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INTERVIEW

## There is zero percent compulsion to go to war: Former Union Home Secretary

- Gayathri, Nitesh and Sujith



The FDR team meets Mr. K. Padmanabhaiah, the Chairman of Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) and Former Union Home Secretary, Hyderabad

*In a candid and an informal interaction, Mr. K. Padmanabhaiah discusses the security situation post-Pulwama attacks and also opens up on the larger Kashmir issue based on his ground-level exposure as a former Union Home Secretary. Read on to find out more...*

**How do you compare today's Kashmir with the Kashmir of 1989-90 (when the insurgency was said to be at its peak)?**

The situation in Kashmir today is not as grave as compared to that in the 90s. Escalation in militancy and terrorism created a situation of political vacuum, breakdown of

civic administration, and dysfunctional courtrooms. This emergency situation required president's rule for 9 years. Attacks on state symbols and killings of few police chiefs and judges, terrorized government servants. Even politicians weren't spared. I must give credit to the army who was the lone ranger, managing the conflict.

In those days there used to be at least 27-30 militant organisations. Today, there are three - Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). Back then, if we eliminate the leader and ban an organisation, it would transform into another outfit with a new name and it was very difficult to know who was doing what. Nobody had any clue about what was happening.

I myself visited some of the districts and saw that there were no supplies like kerosene, LPG; electricity was weak; places were gloomy, dark and morose; people had nobody to complain to.

It was the worst situation in the history of Kashmir. Today's situation can hardly be compared to that.

**What steps did you take since you were entrusted the responsibility of Department of J&K Affairs during 1994-1997 (which was created separately to deal with the Kashmir issue)?**

I told the officers, that you must get together and formulate 5-6 convoy of vehicles with secretaries, protected by the army, to go to the districts, and look at the grievances. Grievance redressal was the most important thing in Kashmir. The officers were initially reluctant, and I had to be tough with them. The army was happy that civil administration was coming back. Slowly, improvements were seen, which was made possible by just meeting people, redressing their grievances, ensuring that some of the supplies were made and assuring that they were safe.

**How does Pakistan look at Kashmir and India?**

As far as Kashmir is concerned, Pakistan has only one clear, well understood policy - *India has to be given a thousand cuts, so that it bleeds to death, economically and politically.* They cannot win over India through a conventional war; they were defeated four times. Nuclear war is out of the question because it would be dangerous to both the countries. So they have realised that proxy war is the best way as they can deny their involvement and hide behind non-state actors. They did the same in 1947 and said the same story for Kargil as well, but we proved them wrong. This policy is constant irrespective of who their PM is.

### **How has India approached the Kashmir issue?**

We have not managed our Kashmir area well at all. On the other hand, PoK is relatively well managed and peaceful with no noticeable public dissent. This is the most important point one has to know. We never hear of any agitation or a single word in the world press. Whether the reason is pressure, force or

dictatorship, they are somehow managing PoK. Whereas our politicians, bureaucrats, and diplomats - everyone has let the people of Kashmir down.

### **What is India's Kashmir policy?**

There is no policy at present. One government says that we should talk to the Pakistanis, while the other government says, there is no point in talking as there is nothing to talk. One party says we should talk to Hurriyat; while another says the opposite. One party believes armed occupation is the only solution while another says backchannel talks have to go on.

The point is, Kashmir is the most important issue as far as India is concerned but we don't have a national policy. We have a BJP policy, a Congress policy, a Leftist policy, etc. If at all there is one policy where national policy is called for, it is Kashmir. This is the reason we are just not able to solve the Kashmir issue.

### **What should be the components of that policy be in your view?**

All the concerned people and relevant stakeholders must sit together and decide. When that happens, all the political parties would adhere to it, as it would be a national policy. It would be in stark contrast to the confusion that prevails today - one day we say talks, the next day we say stop the talks; one day we say share intelligence with Pakistan - we invite them to come and investigate Pathankot, then we want them to investigate something else. This ad-hocism needs to stop. Let there be one policy.

