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The evolution of hybrid terrorism in the Kashmir valley

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ABSTRACT

A new challenge is confronting authorities in Kashmir - hybrid terrorists. According to the intelligence agencies and Security forces in Kashmir, hybrid terrorists are normal “boys next door” who belong to stable families who are well known in their villages and mohallas. Thus, they enjoy complete anonymity from the security forces radar, but at the same time they are indoctrinated and radicalised enough where they can be employed by their handlers to carry out a terrorist strike. The weapon training is often imparted through you tube videos and internet. Sarpanches, political activists and off duty policemen too have been shot dead as a signal to the community at large that those who are opposed to terror ideology and agenda of separatists will be eliminated selectively. However, due to the inviable nature of the threat and their strategy to remain below the threshold of the security forces radar the danger is lurking in most dark corners and alleys of Kashmir.

Keywords: Kashmir Hybrid Terrorism Strategy, Weapon

1. INTRODUCTION

A new challenge is confronting authorities in Kashmir - hybrid terrorists. On 07 Aug Srinagar Police arrested a local boy from Lawaipora, Srinagar who was found to be in possession of a pistol and live rounds. Earlier also, Srinagar Police had arrested two local hybrid terrorists from the Resistance Front (TRF), who were armed with pistols, ammunition and incriminating material. The duo confessed to be having an allegiance to the Pakistani terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba. Interestingly the duo had never been to Pakistan nor ever received any formal arms training – in India or Pakistan. Inspector-General of Police Vijay Kumar called it a big success for Jammu & Kashmir Police. This new challenge of hybrid militancy that has manifested with alarming frequency in recent months has sent the entire security establishment into a quandry. Due to ever mounting losses due to Operation All Out launched by Security Forces in Jammu and Kashmir, both Valley based and Pakistan based terror groups are on the backfoot. In order to abide by the principle of self preservation, these terror organisations have come up with the “strategic move” of recruiting and shielding young boys who have no official or police record. These young boys are then tasked to carry out terror strikes often in densely populated areas like Srinagar. But since they do not have any record, often it is well nigh impossible for security forces to take any proactive preventive measures against such strikes. Thus, Hybrid-terrorism is a well-planned strategic move of Pakistan where they want crime to be committed and criminal to go scot-free. In this type of faceless terrorism, hybrid terrorists kill people including civilians and policemen then go underground in a bid to give impression that they have done nothing.”

2. WHAT IS HYBRID TERRORISM?

What exactly is this new phenomenon of hybrid terrorism ? Let’s take a closer look. According to the intelligence agencies and Security forces in Kashmir, hybrid terrorists are normal “boys next door” who belong to stable families who are well known in their villages and mohallas. They are initially contacted through social media and once they are indoctrinated and express willingness to undertake terror strikes, they are advised to lie low and await orders from their handlers in terror groups. They lead non descript and normal lives as any youth of the Valley would do, they attend school/college and complete their daily chores as anyone else. Due to this outward sense of normalcy, it is almost impossible to keep a track of their movements due to lack of suspicion by the intelligence agencies. This trend is a marked departure from the past where young men would disappear from their homes and would often proclaim their taking up arms for jihad in a particular tanzem by making announcements openly through social media. Due to this it is very hard to trace and track them. They continue to reside amongst the general populace in an open and normal manner. Also, they are not proclaimed as terrorists in the any of the lists maintained by local police. Thus, they enjoy complete anonymity from the security forces radar, but at the same time they are indoctrinated and radicalised enough where they can be employed by

their handlers to carry out a terrorist strike. The weapon training is often imparted through you tube videos and internet. Having carried out a strike they then, dispose off the weapon and go back to their normal lives and daily routine. More often than not, such hybrid terrorists are not used more than once so detection always remains a challenge.

On 07 Oct 2021, two non-Muslim teachers were shot dead at a government school in Srinagar. During the process of investigation, it emerged that the killing was traced to a local terrorist organisation of Kashmir called The Resistance Front (TRF). Further it was revealed that this organisation was unlike a regular terror tanzem and more of an umbrella organisation of young men with no past history of terrorism but willing to undertake strikes against security forces due to their radicalisation. Thus emerged the terminology of “hybrid terrorist” which simply meant someone was a hybrid being a normal young man and a low level terror operative. Allegedly, the trend is occurring in the Kashmir Valley due to an external interplay on the directions of a terrorist infra from Pakistan and ISI.

