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TERRORISM IN KASHMIR: GENESIS AND CAUSES
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ORGANISED BY CENJOWS
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BY MS VAIBHAVI KATAL
ORGANISED BY CENJOWS ON 26 FEB 2026

The comprehensive lecture, delivered by Ms. Vaibhavi Katal provided an in-depth analytical framework for understanding the genesis, causes, and dynamics of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Moving beyond a mere historical narrative, the lecture offered a structural breakdown of the conflict, distinguishing between various forms of political violence and examining the socio-political, economic, and external factors that have perpetuated instability in the region for decades.

The presentation was designed to provide a pragmatic understanding of the security landscape rather than just a descriptive account.

Conceptualising Terrorism and Key Terminology. Ms. Katal initiated the discussion by addressing the critical need for a precise conceptualization of terrorism. She highlighted the ongoing challenges within academia and international relations in reaching a universally agreed-upon definition, noting that disagreements often arise regarding whether state actions constitute terrorism or the necessity of targeting civilians. Despite these challenges, she argued that a working definition is indispensable for crafting effective security policies, informing legal frameworks, and fostering international cooperation against such threats. To ensure analytical clarity, the lecture distinguishes between three often misconstrued terms:

Terrorism: Defined as a politically motivated act of violence designed to instil fear and influence political decisions, frequently targeting civilians or symbolic locations. A primary example provided is the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Insurgency: Characterised as a long-term, organised armed movement aimed at overthrowing or challenging the established authority of a state. The primary targets are usually state forces, institutions, and territory, with examples found in India's Northeast.

Militancy: Described as a broader umbrella term representing aggressive activism for a specific cause.

The lecture noted the evolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which began as a militant group and transitioned into a terrorist organisation as it acquired greater funding, training, and strategic direction.

1. **The Historical Genesis of the Conflict.** The roots of the conflict are traced back to the partition of British India in 1947, which created the sovereign states of

India and Pakistan but left the status of Jammu and Kashmir unresolved. The region was a geopolitical paradox. It was governed by a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, while the majority of the population was Muslim, with significant Hindu and Buddhist minorities in Jammu and Ladakh, respectively. Key historical developments highlighted include:

2. **The Tribal Invasion and Accession:** In October 1947, tribal militias from Waziristan, backed by the Pakistan Army, invaded the state. Following the violation of a standstill agreement, the Maharaja sought Indian assistance and signed the Instrument of Accession, legally merging the state with India and initiating the first Indo-Pak war.
3. **UN Intervention and Ceasefire:** The then Prime Minister, Mr Nehru took the matter to the United Nations in January 1948, leading to a ceasefire that froze the conflict along the current Line of Control (LoC). However, the proposed plebiscite never occurred because Pakistan failed to withdraw its forces as stipulated by the UN commission.
4. **Constitutional Isolation:** The introduction of Article 370 in 1950 and Article 35A in 1954 provided special autonomous status to the state. While intended to preserve demographic and cultural identity, these articles effectively insulated Jammu and Kashmir from the rest of the country, hindering economic interaction and investment.

Causes and Drivers of Terrorism. The lecturer identifies several interconnected pillars sustaining terrorism in the region:

1. **Pakistan's Proxy Strategy:** Following conventional military defeats in 1947, 1965, and particularly the humbling loss in 1971, Pakistan adopted a low-cost, high-disruption asymmetric warfare strategy. This involved sponsoring non-state actors and terrorist groups to fight a proxy war against India.
2. **Rigged Elections and Alienation:** The 1987 Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections are identified as a critical turning point. Widely perceived as rigged, these elections led to a profound loss of faith in democratic processes among the youth, causing many to view armed struggle as the only viable path for political change.
3. **Afghan Jihad Spillover:** The conclusion of the Soviet-Afghan War in 1989 left a surplus of trained fighters, guerilla warfare experts, and weapons. These resources and transnational jihadist ideologies were redirected toward Kashmir, transforming the local separatist sentiment into a militarised terrorist movement.

4. **Socio-Economic Stagnation:** The isolation caused by Articles 370 and 35A led to economic stagnation. High rates of youth unemployment created a frustrated population, making educated but disaffected youth vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist organisations, which often targeted individuals from destitute backgrounds for brainwashing.
5. **Ideological Radicalisation and Digital Propaganda:** Over time, the movement shifted from ethno-nationalist goals toward religiously framed narratives influenced by transnational Islamist currents. The lecturer emphasised that in the modern era, social media and digital platforms have become crucial tools for propaganda, misinformation, and indoctrination, allowing terrorist organizations to reach and mobilize youth directly.

Conclusion and Recommendations. Ms. Katal concluded that the persistence of terrorism in Kashmir cannot be attributed to a single factor but is instead sustained by a self-perpetuating cycle of external sponsorship, local political alienation, economic despair, and ideological radicalisation. These factors reinforce one another, creating a durable conflict that is simultaneously strategic, social, and political in nature.

For a deeper understanding of the genesis, causes, and counter-measures employed by India, the speaker highly recommends the book '**Operation Sindoor by Lt. Gen. KJS Dhillon**'.