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Rise of Jaish-e-Mohammed in Kashmir Valley

- an Internal Security Perspective

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Introduction

On January 2, 2016, a group of four to six well trained Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists launched an audacious attack on the Pathankot Air Base in Punjab. In an operation that continued over the next four days, all the five terrorists were killed by the security forces (Ojha 2016). Seven security personnel and one civilian were also killed and 28 injured. Initially, Pakistan based United Jihad Council claimed responsibility for the incident but soon it was confirmed that the terrorists belonged to JeM, with operational trail leading right up to the Bahawalpur based top leadership of the organisation (National Investigation Agency 2016).

Over the next two years (2006-17), security forces in the Valley have killed a number of top JeM militants in encounters. It appears that after being kept on the sidelines of the J&K operations by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) when the bulk of the terror activities were left at the tried and tested hands of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), an attempt was being made to reactivate the JeM in a major way, particularly for launching high-profile attacks.

This paper seeks to study the trends and developments with a view to decoding the revival plans and its likely impact on the future terror pattern in J&K in 2018.

Brief Background of Militancy

A series of grenade blasts in Srinagar in the late-1988 marked the beginning of militancy in Kashmir and it has since grown into one of the most serious challenges to India's internal security. It is now a well-established and increasingly internationally recognised fact that cross-border terrorism in Kashmir is engineered and perpetrated by Pakistan's notorious intelligence agency, the ISI, as part of its strategy to destabilise India through various militant groups. Over the last three decades, this '*proxy war*' has claimed

21,147 lives of Indian civilians and security personnel, with injuries to many more (South Asia Terrorist Portal 2017).

In the early days of militancy (late 1980's and early 1990's), majority of militants operating in the Kashmir Valley were locals. Gradually, the ISI decided to induct war-hardened, highly indoctrinated foreign militants into the Valley, with logistic support provided by the locals. We therefore saw the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) getting replaced by the the Jam'aat backed HM, a Pakistan based terror outfit essentially comprising Kashmiri militants. This was important since JKLF remained wedded to its philosophy of unified independent Kashmir, while HM backed the Pakistani agenda of integrating J&K with Pakistan.

Due to HM's inability to 'deliver' on the terror front, ISI gradually, around mid-1990's, started to induct into the Valley, an entirely new set of Afghan Jihad veterans. The main tanzims¹ that surfaced in the Valley under the new scheme were the Laskar-e-Taiba and Harkat-ul-Ansar, which later changed its name to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, and even operated under the name of Al Faran in the infamous and failed hostage taking of a group of foreigners in 1995 to secure the release from Indian prison their leader Masood Azhar. This group was also responsible later for the hijacking an Indian Airlines (IC-814) plane on Kathmandu-New Delhi route in December, 1999, to Kandahar. These two operations were clearly staged with the objective of forcing the Government of India to release their leader Masood Azhar from Indian jail.

The LeT, too came into prominence in Kashmir in the mid-1990's. This group, set up by Hafiz Saeed, had earlier proved its terrorist credentials and loyalty to the ISI during the Afghan Jihad and soon emerged as the preferred vehicle for spreading terror not only in Kashmir but also in Indian hinterlands. With the full backing of the ISI, LeT rapidly became the most dreaded terrorist organisation operating out of Pakistani soil.

Release of Masood Azhar following the Kandahar (Afghanistan) hijacking on December 31, 1999, saw the birth of JeM immediately after the ISI managed to retrieve him from Kandahar to Pakistan. With generous support and

