

JAMMU FLARES UP -THE MYTH OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT BUSTED

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



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The year 2024 seems to have brought a number of disappointments and problems for the RSS-BJP regime in New Delhi. First, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to achieve the projected numbers and fell short by 32 seats to have a clear majority in the Lok Sabha.¹ As a result, it had to rely on coalition partners to form government in the Centre. Secondly, just as Mr. Modi assumed power for the third consecutive term, an upsurge in attacks in the comparatively restive Jammu region has busted all the claims of having restored “normalcy” in IIOJK and “gains” made on account of peace, security and development. Mr. Modi himself as well as his senior ministers had peddled this false narrative *ad nauseum*.

Jammu Flares Up

The major attack in Jammu was reported in Reasi on a bus carrying pilgrims, resulting in nine deaths and injuries to 33, on the day Mr. Modi was taking oath for his third term in office.² Two days later, Doda and Kathua imploded with attacks that injured six soldiers. Subsequently, incidents took place in Rajouri-Poonch, Kathua, Doda and Kupwara districts. The second attack in Kathua on July 8 coincided with the martyrdom anniversary of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani (in 2016)

¹ “India’s past prime minister whose parties had much fewer seats the BJP’s 240,” *First Post*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/2024-lok-sabha-election-result-india-past-prime-ministers-whose-parties-had-much-fewer-seats-than-bjp-240-general-election-13779025.html>

² “Nine Hindu pilgrims killed in bus attack in India’s Jammu,” *BBC News*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3ggm5j0lzzo>

by the Indian security forces. As a result of this series of attacks, Indian army has reportedly lost 12 soldiers and officers in the month of July alone.³ Most of these attacks have been claimed by Kashmir Tigers and People's Anti-Fascist Front⁴ – the indigenous resistance forces of IIOJK.

Having caught off-guard, the Indian government has now added 3,000 army troops as well as 500 Special Forces into the Jammu region in addition to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) that is already deployed there.⁵ It also released sketches of three individuals with the head money of INR 5 Lakh each.⁶

Response of the Opposition Parties

Attacks by the indigenous Kashmiri resistance fighters living under illegal Indian occupation are not anything new. However, the recent spate of attacks on Indian security forces in the Jammu region has taken the Indian government by surprise. Operating under the self-generated fallacy that it has been successful in suppressing the popular sentiment for 'Azadi' of the Kashmiri people, the Indian government had been seeking to convince the international community that the Kashmiris have accepted the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Constitution as these steps have 'brought peace and development' to the region. But all these claims dashed to the ground as attacks on Indian security forces mounted in recent months. Omar Abdullah, leader of National Conference (NC), also expressed similar views when he said that "they (BJP) were claiming that entire militancy is linked with Article 370 and after its abrogation, peace would prevail here. We continuously said that Article 370 had nothing to do with militancy and even if it is removed there won't be any effect on militancy. This has been proved now."⁷ Indian National Congress (INC) also criticised the government and termed the situation as 'strategic failure' of the Modi government.⁸

³ "Terror reigns in Jammu: Rising terrorist attacks claim lives of 12 soldiers in July alone," *Economic Times*, July 28, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/terror-reigns-in-jammu-rising-terrorist-attacks-claim-lives-of-12-soldiers-in-july-alone/articleshow/112081265.cms?from=mdr>

⁴ Sameer Patil & Ajaz Wani, "Beyond Response: J&K needs proactive strategies for counter – terror," *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*, July 26, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/beyond-response-j-k-needs-proactive-strategies-for-counter-terrorism>

⁵ "Around 3,000 Army troops, 500 special forces inducted into Jammu area," *Hindu*, July 19, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jammu-and-kashmir/around-3000-army-troops-500-special-forces-inducted-into-jammu-area/article68423441.ece>

⁶ "Doda terror attack: J&K Police releases sketches of 3 terrorists, announces cash reward of ₹15 lakh," *Mint*, July 27, 2024, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/doda-terror-attack-jammu-kashmir-police-releases-sketches-of-3-terrorists-announces-cash-reward-of-rs-15-lakh-11722089819138.htm>

⁷ "Omar Abdullah Criticizes BJP over Kathua Terror Attack," *Daily Guardian*, July 10, 2024, <https://thedailyguardian.com/omar-abdullah-criticizes-bjp-over-kathua-terror-attack/>

⁸ "Jammu becoming centre of terror attacks shows govt's strategic failure': Congress," *Deccan Herald*, July 9, 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/jammu-and-kashmir/jammu-becoming-centre-of-terror-attacks-shows-govts-strategic-failure-congress-3098697>

India Blames Pakistan

Consistent with its typical response, India is externalizing the issue. India finds it both convenient and expedient to point fingers towards Pakistan to hide its own failures. This time, New Delhi went to the extent of suggesting that the attackers targeting Indian security forces are either retired Pakistan army soldiers of Special Services Group or are highly trained in guerrilla warfare.⁹ During his visit to Drass in Kargil district, Mr. Modi alleged that Pakistan is trying to “keep itself relevant by supporting terrorism and proxy war.”¹⁰ Portraying the indigenous struggle of the Kashmiri people as ‘terrorism’ and implicating Pakistan is an old trick in the Indian playbook.

