

The War Against Terrorism: The Jammu and Kashmir Connection

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By M.K. Narayanan

I. Introduction

The following essay is by M.K. Narayanan, former chief of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. It originally appeared on [Asian Age Online](#).

Narayanan argues that there is a connection between the September 11 attacks in the US and the ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. He maintains that Pakistan's credibility in the fight against terrorism is undermined by its previous support of terrorist activities in Kashmir. He concludes that a war against terrorism must address the violence in Kashmir as well as Afghanistan.

II. Essay By M.K. Narayanan

"The War Against Terrorism: The Jammu and Kashmir Connection"

The terrorist attacks on high profile targets in New York and Washington, have caused untold suffering and loss of lives, and disrupted all normal activity on the eastern seaboard of the United States. It has also resulted in the cancellation - possibly temporarily - of the scheduled meeting between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf of Pakistan. This was to have taken place during the UN General Assembly, which has been shelved for the time being.

The scale of the terrorist attack on the United States has served to open the eyes of the world to the horrors of "covert war" and the dangerous dimensions that it is now taking. Countries which had not hitherto been the victims of this kind of "unseen war" often tended to see it as a "lesser evil" than most other types of conflict they knew.

The mindless carnage in New York and Washington has, however, led to the realisation that terrorist

threats have to be met on a war-footing and all civilised nations must enlist the support of each other to deal with this menace.

It is India's hope that this new realisation will compel the world to look at the ongoing terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir with greater enlightenment and lead to better awareness of the nature of the problems India faces there.

Two "wars" are in progress in J&K. Unfortunately, it is the gun battle and terrorist violence that garners the attention of the media and much of the outside world. Despite the lip service these sections pay to "winning the hearts and minds of the people of Kashmir," there is seldom any reference made to the incremental, but steady, steps being taken in this direction.

Obviously, there is no "head-line grabbing" or "glamour" attached to the mundane pursuit of peace. The seminal importance attached to the second meeting of the Indian Prime Minister and the Pakistan President was on account of the fact that any kind of a dialogue - even if it did not immediately lead to peace - was seen to be better than the blood and gore which is the daily staple today in J&K, thanks to the caprice of the many Islamist "jihadi outfits" operating out of Pakistan.

Since the Agra Summit, violence and killings in J&K have attained a new peak. Having used the prolonged period of non-initiation of combat operations to fortify themselves, an escalation in violence was seen from May itself, and the scales tipped further following the Agra Summit.

Large-scale infiltrations had occurred during the period of the non- initiation of combat, leading to a substantial increase in numbers of militants operating in J&K. In the interim period, new recruitments were also made from among the Kashmiris, intended to give verisimilitude to their claim that the movement was indigenous in nature and what was going on in J&K was a struggle by the Kashmiris for self-determination.

The stream of violence has since turned into a torrent. Many of the new infiltrants are highly trained special operatives adept at "distance fighting." Several had been imparted special skills in how to arrange delayed explosions. Others had been taught how to judiciously disguise explosives to cause maximum havoc and impact.

By and large, the new operatives avoided the use of "line-of-sight" explosive devices, preferring to employ triggering mechanisms that operated either under pressure or other means. Targets were chosen with more than usual care.

Fidayeen units had greatly proliferated and were employed in sizeable strength to attack camps of the Special Operations Group of the J&K police, of the paramilitary forces and of the armed forces.

A spurt in the numbers of security force personnel and civilians killed was the outcome in the two months after the Agra Summit, the numbers killed went up exponentially.

Precision targeting and avoidance of random violence meant that the "kill-ratio per incident" was higher than at any time in the recent past. On a single day, September 8 for example, as many as 20 persons were killed by militants striking at nearly a dozen places.

As in the case of the well-planned attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, these tactics were intended to produce the maximum number of casualties and inculcate stark terror in the minds of the ordinary citizen.

The idea was to demonstrate that the long arm of the terrorist could strike anywhere, and at anyone, not bowing to their diktats. A particularly poignant attack was that on a school bus carrying children

returning from a picnic, in which the bus was destroyed by detonating a remotely operated improvised explosive device.

It reveals the similarity in mindsets of religious-oriented terrorists wherever they operate - whether in J&K, New York or Washington. There is an unflinching faith in and willingness to kill innocents for the cause they hold dear.

