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Kashmir

# Pulwama "End the pernicious cycle"! No to war

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**Terrorism is not a reference to any category of persons but refers to a particular method, technique or tactic that involves the killing or injuring of innocent civilians or, outside of a battle or war zone, of even soldiers who by virtue of the distinctive nature of the attack are rendered completely defenceless. Precisely because terrorism is an act of this kind it can be and is carried out by the individual, a group, or larger collectivities like the apparatuses of the state.**

The car bomb attack that has killed 40 CRPF soldiers is just such an act and deserves the strongest condemnation. As in all cases of terrorism, our sympathies and condolences are with the loved ones, families, relatives and friends of the victims. The perpetration was a lone Kashmiri youth Adil Ahmad Dar, while responsibility for preparing and training him was publicly claimed by the Jaish-e-Mohammed, a group that has been sponsored who claims to have the support of important sections of the Pakistan Establishment. Given that this is the case what should be the course of justice for the immediate as well as the longer term that we should demand?

1. The golden rule of justice is to seek punishment for those identified as guilty. Given that JeM has announced its responsibility there is little reason to doubt its culpability. Nevertheless, the Indian government should publicly disclose all evidence pointing to and confirming this if for no other reason than to fully persuade the peoples of Pakistan, India and the rest of the world of who the guilty ones are and thereby not only build pressure from all quarters for their indictment; but by doing so also counter false and motivated conspiracy theories of all sorts. Yes, the Pakistan government must in any case be pressured to take action against the JeM given its past history. As it is, Pakistan has also suffered from terrorist attacks against its people and institutions but there are those in the wider governing Establishment who make a hypocritical and self-serving distinction between those agents who are 'ours' and others.

2. There is indirect state sponsorship and support for agents who have the autonomy to decide when, where and how terrorist acts are to be carried out; and there is direct state execution of such terrorist across country borders (the greatest and most pernicious of such states being the US which since 1945 has killed more civilians outside its territory than all the rest of the world's countries put together have done). Sponsorship abets an act of international terrorism even if it is not the embodiment of such an act. But there is still between the two a very important qualitative difference politically and in respect of international law. The latter carried out as it were by the official armed forces of a country is an act of war, declared or undeclared.

A non-state actor, even when abetted in preparations by a government, no matter how reprehensible this is, is not an act of war. Which is why, for the Modi government to declare that the attack in Pulwama is just such an act of war is not only wrong but it is politically speaking extremely dangerous since it raises the military-political stakes so much higher. That this government should nevertheless resort to such jingoistic rhetoric raises suspicions that the BJP is planning to use this encounter to generate greater communal tensions for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The aim is to whip up public anger against the people and government of Pakistan on one hand and against the people of Kashmir on the other hand - yet another example of a thinly disguised politics of anti-Muslimness that has always been central to the fascist ideology and politics of the Sangh Parivar.

3. An attack by the Indian Army across the border against Pakistani soldiers, let alone against civilians, will not be a 'revenge' because it will cause injuries and deaths to those who have nothing to do with what has happened in Pulwama. This will only cause widespread anger and bitterness among a Pakistan public about the injustice being done to its soldiers and/or civilians and help rally domestic support for their own government including for those sections which are behind such cross-border assaults, when in fact everything should be done to isolate and

undermine these sections within the country. Any hopes of moving towards greater democratization within Pakistan and an end to, or cumulative reduction of, military domination will be seriously undermined by Indian actions that push the Pakistani public to support that military in the name of their own form of belligerent nationalism. All progressives in Pakistan working to democratize that society understand this fully (and much more than progressives in India) realize that progress internally in this regard is directly and intimately connected to greater sobriety, balance and moderation in the ties between the two countries. Religious extremism on both sides, however, feeds on generating greater hatred and hostility between the two countries and peoples.

4. Terrorism always has a specific political context. In this case, as in so many other examples of unwarranted violence by non-state and state actors (including by the Indian government), the context is Kashmir! The fundamental diagnosis is clear. While the Pakistan government since the late 1980s has fished in the 'troubled waters' of turbulence and alienation in Kashmir those 'troubled waters' have been created by successive Indian governments with the current Central government adding a distinctive anti-Muslim attitude and practice to its involvement in Kashmir. Even in the initial decades from independence to the late 1980s when serious levels of domestic violent activism arose, there has been betrayal after betrayal of the commitments made to respect the state's autonomy even as the province as suffered more frequently from the imposition of President's Rule than any other Indian state.

There are over 650,000 troops of all kinds primarily in the Valley making the proportion of armed personnel to civilians the worst in the world when according to New Delhi the number of militants or designated 'terrorists' in recent years is not more than a few hundred or so. This huge presence of troops is required primarily to monitor and subdue a general population whose alienation and anger against New Delhi has spreader wider and deeper than ever before. Among Kashmiri Muslims this has been further exacerbated by this government which has justified the firing on stone-pelters, excused the occasional firing on bystanders as well as condoning the generally humiliating treatment of the populace, not to forget the use of pellet guns injuring and maiming hundreds of unarmed demonstrators. Given this reality it is extraordinary that the Indian army is now saying that they will shoot on sight anyone carrying a gun who does not immediately surrender. All this has not lessened the willingness of Kashmiri youth to get training from the all too willing providers like the JeM across the border; or to carry out their own 'martyrdom' through suicide bombings to make their personal statement against the injustices felt by the injustice dealt to them.

The path to reducing and finally eliminating attacks such as in Pulwama does not lie in belligerent posturing or 'surgical strikes' across the border, let alone in escalating military tensions and actions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. It lies above all in addressing the political context of Kashmir and in ensuring justice to all in the province especially in the Valley, be they resident Muslims or Hindu Pandits wanting to live there with peace and amity once again restored. It is not the Indian government's actions against Pakistan but its behavior in Kashmir that will be decisive for shaping the future. Will alienation there further deepen making it a continuing breeding ground for the cycle of on one side non-state terrorism (aided or otherwise from across the border) and on the other side the state terrorism of the Indian armed forces? Or will we work to end that pernicious cycle altogether?

The solution of Kashmir lies with the people of Kashmir, not with India and Pakistan. The people Kashmir on both sides must be the one who decided the fate of Kashmir. A consultative process from both sides must starts now. The armies of both countries from both parts of Kashmir must be withdrawn. A civilian solution to a civilian issue must be ensured by the civilians and not by any army means or through a bunch of terrorists, state sponsored or otherwise.

We welcome the ban on Jamata Dawa and Anjman Falahi Insaniat by the state of Pakistan. The state must break all open or hidden contacts with religious fundamentalist groups. There is no military solution of Kashmir. Religious fundamentalism is playing havoc with the lives of many not only in Kashmir but also in India and Pakistan. Religion must not play any role in running the state affairs and the use of religion for political means must be discouraged at all level.

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