

Déjà vu in Kashmir: Resurgence of Islamic Militancy

The reality so far in global geopolitics is 'once a contested land, always a contested land'. The best example has been Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). Over 65 years have passed since the first batch of Pakistani intruders with the help of army regulars came face to face with the Indian army, the violence continues unabated in the J&K. Since then, India and Pakistan have fought at least three major wars and as many skirmishes, with intermittent, mostly half-hearted and ineffective bilateral peace overtures from both sides.

Blatant cases of ceasefire violation triggered heavy exchanges of fire at the LoC and reports of massive militant infiltration came into light in early 2013. Since then fears of an impending border conflict have increased manifold between the two neighboring nuclear weapon powers as a series of ceasefire violations, terrorist incursions and suicide attacks on Indian Army and police forces virtually marked the onset of a long battle at the Line of Control (LoC). One estimate suggests, there have been nearly 120 incidents of ceasefire violation from Pakistan side along the LoC in J&K until late September this year, the highest since 2008.

Indian Army and paramilitary forces are always busy fighting a two pronged war at the LoC: preventing infiltration of

militants into Jammu and Kashmir and at the same time tackling provocative firing from Pakistan side which acts as cover for sneaking militants. Gunfire and shelling from the Pakistani side of the LoC is common when simultaneous attempts are made to push militant proxies into Indian Territory. To note, Indian Army has been engaged with an ongoing anti-infiltration operation in Shalbhatti locality in Keran Sector since September 23 after noticing a group of 30 to 40 Pakistan based militants attempting to intrude into the Kashmir.

Jammu and Kashmir has been on the boil one again with the early January beheadings and mutilations of Indian army soldiers in the Poonch sector by Islamic militants that spurred a pitched debate on the very intention of Pakistan especially when cross border violence has subsided substantially over the past many years. Again in early August (06), five Indian soldiers were killed in an ambush by around 20 heavily-armed militants along the Line of Control in the same Poonch sector of Jammu and Kashmir. The involvement of Pakistan Army's Border Action Team (BAT) and heavily armed terrorists were confirmed through subsequent investigations. Soon after, Pakistani soldiers targeted at least 16 Indian army forward posts and civilian areas in Poonch. In late September (September



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26) Pakistan based militants with army fatigue perpetrated “fidayeen” (suicide) attacks on police posts and army units killing around 14 people, including a lieutenant-colonel of the Indian Army in Kathua and Samba districts of Jammu region. The twin terror attack was claimed by a hitherto unknown group Shuhada (martyrs) Brigade. It has to be recollected that efforts inside Pakistan to garner support for Jihad in Kashmir by militant groups like Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Al-Badr Mujahideen (HM-LeT-ABM) in the recent past resulted in the formation of this newly hybrid Jihadi group. The above mentioned groups have been organizing fund raising activities under the banner of “Shuada Conference” and conduct rallies to recruit new talent for revival of jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan for some time openly in Pakistan. In all likelihood the Shuhada Brigade involved in September 26 and following incidents in J&K, a byproduct of HM-LeT-ABM’s Kashmir centric efforts in Pakistan.

The disturbing situation at the border and inside Kashmir could be an act of desperation on the part of the Pakistani military and its Jihadi proxies. Even though Pakistan denies any involvement and washes its hand with that ‘Non state actor’ argument to favor its stand. Of course these so called Non State Actors are freely raising funds from government and private sources in Pakistan to wage jihad in Kashmir.

Evidently, the plan to revive Kashmiri militancy has already been implemented and is ongoing. This spurt of violence in J&K has a direct linkage with regular meetings of Kashmiri separatist leaders hosted by the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), Syed Salahuddin of Hizbul Mujahideen/United Jihad Council (HM/UJC) and Hafiz Saeed of the LeT/JuD who brainstorm to intensify Kashmiri militancy. The Pakistan based militant leaders are seen urging factions of separatists in the J&K to unite, with the sole purpose of reviving the Kashmir militant struggle. They also demanded Pakistan’s active support in carrying out a renewed armed insurgency in J&K in the past and even threatened in the following terms:”We (Jihadi militants) are fighting Pakistan’s war in Kashmir and if it withdraws its support, the war would be fought inside Pakistan.”

Albeit, with change of guard in Islamabad it seems that there is a genuine concern within Islamabad’s political and civilian fraternities, to normalize bilateral ties with India, but alarmingly the military-militant nexus plays a spoilsport every time there is Indo-Pak bonhomie. And it clearly demonstrates that the government and military (along with its proxies) are not on the same page. Not surprisingly, the vexed issues of territory and terrorism remain unresolved and J&K continues to witness gunfire and bloodshed every now and then, justifying its tag as global flashpoint. ■