

India's options after Pulwama

India would do better than Pakistan in a conventional war, but it may or may not remain conventional



HAPPYMON JACOB

The deadly terror attack against a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy in South Kashmir's Pulwama district, which was orchestrated by a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) suicide bomber, Adil Ahmad Dar, 22, has once again brought nuclear-armed India and Pakistan close to a potential armed confrontation. There are widespread calls to respond to the attack which killed 40 CRPF personnel. The question, however, is how. The general election may complicate the answer to this question. The BJP leadership knows that if it plays its cards well, it might stand a chance to form the next government. If it bumbles, that chance would become weak. This makes the situation far more dangerous in terms of payoff structures and associated risks.

Pakistan needs to act

So far, Pakistan's response to the attack has been a blanket and unhelpful denial. Prime Minister Imran Khan has chosen to be quiet about it despite the seething anger in India, even as his Ministers are issuing unconvincing denials. Pakistan needs to stop issuing denials and start acting. Let us be clear: the JeM's leaders are roaming about freely in Pakistan. This is unacceptable. They must be taken to task immediately and there should be a clampdown on other terror organisations as an emergency measure. The Pakistani establishment's usual answers – 'we will come to them eventually' or 'we are also already fighting them' – won't cut ice any more. If Pakistan truly desires peace with India, it needs to play its part honestly. Pakistan should realise that it would be doing a favour to its citizens by cracking down on terror organisations that are thriving on their soil. And why has Pakistan still not invited India's National Investigation Agency to investigate the Pathankot terror attack even though India had allowed the visit of the Pakistani team to Pathankot in 2016? Pakistan needs to take action against the terror elements on



"How is it that a plan to carry out such a major attack on a national highway in a troubled State went undetected?" Security forces after a gunbattle with militants in Pinglan, Pulwama district, south Kashmir. ■ PTI

its soil, now.

Having said that, let's face some facts: Dar was a local Kashmiri boy, the vehicle used in the attack was local, we do not yet know the source of the explosive, and there is a raging insurgency in Kashmir today. Don't these facts tell us that New Delhi's Kashmir policy has been a failure? That it has been unable to calm tempers in Kashmir in the past four and a half years? If so, we must ask the difficult but important question: How did we get to where we are today in Kashmir? Here is some perspective: While in 2013, only six local Kashmiris had joined the ranks of militancy, last year, the figure was close to 200; between 2014 and 2018, ceasefire violations increased five times; between 2015 and 2018, the increase in infiltration attempts more than doubled; and, terrorist-related violence in the Valley has spiked drastically over the past five years.

Despite all this, the government was hardly keen to initiate a serious dialogue process with the Kashmiri dissidents. The BJP-PDP government, which fell last year, ensured that the so-called soft separatist space was given away to militants, and the use of aggressive tactics turned south Kashmir's popular opinion against India. Make no mistake: India finds itself in a bind in Kashmir, and it will take a great deal of political sophistication, backchannel reaching out, and comprehensive political vision to get Kashmir back

on track. Do the politicians in New Delhi realise this? I am not sure. Even as the nation stands behind its government, the Central government, when reflecting on the next steps, must accept that its politically unimaginative policy was a failure.

Then there is intelligence failure. How is it that a plan to carry out such a major attack, by a local who was on the radar of the local police and other agencies, on a national highway in a troubled State went undetected? Why is that 78 buses with CRPF jawans were allowed to travel in one convoy?

India's options

If New Delhi seeks to respond to Pakistan for the Pulwama attack, what options does it have? For the BJP government, given that the elections are so close, its retaliation has to be credible, prompt and visible, thereby limiting its options. Stopping the flow of waters to Pakistan is neither practical nor possible. Withdrawing the Most Favoured Nation status would hardly hurt Pakistan, given the low trade volume involved. Isolating Pakistan internationally is easier said than done – China is closer to Pakistan today than ever before, Russia is warming up to it, and given the impending American drawdown in Afghanistan, there is a sense of triumphalism in Pakistan. This is especially so because of the geopolitical importance of the region – it won't be long before the U.S. makes a

comeback.

One possible way out is perhaps to talk to China discreetly to get Pakistan to crack down on the JeM, but that will take patience, persuasion and discretion. A government caught in an election season may have too little of any of it.