It is important to understand that unilateral armed action cannot be the solution. It is only a small part. One of the mightiest armed forces - the Soviet forces collapsed because they couldn't take everybody together. People's concerns and economic backwardness could not be addressed.

**Why is there a lot of disenchantment among the Kashmiris?**

There is no proper administration. Though huge transfers are made from the Union government, prevalence of corruption and nepotism in the J&K administration prevents benefits from trickling down to the masses. In Kashmir, there are no jobs other than government jobs. Businesses are reluctant to invest. The dearth of non-government jobs causes a lot of hardship among the Kashmiris and they suffer.

But, the most important thing is, do the people feel happy? Do they feel the need to be with us, which they did, from 1947-1989? 42 years is not a small period. Why did such people turn against us? These are questions any thinking individual must ask.

**How do you address the sufferings of the people?**

We all know that a huge amount of money goes to Kashmir (Union government transfers). However, the money is spent on projects like solar systems in Ladakh and the evacuation of power from there. Similarly, hydroelectric power

projects are undertaken. While they are no doubt important - both for Kashmir and the nation, they do not address people's sufferings. Immediate services necessary for the citizens' welfare including civil supplies (food, fuel, water supply etc.), pensions, and so on, need to be delivered. Give them a clean and good administration for five years and then see the results.

### **How do you look at the Army's role in Kashmir?**

The Indian Army is supposed to be the third largest army in the world. Despite their prolonged presence in Kashmir, we haven't moved towards conflict resolution.

The Pakistani agents aren't coming everyday from Pakistan into India. There are a few people who sneak in - about 5-10 in a month. Most of the terrorists are local and the army knows the location of their camps. Why isn't the army taking vigorous actions? The army attacks only when their armed camps are attacked (like in the case of Uri in 2016). They only retaliate, otherwise there was a sort of "live

and let live attitude". When I was in office, I was told that it is not in the Army's mandate to go and eliminate the camps. Apparently, they just had to ensure that the insurgency is kept at such a level, that a semblance of civil governance can take place. Suffering more casualties would affect their morale, and nobody would want to work in Kashmir, which they cannot afford. But there must be a strong mandate given to the army for a robust response.

### **Is armed action a solution?**

CRPF people get a tenure of 3 years elsewhere, but in Kashmir, they get 2 years, since it is a tough posting. It takes about 6 months for the person to settle down and about 6 months to demobilize and come back. So effectively, it is only one year that a CRPF jawan is there. In this one year, his main concern is to see that he is not killed and return safely. This is the attitude that is followed. Also, like any other organisation, there is a certain amount of corruption in the border security force. There were a few cases of smuggling of

arms, ammunition, trucks etc which were overlooked by BSF personnel. So, total reliance on armed action or even bureaucracy for that matter, is wrong. It has to be a mix of all of this, including diplomacy, which is the most important thing.

### **What has been the role played by our intelligence agencies in this?**

Let's compare RAW with CIA of the USA, Mossad of Israel, or MI6 of UK. All of them undertake covert operations and eliminate people who are supposed to be enemies of the country. We never hear of RAW doing such things. Our intelligence has been reduced to the level of sending reports. There is a lack of inter agency coordination.

Our intelligence must be given the power and mandate to eliminate targets. They say that it is not treated as murder if MI6 officers kill somebody outside the country. That particular country may treat it as murder, but Britain will not. Mossad functions outside the

constitution. CIA also gives power under the Patriot Act and NSA to eliminate enemies of the state. They must declare somebody as an enemy of the state before that, which is an executive action.

We have not faced the first or second world wars, so we are not familiar with these things. But they must be done for our security. We are living in a tough neighbourhood, with China and Pakistan on both sides. The remaining countries - Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, or Bangladesh are not very friendly with us. Their friendship changes the moment their regime changes. We are in an extremely hostile situation, I think we must first set our house in order instead of talking incessantly.

