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ORF OCCASIONAL PAPER

OCTOBER 2016

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews to explore the phenomenon of militant disengagement as experienced by six former militants in Jammu and Kashmir. The paper seeks to understand how and why individuals who enthusiastically joined the militant campaign against the Indian state beginning in the late 1980s subsequently moved away – physically – from armed violence. The study also aims to shed light on the nature and extent of ideological evolution experienced by the same individuals before and/or after their physical departures from militancy. The paper attends closely to the interplay between these physical and ideological aspects of disengagement, asking – in the case of each interviewee – how one relates to the other. The paper's findings are presented with an eye on policy, to help guide the Indian state's future management of disaffection and its violent manifestations in the Valley.

INTRODUCTION

Since militancy began in the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s, thousands of young men have joined and energised the violent campaign against the Indian state—and eventually moved away from it. Yet their stories remain largely untold, and while the subject of terrorist disengagement is relatively well-studied in many other conflict zones across the world, Kashmir's sizeable contingent of former militants has managed to elude scholarly

attention.[1] This study attempts a first step towards filling this gap, exploring how and why former militants in Kashmir "left militancy behind."[2]

In order to present a diverse set of narratives, this study visits six former militants in the Kashmir Valley. It uses semi-structured interviews to capture the factors that prompted them to join militancy, the nature of their involvement, and the circumstances around their disengagement. Taking a cue from current literature, this study is careful to disaggregate the concept of 'disengagement' into its physical and psychological components.[3] If physical disengagement represents an individual's observable – albeit, often non-linear – transition from militant to former militant status, psychological disengagement involves a less tangible process of ideological reorientation. The study also recognises that physical disengagement can occur involuntarily, as a consequence of arrest, but also voluntarily, as when individuals withdraw of their own volition.[4]

The paper opens with a discussion of the methodology employed in the study. It justifies the use of a small-N case study method to explore the experiences of individual respondents, acknowledges the shortcomings of this approach, delineates the scope of the study, and briefly describes the interview sample and the manner in which it was selected. The second part proceeds to ask how and why Kashmiri combatants – who once signed up readily for the effort to violently disturb the status quo – walked away from militancy.[5] It focuses on the personal stories of six former militants, including of their disengagement. (In order to protect their identities, this paper refers to its interviewees using pseudonyms). This section explores their motivations for joining militancy, the conditions in which they operated as active militants, and the details of their eventual exit. This narrative section attends closely to the interplay between the physical and psychological aspects of disengagement, analysing how the militant's commitment to the 'cause' and its violent pursuit evolved during and after involvement in the struggle. In tracking the individual militant's ideological reorientation, this section also pays careful attention to the

shifting targets of one's disaffection. If young men in the Valley started their journeys with purely anti-India mindsets, might the subsequent 'shortcomings' of other actors – an irredentist Pakistan and a domestic separatist leadership – have induced them to re-direct some of their disaffection towards these entities?

The paper closes by presenting key lessons that emerge from the narrative section, and discusses measures that can be taken by the Indian state to manage discontent and its violent expressions in an increasingly dynamic environment.

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on the case study method, which offers the distinctive advantage of capturing a degree of "detail, richness, completeness [and] wholeness" that only an in-depth analysis can provide.[6] This quality is particularly important in the context of this paper since, as Horgan notes, "the complexity of [militants' individual experiences] would not emerge in any other way."[7]

The six respondents featured in this study were selected using a top-down approach.[8] A former combatant who currently serves as an activist for former militants was interviewed, and relied upon to locate other individuals willing to share their stories of disengagement. In order to maximise the time period over which respondents could experience ideological reorientation, this study limits its sample to individuals whose physical disengagement from militancy began no later than 1997, and who were released from prison in or before 2002. This means that each respondent has had over a decade to process the implications of his involvement in militancy. The downside of this sampling, however, is also quite obvious: it deprives us of the opportunity to compare the experiences of militants who were active in the 1990s with those of a subsequent batch of fighters. Without denying the value of such cross-cohort analysis, this study had good reason to exclude individuals whose disengagement from

militancy occurred more recently. Since the process of ideological evolution occurs gradually and over a long period of time, it would be difficult in their case to distinguish a genuine incapacity for ideological reorientation, on one hand, from a lack of available time for this process to play out, on the other.

Although the process of case selection was non-random, and designed to include a specific cohort of militants, the resulting sample of interviewees shows considerable diversity. Together, the respondents in this study represent four different militant groups, more than 15 years of militant activity, and a wide range of unique circumstances. While some were trained in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, others received their schooling in weaponry and warfare locally. While some directed their energy exclusively towards *azadi*, others were readily co-opted by forces plotting Kashmir's eventual merger with Pakistan. While some experienced physical disengagement as a consequence of prior ideological reorientation, others only began to re-assess their commitment to the 'cause', and its violent pursuit, during imprisonment. While some made a clean break from militancy, others were more prone to recidivism.

