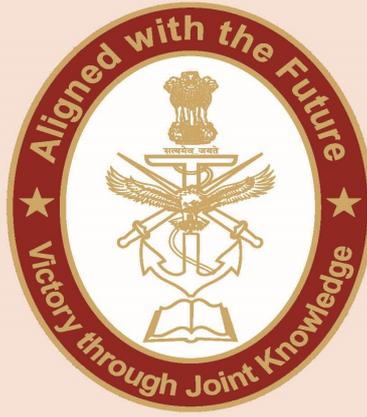


# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### COHESIVE KASHMIR POLICY

BY

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Kashmir has been facing varying levels of militancy for the past three decades. Initially it was high, with the region flooded with Pak infiltrated militants. It was brought under control on multiple occasions however no action was taken by any government to remove the irritants. Governments have appointed interlocutors and organized round table discussions, but to no avail. At present, there are more local militants than those infiltrated from Pak.

The seeds sown by Pak over the decades, based on its clear policy which no elected government could change, slowly stoked by some infiltrations, funding, a successful media campaign and maintaining an ISI sponsored over ground workers group has led to projecting a local character to the militancy. Most militant leaders are now locals, not visible till a few years ago. It remains controlled by terrorist groups based in Pakistan.

The youth of the region are those born and raised under the shadow of the gun. For them, cord on and search operations, encountering army patrols and police checkpoints are part of daily life. Elimination of militants is routine, as is death and injuries in retaliation to

stone throwing. This has visibly reduced their fear of weapon bearing soldiers moving in vehicles or on foot across the region. Those who possess the funds and have backing of parents have left the valley to seek a better future in the rest of the country.

The youth have been taught since childhood that India is the occupier and they are being deprived of their rights. With the forced migration of the Kashmiri Pundits in 1990, they have only heard calls for prayer for one religion; hence tolerance has all but vanished. With the advent of social media, they have been fed with false propaganda from Pak on atrocities being committed by Indian forces and the need to revolt for the sake of their freedom and religion.

The religious flavour has been given a deeper twist by the Imams and the separatists over the years. They have been made to believe that they are fighting a Jihad against the Indian state. Even valley based political parties, when not in power, advocate talks with Pakistan and separatists, knowing such talks are meaningless in the current environment. They condone deaths of militants, rather than that of innocents, local police and security personnel and visit families of eliminated militants, not even of the innocents murdered brutally.

Separatists seek bandhs on deaths of local militants, not for innocents killed by bloodthirsty militants. Political parties stoke anger by claiming that removal of articles 370 and 35 A would change the demography of the state and is an action by a Hindu dominated government.

Hence, the youth have for the last few decades been fed a collection of lies and false information, solely to enhance anger against the centre. It has been further compounded with the emergence of the BJP in the centre with claims that the central government is pro-Hindutva and anti-Muslim. Thus, slowly Kashmir is becoming a religious issue rather than a social one, as claimed by most.

This has been compounded by lack of cohesive policies of successive governments, considering Pak as the major threat and being solely responsible for the mess, ignoring the changing atmosphere within. While restricting infiltration and targeting militants was normal however, the centre delayed taking strong decisions instead adopted

time gaining measures like appointing interlocutors and conducting round table discussions, the results of all have been ignored.

Every national party, while in the opposition has claimed to have a solution for Kashmir, which never sees the light of day when in power. Valley based political parties have no desire for a resolution aware that a troubled valley suits them, as major political parties avoid venturing in. All seats in the valley are either won by the PDP or NC. The state government of the day only adopts cosmetic measures at regular intervals.

To appease the local public and seek the support of the separatists, hoping to commence talks at some time, governments continued with a soft policy towards the valley. Everything being provided to the valley was subsidized, costs being borne by the national tax payer. Security to separatists ensured that they could continue to rant and rave, secure that they were protected. Crores were spent on 'Sadbhavana projects' run by the army, to no avail.

The aim of successive central governments remained the same, win hearts and minds and reduces the impact of Pakistan. However, it left the valley feeling secure enough financially to challenge the Indian might. Freebies from the government became a way of life and have almost become a demand. If the valley has developed an anti-India bias, then why should the Indian tax payer continue to pay for their subsidies?

It is time the government realises that the problem is deeper with a religious character and needs an offensive approach in multiple spheres. The target should remain the same as what the government was hoping to win with substantial subsidies, hearts and minds. However, the approach must change.

Media and social media campaigns must be launched with full vigour, projecting the poor state of their Kashmiri brethren in POK and the treatment of minorities in Pak. The reality of Pak not desiring Kashmir for its population but for its resources and water must be projected and emphasized. Similarly lies being propagated from Pak should be countered. Minds may begin to change once youth realise

that Pak is playing with them and using them for their own interests. In summary, the battle for minds through every form of media must be fought and won. Ignoring the media battle has brought the state to its present condition.

Simultaneously, venom spewing Imams must be shunted out. Separatists are no longer protected individuals and hence, if they resort to anti-India propaganda and comments, then sedition charges as applicable across India should be adopted. All subsidies must be stopped, and the residents pay as those across the country. If the attitude is anti-India, then why should subsidies continue? If articles 35 A and 370 would change the character of the region, then it must go, fallouts should be acceptable.

The comments of the General Officer Commanding 15 Corps made recently on how he proposes to handle militancy must be implemented. Those picking the gun are clear targets in encounters. Those attempting to disrupt operations should also be considered as over ground workers or terrorist supporters and so targeted.

The state must reconsider its policy. If soft approach and mollycoddling has not worked for decades, then there is a need for a shift. Most importantly, an aggressive media campaign must be implemented as of yesterday.

**Disclaimer:-** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.