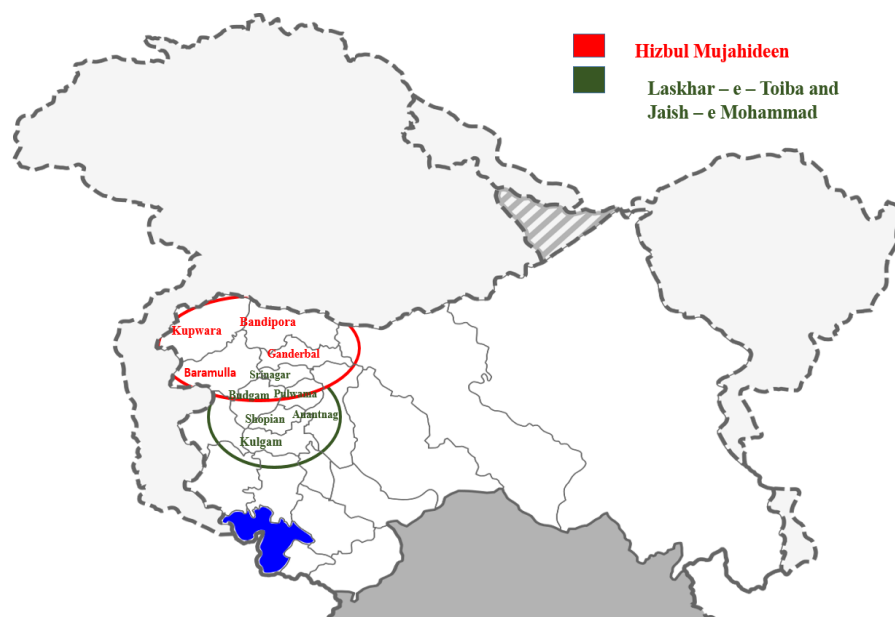
¹ Tanzim - a terrorist group.

assistance from ISI, JeM quickly established itself and on 20th April 2000, the group carried out the first suicide bombing in Kashmir, exploding a bomb in an Indian army barracks. Five Indian soldiers were killed. Later, in October 2001, the JeM carried out a high profile bombing near the J&K Legislative Assembly in Srinagar, killing 38 people and claimed responsibility for it. Finally, JeM attracted worldwide attention when it infiltrated a group of well-trained militants to attack the Parliament House in New Delhi on December 13, 2001 (Parliament of India 2017). While all the terrorists were killed by the brave men of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Delhi Police deployed there, the entire conspiracy was unearthed very quickly based on intelligence inputs.

Alongside the induction of these better trained, highly indoctrinated and battle-hardened terror groups, the Valley also witnessed the induction of more potent weapon systems, graduating from the old conventional .303 bolt action rifles, RDX blasts etc. to the AK – 47, AK – 56 rifles, advanced M-60 carbines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). Along with these also came high tech communication equipment and use of information technology to give impetus to further radicalisation.

Current Status

At present, LeT, HM and JeM are the three prominent terror groups operating in the Kashmir Valley. These groups are well supported by logistics and funds from across the borders. They also receive over ground support from local youth born mainly after 1990 when militancy assumed its present form. Participation and support of these Over Ground Workers (OGWs) has added teeth to the operations of the foreign militants. These external elements get fused with the domestic radicals within the state and are provided domestic logistic support and operational information about the presence and movement of the security forces. The tentative area of prominence of these tanzims and their estimated strengths can be seen in tables shown below.



Area of operation of militant groups in Kashmir valley

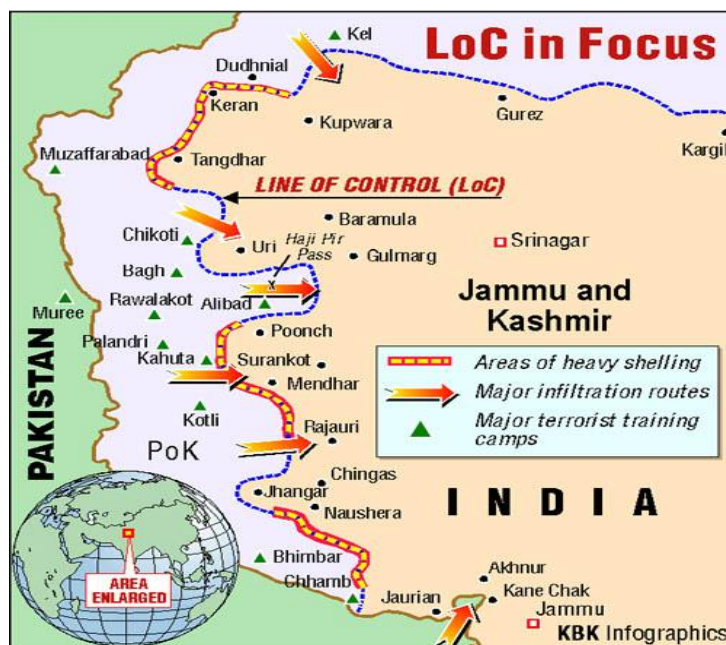
(Source – (Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.676 2013), Mapping based on media analysis by the Author)

