its website. <sup>28</sup>

There is an urgent need for Islamic institutions, religious leaders, family members and of course the educational institutions to devise ways and means to spot initial trends at radicalisation among the youth and initiate corrective action ensure that the religious teachings of Islam are not misinterpreted to further the cause of radicalisation.

### **Conclusions**

There seems to be a perception in the larger strategic community that the Indian state has been too pre-occupied with 'winning the kinetic war' while fast losing the psychological/ ideological war. As mentioned, Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (Retd), former General-Officer-Commanding (GOC) of 15 Corps, while addressing a select group of informed audience at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, (28 March 2019), stated that Pakistan's 'proxy-hybrid war' in the State of J&K could not be met only using counter-terror response or conventional military approach. There was need for a comprehensive 'all-ofgovernment' approach which includes, along with military, political, social, economic, and psychological domains to work together for a common goal to counter Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

According to the data provided in this review, despite robust kinetic approach leading to rising attrition terrorists and higher counts of ceasefire violations across the LC and IB and continuing Pakistani support to the militants groups, terrorism in the Kashmir Valley is unlikely vanish anytime soon. However, due to success of the NIA in its tight grip on the separatist groups and other such entities, the support system to anti-India activities in the Valley is being continuously degraded. The on-going welfare and developmental policies of the Government of India are seemingly not enough to bring the youth of Kashmir back into the mainstream. There is need for every sector and institution - be it government, civil bodies, religious institutions and the local political leaders - to act in unison. This unfortunately is missing. It is important for every institution including the media to get constructively engaged in the task of reclaiming Kashmir.

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