Jammu and Kashmir Militancy – Phases, Factors & Way Forward – Explained Pointwise

The November 2025 Delhi Red Fort car bomb blast has been linked by Indian authorities to militancy networks operating out of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). The bomber, Umar Un Nabi, was a Pulwama-based doctor with alleged ties to militant groups Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, highlighting active terror module linkages between J&K and urban centers like Delhi.

Introduction:

- Jammu & Kashmir militancy refers to the ongoing armed insurgency and terrorist violence in Jammu & Kashmir aimed at challenging Indian sovereignty over the region, either by seeking secession/independence or accession to Pakistan.

- It combines local separatist militancy with Pakistan-supported cross-border jihadist groups and has both political and religious dimensions.

Key phases of J&K Militancy:

Phase 1: The Rise (Late 1980s – Mid-1990s)	**Indigenous Start:** Initially, the movement was dominated by groups advocating for independence (Azaadi) or merger with Pakistan. The **Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF)**, which fought for independence, was prominent. **Escalation:** The period saw massive infiltration, targeted killings of government officials and security personnel, and the migration of the Kashmiri Pandit minority community from the Valley. **Shift in Ideology:** Over time, the more nationalist JKLF was overshadowed by groups that were religiously conservative and heavily supported by Pakistan, such as the **Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)**.
Phase 2: The Foreign Jihadi Wave (Late 1990s – Early 2000s)	**De-Indigenization:** As the native Kashmiri militant leadership was decimated by counter-insurgency operations, foreign fighters (mainly from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other countries) began dominating the ranks. Groups like **Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)** and **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)** became the primary actors. **Major Incidents:** This phase was marked by high-profile attacks, including the Kargil War (1999) and the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, which brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war. **Decline in Local Support:** The increasing brutality and hardline religious ideology of foreign groups led to a dip in local support for the armed struggle.
Phase 3: Post-2010 Resurgence and the 'New Militancy'	**Shift to Homegrown Militancy:** A new wave of militancy emerged, primarily fueled by young, highly educated, and radicalized local Kashmiris, often through social media and online propaganda.

Mass Public Support: The killing of popular militant commander Burhan Wani in 2016 triggered widespread public uprisings and a culture of youth rushing to encounter sites to disrupt operations by security forces.

Hybrid Terrorism: The focus shifted from conventional attacks to **"hybrid terrorism,"** where local, often non-listed militants carry out targeted, small-scale attacks before disappearing back into the civilian population.

Jammu & Kashmir: A Region Long Caught Up in Conflict

Total number of terrorism-related incidents in Jammu and Kashmir, by year*
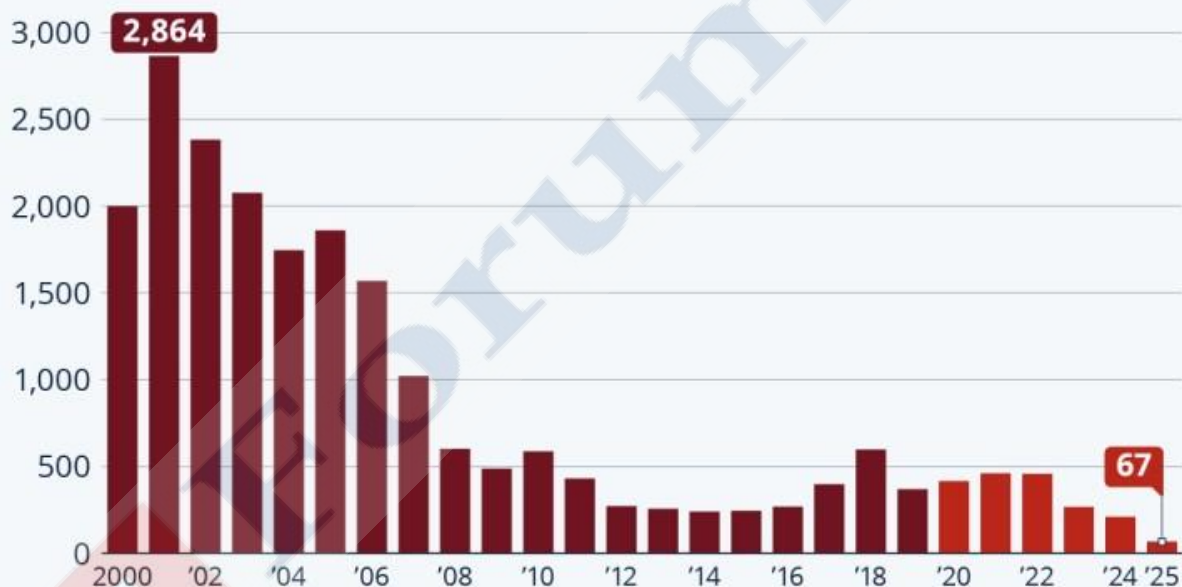
* Provisional data from Mar. 6, 2020 - May 10, 2025. Includes incidents where people were killed or injured, arms recovery, suicide attacks, explosions and arrests