Estimated Operational Strength of Militant Groups in the Valley

| Name of the Group | Funding Source |
|----------------------|--|
| Hizb – ul-Mujahideen | Hawala and Money Laundering, receiving funds originating from Pakistan through different mediums. The investigation by the NIA has also disclosed that Jammu Kashmir Affectees Relief Trust (JKART), a front organization of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen(HM), with its Head Office at Rawalpindi and Branch Offices in Islamabad and Muzaffrabad, is actively involved in raising and collecting funds in Pakistan and transferring it to India for its distribution to active cadres and other beneficiaries of the terrorist organization. In this case, banking channels were used for transfer of funds to various bank accounts. In this case, approximately Rs. 80 crores was channelised into India to support terrorist activities since 2007 (Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI 2015). |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Jaish - e - Mohammed | Informal means like Hawala and Money Laundering. To avoid asset seizures funds are withdrawn from bank accounts and invested in legal businesses, such as commodity trading, real estate, and the production of consumer goods. Funds are also collected through donation requests in magazines and pamphlets, sometimes using charitable causes to solicit donations (US Department of State 2017). |
| Lashkar - e - Taiba | Informal means like Hawala and Money Laundering. Prominently LeT collects donations in Pakistan and the Gulf as well as from other donors in the Middle East and Europe – particularly the United Kingdom, where it is a designated terrorist organization. In 2016, LeT front organizations continued to openly fundraise in Pakistan and solicited donations in the Pakistani press (US Department of State 2017) |

Infiltration Routes (Tribune News Service)



Induction of trained militants into Kashmir is fully controlled by Pakistan ISI which determines the numbers, the routes and the tanzims to be activated. As proof of Pakistan's direct complicity, if any was at all needed, the number of

militants including Pakistani nationals killed by the Indian security forces in counter-terror operations of over the decades of militancy is well over 23,347 (South Asia Terrorist Portal 2017). Besides, over the entire period of militancy in Kashmir, Pakistan is known to have infiltrated militants across the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) in J&K. As per the information provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Parliament, there were 11,167 infiltration attempts made by Pakistan to subvert peace in J&K since 2001 (Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI, Infiltration in Jammu and Kashmir since 2005-2017 2017).

Historical Genesis of JeM

As mentioned earlier JeM is the youngest terror organisation operational in the valley after the LeT and HM, which simultaneously rose with rise in militancy in Kashmir since 1989. JeM was launched in January 31, 2000, by Maulana Masood Azhar in Karachi, Pakistan, after he was released in a swap for the hostages of Indian Airline Flight of IC – 814 on December 31, 1999. Azhar was already a well-known name in Pakistan in the context of his involvement in the Afghan Jihad and more importantly as a fiery speaker. He became instantly popular and received enormous financial and logistic support from the ISI, the Taliban regime in Kabul and the Al Qaeda leadership then resident there. Leading experts on terrorism like Lisa Curtis and C. Christine Fair point out that the ISI had established JeM by working with several Deobandi terrorists associated with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (formerly Harkat-ul-Ansar) which had hijacked the above mentioned Indian Airlines flight (Fair 2015).

