
Counter-Terrorism Responses: A Military Perspective

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The Approach

Counter-terrorism necessitates an approach which must embrace three types of capabilities. These include the preventive (before), responsive (during), and “post” or “after” capability to deal with incidents and eventualities after the strike. If prevention and deterrence fail, then there must be effective administration and law enforcement, and the military to react to events, along with a strong, accountable and clear criminal justice system.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the late Eighties (1989–1990) characterised weak governance and poor administration, giving cause to the rise of insurgency in the Valley. The fact that the insurgency was inspired, funded and controlled by Pakistan through its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency is now well known. The criticality of the situation can be gauged by Sumit Ganguly's article: “Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political Mobilization and Institutional Decay” in *International Security*, Vol 21, in which he writes: “On December 8, 1989, members of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front kidnapped Dr. Rubiya Sayeed, the daughter of the Indian Minister of Home Affairs. The kidnappers refused to release her until several incarcerated members of their outlawed group were released. Following hasty negotiations over the next several days, the government in New Delhi agreed to meet the abductors' demands. In the weeks and months that followed, dozens of insurgent groups emerged and wreaked havoc throughout the Kashmir Valley, killing government officials, security personnel, and innocent bystanders. Although they were of varying ideological orientations, all the insurgent groups professed opposition to Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir, and the authority of the Indian state virtually collapsed there.”

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Except for the military, all other institutions of the state had been subverted. The Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service cadres of J&K state stood isolated. They received only marginal cooperation as they were considered symbols of the Indian colonial rule. The collapse of the administrative machinery created various problems which worked to the advantage of the secessionists and terrorists. The latter filled the administrative void and the leaders of terror groups became the dispensers of justice. Few are aware that the local politicians and bureaucrats and a number of national level political leaders shamefully started suggesting that in view of the growing insurgency and a demand for secession, India should compromise its stand on Kashmir. The Indian Army can justifiably take pride in the fact that it was then perhaps the only pillar of the nation which resisted all suggestions of secession and came out strongly against any appeasement of terrorists and insurgents in J&K.

Jointness and Cooperation

Counter-terrorism requires very close cooperation among all the instruments of power and governance i.e. political leadership, civil administration, intelligence agencies and security forces. Moreover, a cardinal principle of counter-terrorism and insurgency is that military operations against the terrorists must not result in alienating the people from the government, because such situations invariably help the terrorists in achieving their objectives. It is a universal experience that the wider the support base for the terrorists, the less effective will the coercive tactics be, and if the support base is limited, then strong military action can prove effective. Hence, at no stage can good governance and effective civil administration be delinked from military operations.

The centre and the state failed to formulate a definite policy to combat terrorism and to prevent Pakistan from blatantly waging proxy war against India by controlling the flow of terrorists across the Line of Control (LoC). Former Vice Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. (Retd) Vijay Oberoi, who was then the director general, Military Operations, states, "The biggest problem was the inadequacy or inability of the central government to understand that tackling an insurgency situation requires, apart from political will, centralised control and integrated operational command so that overall assessments could decide on future strategies and design and conduct of operations. Only then can top down coordination be achieved which is a vital operational necessity in such operations. Ultimately, seeing the ambivalence and vacillation of the government at the centre and the state, the army decided to make the 'best of a

bad bargain' and continued to operate on their own by coordinating with other agencies as best as they could. In due course, the concept of unified headquarters, comprising heads of all departments and agencies, headed by the chief minister, came to be acknowledged as the acceptable apex body for coordinating and combating the insurgency in J&K. A somewhat similar model was established to tackle the insurgencies in the northeast also."

The situation improved gradually as the centre and the state governments started showing more determination to deal firmly with the problem. The Kargil conflict in May-June 1998, followed by the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US, exposed Pakistan's involvement and gave India ample opportunity to unmask Pakistan's intentions, attitude and actions.

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The Response

India's response can be examined in the light of two proclaimed models of counter-terrorism, the Criminal Justice Model (CJM) and the War Model (WM). The CJM prioritises the preservation of democratic principles as being the fundamental premise in the fight against terror, even at the expense of reduced effectiveness of counter-terrorist measures. The WM places a stronger emphasis on countering terrorism rather than upholding liberal democratic rights. In this model, viewing terrorism as an act of revolutionary warfare, the onus for response is placed on the military, ranging from using elite special forces, retaliatory strikes and large troop deployments. The reasoning is that the terrorists are waging a war and the state must deploy its war-fighting capability in order to counter the problem effectively.

Many academics think that these two models are mutually exclusive. However, most democracies use a hybrid of CJM and WM and this is called the "Extended Criminal Justice Model" (ECJM) which gives flexibility and the ability to use and combine all measures to suit specific cases.

India has been following the hybrid model i.e. staying within the bounds of democratic principles while conducting operations against the terrorists. She has tried to overcome the "grey areas" between the two models. In J&K, employing this model, the army leads the operations, with a view to countering the proxy war waged by Pakistan while the central and the state governments do their best to preserve the democratic principles through effective

administration and economic development, to convey the appropriate messages, internally as well as to a globalised world.