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

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Factors behind the militancy in J&K:

1. **Political and Constitutional Grievances (The Internal Catalyst):** The primary driver of alienation and subsequent militancy stems from a breakdown of trust between the people of the Kashmir Valley and the Central Government of India:

a. **The Disputed Accession and Autonomy:** While J&K acceded to India in 1947, the subsequent agreement (Article 370) promised a high degree of internal autonomy. Over the decades, this autonomy was progressively eroded by the central government, leading to a strong feeling that the constitutional relationship was being diluted unilaterally.

b. **Political Disenfranchisement and Rigged Elections:** The most crucial trigger was the widespread perception of political manipulation, particularly the widely believed rigging of the **1987 State Assembly Elections**. Many young political activists who had faith in the democratic process (like those in the Muslim United Front) saw this event as definitive proof that legitimate political avenues were closed to them, pushing them toward armed insurgency.

c. **Lack of Responsive Governance:** Poor governance, corruption, and a lack of accountability in the local political system compounded the sense of betrayal. The absence of credible local leadership exacerbated the disconnect with the mainstream Indian political system.

d. **Human Rights Concerns:** The deployment of large numbers of security forces and the implementation of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) led to allegations of human rights abuses, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings. These incidents became powerful rallying points for militant recruitment.

2. **Socio-Economic Pressures:**

a. **High Unemployment:** Despite high literacy rates, the region consistently suffered from high rates of educated unemployment, particularly among the youth in the Valley. The lack of viable economic opportunities made extremist narratives appealing.

b. **Stagnant Tourism and Industry:** Political instability and recurring violence severely damaged the vital tourism industry and prevented large-scale industrial investment, thus limiting employment prospects.

c. **Development Deficit:** Many areas felt neglected in terms of infrastructural development, contrasting sharply with perceived central spending on security and administrative apparatus.

3. **External and Geopolitical Intervention (The Primary Enabler):**

a. **Pakistan's Active Role:** Pakistan views J&K as "unfinished business" from the 1947 Partition. Its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), began actively supporting, arming, funding, and training militant groups in the late 1980s. This policy is often termed **"proxy warfare."**

b. **The Afghan Factor (1980s):** The Soviet-Afghan War created a pool of battle-hardened, religiously motivated foreign fighters and an abundance of weapons. Following the Soviet withdrawal, these resources and fighters were diverted toward the Kashmir conflict, escalating the violence dramatically.

c. **Ideological Shift (Global Jihad):** The initial, more nationalist and pro-Independence groups (like the JKLF) were systematically marginalized and replaced by Pakistan-backed, religiously focused organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). This shift globalized the ideology, moving the conflict beyond local political grievances to a broader jihadist narrative.

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d. **Propaganda and Radicalization:** Pakistan uses vast propaganda networks (both media and online) to fuel anti-India sentiment and radicalize Kashmiri youth, often exploiting historical and religious narratives to encourage armed recruitment.

Challenges in tackling the J&K militancy:

1. **Porous Borders and Terrain:** Difficult LoC/IB (740 km LoC, 192 km IB in Jammu) with forests/mountains enables infiltration and arms smuggling despite fencing.

2. **Hybrid Militancy & Support Networks:** Educated "hybrid militants," Over Ground Workers (OGWs), and locals aiding logistics/funding via encrypted apps (Telegram) sustain operations without direct combat.

3. **Intelligence & Coordination Gaps:** Fragmented intel-sharing between Army, CRPF, J&K Police; militants use locals' phones and online radicalisation, evading detection.

4. **Geographical Shift:** Militancy moved to Jammu's Pir Panjal forests (Poonch, Rajouri, Kathua); less dense security grid and redeployment to LAC/China border weaken coverage.

5. **Radicalisation & Local Sympathy:** Online propaganda, unemployment, grievances fuel youth vulnerability; community distrust hampers HUMINT despite de-radicalisation efforts.

6. **Pakistan's Proxy Role:** Cross-border arms (drones), training, info warfare by LeT/JeM proxies; hard to deter non-state actors.

7. **Manpower & Community Issues:** Extensive ops require heavy troops; reviving Village Defence Guards (VDGs) faces past abuse allegations and communal tensions.