Thus JeM, in a short period of time, became one of the prominent schools of Jihad. Its ideology is completely in line with that of the Al Qaeda and the Taliban which Azhar has often highlighted in his speeches. As mentioned earlier, JeM gained notoriety for its attack in J&K and prominently came into news for launching a fedayeen attack on Indian Army's 15 Corps Headquarters in Badami Bagh, Srinagar on April 19, 2000. The suicide bomber was subsequently profiled in the official Jaish Publication, Zarb-e-Momin and brought JeM on the international jihad league (Jaleel 2016). These deadly

attacks and operational capabilities for big-ticket terror strikes soon made JeM an equally preferred strategic asset for the ISI at par with LeT. Though the operational difference made these two organisations distant, high-risk missions became the core character of LeT whereas Jaish pioneered the use of suicide attacks in J&K. It launched an attack on the J&K Legislative Assembly in October 2001 after which India, through intense diplomatic efforts and appeal to the international community, got the United Nations list JeM as an international terrorist organisation on October 17, 2001. This listing was in persuasion to Paragraph 8(c) of Resolution 1333 (2000) (United Nations Security Council 2001).

JeM Declared International Terrorist Organisation

Despite its listing by the UN, JeM gained further world-wide notoriety when it executed the audacious and daring attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001. In response, apart from taking recourse to a full-might military mobilisation during 'Operation Parakram', India also mounted intense diplomatic campaign against Pak-sponsored trans-border terrorism (Kalyanaraman 2008). This led to the US designating JeM as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation² (FTO) along with LeT, on December 26, 2001 (B. US Department of State 2001).

Split in JeM and Attacks on Pakistani Cities and Even Musharraf

Under international pressure, Pakistan was soon compelled to ban the JeM in January 2002. But, as in the past with other tanzims, Pak controllers allowed JeM to continue its operation under a new name as Khuddam-ul-Islam, which was also subsequently banned by the government (Cronin 2004). Since it was proscribed in 2002 (US Department of Treasury 2010), JeM again rebranded itself as a charitable trust called Al-Rehmat Trust. Around this time, owing to internal conflict, its commanders Abdul Jabbar, Umar Farooq and Abdullah Shah Mazahar left JeM and formed Jamaat ul-Furqan in late 2002. Masood

² The organization must engage in terrorist activity, as defined in section 212 (a)(3)(B) of the INA (8 USC § 1182(a)(3)(B)), or terrorism, as defined in section 140(d)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1988 and 1989 (22 USC § 2656 f(d)(2)), or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism.

Azhar continued to run JeM under the name Khuddam-ul-Islam (Gunaratna and Li Yee 2016).

Following the then Pakistan President Musharraf's sudden U-turn to join the post-9/11 US 'War on Terror', JeM demanded Musharraf's resignation and also launched several suicide attacks in various cities including Islamabad, Murree, Taxila and Bahawalpur (Popovic 2015). In November 2003, Pakistan reacted by banning Khuddam-ul-Islam as well as Jamaat-ul-Furqan. Enraged by the Musharraf's decision, Masood Azhar tried to carry out two assassination attempts on the convoy of President Musharraf himself on December 14 and 25, 2003 (Masood 2003). Pakistani investigators found the involvement of the JeM in these attacks as well as in another one on the Lal Masjid in Islamabad. The Pakistani Army then conducted a weeklong operation against the JeM militants in the heart of Islamabad. Militants responsible for the attempted assassination bid on Musharraf were identified, put on trial and convicted to death, which was carried out later. Despite Azhar's professed loyalty to the Pakistani establishment, whose creation he was, Pakistani authorities put JeM in the doghouse and confined Azhar under frequent house arrests in Bahawalpur. This was entirely due to the assassination attempts Masood Azhar had launched on Musharraf.

Weakening of JeM in India

In India too, the terror group lost grounds in J&K where most of its ranks were neutralised by the security forces. In an exceptionally well crafted intelligence driven operation by the Indian security forces at Lolab in early 2004, JeM suffered heavy losses (Swami 2004). Since then, Hafeez Saeed and his LeT have reasserted its primacy in India-centric operations. LeT has enjoyed greater patronage from Pakistani military establishment. This fact was acknowledged by Parvez Musharraf in September 10, 2017 in an interview to ARY News channel of Pakistan (ARY News 2017); Musharraf is in self-exile in Dubai (Press Trust of India 2017).