**Post-Pulwama attacks, there is a lot of aggressive posturing by politicians. Earlier, we had surgical strikes in response to the Uri attack in 2016. Will there be a strong retaliation this time as well? (As this interview goes to publishing, the IAF has**

**attacked terror camps in  
Balakot, Pakistan)**

The surgical strikes didn't achieve anything substantial. They just ventured and stepped into their area once. All of this is posturing. Somebody said, that we have stopped water (Indus waters). They haven't stopped anything, 60% of the water of the western rivers goes to them while only 40% of the eastern rivers come to us.

Withdrawing Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status hardly matters, due to minimal trade relations between us. All of this is cosmetic. These are exaggerated statements made before elections, but every party does it. I am not just blaming the present government.

**Can any comparison be made  
with Indira Gandhi's decisive  
action against Pakistan in 1971?**

Indira Gandhi led the Bangladesh war (1971) which was literally thrust on us. It gave her tremendous leverage and she won the election thereafter. But at the time, 20 million Bangladeshi refugees had come into India,

when India itself was a poor country. If we had not waged the war, it would have been much worse, so it was the right thing to do then. So, don't compare it with that time, things were different then.

**Is there a compulsion to go to  
war now?**

Going to war would be foolish. There is 0% compulsion to go to war. However, India might mobilize its army as they did during Operation Parakram, after the Parliament attack in 2001. There have been more severe attacks. One shouldn't be under the notion that the world started yesterday and this is the severest attack in history. This has been going on for a long time.

**What is your opinion on the  
President's rule in Kashmir?**

Central rule must be avoided in Kashmir as much as possible. It appears to impinge on people's democratic rights, which causes resentment against the Union. It was inevitable during 1990-1994, therefore we had to do it. The state

government should be allowed to function and at the same time, be held accountable. Unfortunately, the moment a chance arises, political instinct drives one to grab it and impose Central rule.

**Can cricket and art (films, music, etc.) act as a bridge between India and Pakistan?**

This is not a big issue. Such relations don't make much of a difference especially with an enemy state. Cricket is no longer a sport, it is a huge international business which people make money out of. This money, anyway goes into the Army. In Pakistan, the Army has huge establishments and controls a lot of industries. I personally feel we should stop all these things.

**But at least it will preserve the people to people outreach, whatever little is left?**

As somebody would say, not at this stage. At this stage, the people of Pakistan have no voice. We have a voice because India has a democratic system. Their voice is not heard by anybody. Even if 60% of Pakistanis want friendship with

India they are not in a position to influence the government or their army to take their point of view into account and act accordingly.

**Do you believe foreign intervention can help solve this issue?**

Pakistan has been saying that this is a bilateral issue between us. I agree, we don't want any foreign intervention but I think foreign help is necessary. Not mediation, but help. If two of us are quarrelling, you would like to tell your case to your friends, convince them, and use some extra influence. Going round to various embassies, ambassadors, calling them, giving them your point of view can help.

**Why does China keep supporting Pakistan?**

China is supporting Pakistan not because they have a great love for it, but for strategic and economic reasons. That's the reason they are building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Eventually, Pakistan would go into a debt trap, China would buy over



the properties, and ultimately it would become a satellite entity. They are doing this because they don't want India to grow as a competitor to China in the Asian continent. India is growing fast despite its troubles. So China would do its very best to contain India. I wouldn't be surprised if they open a second front if we get into a war.

**Your final thoughts on resolving the Kashmir issue?**

We are in a tough situation, have given birth to a defective child, so we have to bear with that. But I see a clean, people-oriented administration for five years, without Union intervention making a difference. Also, a strict border, and an empowered intelligence agency is the need of the hour. To sum it up, we are in dire need of a national policy for Kashmir. •

*K. Padmanabhaiah (b. 1938) is a retired Indian civil servant and a former Home Secretary of India.*

*He is the chairman of the Court of Governors of the Administrative*

*Staff College of India, and has headed many government committees such as the Committee on Police Reforms (2000), the Committee on Reorganization of the Services Selection Board, and the Committee to Review the working of National Institute of Urban Management.*

*The Government of India awarded him the third highest civilian honour of the Padma Bhushan, in 2008, for his contributions to Indian civil service. ▪*