Implications

Upping the ante against Pakistan can serve BJP’s purpose in two ways. First, it helps cover up its own security failures and divert attention of common people from their genuine grievances. Secondly, blaming Pakistan helps New Delhi whip up anti-Pakistan sentiment and create a pretext for yet another ‘false flag’ operation as happened in the 2019 Pulwama case. Such a course would aid BJP in restoring its lost popularity as elections in a number of states are due over the next few months.

Additionally, there have been indications that the recent upsurge is aimed at disrupting the assembly elections in IIOJK that are to be held before 30 September 2024, as per the direction of the Indian Supreme Court. But the question is, who benefits from this disruption? The BJP under Narendra Modi is fully aware that its illegal and unilateral steps of 5 August 2019 were rejected by Kashmiris of all hues. This is clearly evident from the fact that the BJP chose not to field its own candidate in the Kashmir valley during the recently held 18th Lok Sabha elections.¹¹ It is also evident from the fact that the traditional pro-India political parties were for the most part rejected by the people and instead Kashmiris have chosen people like Engr. Rashid who contested the election from Tihar jail.¹² Further, fearing the public mood and in an effort to further tighten the Centre’s control over the region, New Delhi has introduced the Transaction of Business of Government of UT of

⁹ “Ex-Pakistan armymen, trained terrorists may be behind attacks in Jammu: Intel Officials,” *Hindustan Times*, July 20, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/expak-armymen-trained-terrorists-may-be-behind-attacks-in-jammu-intel-officials-101721431249340.html>

¹⁰ “On Kargil war anniversary, PM Modi warns Pakistan against supporting terrorism and proxy war against India,” *Hindu*, July 27, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jammu-and-kashmir/kargil-vijay-diwis-pm-modi-kargil-war-memorial-visit-on-june-26/article68448448.ece>

¹¹ “India election 2024: Why isn’t Modi’s BJP fielding candidates in Kashmir?,” *AlJazeera*, May 13, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/13/india-election-2024-why-isnt-modis-bjp-fielding-candidates-in-kashmir>

¹² “Jailed Kashmir leader Engineer Rashid takes oath as MP,” *NDTV*, July 5, 2024, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/jailed-kashmir-leader-engineer-rashid-takes-oath-as-mp-6039672>

Jammu and Kashmir (second amendment) Rules, 2024.¹³ These amendments give more powers to the Lieutenant Governor of J&K on issues of public order, police, transfers and postings etc. The People's Democratic Party, in its response to the move, raised the question: "Why hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir when the powers of the elected government are permanently delegated to an unelected administrator?" Omar Abdullah added: "It's an absolute fact that this amendment will empower LG and disempower democracy".¹⁴ This just goes to show the BJP's single-minded resolve to keep a tight grip on IIOJK and deny virtually any breathing space to its people or elected representatives.

Conclusion

India has been claiming that through the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, the 'root cause' of "unrest, stone pelting and militancy" has been addressed and that IIOJK has entered a new era of 'peace and development.' All these claims are fallacious on several counts. First, the Indian actions of 5 August 2019 were so unpopular that the government had to bring in additional troops and impose curfew for a prolonged period as it feared backlash from the people. Later, it took a series of steps including demographic changes and electoral engineering that led to further disenfranchisement, disempowerment and marginalization of the Kashmiri people. The 18th Lok Sabha elections, in which the voter turnout was recorded at 58.46% in IIOJK,¹⁵ were projected as a sign of 'endorsement' of Mr. Modi's policies. However, in reality, he fully sensed that his policies were deeply unpopular and for that reason the BJP did not field its own candidates in the Kashmir valley. The election results in IIOJK were equally embarrassing as no pro-India party was able to make any mark. As for the higher turnout, observers believe, the Kashmiri people came out of their homes to cast vote not as an expression of endorsement of Modi's policies. Instead, they came out to choose people who could become the people's voice; those who would tell the world about the atrocities being committed against the Kashmiri people. The election of Engr. Rashid is a case in point.

¹³ "Centre gives more powers to J-K Lt Governor on matters related to police, all India service officers," *Indian Express*, July 13, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/centre-gives-more-powers-to-j-k-governor-in-matters-of-police-all-india-service-officers-9450773/>

¹⁴ Zaid Bin Shabir, "Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor gets more power, and it doesn't bode well for democracy," *FrontLine*, July 17, 2024, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/jammu-and-kashmir-lieutenant-governor-more-power-impact-on-politics/article68413137.ece#:~:text=The%20amended%20Transaction%20of%20Business,the%20matters%20enumerated%20in%20the>

¹⁵ "Voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir highest in 35 years: Election Commission," *Hindustan Times*, May 27, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/voter-turnout-in-jammu-and-kashmir-highest-in-35-years-election-commission-101716814177538.html>

The recent spate of attacks should also be seen in the same context. It would be foolish on the part of India to think that the popular sentiments of the people of IIOJK for '*azadi*' can be suppressed through the use of brutal force. Blaming Pakistan for India's own security failures will not serve any purpose either. It is time that instead of pointing fingers, India accepted the reality that despite its illegal and forcible occupation for 77 years, it has failed in breaking the spirit of the Kashmir people, what to talk of winning their hearts and minds. India must come to terms with the undeniable reality that Kashmiris will not settle for anything less than full realization of their inalienable right to self-determination.