



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title: THE KASHMIR ISSUE: THE WAY FORWARD

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The ongoing territorial dispute in Kashmir has been one of the major causes of conflict between India and Pakistan and one of the oldest disputes in contemporary times, gaining significant international attention. With the recent rise in anti-India and pro-Pakistan sentiments in the region, coupled with existing separatist elements, the clamour for 'Azadi' has grown. Kashmir has been a "troubled" valley for India, with no permanent and lasting solution in sight. Thus the issue of insurgency and militancy in the region remains even today. What further makes matters worse is that Pakistan has always pursued the Kashmir agenda aggressively at national and international levels over the years, projecting the 'poor plight' of the Kashmiris who they claim are subjected to gross violation of human rights over the issue of self-determination.

Following Burhan Wani's death, the civilian outburst broke out with an unprecedented intensity. One of the possible reasons could be the changing profile of militants today. Unlike his predecessors, Wani belonged to a well-to-do family by local standards, had educational qualifications and still leaned towards extremism. Wani displayed potential for a young and aspiring citizen of India but still chose the path of militancy. This factor drew a lot of Kashmiri youth in different parts of the Valley who could easily idolize him. These sentiments have gathered support from all sections of the



Kashmiri society. The media, too, played a major role. This is also the main reason why the protests after Wani's death in the Valley have intensified much more than previous protests over the death of militants.

Furthermore, the role of separatist leaders cannot be ignored in this context. Wani's death had been capitalized in order to suit the separatist agenda. This is how the alienation of Kashmiris in their own homeland has been portrayed. Stone pelters and protesters that take to the streets are known to be funded by Hurriyat separatists, making a decent earning for unemployed youth. Because of separatist elements rampant in the Valley, these youth are misled into believing that self-determination for 'Azadi' will do the Kashmiris good.

It seems imperative at this stage, to understand how one can bring about a sense of duty or consciousness among youngsters that lack a sense of purpose; how an environment can be created to generate such sentiments; and most importantly, how militancy can no longer be an option for Kashmiris. This further raises other pertinent questions, such as the role of the military and state infrastructure.

Anywhere in the world, the need for military intervention is inevitable when masses become antagonistic towards authority and display an anti-national leaning. What makes Kashmir especially unique is the fact that Pakistan has been so proactively pursuing an agenda of keeping up the intensity of turmoil in the region. The Army's role in Kashmir has thus reached beyond traditional duties and has emerged as a force geared to indulge in public welfare and confidence building, despite separatist elements that continue to regard it as an occupation force. While weighing the pros and cons, there is no doubt that the Army needs to continue in Kashmir.

In the given scenario, a "way forward" approach needs to be kept in mind and possible solutions – short and long term – need to be evaluated. Some of these are:

1. As the world fights against Islamic fundamentalism, India can play the "secular card" and seek to gain international support on the Kashmir front. Further, as Pakistan has significantly lost its credibility in the world today, India can hope for more global empathy than before.

2. The PM's 70th Independence Day address mentions the grievances of people in Baluchistan. India must be prepared for the probable repercussions of doing so at the global stage and also on a bilateral stage with Pakistan.
3. Economic development - whether from within or through outsourcing Kashmiri youth through conscription of employment/educational opportunities etc. - can be explored with the aim of scattering Kashmiris across the country. However, many plans have been put in place through initiatives undertaken by NGOs in this direction but the anti-India sentiment remains.
4. Intervention needs to come from within Kashmir, whether through the clergy or intellectual section of the society so that 'Azadi' and its consequences can be explained to Kashmiris in its true sense.
5. As far as the media is concerned, it seems to be painting the picture which is easily sold in the Valley. Some intervention by the media is also necessary wherein they appear neutral, impartial and more sensitive towards the government's and Armed Forces' efforts in the Valley.
6. Elected representatives of the State need to have more face-to-face interactions with the people as grievances are not even heard properly, let alone addressed in Kashmir, thereby heightening the sentiment of alienation.

In conclusion, the Kashmir issue is something that India has had to deal with since independence, which it has done to the best of its abilities. While no immediate solution comes to mind, India needs to make it clearer than ever before that Kashmir is a non-negotiable issue.