What about military options? One can think of four types of kinetic options. The first could be to carry out surgical strikes, like India did in 2016. However, while the Pakistani side did not respond to it then, the reaction this time could be different. If Pakistan responds, the two sides may soon find themselves in an escalating military crisis with little clarity about the outcome, something an election-bound government might fight shy of. The second option is to use strike aircraft to carry out precision strikes in locations across the Line of Control (LoC). But such air incursions are likely to be detected and intercepted by Pakistani radars and air defence systems. If an aircraft is shot down or pilots are captured, it could become a bigger headache for the government. Pakistani retaliatory strikes cannot be ruled out either. The third option is to go in for stand-off strikes without physically crossing the border, using heavy artillery or other precision-guided weapons such as rockets. Stand-off strikes, or fire assaults, across the LoC would be responded to in kind and eventually might not achieve anything. The final option is to carry out covert operations inside Pakistan to take out high-value human targets such as leaders of terror outfits. This might be the least costly and most optimal strategy. However, this would require a great deal of preparation and might not be domestically useful given the amount of secrecy and lack of optics surrounding it.

In short, the fundamental problem with kinetic options is uncertainty with regard to what those options would lead to if Pakistan decides to respond. India would do better than Pakistan in a conventional war of attrition, but it may or may not remain conventional and there would be attrition on both sides. Would New Delhi be willing to run those risks so close to a crucial election?

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A catalyst for the Congress

It makes sense for the party to give Priyanka Gandhi Vadra a bigger role



BADRI NARAYAN

In late January, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was appointed by the Congress as a general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh-East. She will be in charge of around 42 parliamentary seats. This is the region where the constituencies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath lie. It is also the region that includes the important constituencies of Allahabad, Phulpur, Amethi and Rae Bareilly. How is Ms. Vadra going to influence the general election, given that she's campaigning in the State with 80 Lok Sabha seats, which can determine which party or coalition goes on to form the government at the Centre?

Mobilising party workers

First, Ms. Vadra could work as a catalyst for the Congress. She is not new to politics; she has been consulted on important decisions concerning the party several times in the past. Her presence is known to energise Congress workers and give them greater confidence. Reports say that her campaigning will be restricted to U.P., but if she chooses to campaign outside the State, it could enthrone more party workers. Her direct presence in rallies, meetings and road shows may help mobilise scattered old-time Congress voters and sympathisers, who have remained inactive for many years. It will also stop Congress voters from shifting to the BJP, wherever they are not happy with the ruling government in the State. In the Tripura Assembly election, for instance, political analysts found that Congress voters shifted to the BJP where the Congress did not have a strong presence. This could happen in a State like West Bengal where some disgruntled cadres of the Congress, which is practically in a direct fight with the Trinamool Congress, could shift to the BJP, which is emerging as a strong Opposition party in the State. Ms. Vadra's presence could help reduce the shift of voters to the BJP. Even in south and western India, where the Congress is not the main Opposition party, voters could be mobilised so that they don't shift to other parties.

Second, many have pointed out how Ms. Vadra resembles her grandmother, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. She evokes memories of Indira Gandhi for those who are above 50 years of age. This could help forge an emotional link with voters who admired

the former Prime Minister. Of course, Indira Gandhi reminds people of the Emergency, but a large section of voters returned to the Congress in the 1980 parliamentary election. In fact, many were Congress voters for a long time and shifted to the BJP only when the Congress became weak in 2014. Ms. Vadra could help bring them into the Congress fold again. Then there is the question of her personality. A young Muslim boy in a village near Allahabad, for instance, said about Ms. Vadra: "She communicates in a very impressive manner with the people."

Attracting new voters

In U.P., Ms. Vadra's presence will affect the performance of not only the BJP but also the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to some extent. The Congress's growing visibility in U.P. could impress upper caste voters. This may be a loss for the BJP. The Congress also seems to be impressing a section of Muslims and many smaller Dalit communities which are not supporters



of the BSP. Many Scheduled Caste communities voted for the BJP in the 2014 election. They may support the Congress for two reasons: they are disenchanted with both the BSP and the BJP, and the Congress's outreach is stronger now. The Congress seems to be placing emphasis on mobilising Other Backward Classes and Dalit communities for their new politics.

The discourse of the 2019 general election is centred around personalities: Mr. Modi, Congress president Rahul Gandhi, Ms. Vadra, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar, etc. However, some of them have an appeal only in their respective States. The Congress would like to promote Ms. Vadra as a leader rooted in U.P. politics, but it would do well to widen her role.

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SINGLE FILE

Pay people for data

Imagining a future in which we can remunerate people for their contributions to the digital economy

ANIL K. ANTONY & ANKUR PRASAD



The raw materials driving today's digital economy are data, leading many, including industrial tycoon Mukesh Ambani, to say that data is the new oil. Nowadays, wealth is increasingly built upon information. Companies that aggregate and analyse information the fastest accumulate unprecedented power and wealth. For example, social media companies gather and analyse huge amounts of data related to customer behaviour and preferences. They use this to build features to ensure that customers constantly browse, and to show customers advertisements that they are most likely to click on. This information translates into huge revenues and profits.