Notwithstanding the diversity of this sample, it is important to acknowledge at the outset that no grouping of six individuals (howsoever composed) can do justice to the breadth of experience represented by the universe of Kashmiris who have joined militant ranks over the course of nearly three decades. While leveraging the strengths of the small-N approach, this paper also recognises its shortcomings. It is guided by the caveat that any accounts obtained through the interview method should be considered "exploratory" rather than "explanatory," and delineates its scope accordingly.[9] The paper seeks to extract maximum information from respondents' individual narratives, and to identify their implications, but to do so without drawing grand conclusions that might not be supported by a larger and more representative sample. The study thus views itself as an exploratory exercise inviting more focused research that could build on the findings presented below and further examine their nuances.

DISENGAGEMENT FROM MILITANCY: SIX STORIES

Case 1: When physical disengagement leads to ideological reorientation

As an 18-year-old in 1987, Shafqat was actively involved in the Muslim United Front's (MUF) campaign to establish a presence in Jammu and Kashmir's legislative assembly.[10] MUF representatives were confident of winning several seats in the Valley, including the Amirakadal seat contested by Mohammad Yusuf Shah – better known today as Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) chief Syed Salahuddin. When the election results were announced, however, MUF supporters were shocked to learn that their party had only won four of the 43 seats it contested, despite securing nearly a third of all votes polled. In an effort to maintain order amidst allegations of rigging, security forces detained many known MUF supporters, including Shafqat. "I was kept in jail for several days and tortured," he says. "Between the conclusion of the elections and 1988, the police picked me up several times." Not long after the first batch of MUF-affiliated militant trainees crossed the Line of Control (LoC) into Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a friend of Shafqat's who worked as a militant coordinator encouraged him to follow a similar route. Taking his advice, Shafqat crossed the LoC, training in Abottabad, Gadi Dupatta, Machis Factory, Mirpur, and Kotli, before returning to Indian-administered Kashmir in 1989. Interestingly, while Shafqat went to seek training as a member of the pro-azadi Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), he returned to the Valley as a Harkat-ul Mujahideen operative championing Kashmir's merger with Pakistan. Shafqat explains the change in group affiliation thus:

> *If you affiliated with MUF and wanted to become a militant, you were a JKLF member by default […] But across the LoC, we were converted along pro-Pakistan lines. When we were there, we were motivated, provided money, and told that Kashmir could not realistically become an independent state. Pakistan had spent 40 years telling the world that Kashmir was its property. Now it had an opportunity to create a generation of Kashmiris willing to promote Pakistan within Kashmir.*

Although Shafqat was very much of the pro-azadi mindset when he decided to join militancy, he admits that Pakistan's argument proved compelling to his young, impressionable mind: "I began to believe [that a merger with Pakistan] was the way forward." Shafqat remained active with Harkat-ul Mujahideen until 1991, mainly operating in the districts of Baramulla, Kupwara, and Anantnag. Shafqat recalls his days as an active militant with pride: "I followed the instructions of several commanders, including Sajjad Afghani and Nasrullah Langrial. In those days, Harkat-ul Mujahideen was headed by Maulana Masood Azhar, who subsequently became the head of Harkat-ul Ansar before assuming his current role as head of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM)." On September 7, 1991, Shafqat was arrested after getting wounded in an encounter with the Army in Srinagar's Munawar Abad neighbourhood. He would spend the next eight-and-a-half years in prison.

Shafqat says that his real education began in prison, where he read extensively and, for the first time, introduced himself to the tenets of Islam. He says these readings allowed him to experience a gradual process of ideological reorientation:

> *The Quran says that you can fight if you are oppressed or if you are kept from fulfilling your religious obligations. But fight whom? If someone comes to kill me with a rifle then, yes, I can stop him in self-defence. But nowhere in the Quran does it say you can kill an innocent person [...] When I read the Quran I realised we had been going in a wrong direction. In one Hadith, we are told that whenever the Prophet took his army into battle, he instructed them never to harm children or the elderly, not to damage crops, and not to kill women.*

Shafqat believes those who sent young Kashmiris to wage '*jihad*' against India did their religion a disservice: "I blame those who sent me across the LoC without a basic religious education. It was their duty to teach us right from wrong. We came back with rifles. We killed [Hindu] Pandits, we killed Muslims, we even killed dogs and cats. We also made money extorting people. If I had studied the Quran beforehand and followed its guidance, things would have been very different."