Impact of Recent Intelligence Based Operations

Before taking up the issue of JeM's recent reactivation with some daring operations in Kashmir Valley, it would be appropriate to briefly look at the

trend of militancy related developments in the Valley. Recently, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Chinara Corps, in a press conference at Srinagar on November 19, 2017, stated that the security forces had neutralised over 190 terrorists in the year 2017. In fact, if one were to include all the killings since the Burhan Wani episode (July 8, 2016) the number of militants killed by the security forces till now has gone well past the 200 mark.

What is notable in this operational achievement is that most of the top leaders were targeted; almost all the operations were based on pin-pointed intelligence and there was unprecedented level of coordination between the forces. The net message to the militant groups has been, 'if you are there, we will get you soonest'. The tables below clearly depict the success story:

Prominent Terrorists killed at Jammu and Kashmir in 2017

| No | Name | Organisation | Encounter Location and |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) | | | |
| 1 | Abu Musaib (nephew of Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi) | LeT | Hajim, Bandipora, N Kashmir / January 19, 2017 |
| 2 | Junaid Mattoo | LeT | June 16, 2017 Arwani village in the south Kashmir |
| 3 | Adil Mushtaq Mir | LeT commander | June 16, 2017 Arwani village in the south Kashmir |
| 4 | Bashir Ahmad Wani alias Bashir Lashkari | LeT commander | July 01, 2017, Mailgram, Anantnag |
| 5 | Azad Malik alias Dada | LeT commander | July 01, 2017, Mailgram, Anantnag |
| 6 | Abu Dujana | LeT's Kashmir head | August 01, 2017 Pulwama |
| 7 | Atif Lilhari | LeT | August 01, 2017 Pulwama |
| 8 | Ayub Lehri | LeT commander | August 16, 2017 Banderpora region, Pulwama district |
| 9 | Abu Ismail | Divisional Commander LeT Mastermind Amarnath Attack July 10, 2017 – 8 pilgrims died and 19 injured | September 14, 2017 Aribagh, Nowgam sector |
| 10 | Abu Qasim | LeT | September 14, 2017 Aribagh, Nowgam sector |
| 11 | Ahmad Shah alias Abu Usama Bhai | LeT District Commander | October 14, 2017, Litter Village, Pulwama District |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 12 | Nisar Ahmad Mir | LeT | October 14, 2017, Litter Village, Pulwama District |
| 13 | Arshid Majid Khan college student and footballer | LeT | Surrendered , November 17, 2017 Srinagar |
| 14 | Owaid, Abdul Rehman Makki's son and nephew of 26/11 master mind Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakhvi, Pakistani national | LeT | on November 18, 2017 Killed at Chandergeer village of Bandipora district |
| 15 | Zargam from Pakistan | LeT commander | on November 18, 2017 Killed at Chandergeer village of Bandipora district |
| 16 | Mehmood + 3 terrorists of Pakistani descent | LeT commander | on November 18, 2017 Killed at Chandergeer village of Bandipora district |
| 17 | Muzzamil Pakistani National | LeT, Divisional commander North Kashmir | Killed on November 30, Sopore Area, Baramulla |
| 18 | Abu Furqan (Pakistani National) | Took over LeT, Divisional commander after Abu Ismail South Kashmir - Mastermind Amarnath Attack July10, 2017 - 8 pilgrims died and 19 injured | Killed at Qazigund operation began at afternoon on December 4, ended at 2am on December 05, 2017. All 4 responsible for Amarnath attack of July 2017 were killed |
| 19 | Abu Maviya (Pakistani National) | Mastermind Amarnath Attack July10, 2017 - 8 pilgrims died and 19 injured | Killed at Qazigund operation on December 05, 2017 |
| 20 | Yawar Basir Habiash of Kulgam, joined ranks with LeT this year in February after snatching weapon from a policeman | Involved in Amarnath Attack July 10, 2017 | Killed at Qazigund operation on December 05, 2017 |
| 21 | 3 terrorists of Pakistani origin | LeT | Killed at Unsoo, Handwara on December 11, 2017 |
| Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM) | | | |
| 1 | Aqib Maulvi | HM | Tral, Pulwama, March 05, 2017 |