In J&K, new militant outfits are also emerging each day, like termites from the woodwork, threatening innocent folk with reprisals of various kinds. A diktat to compel women to wear the burqa (veil) is now being enforced employing the cruelest of methods, including throwing of acid on those who fail to obey their "order." This attempt at "Talibanisation" of the struggle in Srinagar is producing many "tinpot" Osama-bin-Ladens.

This type of indiscriminate, often outrageous, "strikes" by jihadi outfits (as also their open boasting of the success achieved in inflicting damage and injury to India) has not so far deterred India from trying to negotiate a peace in J&K, and against all odds, seek an improvement in relations with Pakistan.

It is essentially the yearning for peace among the people of J&K - which seems to have become stronger with the efflux of time - that has fuelled Prime Minister Vajpayee's determination to persist with holding of talks with Pakistan and keeping the dialogue going.

Sustaining the dialogue is seen by India as essentially serving the cause of peace though the move is not uniformly popular, nor has a clear political consensus on this issue emerged.

Success does, however, depend mainly on whether Pakistan is willing to make an "about turn" in its attitudes and approach. Pakistan's mindset in regard to Kashmir seems hardly dissimilar to that of the extremist fringe of radical Islam - in which category fall the Al Qaeda (of Osama- bin-Laden), Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the PFLF, the Lashker-e-Tayyaba and many others.

Pakistan continues to instigate, support, fund, train and arm the Islamist storm-troopers who daily engage in their "dance of death," killing innocents in J&K. They also sublimate "terrorism" as "jihad."

They see little virtue in civil society norms and remain ensconced in medieval beliefs of revenge for so-called grievances and hurts, or territorial spoils in the name of religion.

Having been present at the birth of the Taliban and carefully nursed it in the initial years to the stage where it has become a monster spawning the hordes indulging in violence in J&K, Pakistan is in no position to disown it now.

The events of September 11 and the stark terror that rained down from the heavens on that day should be a wake-up call. All those who support or back terrorism - whatever their reasons or causes for doing so - should be put in the dock. In the court of world opinion they should stand condemned for their endorsement of a pernicious and wicked philosophy.

There are many in the West - especially in so-called liberal think-tanks - who try to propagate that India and Pakistan should become partners in the common enterprise of sorting out the Kashmir imbroglio. There was never any question of partnership between the two countries.

Now that the "ugliest face" of terrorism has revealed itself, and Pakistan's ambivalence and equivocation stand exposed, to talk of partnership would amount to "supping with the devil." India and Pakistan are and have been antagonists. Their legacy of conflict goes back more than 50 years. In a civilisational sense the divide between them is even wider.

This hence leads on to the question whether at all it is possible to deal with Pakistan diplomatically. Much water has flown under the bridge since Lahore (1999), and even Agra (July 2001).

Pakistan's attempts at dissimulation regarding the reasons why an agreement could not be reached with India at Agra should be seen in the light of the latest terrorist attack as concealing a more sinister design.

Its unwillingness to address the core issue of cross-border terrorism translates as a continuing belief in, and sympathy for, the terrorist cause. No amount of circumlocution can hide this ugly truth.

There are hidden dangers in holding negotiations with governments who support, instigate, fund and arm "messengers of death." Pakistan must provide proof that it is doing something concrete to check the "jihadi outfits" from launching attacks in J&K from its soil, or if it admits its incapability to do so, be willing to seek outside assistance for this purpose. Only then can some degree of certitude return to the dialogue process, if and when it resumes.

General Musharraf cannot hope to get away by functioning as a quintessential divisional commander. He needs to not only understand the enormity of the human tragedy being played out in J&K on account of the terror tactics and violence unleashed by the "jihadi outfits" nurtured on Pakistan soil, but also realise that there are unintended consequences that result from them as evident from the terrorist attacks on US targets.

Unless he takes steps to reverse the spiral of hostility, the situation could well get out of control. The past week's events represent a kind of water-shed in the history of mindless violence.

Something drastic needs to be done to curb the Islamist outfits currently engaged in cascading violence in J&K, otherwise there is no knowing where matters would end. The warning call of September 11 must be properly heeded. The Alliance for the Battle against Terrorism must gear itself to deal with a situation which is fraught with dangerous possibilities.

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