Shafqat acknowledges that his ideological reorientation was made possible by his prior involuntary physical disengagement: "I only became disillusioned with militancy in prison. I very much enjoyed my time as an active militant. I used to feel proud that I was fighting for my people." Apart from discovering that militancy was antithetical to the tenets of his religion, Shafqat's mental divorce from militancy was also prompted by two other factors. One has to do with the impact of his involvement on members of his family:

> *Before going across the LoC, I shared my intentions with my mother. She said I was making a mistake and that I would only ruin my life. But I did not listen to her. When I returned from training, she again tried to explain to me that I should move away from militancy. But I still did not listen. When I was arrested, my mother and younger brother came to visit me in Kot Bhalwal jail. I felt very shaken to see my mother's condition. She was sweating. Parents bring their children into this world hoping that they will give them joy and comfort. But my actions only forced her to visit me in a place where she did not deserve to be. I only met her for five minutes, but it felt like a long time. It was my first meeting with her after I was arrested. I decided then that I would never make the same mistake of joining militancy again.*

Guided by his own experience, Shafqat warns the next generation of prospective militants that the consequences of their decision to join militancy are inevitably felt by their loved ones: "Today, I would tell zealous youngsters that they should not even consider getting into militancy. You lift a gun for a few seconds, and you spend your whole life paying the price. Your mother, your sister, your relatives – everybody pays the price."

Another factor that contributed to Shafqat's psychological disengagement from militancy was his disgust over what he saw as 'special treatment' accorded to separatist leaders in prison:

> *One of the biggest reasons why I became disillusioned with militancy was that [militant leaders such as] Shabir Ahmad Shah, Zafar Akbar*

Bhat, and Yasin Malik ruled even in prison. All the money came to them. They were somehow exempt from wearing the prison uniform. They got to eat mutton ordered from outside. They were allowed to meet visitors on a daily basis while the rest of us had to wait for months between visits. They even used to make us beg for cigarettes.

Together, his religious education, the felt impact of his actions on his loved ones, and the special treatment of militant leaders in jail have brought Shafqat to a point where he can no longer justify militancy. But that does not mean Shafqat is in favour of the status quo: "I want azadi, I want freedom, if we get it through talks." The only way forward now, according to Shafqat, is to resolve problems politically: "There should be peace. Let everybody sit at the table, let us talk. Violence cannot be a solution." Shafqat says that while his training in Pakistan caused him to temporarily stray from the pro-azadi mindset, he re-embraced the objective in prison.

One finds that Shafqat's ideological reorientation revised his commitment to violence without erasing the desire for azadi that nearly three decades earlier pushed him into militancy, to begin with. Shafqat wants azadi, but is also clear that he will not support its violent pursuit: "Militancy ruins the person who lifts the gun, it ruins his kids, and it ruins his wife. It ruins many households at once." Shafqat opposes a militant campaign in the hypothetical scenario that militants exclusively target security forces without causing any collateral damage: "Even those who join the security forces are helpless. They cannot be punished for responding to their own specific circumstances."

Shafqat's account suggests that one's resolute commitment to azadi need not promote militancy so long as one is adamantly opposed to its violent pursuit. In other words, while physical disengagement is necessary for an active militant to become a former militant, remaining a former militant only requires ideological reorientation to the extent that one abandons the commitment to violence.

Apart from causing him to disavow a commitment to violence, Shafqat's ideological reorientation has also changed the targets of his

disaffection. The exclusive resentment towards the Indian state that guided his actions in the late 1980s has morphed into a more 'scattered' form, so to speak, of disillusionment directed simultaneously towards India, Pakistan, and domestic leaders – particularly separatists – within Jammu and Kashmir. If Shafqat initially considered Pakistan a reliable source of support, and even subscribed – albeit briefly – to its 'project' of merging Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan, he now views the irredentist neighbour in less positive terms:

> *Pakistan undermined the struggle for azadi by subjecting it to its own interests. The whole movement was corrupted by Pakistan's involvement. Pakistan's ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] wanted to absorb Jammu and Kashmir. But I believe the Indian- and Pakistan-administered parts of Kashmir both belong to us. We neither want India, nor Pakistan. We want a free Kashmir.*

Shafqat also holds an unfavourable opinion of the Valley's separatist leadership. He views separatist leaders, collectively, as an opportunistic lot, conveniently placed between India and Pakistan's corrupting tendencies: "When India's bastards meet Pakistan's bastards, then absolutely obnoxious bastards like these [separatist leaders] are born." Shafqat believes the Valley's separatist leaders are "double agents," simultaneously on the payrolls of the Indian and Pakistani states. He likens the Hurriyat Conference's activities to those of a shop, and explains how he perceives its workings:

