

AN UNCONSIDERED SURRENDER POLICY FOR MILITANTS

BY

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There have been differences within the ruling coalition of J and K on the newly proposed surrender policy of the state government. It was blocked by BJP members of the state cabinet after being proposed by Mehbooba Mufti. The J and K government proposed to grant an amount of Rs 6 Lakhs to each surrendered militant along with job schemes. The amount was to be kept in a fixed deposit for ten years and the interest accruing of approximately four thousand per month, was to be given to the surrendered militant as monthly sustenance. After ten years, once confirmed by state security agencies, the amount was to be released to the individual.

There was also a proposal to hike payment for those who hand over weapons, ammunition and explosives. The amount proposed was in cases even three to four times the amount forming part of earlier incentives announced in 2004. For example, for every AK rifle the incentive proposed was fifty thousand as against fifteen thousand in 2004. Similarly, for every pistol it was ten thousand as against three earlier.

The coalition BJP felt that the proposed amount was more than the amount given to those killed either by terrorists or even by Pak

shelling or firing, which was five lakhs. Further, the amount earned by the surrendered militant as interest was almost at par with what educated youth were getting under the 'fixed pay policy' of the government. The BJP was also concerned that such large grants for valley specific terrorists would impact their hold on the Jammu region, where they were already facing flak on multiple issues.

The intention behind changing a surrender policy needs to be clearly spelt out by the state government. A glance at the amount offered appears to indicate, as per the state government, that youth have taken to guns solely for economic reasons, hence if bribed would change their stance. This view is clearly wrong. In the case of J and K, picking the gun is either due to strong religious sentiments, motivation through Pak based handlers or influence by local militants. Lack of employment opportunities has very limited impact. Hence, high financial motives alone may not be the answer.

Further surrender policies should not be akin to the forgiving stone thrower policy, wherein all court cases against stone throwers was withdrawn, thus giving them the freedom to continue the same with impunity. Most surrender policies have earlier failed, the reasons for which have never been analysed by the state, hence announcing another one may only provide publicity but is doomed to fail.

Surrender policies have been in vogue in J and K from the nineties. The first policy of early nineties was replaced by one in 1997. Subsequently there were two more. One was announced for local militants in 2004, which is being modified at present, and another for local militants but residents of POK, in 2010. Surrenders have occurred, but due too the nature of militancy, many reverted back. Militancy in J and K is Pak sponsored and led generally by Pak militants, who have no respect for local citizens, hence act severely on those who surrender. In other Indian insurgencies, while external support remains, militants are state residents and have hardly targeted those who surrender.

The most notable period of surrenders in J and K was in 1995, when many locals quit Pak supported militant organizations such as the HM because of mindless killings of locals. They were initially drafted into the Ikhwan force as the pro-government militia, supported and paid for by security forces. In the initial phases, the Ikhwan force was effective and helped identify wanted militants. Their contribution in bringing down militancy levels has been acknowledged. With passage of time, they became a law unto themselves and started dishing out their own brand of justice. They thus ended up becoming a major law and order issue and court cases against them continue to date.

As per a newspaper report of Dec 2007, over four thousand militants had surrendered till then since the commencement of insurgency. Most

surrendered militants for varying reasons, including pressure from security agencies or threats from their foreign handlers and comrades, went back to militant ranks. This was most noticeable during the ceasefire declared by security forces in Nov 2000. Thus, inviting surrenders is not a major issue for the state government, but creating a viable surrender policy to manage those who lay down their arms is. Surrenders since then has been negligible.

The major reason of failure of earlier policies was the terms of surrender and subsequent interrogation and harassment by the local police. The policy insisted months of interrogation at the joint interrogation centre, prior to being released. In addition, the sops offered by the state failed to be implemented at the grassroot levels. In the earlier policy too, the amount offered was to be deposited in a bank and interest provided to the militant. Corruption and demands for bribes at every stage impacted those who surrendered. Their rehabilitation was also a shoddy affair, disillusioning most.

Surrendering of militants is a double-edged sword. It gives good publicity to the government and security forces, while is detrimental for militant groups morale. When surrenders increase, militant groups would commence targeting surrendered militants as they did in the nineties, seeking to pull back those who laid down their weapons. Countering this becomes more important.

In case the government is serious in its desire to enhance surrenders, enhancing funds is not the answer. Every militant would be facing court cases for waging war against the state. Dropping court cases may provide some relief, but more important is to ensure their protection from militant groups which they have chosen to discard. Thus, they need to be moved away from militant affected areas and news of surrenders kept under wraps till they are secure. The announcement should only be done once he is secure and security agencies are convinced that he has done so in good faith and his surrender is not a ploy.

At the same time, a high surrender package is also detrimental to enticing surrenders. In Assam, most joined militancy for short durations, seeking to gain state government benefits including financial packages. The system failed and many who surrendered have yet to receive their dues. The same, if adopted in J and K, would add to the difficulties of security agencies, rather than being beneficial.

Thus, rather than providing high financial benefits, employment within the state, away from his home base would be more lucrative. Security agencies have already classified militants in categories based on their involvement in operations. Therefore, security agencies should be responsible to exonerate militants, prior to being offered state benefits. Financial benefits can be offered based on classification of militants.

State police forces have faced the brunt of militancy. Hence, mentally conditioning local police forces against harassment of surrendered militants assumes importance. In earlier surrender offers, continuous harassment and pressure, pushed many back into the fold of militancy. If successfully integrated into the system they could be employed as motivators, to entice those still wielding the gun.

Surrendering of militants gives security forces the upper hand, while wooing them back into the group which they discarded benefits militant organizations. It is a battle of wits, which needs careful monitoring at state level and security of those who have accepted government offers. Money alone is not the answer, which could also become a negative factor. What is more important is sincerity of security agencies in supporting the move, especially the local police, which has borne the brunt of militant actions. In addition is the importance of ensuring a sound rehabilitation policy.

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