| | | | |
|----|---|--|---|
| 2 | Sabzar Ahmad Bhat | HM | Tral, Pulwama, May 24, 2017 |
| 3 | Faizan Bhat (Youngest militant - 15 years) | HM | Tral, Pulwama, May 27, 2017 |
| 4 | Danish Ahmed | HM | Surrendered on June 07, 2017 |
| 5 | Pervaiz Ahmad Wani alias Mudasir alias Bashir alias Ishfaq | HM divisional commander | September 04, 2017, Check-e-Brath area of Sopore on |
| 6 | Naeem Ahmad Najar | HM | September 04, 2017, Check-e-Brath area of Sopore on |
| 7 | Abdul Qayoom Najar the oldest surviving militant commanders of HM | HM Commander / carrying bounty of ₹ 10,00,000/ | September 26, 2017, Zorawar Post, Uri |
| 8 | Zahid Malik alias Zahid Mir | HM District Commander | October 09, 2017, Kellar village, Shopian District |
| 9 | Irfan Abdullah Ganie | HM | October 09, 2017, Kellar village, Shopian District |
| 10 | Asif Ahmad Paul | HM | October 09, 2017, Kellar village, Shopian District |
| 11 | Arizoo Bashir Nazar | HM | Arrested on October 24, 2017 at Tral, Pulwama. |
| 12 | Toyib from Sopore | HM | November 13, 2017 killed at Handwara, Kupwara |
| 13 | Ashiq from Pallanhallan | HM | November 13, 2017 killed at Handwara, Kupwara |
| 14 | Muzamil Ahmad from Badroo yaripora, Kulgam (engineering graduate) | HM | November 14, 2017 killed at Nowbug Kund, Kulgam district |

Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) too has lost many of their top operatives as indicated below:

| JeM | | | |
|-----|---|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Osama | JeM | Tral, Pulwama, March 05, 2017 |
| 2 | Khalid Ahmad alias Khalid Bhai alias Shahid Showkat | JeM Operational Commander | October 09, 2017, Lodora Village, Baramulla [Khalid was trained in Pakistan and was apparently commander in the group of 12 terrorists who crossed over recently and was mainly active in |

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| | | | Sopore in North Kashmir] |
| 3 | Waseem +2 unidentified terrorists of Pakistani Descent | JeM | November 06, 2017 Killed in Aglar Kandi Village of Pulwama district along with |
| 4 | Talha Rasheed+1 | JeM | November 07, 2017 in Aglar Kandi Village of Pulwama Besides two AK-47 rifles, an Colt-manufactured M4 carbine, a weapon mostly used by the US army in its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq |
| 5 | Shabir Ahmad Dar - resident of Thokerpora Pulwama +3 foreign origin terrorists | JeM | Killed on November 30, 2017 at Futlipora area of Police Post Pakherpora, Charar-e-Sharief in Budgam |
| 6 | Noor Mohammad Tantray, 47 year old from Tral, Pulwama district | JeM for South Kashmir | Killed on December 26, at Samboora Village, Pulwama. Close aid of Gazi baba, Mastermind for attacks like BSF camp Srinagar attack October 2017, was arrested in 2003 and was sentenced to life by POTA court in 2011 and shifted to Sri nagar where he jumped parole and joined ranks. |
| 7 | Ali Sozal | Pakistan Based | Killed in encounter on ealy morning of 31 December 2017 on CRPF camp at Latpora, Pampore area of Pulwama. |
| 8 | Fardeen Ahmad Khanday | Tral Pulwama Based | Son of J&K Police man. Killed in encounter on ealy morning of 31 December 2017 on CRPF camp at Latpora, Pampore area of Pulwama. |
| 9 | Manzoor Ahmed Baba | Drubgam Pulwama | Killed in encounter on ealy morning of 31 December 2017 on CRPF camp at Latpora, Pampore area of Pulwama. First time these terrorists have used armor piercing bullets in India. |
| Ghazwat-ul-Hind | | | |
| 1 | Mugees Ahmad Mir | Ghazwat-ul-Hind led by Zakir Musa | November 17, Zakoora area of Srinagar |

