

Blind To The Valley

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The traditional difference between radicalism, extremism, militancy, terrorism and insurgency has blurred over a period of time. Assemblies or speeches preaching radicalism, extremism or militancy without violence are not a crime in the US. For long, the UK was accused of tolerating “non-violent extremism”. But these activities could be punishable in India.

On the other hand, terrorism and insurgency are violent tactics employed by the first three categories for religious or political ends. A terrorist could be a foreigner or local. He does not care whether he gets local support or not. But the insurgent is always a local and needs local support as he is fighting for a local cause. This is because insurgency arises when a section of the local public starts supporting a cause against the mainstream, example being the Maoist uprising in India. Insurgency could also happen if the original idea is catalysed from outside the country's borders, like the present Kashmir insurgency. Yet they are “our people” who have to be treated differently from foreign terrorists.

History indicates that separate strategies were used while dealing with terrorism and insurgency. It was always a “total war” against terrorism like the “War on Terror” in the wake of 9/11 or the war against Islamic State. But insurgency was always dealt with by a combination of coercive action, conciliation through talks and rehabilitation. The latter examples are the Hukbalahap rebellion in Philippines (1946-54), Malaya (1948-60), Mau Mau in Kenya (1952-60), Northern Ireland (1969-1996), and the Sikh, Naga and Maoist insurgencies in India.

Most of these resemble the latest phase of the Kashmir insurgency, which started in July 2016. Like in Kashmir, both army and police had taken part in most counter-insurgency operations. The Irish and Sikh insurgencies were aided by foreign help. So was the Naga uprising in its initial period. Intense feelings against the government arose through a combination of factors like intolerance (by the administration), repression and humiliation.

This vital difference is not understood by the Modi government in Kashmir Valley, although they had followed it while talking to the Naga insurgents. J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti understands this and had recommended political dialogue. This was before the Hakripora encounter (August 2017), when locals tried to obstruct security forces. This trend has accelerated in 2018. This type of public support is not seen in any terrorism-affected countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria. It is seen only in the Palestinian areas in Israel.

The Concerned Citizens' Group led by senior BJP leader [Yashwant Sinha](#) had also anticipated this trend in 2016 and advocated dialogue with the Valley residents, who were resentful of the government's attitude in describing all protesters as “puppets of Pakistan”. In October 2017, Sinha said that we have “lost Kashmiris emotionally”.

To counter this, the Modi government asked former IB chief Dineshwar Sharma to talk to the stakeholders. No doubt Sharma is an outstanding intelligence officer with considerable experience in handling Kashmir. But intelligence officers are seldom appointed in democracies for leading overt conflict resolution measures as they are seen as the hidden faces of government coercion.

Meanwhile, situation on the ground has deteriorated with the killing of more security forces (SF). The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) says deaths rose from an average of 166 during 2012-2015 to 267 in 2016, 358 in 2017 and 96 in 2018 (till April 8). The BJP leadership and security chiefs have claimed that this was due to better counter-terrorist action.

Till 2015, more killings of security officials in India were done by the Maoists. In 2015, Maoists killed 57 security officials, while Kashmir saw 41 deaths. From 2016 onwards, the trend changed. Eighty-eight security officials were killed in 2016 and 83 in 2017 in the Valley compared to 66 and 74 in Maoist areas. This year, 25 security officials have been killed in Kashmir till April 8.

The NDA government fails to realise this fact due to its ideological and religious obsession in treating all Valley protestors as Pakistan's proxies. Another reason is the pathological hubris and delusions of grandeur arising out of inexperience in dealing with such situations. The government's bluster is not backed by adequate capability. On May 14, 2017, the BJP's strategic adviser in Kashmir told a TV channel that his government would "eliminate" all terrorists and militants.

The Modi government should listen to professional advice in formulating its Kashmir policy. The results of wrong policies are borne by the security forces, not to mention the Valley public. In August 2016, Northern Army Commander, Lt. General D S Hooda, recommended that "all" including separatists and student protestors should "sit down and see if we can find an end". Even DGP (J&K), S P Vaid, told a prominent weekly on April 12, 2018 that "talks, including with neighbour Pakistan, was the only solution to Kashmir issue".

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