Improving the Existing Weaknesses/Drawbacks

Despite considerable effort made to create the appropriate architecture at the centre and in the states to tackle insurgencies and terrorism, the situation is far from satisfactory. The inherent weaknesses of the Indian system remain unresolved. Both insurgency and terrorism, due to their ideological and political nature, require a holistic and integrated analysis at the national level in order to arrive at a national strategy which could provide direction to the states and the various agencies at the centre. This kind of holistic survey and assessment is lacking in the Indian context. Moreover, the quality of governance in most of the Indian states is poor. These factors together give rise to a large number of weaknesses which hamper counter-terrorism operations and need to be eradicated or minimised. These are explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

A Long-Term Strategy for J&K and the Northeast

This implies that national objectives and national strategy with respect to the prevailing situations in the “disturbed areas” must be known to all the agencies to prevent independent assessments and formulation of piecemeal policies. This will prevent the agencies from working at cross-purposes.

Reforms at the Operational Level

There is an urgent need to once again look at the integrated command model, for all security forces operating in a sector, to ensure operational efficiency and accountability.

Technology

Modern technology is required for round the clock surveillance, target acquisition, data storage and retrieval, integrated communications, effective body armour for the soldiery and modern weaponry.

Exemplary Penalty for Nexus with Terrorists

Political leaders in many states are involved with criminals and terrorist groups. Such nexus relegates corrective action to a lower priority. Hence, the situation on the ground does not improve. This can be countered through political reforms and exemplary penalty.

Terrorists With Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

This is a low probability threat but carries a high risk and can be addressed by integrating surveillance and disaster response capability. While limited capability has already been built into the National Disaster Management Authority in the form of a National Disaster Response Force, the overall capability in this regard should be developed in the defence sector as the armed forces are the only organised body that can manage large scale disasters.

Closer Integration with Military Intelligence

For the military to be effective in the disturbed areas, there is a need for integrating military intelligence with the national intelligence communication grid. Currently, no such facility exists.

Lack of Coordination

The Indian Army has been fighting insurgency and terrorism in J&K for the past two decades and in the northeast since 1956. These operations have been made possible only after the concerned areas were declared as “disturbed” and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was made applicable. This allows the armed forces a free hand to operate against the insurgents and terrorists. However, the army operations can only help to bring down the degree of violence and give an opportunity to the civil administration to function. The army on its own cannot eradicate the ideological or political motives of the insurgents. This has to be achieved by the political leadership and in this sphere, India’s successes are few. It is also seen that political leaders, at times, either due to political expediency or in their mistaken beliefs, recommend the withdrawal of army operations or imposition of a ceasefire to achieve an anticipated breakthrough in negotiations with the insurgent groups, without adequate thought and consultation. The most appropriate example is of that of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses website on Strategic Comments, *Dealing With ULFA’s Terror*, dated January 22, 2007, states : “The ULFA’s offer to hold talks with the centre during major security operations has been aimed at getting the security forces off its back. This happened during Operation Bajrang in 1990 and Operation Rhino in

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1991. In 1992, in response to ULFA's offer to hold talks, the centre released five of its senior leaders. But soon after the first round of talks, the leaders slipped into Bangladesh and never returned to the negotiating table." Similarly, in August 2006, the central government unilaterally, against the army's advice, announced a ceasefire with the outfit and ULFA also responded by promising to end hostilities. However, after a period of six weeks, the government called off the ceasefire and resumed military operations on the ground that ULFA had not kept its promise. This gave time to ULFA to refurbish and replenish its cadres who had been severely weakened. This shows naivety and inexperience among the security planners of the central government and lack of strategic dialogue and coordination between the army and the political leadership.

Differences in Operating Culture

Conduct of operations by the army and the police differ in methodology. The prevailing culture of the police and the central paramilitary forces (CPMFs) is "Live and Let Live", In other words, they avoid offensive action whereas the army excels in it. Quite often, the difference in "operating culture" creates unnecessary friction which can be avoided through allocation of appropriate missions and mature handling at the Unified Headquarters. Moreover, the police forces do not have the striking power of the military and, hence, need the military to strengthen their operational capability and resolve, and in return, the military needs the local knowledge of the police to operate within a region. Additionally, the local police personnel who belong to the same area, may shy away from taking strong action for personal reasons. This problem too can be overcome by the army presence. If these issues are explained in the right perspective, the problems can be overcome.

The Need For Army Led Paramilitary Forces

In a democracy like ours, the police is neither organised nor trained to achieve operational results. Police leadership in CPMFs is also ineffective. Hence, they invariably need the army to back up their efforts wherever an insurgency situation comes about. The government should, therefore, maintain army led paramilitary forces like the Rashtriya Rifles (RR) and Assam Rifles (AR) for army led proactive and offensive operations while the plethora of CPMFs are employed for defensive and protective tasks.