An overlooked fact is that ordinary people are crucial for companies to create disruptive technologies that earn them billions. Algorithms rely on statistics to make decisions, and it is the people who feed companies the data.

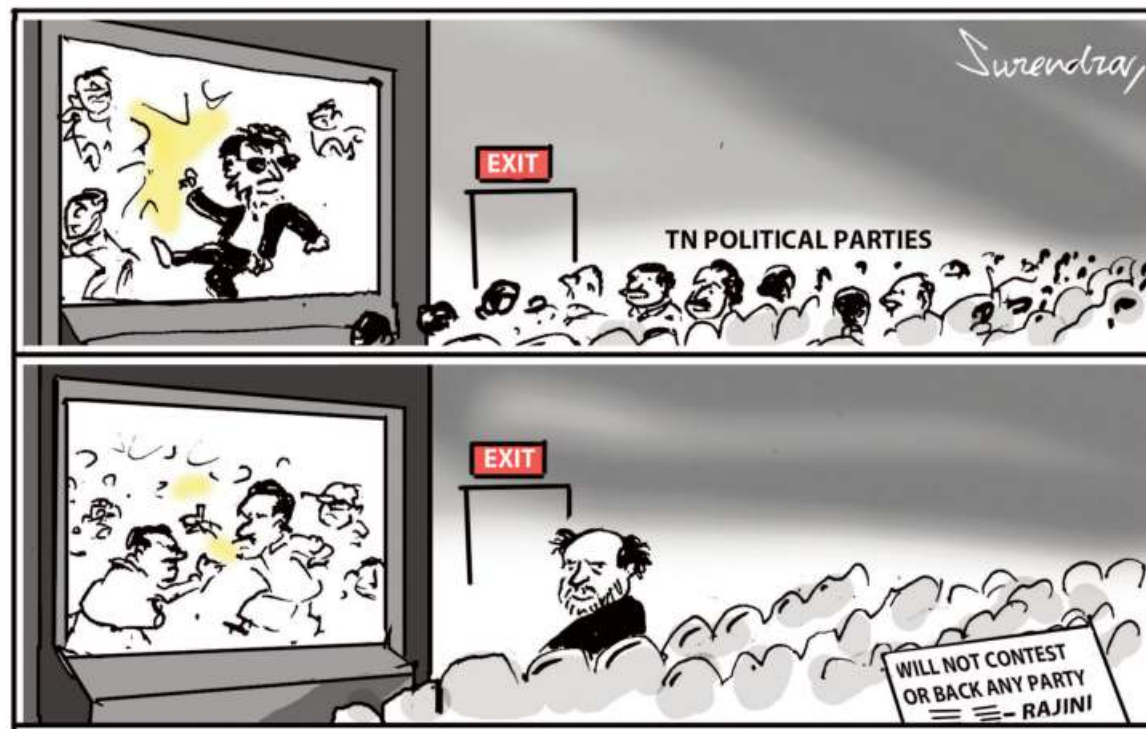
Despite this vast amount of data fuelling massive value and wealth creation, the new digital economy is increasingly shaping up to be like the feudal or robber-baron economies of the past, where wealth was concentrated among a very select few. The general public, who predominantly contribute the raw data, get a negligible portion of the pie.

The digital economy without doubt is creating jobs that were previously inconceivable. Who could have imagined the role of a search engine optimisation expert before Google, or a video streamer before YouTube? These new jobs will likely not be as abundant as the current jobs being eroded due to advancements in artificial intelligence and automation. This means that the jobs to share the massive wealth created in the digital era are steadily decreasing.

At present, seven high-technology firms find themselves among the list of the top eight most valuable companies in the world, with a cumulative market capitalisation of almost \$5 trillion (almost 2.5 times India's GDP). However, they directly employ fewer than 11 lakh people among them.

These days, the primary discourse during any election in the world is on how to create conditions for a more equitable distribution of wealth. For this to happen, we need to conceptualise an approach that can remunerate people for their contributions in this digital economy. As the primary step, we have to educate our population about the value of the data they generate. Secondary measures, including legislative policies, must be taken to ensure that people can extract their justified pay for their digital activities. Technologies such as blockchain can facilitate nano-payments, proportional to the degree of contribution, and value creation to each individual in the digital space. The right redistributive policies can turn this world of technology-driven inequality into one that is truly participatory and egalitarian.

