

## **COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN KASHMIR – THE HARD OPTIONS**

**Kashmir Times December 08, 1992**

Considering the secessionist cause for which the militants in Kashmir are fighting and the magnitude of the resistance that they are offering, even if with the help of Pakistan, there can be no doubt that what the Government is faced with in Kashmir is insurgency in its acutest form. The situation cannot, therefore, be tackled with ad-hoc and half hearted measures but only by conducting a regular counter-insurgency operation with both its military and political components acting harmoniously. The Government action in Kashmir must therefore be viewed in this light. At present it would appear that while the military aspect has been taken well care of, the political side is faltering.

Insurgency generally starts only when the government, after due consideration of the demands of the militants, determines that these demands cannot be met without detriment to the national cause. That is when the negotiation stage has passed and the militants have decided to achieve through force of arms what the government would not give through negotiations. Any initiative on the part of the government to revive dialogue with the insurgents after they have taken up arms against it would naturally be taken as a sign of weakness and is bound to prove counter-productive. For this would generate hope among the insurgents, boost their morale, and induce them to continue their fight rather than end it. At the start of insurgency, the normal action of the government should, therefore, be to pend all talks and give strong indications to the insurgents, through word and deed, that it means business and intends to deal with them firmly with all the resources at its disposal. Only when the first round has been successfully fought by the government and the insurgents convinced of the futility of an armed struggle that any feeler for talks may be sent to them. No doubt it is a prestige issue for the government, for no government can function without prestige, and it must place itself in a position of strength before initiating any dialogue. Apparently in Kashmir the will of the insurgents to fight has yet to be broken, and any talk of restarting the political process (whatever that means) will convey the type of signals that are likely to prolong the ordeal.

Evidently the Government's political initiatives in Kashmir are directed towards weaning away the masses from the militants. In this regard it must be understood that the militant in Kashmir is also a terrorist who is virtually holding the people as hostages. The Government need not feel unduly concerned about what appears to be the popular support of the militants. We now have the experience of Punjab to show that much of the support that militancy acquires is through the gun. The Kashmiri militant is known to have made an effective use of his gun for silencing all dissidence and opposition, even before embarking upon his "Freedom Struggle", through selective killings and threats to kill. Besides supporting militancy for the fear of the gun, the masses also have a general tendency to drift towards the winning side. All that the Government needs to do to wean away the masses is to keep winning in its fight against the insurgents and create the necessary impression that the ultimate victory will be that of the National Cause. In any case what political activity can be started with the help of discredited leaders who dare not stand in the Lal Chowk even to the extent that Murli Manohar Joshi did during his *ekta yatra*. Or for that matter through leaders who though living in Kashmir are known to have bought their lives by giving an undertaking of their "good conduct" to the militants. The common man in Kashmir has to be convinced that his freedom is already guaranteed under the Indian Constitution like that of every other Indian and that the activity of the Congress-National Conference Alliance that caused them so much disgust was petty

politicking and not a product of the Constitution. He may not find much support in India for his quest for a Special status, which many fear, and rightly too, will put the Centre's relations with other States to unnecessary stress, but the whole Country will stand by him when he fights for his rights under the Constitution. The crux of the problem in Kashmir is that notwithstanding the repeated assertions by the Indian leaders that Kashmir is an integral part of India, it has not been made to look like one. This has kept the issue of accession alive and consequently made Kashmir vulnerable to both internal dissensions as well as external intervention. But what is even worse is that, like this, the Government of India have thrown themselves open to black-mail by an unscrupulous section of the local Kashmiri leadership for promoting its personal interests.

Counter-insurgency can be a long drawn-out affair, particularly when it is not possible to cut off completely the channels of communication between the insurgents and the foreign power that assisting them by way of arms, ammunition, training and the necessary incitement to keep the insurgency going. There are no short cuts and no easy solutions to the problem. The stress and agony of having to fight your own people over a prolonged period is indeed great and there is a requirement for a strong national will for the inevitable fight to the finish. With context to the counter-insurgency in Kashmir the national will seems to be beginning to wilt already. This is, perhaps, because of, one, the prick of the conscience at the sufferings, hardships and casualties among the general public that invariably result from the strong measures adopted by the security forces against the terrorists operating from thickly populated areas and, two, the general despondency and desperation that the terrorists' deliberate killings of innocent people generates among the public. It has to be understood that the fighting in Kashmir is not of our making. The fighting will stop the day the terrorists decide to do so. In any case though a sad reflection on human behaviour, there has been no period in the history of the world when innocent people have not suffered or got killed due to some reason or the other. Terrorism is a calamity and death there of has to be faced as stoically as one would under a calamity.

As in a democracy the survival of the government depends on the support of its public, it cannot afford to ignore public opinion even when such opinion goes against the basic tenets of counter-insurgency. It follows that public opinion that results from ignorance could, by exerting the wrong type of pressure, inadvertently damage the national cause. A knowledgeable public that appreciates the difficulties of the government in having to choose between its hard options and continues to provide the moral support that it needs for the successful conduct of counter-insurgency operations, is, perhaps as important as the security forces themselves. It is one of the major responsibilities of the government to educate the people with regard to the intricacies of counter-insurgency operations in order to ensure their full cooperation.