> *Hurriyat's shop opens when all other shops in Kashmir are forced to shut down. When the market at Lal Chowk closes because of a hartal [shutdown strike], then Hurriyat's shop opens for business. Hurriyat leaders create unrest by sending paid stone pelters out to provoke security forces. Security forces then respond by making arrests and sometimes even injuring or killing civilians. Such incidents in turn give separatist leaders reason to create additional unrest. Ultimately, Indian agencies are forced to pacify separatist leaders by giving them monetary inducements. This is how Hurriyat's shop is run.*

Implicit in Shafqat's overview of Hurriyat's business model is the notion that India and Pakistan reluctantly accept the Hurriyat leadership despite the fact that it deprives each country of its favoured outcome. Although Pakistan knows that Hurriyat leaders will not follow through on their secessionist rhetoric and that any unrest will fizzle out before sufficiently disturbing the status quo, Islamabad is satisfied with the upside of investing in an imperfect proxy: that separatist leaders will take Pakistan's name while raising Kashmir's profile internationally. Though less apparent, India also has a strong interest in tolerating Hurriyat leaders despite the fact that they foment separatist sentiment and continually incite anti-India activities. Shafqat distinguishes "true separatists" like himself from what he refers to as "so-called separatists" represented by the Hurriyat Conference and other non-Hurriyat leaders like Yasin Malik. So long as the separatist space is monopolised by individuals who only pretend to be committed to any form of secession, true separatists in the Valley are deprived of a voice. "If things stay this way," says Shafqat, "azadi is impossible." That sections of the Indian state recognise the benefits of investing in a band of professedly separatist leaders is acknowledged by A.S. Dulat, former head of India's Intelligence Bureau:

> *Using money to win people over is perhaps the most effective tool at the disposal of intelligence officers not just in Kashmir, and not just all over the subcontinent, but all over the world. Most agents are paid agents. If in Kashmir, for instance, you find someone who is working for the ISI, you just offer a lot more money than it does. Perhaps he will be afraid of getting killed by the ISI but at the very least you have neutralised him. Corrupting a person by giving him money is not only a lot more ethical than killing him, but a lot smarter in the long run. And no one has yet come up with a better way of dealing with Kashmir.*[11]

Shafqat generally views the separatist leadership as a collection of "frauds" and questions the earnestness of its constituent leaders. "Why," asks Shafqat, "did Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik have to go abroad to find wives? If they cared so much about the people they claim to represent, could they not have married the widow, sister, or daughter of a

Kashmiri martyr?" Shafqat also wonders how Shabir Ahmad Shah was able to emerge so wealthy from a long stint in jail: "I spent more than eight years in prison and consequently struggle to get by. Shabir Ahmad Shah spent a longer time in prison and has somehow managed to build himself a 5-star hotel in Pahalgam. How can he be deprived of income for so many years and still have so much money? Why doesn't he tell us where he got it?" Shafqat also questions the integrity of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, arguably the most revered separatist leader in the Valley:

> *When Mahatma Gandhi sought independence from Britain, his first step was to boycott British goods. He encouraged his supporters to wear indigenous clothes and led by example. Our leaders here are busy feeding off the entity they claim to oppose. Geelani Sahib and Mirwaiz Sahib have at least 10 Personal Security Officers [PSOs] guarding their homes at all times. How can you demand azadi from India and then also allow the Indian government to secure your house? [...] When Geelani Sahib feels ill in winters, he heads straight to Delhi. When it is cold here, you can be sure to find him at his Malviya Nagar residence in Delhi [...] Men like Geelani have made a living selling our blood, our youth, and our livelihoods. But nobody in Geelani Sahib's family has been martyred [...] Not so long ago, Geelani Sahib was a member of the legislative assembly, and kept busy contesting elections. Tell me, where was his commitment to azadi then?*

Shafqat accuses separatist leaders of exploiting the sacrifices of individuals who have more sincerely devoted themselves to the struggle for azadi: "These [separatist leaders] eat out of gold plates. But the people who made Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Yasin Malik, and Shabir Ahmad Shah heroes are suffering. These men are leaders today only because militants like myself struggled selflessly." Today, after experiencing considerable ideological reorientation, Shafqat exhibits what one may reasonably term 'omnidirectional disaffection'. He resents both the Indian and Pakistani states, as well as the separatist leaders he says are 'betraying' Kashmir.