However, despite the new modus operandi, the aim of this new generation of terrorists remains unchanged. Targeted killings are undertaken to spread fear in people. It also acts as a deterrent to those who are known to be opposed to the terror methodology and are pro peace and engagement. Business activities are targeted specially those run by non muslims. Recently a pandit medical store owner was shot dead. In other incidents in recent days killing of non local labourers and teachers including a Sikh lady teacher have all highlighted this trend – that outsiders are not welcome in the Kashmir. In almost all these cases, the killings were undertaken by hybrid terrorists armed with pistols who chose their targets with ample reconnaissance and planning. This was possible since these young men were virtually unknown in the security forces and intelligence circles. Apart from teachers and non local owners of small businesses have been killed. Sarpanches, political activists and off duty policemen too have been shot dead as a signal to the community at large that those who are opposed to terror ideology and agenda of separatists will be eliminated selectively.

3. WHO ARE THE LIKELY TARGETS ?

The opinion among those experienced in studying terror trends in Kashmir is that the selection of those killed is not random but a carefully drawn list with inputs often from across from Pak after studying all their activities and the message that needs to be sent out. Movement patterns are carefully studied and watched through informers to identify unprotected moments where a subject can be targeted. For identifying the selected target and carrying out reconnaissance, a “Spotter” is often used. He could be practically anybody – a boy next door, a young woman, a sympathiser, an over ground worker or someone who himself fits the bill of a hybrid terrorist. Such shooters are first timers who are so far not on the police list, but suitably indoctrinated to execute a cold blooded killing and normally armed with a small arm like a pistol which cannot be detected easily. In this ecosystem the victim is only a convenient soft target whose killing will send out the desired message with no particular enmity with the terrorists. In this entire process the identity and credentials of the target is of no consequence. He may represent a community, ideology or security force. Hence the victim may have no particular individual significance and is only a statistic in a numbers game. Thus, this poses a threat to the general population and can be assessed clearly from the figures of the year 2021 wherein many soft targets like political workers, policemen who were off duty, minority community civilians and others were killed. As per security agencies, the only way to get to these invisible hybrid terrorists is through extensive technical surveillance and monitoring of their activities on social media platforms. Though the security forces have gained many successes in neutralising many hybrid terror modules specially those operating in South Kashmir, this sense of uncertainty was not seen since the 1990s. Even policemen are finding it difficult to go out with their families now as anyone can be a target. Change in routine does not help. The other type of targets in the house are migrants. Police had declared Srinagar city as terrorist-free in the first week of September 2020. However, even after this hybrid terrorists have been successful in carrying out attacks both fatal and non fatal on many civilians and policemen in recent times.

4. CONCLUSION

On their part the nexus handlers are not too perturbed by the elimination of such hybrid terrorists by the security forces. Since most hybrid terrorists are young men with no past record, it is extremely difficult to prove their association with any known terror groups. Also, their neutralisation leads to a vicious cycle of more young locals picking up arms as a motivation or to seek revenge thereby creating a self reinforcing cycle and increasing the bodies in terror ranks.

Taking their invisibility as a pre-requisite, hybrid terrorists are often known to carry a small weapon like a pistol or grenade instead of the more traditional AK series weapons that terrorists in the past have preferred to carry. This is because pistols and grenades are small and relatively easy to carry and hide on their person. Also, these weapons are much more sophisticated and better in metallurgy and hence more reliable, thereby catering for the relative inexperience of the hybrid terrorists. Consignments of pistols are also sent across the International Border as has been seen in last few months wherein drones laden with weapons have been shot down by security forces. Despite this, due to the small size and easy transportability many such weapons have been delivered by couriers to hybrid terrorists. Hybrid terrorists targeting civilians prefer using sticky bombs. This trend of hybrid terrorism which first manifested itself in 2021 has become more pronounced in the year 2022. So far, the security forces have found reasonable success in countering and neutralising them. However, due to the inviable nature of the threat and their strategy to remain below the threshold of the security forces radar the danger is lurking in most dark corners and alleys of Kashmir. Security Forces have their task cut out in coming days.

5. REFERENCES

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