(Based on Media reports data compiled by the author)

Relentless Pressure on HM and LeT

The GOC Chinari Corps, in a press conference at Srinagar on November 19, 2017, further clarified that of the eliminated 190 terrorists, 80 were locals and 110 were of foreign descent. Amongst the 110 foreign terrorists, 66 were killed near the Line of Control (LoC)/International Border (IB) while trying to infiltrate into India. Further, the GOC said that through these operations the security forces had wiped out the top leadership of the Pakistan backed terror group LeT (Press Trust of India 2017), including including Muzammil, Abu Dujana, Sabzar Ahmed Bhat, Burhan Wani, Abu Ismail, Bashir Lashkari, along with many others. In the year 2017, nearly 12 commanders of LeT, 14 prominent terrorists and commanders of HM were neutralised by the security forces.

While the militant leadership of LeT and Hizbul is wiped out, their overground network is under investigation and prosecution by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which has been investigating various terror funding cases. In December 2008 after Mumbai terror siege the UN has included Hafeez Saeed in its the terrorist list under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 (United Nation Security Council 2009). The US too has designated Saeed as a global terrorist and has announced a reward of \$10 million for information leading to his arrest and conviction (Department of State 2008). Similarly, the US has listed Mohammad Yusuf Shah, also known as Syed Salahuddin of HM, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Section 1(b) of Executive Order (EO) 13224 in June 2017 (US Department of State 2017). The US also designated HM as a foreign terrorist organisation in August 2017 (US Department of State 2017).

With the elimination of most HM commanders and cadres in encounters, including some of its top leadership such as Burhan Wani and its successors, HM and LeT have become the most affected terrorist outfits operating in the Valley. Loss of militants means loss of weapons and muscle for the outfit. As a result, both these organisations are trying to lure personnel from J&K Police along with their arms and ammunition (Javaid 2017).

Why the Revival of JeM?

With most of the militant leaders of LeT and HM neutralised by the Indian security forces and their support infrastructure within the Valley under intense scanner of investigation and law enforcing agencies at domestic, regional as well as global level, the Jaish has become the obvious choice for its handlers (ISI) across the borders to continue to perpetrate high profile terror activities in J&K Valley. Various initiatives and activities by JeM also suggest a gradual rise in JeMs activities in Pakistan. The group organised a congregations by Al-Murabitun, (student wing of JeM) titled as Islamic and Training Convention at Balakot from July 28-30, 2017 which was addressed by Talha Al-Saif, brother of Azhar Masood. It is further learnt that JeM inducted a batch of 12-13 students at Markaz Usman-o-Ali, Bahawalpur, from July 10 to 21, 2017, in which 70 students from Peshawar, Manshera and Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had participated.

Financially, the Al-Rehmat Trust has sought donations in the form of money and animal hides for Jihad and for taking care of dependents of militants killed in Kashmir operations. Another JeM centre in Karachi has conducted a Daura-e-Tarbiya course from July 21 to 27, 2017 (Ohri 2017).

Pakistan's outreach to China against Azhar's proscription under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 and the continuous shielding of JeM by Pakistan despite efforts by India along with other UN Security Council members, reflects ISI's intention to revive JeM with funds and arms to continue to destabilise the Kashmir Valley. China's protection of Pakistan based militant groups responsible for terror strikes like Mumbai and Pathankot has invited heavy criticism globally and undermines China's claim of neutrality (Chang 2017).