Case 2: When psychological disengagement does not readily translate into leaving

Fawad joined JKLF in 1992, when he was in his early teens.[12] Though his decision was guided in part by the stories of young men who had returned to the Valley after training across the LoC, Fawad admits that he was blindly following the prevailing trend: "Although we were young and didn't have a very good understanding of what it meant to get into this line, there was a pro-azadi wave. Everybody wanted to become a militant." Unlike those who crossed the LoC to obtain training in camps run by the ISI, Fawad secured his training locally in Srinagar. "Since many homes in the city were vacated by Kashmiri Pandits who fled when violence erupted," explains Fawad, "these empty homes were used to train militants locally." Fawad was active with JKLF from 1992 until 1996. During this period, he operated exclusively within Srinagar, mostly participating in "action" against security forces.

However, it did not take long for Fawad's interest in militancy to wane: "I liked [militancy] initially. I had a gun in hand and things were exciting. But then I stopped enjoying it. I had left school. I had left my studies." Despite his desire to leave militancy relatively early on, Fawad says it was practically impossible:

> *There were many boys who wanted to leave. But they couldn't. If you left, you'd likely be killed – either by the army, or by militants [...] I thought of leaving, but wasn't able to. If I left, other members of JKLF would have found and killed me. Once you get involved in this, you have to think fifty times before leaving."*

While the process of Fawad's psychological disengagement had already begun unraveling, he did not begin to physically disengage until 1996, when the Army apprehended him. Fawad says that military personnel picked him up from his home, tortured him, and released him after four days of detention. Following his release, Fawad went to Jammu, where he spent a year working as a painter before returning to Srinagar. Although

Fawad claims he had not been actively involved in militancy since his brief detention, security forces kept visiting his home to enquire into his activities. To put an end to this harassment, says Fawad, he formally surrendered to the Jammu and Kashmir Police. The police in turn encouraged him to join the Special Operations Group (SOG), its dedicated anti-insurgency unit. Fawad thus began working with the SOG, drawing a monthly salary of INR 1,500 for his participation in police-led encounters against militant groups, particularly in rural areas surrounding Srinagar. Fawad's job with the SOG was cut short after roughly six months, when he was arrested for what he calls a "misunderstanding":

> *When I returned to Srinagar from Jammu – before joining the SOG – I facilitated the surrender of another militant called Niyaz. He was with HM. When he surrendered, the army gave him a pistol to protect himself against members of his group who might have sought to target him as punishment for surrendering. The army gave him this gun unofficially, without any authorisation letter [...] It turns out, that fool [Niyaz] subsequently used the same 9mm pistol to extort money from a shopkeeper. When the police arrested Niyaz, he told them that I had given him the weapon. This was obviously untrue. He got it from the army. But the army denied giving him the weapon, saying it wasn't their pistol. And so I was arrested.*

Fawad would spend the next two years in prison in Hiranagar District. Although it is fair to say that Fawad's psychological disengagement began while he was an active militant, and that his capture and brief detention in 1996 initiated his physical disengagement, constant visits by the security forces and a stint with the SOG made it difficult for him to properly extricate himself from the world of militancy. It was only through his arrest in 1998 that he was able to fully process the implications of his involvement in militancy and to more significantly experience ideological reorientation. Today, Fawad says he is no longer interested in azadi: "I don't want azadi. I'm done with this whole azadi business. Yes, I wanted it. But not anymore. I've seen what it's all about. Besides, I don't need azadi

anymore. Azadi from what? From whom? I am no longer anybody's puppet." Fawad explains the difference between himself and fellow Kashmiris who continue to crave a change in the status quo: "For most Kashmiris who view the struggle from a distance, it all looks very nice. But once a person gets involved and sees what this life looks like on the inside, it is a very different picture. A much uglier one." Further probing, however, reveals that Fawad remains conflicted when it comes to azadi. He admits that he wanted azadi and that a complete disillusionment with the militant campaign through which it was sought has caused him to lose faith in the project's viability: "I did not lose interest in azadi. I was forced to set my interest aside." Unlike Shafqat, who remains committed to a political solution, Fawad struggles to de-link the ends from the means. Fawad became disillusioned with militancy and sees no other way in which azadi can be achieved.

Today, Fawad works for a transportation company, driving tourists between Srinagar and Jammu. Since the tourist season in the state is relatively short, he is unable to get driving assignments throughout the year. Yet, he says, the job allows him to meet his basic needs. Fawad believes his ability to achieve success is limited by the government's lack of interest in supporting former militants:

> *The government's rehabilitation schemes are not properly implemented [..] And if you want to start your own business, it is practically impossible to get a loan. I know people who applied for a loan four years ago and are still waiting. There are 500 formalities. Do this, then do that. It never ends. You only get a loan if you do not need one. This means the government is not making any effort to help us [...] What, are we [former] militants not human beings? If a person has made changes and tried to return to a normal life, should he not be confronted with less obstacles?*

Fawad says most former militants in the state are struggling: "Some former militants are driving auto rickshaws to make money. Others are engaged in physical labour. One day you get work, then for eight days you

don't. You won't find any with their own businesses. Most don't have much at all." While the lack of economic opportunities within the state might normally encourage the more enterprising among former militants to seek employment overseas, Fawad says the government prevents them from emigrating: "If you are a former militant, you do not get a passport. It's that simple. Only separatist leaders like Yasin Malik get passports. [The Indian government] only gives passports to those who are responsible for ruining the entire system."