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NOTEBOOK

Covering a tragedy with empathy

For many 24x7 TV channels, death means a sensational story

MOHIT M. RAO

Accidents, murders, and cases of sexual assault and violence dominate the news cycle. Journalists are confronted with difficult questions when such incidents take place: Whom do we approach for information? When does the quest for details become an intrusion into moments of grief? How do we move beyond basic facts and provide a human face to a tragedy in a sensitive manner?

While many print journalists grapple with this moral quandary, many reporters of 24x7 news channels, especially local channels, have little time to ponder such questions as morbid deaths pique public curiosity. While journalists often hover around a victim's house, waiting for the so-called right moment to ask the kin questions, TV journalists hound bereaved family members.

Camerapersons even jostle for a view of the body in the ambulance.

For me, this macabre fascination was most apparent on April 9, 2013, when a gas tanker toppled close to Mangaluru. The expanding gas ball set fire to everything and everyone within 50 meters. Ten people died in the accident, and many more were injured. In hospitals in Mangaluru, where victims were shifted for treatment, the staff forgot to man the entry into the burns ward. Journalists entered in droves and camerapersons attempted to go as close to the victims as they could. Wails and screams of pain cut through the chaos.

A few journalists stood by the door. The sister of a victim, who was critically injured, skirted the camerapersons and stood beside us. We tucked our notebooks into our pockets, and she gave vent to her

grief in disparate words uttered amid uncontrollable sobs. The camerapersons saw this. One quickly gave me the mic and instructed me to hold it close to her face (TV reporters were at the accident site and he had to ensure that his channel logo was in the frame). She turned away and covered her face. She clearly did not want her private moment of mourning to be telecast. When he was done with his shot, he went to the other families.

In another hospital nearby, the brother-in-law of a delivery man, who had been riding behind the gas tanker, stepped out of the ICU. He was in shock, but answered questions calmly. But long after the TV cameras moved away, he sat on a chair and wept. Only two reporters remained. We sat beside him in silence. The family, he said, was in debt. It had been only six months since his sis-

ter's wedding. She hadn't been informed of the accident yet. Our end-of-the-day deadline allowed us the time to console him.

Later that evening, when I was struggling to file the copy within the allotted word length, he called up to say his brother-in-law had died. He asked if I could request the district administration to expedite formalities. By then, gory images had been repeatedly telecast, and many people had come forward to help the affected families.

Minutes later, a TV reporter called me to say he had visuals of a man in flames running on the road. Could I ask the man whether it was his brother-in-law in the video, he asked. No, I said. Soon after, I switched on the TV. The channel announced his death and played visuals of the man in flames and his brother-in-law crying on loop.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 19, 1969

Communist MPs demand resignation of Union Govt.

The Lok Sabha, on the second day of its Budget session to-day [February 18, New Delhi], took up for consideration a censure motion against the Union Government primarily intended to highlight, among other things, "its failure to promote a balanced development of all regions in the country" and its "encouragement" to aggressive regional movements. Communist members demanded that the Union Government should resign in view of the "rejection of the Congress" in the mid-term poll. The no-confidence motion, moved by Mr. P. Ramamurti (C.P.I.-M) was supported by the C.P.I. and S.S.P. The debate was inconclusive and will conclude to-morrow, according to a recommendation made by the Business Advisory Committee of the House. The Prime Minister, will reply to the debate on Thursday [February 20].

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 19, 1919

The Rice Crop of 1918-19.

The total area under rice in the Madras Presidency in 1918-19 is estimated at 9,71,000 acres, which is less by 19,44,000 acres than the area finally reported for the previous year. In fact the area is the lowest that has been recorded since complete statistics were first tabulated in 1907-08. The reasons for this decrease have already been given in the first and second reports, i.e., the failure of the south-west monsoon in July and August and the delay in the establishment of the north-east monsoon until November. The season has in fact been entirely abnormal and it is only in the tracts protected by the major irrigation works and in the tract along the East Coast which received the full benefit of the north-east monsoon, that anything like a normal is greatest in the Deccan and Central district. Conditions are better in the south, and Rammad and Tinnevely actually show some increase in area.

CONCEPTUAL

Smoke detector principle

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to the idea that the human brain is designed by nature to be paranoid as a defence mechanism to protect itself from possible dangers that could be fatal to its chances of survival. While paranoia can lead the brain to commit a lot of false positive errors, it can, however, help human beings avoid a number of false negative errors which could turn out to be extremely costly as well. This is similar to the way a smoke detector is designed by engineers, who want the device to never miss an actual fire even if such a design causes the device to raise a number of false alarms. The term was coined by American physician Randolph M. Nesse in a 2006 paper.

MORE ON THE WEB

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