Junior Leadership in the Police

They are neither trained nor motivated to lead from the front. It is not possible

for police officers of the rank of inspector to achieve what the young officers of the army are capable of achieving. However, their advantage lies in their knowledge of their precinct, knowledge of the villages in their jurisdiction or the *mohallas* in a city and the people who live there. Hence, their employment should be accommodated accordingly.

Development of Vested Interests

In an insurgency situation, central funds continue to flow in abundance and there is hardly any accountability of the state government and the functionaries of the state. Some analysts feel that one of the major reasons for the continuing instability in J&K and the northeastern states is the power and pelf that the political leadership and the separatist groups and even the security forces enjoy, thus, developing a vested interest in the continued state of insurgency in the concerned state.

Exploit Pakistan's Fault Lines

The operational centre of gravity (C of G) of the insurgency in J&K lies across the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) i.e. the *jihadi* camps which need to be destroyed to close the tap. Similarly, the terror groups sponsoring insurgency from Bangladesh need to be punished. So far, India has avoided striking these camps for fear of escalating the conflict and the likely collateral damage which could hurt India's image. Thus, Pakistan has secured "escalation dominance" in the context of the low intensity conflict in J&K, forcing India to fight the terrorism and insurgency within its own borders. The answer to the proxy war launched by Pakistan lies in exploiting their fault lines by developing levers to influence their adverse situation in Baluchistan, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and Sind.

Elusiveness of a Joint Approach

Terrorism is defined as the use of violence for the purpose of creating fear in order to achieve a political, economic, religious or ideological goals. Hence, it is apparent that the strategies, practices, tactics, and techniques that governments, militaries and other groups adopt in order to fight terrorism include a variety of measures simultaneously. This entails political (including

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social and economic) diplomatic, punitive, judicial and military measures. All measures require effective intelligence for execution of operations which are time sensitive, and for long-term planning and policy-making. Moreover, all measures necessitate the development of an overall strategy which guides all government agencies to work towards common objectives. Hence, the necessity of a joint approach is well established universally. Some reasons for the lack of a joint approach have been covered in the foregoing paragraphs.

These can be summarised under two heads, namely, strategic and tactical levels.

- At the strategic level, the army is not represented at senior levels within India's National Security Advisor's Secretariat which, for inexplicable reasons, has been hijacked by retired police and Foreign Service officers who have only chair-borne experience in the arena of low intensity conflict. Hence, their view-points are conditioned by their lack of experience, and catholicity. Moreover, even the higher defence organisation does not have a formal structure or mechanism by which the chief of Army Staff, for example, can meet the prime minister who is the executive head of the nation, on a regular basis.
- At the tactical level, the lack of a joint approach is due to a variety of reasons, including the absence of integrated operational commands in "disturbed areas" which leads to lack of accountability of various agencies, and turf struggles, wide differences in operating culture between the police and the army, lack of junior leadership among the police, and incompatible communication equipment.

Counter-Terrorism Measures

These measures involve both defensive measures, to reduce vulnerabilities to terrorist acts and offensive measures to prevent, deter and respond to terrorism, along with contingency measures to respond to a variety of terrorist attacks. There are a number of different measures that can be used to fight against terrorism because terrorists operate at different levels and dimensions such as political, economic, criminal, national and international, thus, one needs to counter the terrorist at each level. Many of these measures are listed on the UN website "Classification of Counter-Terrorism Measures" (http://www.undcp.org/terrorism_measures.html).

Intelligence

The role of intelligence agencies is paramount in the fight against terrorism. Valuable information that can be turned into intelligence can be acquired and

gathered through signal intelligence/ communication intelligence (SIGINT/ COMINT), electronic intelligence (ELINT), and human intelligence (HUMINT) as well as through open and closed sources, surveillance and a variety of other means. Intelligence agencies need to have a large number of personnel with diverse experience. Agents and analysts need to have cultural, linguistic and regional expertise which in our case was woefully inadequate when the Kargil conflict broke out. No one understood the various dialects of the language spoken in the Northern Areas of POK which proved an impediment to quick understanding of signal intercepts and dissemination of intelligence.

India is threatened by international terrorism whose contours are uncertain and this requires, a very effective proactive approach based on superior intelligence and contingency planning.

Conclusion

The presence and activities of the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the rise of the Maoists in Nepal, the resurgence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the sustained growth of the fundamentalists in Bangladesh and the operations of Kashmiri terrorist groups in Pakistan paint a gloomy picture of India's strategic periphery. Despite this gloomy picture, the emerging trends indicate that civil society and democratic forces have not been run over entirely. The beginnings of a democratic turnaround can be seen in each of these countries. The challenge lies in supporting the consolidation of democratic forces in the region and assisting in political stabilisation without getting embroiled in their domestic conflicts or reducing the international pressure on the violent and extremist elements.

India is also threatened by international terrorism whose contours are far more uncertain and this requires, among other measures, a very effective proactive approach based on superior intelligence and contingency planning at the national level to prevent acts of terrorism.