Like Shafqat, Fawad is no fan of the separatist leadership: "I consider all of them to be thieves." According to Fawad, separatist leaders have made a living exploiting the state's youth:

> *[Syed Ali Shah] Geelani has 1000-2000 boys. He encourages them to throw stones at the security forces each time there is a hartal. But the separatist leaders are not troubled when these young boys are caught. Yasin Malik does not have to pay a price for their arrest, nor does Geelani Sahib. It is the boy who pays the price for his actions. The boy's family pays the price. And these youngsters generally come from poor families [...] Geelani Sahib himself watches television in an air-conditioned room. The most he has to do is swap channels and offer instructions without getting out of bed.*

Fawad has equally little affection for Pakistan, at whose behest Geelani has sought to mobilise young Kashmiris. As Fawad sees it, Pakistan has no right to claim Jammu and Kashmir when it has done little to develop those parts of Kashmir it administers: "Pakistan doesn't have enough to feed its own people. What could it possibly offer us? Look at Azad Kashmir. It is the poorest part of the country. What has Pakistan done for them? Nothing. When we see Azad Kashmir on television, we can't help but feel bad."

While Fawad has no love for India, he acknowledges that the Indian state could have extended him less clemency:

> *Look, if we had raised arms against Pakistan the way we did against India, it would have skinned us alive in some public square. I have*

seen that somewhere, at some place, India does have compassion. Okay, I was locked up for two years. But they let me go. Pakistan would not have done the same. It would have finished us off. I have to admit I admire this about India.

Evidently, Fawad's ideological reorientation has caused him to shun militancy and practically rendered inert his desire for azadi. It has also caused him to become disaffected towards Pakistan and its separatist proxies in Jammu and Kashmir, parties that promised much and delivered little. While the Indian state earns some points for punishing Fawad less than he might have expected, he rates New Delhi poorly in terms of its efforts to facilitate the rehabilitation of former militants—some 27,000 by his estimate. On the whole, Fawad – much like Shafqat – exhibits omnidirectional disaffection towards India, Pakistan, and Kashmir's separatist leaders.

Case 3: When physical disengagement is unaccompanied by ideological reorientation

In 1996, Mushtaq was a student at the D.A.V. Institute in Srinagar's Jawahar Nagar area.[13] According to Mushtaq, a fellow student was "somewhat involved" in militancy, motivating people to join the ranks of militants in the Valley in his capacity as an overground worker. Influenced by this individual, Mushtaq joined Harkat-ul Mujahideen, leaving his studies when he was only in 8th class. He would spend the first few months of his training in Srinagar, before crossing the LoC: "Towards the end of 1996, I went across the LoC along with some 25 other boys. We received shoes, and lots of clothes. I spent approximately four to five months training at a single location in Sheikhupura [Punjab Province]. Harkat had a training camp there." When Mushtaq returned to Indian-administered Kashmir, he operated as an active militant in Ganderbal: "My role was essentially to carry out attacks on security forces and to rid Kashmir of their presence." Although Mushtaq ended his formal schooling early, he says his time as a militant was also educative: "Spending time as a militant was probably good for me. I learnt a great deal at an early age, I had the

opportunity to meet all sorts of people – both good people and bad ones." Despite being part of an unequivocally pro-Pakistan outfit, Mushtaq claims he was not working for Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, and that azadi was only a prerequisite for his larger objective:

> *I was influenced by my commander, Ghaznavi Sahib, who was not motivated by azadi. He was more interested in bringing Nizam-e-Mustafa [Islamic Law] to Kashmir. We trained in Pakistan but our thinking was different. Those who trained us wanted us to work towards Kashmir's merger with Pakistan, but my commander was of a different mind. Of course, we first needed to free Kashmir from India to implement the system we sought, but azadi was never the goal. I was not fighting for azadi.*

Mushtaq thus attributes the fact that his commitment to militancy was primarily driven by religious duty when most militants in his cohort were guided by a want for azadi, or by the pro-Pakistan ideology received during training, to the influence of his commander.