In continuation of the earlier narration of JeM's background, it may be added here that JeM had struggled to get a firm foothold in Kashmir after its aborted attack on then President Musharraf and earlier loss of its top commanders like Sajad Afghani alias Qari Hamaad (1999), Qari Yasir (2013), Adil Pathan (2015) in various intelligence-based operations by security forces (Bukhari 2011), (Jaleel 2016). Adil Pathan's return to Kashmir Valley in 2012 perhaps marked

the turning point in ISI's plans for revival of Jaish in Kashmir. Pathan is alleged to have trained a local militant from Kashmir named Altaf Baba alias Gazi Baba to revive JeM operations in the Valley and is believed to be close associate of Sajad Afghani. Baba too was killed in a fierce gun battle that lasted for 19 hours at Pulwama on June 05, 2013 (Press Trust of India 2013). Noor Mohammed Tantray, a close aid of Gazi Baba, then took over the command of Jaish operations in the Valley. He conducted the recent terror attack on the BSF camp at Srinagar in October 2017. Tantray was first arrested in 2003 and was sentenced to life by Prevention of Terrorist Act (POTA) Court in 2011. Later, he was shifted to Srinagar where he jumped parole and re-joined JeM ranks to revive Jaish operations in the Valley. Tantray was eventually neutralised after a fierce gun battle at Samboora village in Pulwama district (Ehsan 2017).

Even though the Jaish Chief Azhar was proscribed by the UN and the US, Pakistan state machinery continued protecting the group. Azhar freely operated in his hometown Bahawalpur in Southern Punjab (Fair 2015). Some analysts such as Bruce Riedel believe that revival of JeM has a connection with the return of Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister of Pakistan which had bolstered the JeM in the past against India (Riedel 2016). It falls in line with ISI's strategy to rehabilitate those assets who defected to the Pakistani Taliban and to utilise them in Kashmir. Masood Azhar's resurfacing on the political landscape of Pakistan since 2014 and its venomous campaigning, full of fiery speeches, calling for more attacks on India and the US, stands testimony to it (Fair 2015). Azhar's well-organised event at Muzaffarabad in PoK on the occasion of a book written by slain terrorist Afzal Guru in 2014 needs mention in this context.

Some of the other major attacks such as the one on CRPF Camp in Tangdar Area in July 2015, followed by an attack on Army camp in November 2015 marked the revival of Jaish in the Kashmir Valley. The year 2016 began with the Pathankot terror attack of January 02, 2016, followed by one on the BSF camp Srinagar in October 2017 underscoring the revived capabilities of Jaish marking its presence felt (Chakravarty 2016). Due to its better preparedness

and committed and well-trained militants, the rise of JeM in the Kashmir valley would certainly impact the overall security situation in the region.

Implications and Recommendations

But would the revival of Jaish mean the end of Lashkar or HM? Not necessarily. However, with consistent anti-terrorist operations of the security forces and extensive vigil along the LoC, very little space seems to be available for militants to manoeuvre. In this process, clearly LeT and Hizbul are losing ground in the Kashmir Valley and the resultant void seems to have provided JeM the opportunity to re-enter the arcana, subject of course to the operational concurrence and within the operational priorities defined by its controllers, the ISI.

The likely impact of these developments is the continued militant activities through the three main players/assets of the ISI namely, LeT, HM and JeM. Attempts will be made to induct fresh group of militants, particularly in South Kashmir areas, as soon as the passes start reopening, with the first flush, as usual, coming in through the Gurez route. These inductions will be carefully calibrated due to capacity constraints. Border crossings are becoming more difficult due to shrinking of safe available hideouts, and heavy retaliatory actions by the Indian security forces, and above all, greater flow of actionable field and technical intelligence. It is also expected that the three groups will resume their post winter operations with better defined areas of responsibilities. It is also likely that size of operating groups too will shrink to curtail losses.

The summer of 2018 may likely witness a renewed attempt by the militant groups to stay relevant in the valley as a pressure group to influence the new unfolding narrative in the state. The recent attacks on BSF camp on December 31, 2017 and IED Blast at Sopore on January 06, 2018 by Jaish in which nine security personnel lost their lives stands testimony to it.

Image Source:

- <https://www.thequint.com/news/world/brics-xiamen-summit-declaration-lashkar-jem>

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