   Measures taken to tackle the issue of J&K militancy:

Security and Counter-Insurgency Operations	**Border Management and Infiltration Control:** 1. **Anti-Infiltration Grid:** A multi-tiered system consisting of fencing, surveillance systems, and forward-deployed troops along the **Line of Control (LoC)** to detect and neutralize infiltrators from Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK). 2. **Technological Surveillance:** Extensive use of advanced thermal imagers, ground sensors, drones, and electronic surveillance to monitor the porous terrain. 3. **Strategic Fortification:** Building fortified bunkers and posts along key infiltration routes to prevent militants from crossing into the Valley. **Counter-Terror Operations (CT Ops):** 1. **Operation All-Out:** A systematic, intelligence-driven approach to targeting and neutralizing top leadership and local militant commanders across various terror outfits (Hizbul Mujahideen, LeT, JeM). 2. **Intelligence Sharing and Synergy:** The **Unified Command Structure**, involving the Army, CRPF, BSF, and J&K Police, ensures seamless coordination and real-time intelligence sharing to execute surgical operations.

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3. **Addressing Hybrid Terrorism:** Recent measures focus on identifying and neutralizing "hybrid terrorists" and over-ground workers (OGWs) who provide logistics, shelter, and intelligence to active militants, thereby breaking the support structure.

4. **Deradicalization Efforts:** Local police have engaged in counseling and surrender policies to bring local youth who joined militancy back into the mainstream.

Legal and Administrative Tools:

1. **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA):** Provides legal immunity to security forces for actions taken during counter-insurgency operations, although its scope has been debated and reduced in some areas.

2. **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA):** Used to designate individuals and organizations as terrorist entities, freeze assets, and prosecute individuals involved in terror financing and recruitment.

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Political and Constitutional Measures

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1. **Revocation of Article 370:** This measure revoked the special constitutional status of J&K and converted the state into two Union Territories (J&K and Ladakh). The stated aims included:

1. Fully integrating J&K into the Indian Union.

2. Allowing all central laws to apply, including anti-corruption and anti-terror laws.

3. Addressing the separatist ideology which often leveraged the special status for political ends.

2. **Delimitation and Electoral Process:** The ongoing process of reorganizing assembly constituencies (delimitation) is aimed at preparing for future state elections, attempting to re-establish democratic processes at the grassroots level.

3. **Empowering Local Governance:** Efforts have been made to strengthen the **Panchayat Raj** institutions (village councils) to decentralize power and fund development at the local level, bypassing traditional political elites.

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Socio-Economic and Developmental Initiatives

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1. **Infrastructure Investment:** Accelerated development of road networks, power projects, and healthcare facilities under various central schemes (e.g., Prime Minister's Development Package – PMDP).

2. **Employment Generation:** Launching specific skill development programs and initiatives to boost employment for educated youth, including job fairs and incentives for investment in industrial and service sectors.

3. **Boosting Tourism and Handicrafts:** Focused efforts to restore peace and create a safe environment to revitalize the tourism sector, a major employer in

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the Valley. Financial assistance and marketing support are provided for the traditional handicraft sector.

4. **Educational Outreach:** Initiatives aimed at keeping educational institutions operational and engaging students through competitive exams and scholarships to encourage future-oriented career paths over radicalization.

Way forward to resolve the issue of J&K Militancy:

1. **Enhanced Security Measures with Human Rights Focus:**

a. Continue robust counter-terror operations and intelligence sharing to disrupt militant networks, while strictly adhering to human rights to rebuild trust with locals.

b. Reform laws and ensure accountability to prevent excesses that fuel alienation.

2. **Political Dialogue and Reconciliation:**

a. Resume meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders, including separatists willing to renounce violence and mainstream political actors, with guarantees for autonomy and participation.

b. Consider calibrated political reforms to address local aspirations without compromising national integrity.

3. **Community Engagement and Empowerment:**

a. Empower grassroots governance, develop local leadership, and implement de-radicalisation programs targeting vulnerable youth and communities.

b. Revive Village Defence Guards and community policing with training and safeguards.

4. **Socio-Economic Development and Opportunities:**

a. Accelerate employment generation, skill development, education, infrastructure, and healthcare, especially for youth to address root causes like poverty and alienation.

b. Promote cross-community economic integration and cultural dialogue.

5. **Diplomatic and Regional Stability Initiatives:**

a. India should utilize international platforms like UNSC (e.g., highlighting role of Pakistan in cross-border terrorism), FATF and take support of like-minded countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia and UAE) to put pressure on Pakistan to curb non-state actors operating from its soil.

b. Strengthen regional cooperation for security and development.

Conclusion:

Achieving peace in J&K and tackling the militancy depends on synergizing the above mentioned dimensions through sustained political will, inclusive governance, and people-centered development.

Read More: The Indian Express
UPSC GS-3: Internal Security (Terrorism)

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