Mushtaq's time as an active militant was cut short in 1997, when he was arrested near Srinagar's Soura area, two days after returning from Ganderbal:

> *Harkat had sent me to Srinagar so some informant must have told the security forces that I was there. The Special Task Force (STF) picked me up when I was out in the evening. I was first taken to the Cargo Interrogation Center, where I was held in detention for 22 days. They then shifted me to Parimpora Police Station. I stayed there for roughly two-and-a-half months until one member of the STF accepted INR 20,000 to let me go.*

Four months after his release, Mushtaq was again picked up by members of the security forces. He was arrested under the Public Safety Act (PSA) and spent three years in Kot Bhalwal jail before spending another year in Srinagar's Central Jail. Mushtaq says he was tortured in prison:

> *I was interrogated nine times. My toenails were pulled out. All my teeth were broken. They would attach wires to my tongue and my foot*

and then electrocute me. But when one embarks on such a struggle, these things must be confronted. One knows that the path of militancy involves bullets, torture, and abuse. But these things have to be accepted when one is out to serve Allah's cause.

Mushtaq's arrest and time in prison represented an involuntary but relatively straightforward process of disengagement from militancy. Since his release from jail in 2002, he has had no involvement in militancy: "My record has been clean."

Interestingly, Mushtaq has experienced little ideological reorientation over the years. He has simply come to recognise that the militant movement he partook in did not converge – in terms of its objectives – with his understanding of jihad. Today, Mushtaq believes the militant struggle he left behind was not legitimate: "If we think the struggle for Kashmir's azadi was jihad, that isn't true. It was not jihad. It was terrorism. I would call it terrorism because people fought it for their own selfish interests. Young fighters were misguided and they were used." Mushtaq places considerable emphasis on the motivation behind the fight. Although he thinks it permissible to achieve azadi en route to a more 'legitimate' end, he does not believe azadi should be sought:

If we fight, it must be for Allah's writ. We cannot fight for freedom. Here, people have been fighting for azadi. This is not right. Granted, every community raises its voice for freedom, but such efforts cannot be termed jihad. The Quran does not consider this jihad. Jihad is that struggle which is waged for Allah. Azadi is fine, but it must lead to the ultimate objective.

Mushtaq suggests his ideological dataset has been intact since he was an active militant and that he was aware then of the meaning of jihad and how it should be waged: "What I lack in worldly education, I possess in religious training. As a child, I studied the Quran and Hadith [Prophetic traditions] properly. I have always been attracted to religious subjects. When I raised the gun, it was to help further Allah's religion."

Insofar as his commitment to militancy is concerned, Mushtaq says he does not support a militant pursuit of azadi for the sake of it, but that he is willing to support and even participate in a violent campaign that comports with his vision of jihad: "I have not lost interest in militancy per se. I am ready to support a violent path if it is waged for Islam. But I won't lift a gun if freedom is the end goal."

Although Mushtaq's interest in azadi is clearly subordinated to what he considers his religious duty, there is little doubt that – at some level – he longs for azadi, too. That Mushtaq is emotionally invested in the pursuit of azadi is most apparent when he expresses his frustration with the separatist leadership:

> *Our leaders have betrayed us time after time. They are corrupt. They are India's bootlickers [...] We had mass agitations in 2008 and in 2010. People were on the streets for months. Everyone was. Even India was saying that Kashmir was close to freedom. Kashmir would have been free if it weren't for Geelani Sahib. He came up with all sorts of excuses to end the uprising – "Children are unable to study, the crops are being ruined, people need to work." Why did it take him so many months to realise that people's futures were at stake and that people were sacrificing their studies and their livelihoods? He ended the agitation.*

Mushtaq is convinced that Geelani accepted financial inducements to end the agitations: "He definitely accepted money. There is no doubt in my mind. I am willing to stand in the middle of Lal Chowk and tell everybody he did so. These [separatist] leaders have been corrupt from the very beginning," says Mushtaq. "There was never a time when they did good work." But Mushtaq finds consolation in his conviction that Geelani, Mirwaiz Farooq, and other leaders will not get away with their betrayal of Kashmiris: "They will have to answer for their sins. Here, and also in the hereafter. A time will come when they will have to pay a price. Their tricks will not go on forever." Mushtaq believes that as awareness of the separatists' "insincerity" spreads, the Indian state will find it harder to hold

on to the Valley: "The leaders here are thieves, but we haven't understood that. The day our brothers [fellow Kashmiris] get it, India will have to leave Kashmir." Mushtaq's suggestion is simple and echoes a similar point made by Shafqat: no alteration of the status quo can be achieved so long as people follow separatist leaders who claim to represent the cause for azadi but are really benefiting (in Mushtaq's view, monetarily) from continuation of the current arrangement.

