

SLOW PATH TO PEACE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Indian Express

Paper-III
(Internal Security)

It was recently reported in this newspaper that the Union government is discussing a “proposal to withdraw the Indian Army completely from the Valley hinterland. If approved, the Army will have presence only on the Line of Control (LoC)”. The Army could be withdrawn in a phased manner, starting with a few districts in Kashmir, with responsibility for counter-terror operations being handed over to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the J&K police. An official is quoted as saying, “In a way, the decision has been taken, and it is a matter of when it will be done”. The reason for this move is the reduced levels of violence in J&K since the August 5, 2019 decisions. The government has been claiming that normalcy is returning to Kashmir and now wishes to “make it visible” by reducing the presence of the Army in the hinterland.

Army has been reduced even before Jammu and Kashmir

There is no arguing with the logic that decreasing violence levels should lead to a reduction in the number of security forces deployed for internal security roles. This has happened in the past. For example, between 2007 and 2009, two divisions were pulled out from counter-terror operations in J&K and reverted to their conventional role. Two brigades were also relocated from Kashmir to strengthen the deployment along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh. Over the years, with the improving situation in the hinterland, some Rashtriya Rifles (RR) units have also been shifted from the hinterland to the LoC in the counter-infiltration role.

Some other reason

The Army is also facing manpower pressures. The two-year freeze on recruitment during Covid-19 has led to a shortage of around 1,20,000 soldiers, and there are no plans to bridge the gap through additional recruitment. The manpower problem is exacerbated by the enhanced deployment of troops along the LAC to handle the crisis that erupted in 2020 in Eastern Ladakh. Any reduction in internal security duties gives the Army an opportunity to right-size its force structure.

In fact, the Army has already been thinking along these lines. There is a proposal to reduce the RR companies in a unit from six to four and disband some of the sector and force headquarters. In addition, some

RR units have already been sent to Eastern Ladakh and deployed along the LAC. Taken together, this would lead to a significant reduction of the Army from the hinterland.

It would thus appear that the Union government proposal is a win-win for all, but the devil, as the saying goes, lies in the details.

The manner of execution, in terms of timing and phasing, will be the key to success

First, the timing. Assessing normalcy requires us to look at how the external and internal factors that have kept the problem festering have been addressed. The external factor has been weakened. Pakistan has provided immense support to terror activities in J&K in the past, but its ability to influence the situation today stands diminished. This is a result of India's strong response to terrorist acts with a Pakistani signature, and the deep political, economic, and internal security mess in which Pakistan finds itself.

The internal factors that need to be addressed include bringing the security situation under control, tackling radicalisation, meeting the aspirations of the people, bringing economic development, and resumption of political activity. Lessons from the past indicate that violence levels alone are not an indicator of normalcy. In 2012, fatalities from terror-related violence were less than half of 2022, but because the underlying causes of the conflict in J&K were not focused on, the situation steadily worsened. While the security situation today is stable, it would be prudent to take some more time to tackle the other issues comprehensively. This would ensure that J&K remains stable, even without the presence of the Army.

Second, the phasing. Handing over areas to the CRPF should be done in a phased manner. The start could be made in the Jammu region, where the CRPF takes over the complete responsibility for counter-terror

Special status of Jammu and Kashmir and its repeal

- According to the provisions of Article 370, the Parliament had the right to make laws regarding defense, foreign affairs and communications regarding Jammu and Kashmir, but the Center needed the approval of the state government to implement the law related to any other subject. Because of this special status, Article 356 of the Constitution did not apply to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The President did not have the power to abrogate the state's constitution. The Urban Land Act of 1976 did not apply to the state and other states of India. People of J&K could not buy land. Under Article 360 of the Indian Constitution, there is a provision to impose financial emergency in the country, it did not apply to J&K.
- Article 35A fixed the rules of permanent citizenship for Jammu and Kashmir and the rights of citizens. Those who settled in Kashmir before 14 May 1954 were considered as permanent residents. Those who were not permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir, Couldn't buy property in the state, couldn't apply for government jobs, couldn't enroll in universities there, and couldn't get any financial aid from the state government.
- August 5, 2019: The government moved a resolution in Parliament to abrogate Article 370 and reorganize Jammu and Kashmir into two separate Union Territories—Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh—by October 31, 2019. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was officially bifurcated into the Union Territories (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

operations. A few RR units could be kept as a reserve for any contingency that may arise.

After the stabilisation of the CRPF deployment in the Jammu region, the second phase could be the handover of the Kashmir hinterland to the CRPF, with the bulk of RR units being disbanded, except for a few that could act as reserves. However, handing over some districts in Kashmir on an experimental basis is not recommended as it would create problems of operational integrity, intelligence collection, and command and control issues with neighbouring forces operating under different ministries.

Phasing is being suggested for two primary reasons. Today, the Army, CRPF, and J&K police work in synergy, with each force bringing its unique capabilities to the operations. In the case of the Army, these include not only the highly trained soldiers but also the logistics, communication, engineering, and medical support that is integral to the organisation. In the absence of the Army, this capability void would need to be filled up, and the initial deployment of CRPF in the Jammu region could provide valuable lessons in this regard before they take up responsibility in the Kashmir valley.

The phased deployment would also ensure that the complete RR is not quickly disbanded. This is India's most experienced counter-terrorism force for J&K, and it would be prudent to ensure that the situation is stabilised before we lose this capability.

Way forward

There is merit in the government's proposal that normalcy must be accompanied by a reduction in the force levels of the Army deployed for counter-terror operations in J&K. This would also come as a relief to the Army saddled with manpower cuts even as its operational commitments have increased. However, the gains in J&K have come at great cost, and it would be sensible to err on the side of caution and conduct the pull out of the Army in a graduated and phased manner.

Some important operations of the Indian Army in Jammu and Kashmir

- Operation Rakshak was an anti-terrorist operation launched in June 1990 during the height of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Operation All Out was a joint operation by Indian security forces in 2017 to flush out terrorists from Kashmir. Operation All-Out involved the Indian Army, Central Reserve Police Force, CRPF, Jammu and Kashmir Police, BSF and Intelligence Bureau (India). It was launched against several terrorist groups including Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen and Al-Badr (Jammu and Kashmir)-Al-Badr.
- Operation Calm Down was launched by the Indian Army in July 2016 following the death of Burhan Wani in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Operation Sarp Vinash (Snake Destroyer) was an operation by the Indian Army to flush out terrorists in the Hilkak Poonch - Surankote Pir Panjal area.
- Operation Sadbhavna, also known as 'Operation Goodwill' was launched by the Indian Army as part of its military campaign in Jammu and Kashmir. The objective was to "win hearts and minds". Welfare initiatives under Operation Sadbhavna included infrastructure development, medical care, women and youth empowerment, educational tourism and sports tournaments.

Expected Question

Que. Consider the following statements-

1. Area-wise Jammu and Kashmir is a larger union territory than Ladakh.
2. Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh were made Union Territories in the year 2019.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : B

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: Considering the peace and stability in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is it a right step to reduce the presence of the army in this region? Analyze.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Give a brief account of peace and stability after the formation of Union Territory.
- ❖ Discuss the pros and cons of removing the army from Jammu and Kashmir.
- ❖ Give a balanced conclusion considering the current situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.