Mushtaq's dislike for Kashmir's separatist leaders coexists with his opposition to the Indian and Pakistani states:

> *Pakistan misguided us. When we were there training, we were told that we should carry out militant attacks and that they would follow behind us. That was all nonsense. Pakistan is our biggest enemy. If India is our enemy, Pakistan is an even bigger enemy. I don't want to join Pakistan and I don't want to join India. Both countries have tried to make us their puppets.*

Mushtaq thus shares the omnidirectional disaffection exhibited by many of his fellow former militants. In his particular case, however, the perceived absence of allies only reinforces his tendency to seek refuge in a religious cause: "The Taliban established Sharia in the Afghan provinces it took control of in the mid 1990s. That is the kind of system we want here in Kashmir."

While Mushtaq – who supports himself, his wife, and two young children, by working seasonally as a wedding photographer – experienced physical disengagement in a clean-cut linear fashion, one cannot say he has disengaged psychologically. He is not ideologically committed to a campaign characterised primarily by secessionist objectives, but never was. Ideologically, it is fair to say that he is where he was when he joined militancy in 1996. He remains stubbornly committed to the pursuit of Nizam-e-Mustafa, even by violent means. He has simply given up the illusion that the militant struggle in Kashmir converged with his religious goals. To the extent that Kashmir's present militant landscape evolves to grant access to global jihadist groups and ideologies, a former militant with

Mushtaq's ideological wiring could conceivably channel his unchecked disaffection towards such imports.

Case 4: When psychological disengagement prompts voluntary physical disengagement and continued ideological reorientation

Like many other young men in the Valley, Bilal was actively involved in MUF's electoral campaign as a 19-year-old in 1987.[14] "Established political players at the time never did anything for ordinary Kashmiris," says Bilal, "so we enthusiastically supported MUF in the hope that things would change." When MUF lost, Bilal came to view militancy as the appropriate next step. Fully committed to azadi, Bilal joined militancy as a member of JKLF's student wing, the Jammu and Kashmir Students Liberation Front (SLF). "There was no difference between SLF and JKLF," says Bilal. "We used them interchangeably." Although Bilal made a brief two-day trip across the LoC in 1989, he did not obtain formal militant training. Bilal remained with SLF for a short while, serving as an overground worker. Not long after, he shifted allegiance to Jihad Force, another militant group active in the Valley. This move was prompted by JKLF's diminishing resources, but also by what Bilal considered the 'appealing' personality of a senior Jihad Force operative:

> *Which groups were and weren't well positioned to work towards azadi became clear very early on. JKLF did not have enough guns so I looked around to see which outfit could do most for the Kashmiri people. That is how I moved to Jihad Force [...] The group also had a very brave leader who mostly operated in Bandipora. His name was Abdul Khaliq Ghanai but he went by Jamal Afghani.*

Bilal would become Jihad Force's district president for Budgam, serving primarily in an organisational capacity:

> *I was an overground worker throughout. My role involved motivating young boys, and sending them across the LoC to Pakistan for training. I did not fight myself but I was often involved in arranging*

> *operations. I would communicate with the individuals involved in attacks, telling them which areas to target and when. I would receive the instructions from Jamal Afghani and then pass them on. Most of this communication occurred through human couriers.*

While most of this work was confined to Budgam, Bilal also occasionally operated in other districts. Though Bilal claims he was fully committed to militancy for the first two years, he began to experience psychological disengagement as the struggle for azadi lost its focus and discipline. Prompting Bilal's disillusionment was Pakistan's disproportionate influence on the campaign: "When the objective of militancy changed from azadi to Ilhaq-e-Pakistan, I began to wonder what was going on. I remained firmly committed to azadi, but all efforts around me were geared towards making [Indian-administered Kashmir] a part of Pakistan. One group after the other emerged to support this Pakistani cause." Bilal says that individuals tempted by the prospect of attracting Pakistani funds were to be found even within his own group: "A senior leader of Jihad Force left the group to start another outfit. He then got money from Pakistan." Pakistan's growing influence compelled Bilal to retreat. Despite receiving warnings and threats from fellow operatives within Jihad Force, Bilal made a voluntary decision to disengage physically in 1991. Bilal has not participated in any militant activity since then, and has also managed to evade legal repercussions for his involvement with Jihad Force: "I never got involved again, I didn't tell any agency that I was a militant, and I didn't go to jail. My record is basically clean."

In the years after leaving militancy, Bilal continued to experience ideological reorientation. One factor causing him to become increasingly disillusioned with militancy was the emerging *ikhwan* culture:

> *When the intelligence war between Indian and Pakistani agencies heated up, the Indian government gave militants monetary incentives to surrender. It then organised them as a renegade force [Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen] and used them to target active militants. Members of the ikhwan were instructed to kill militants and would then be rewarded for it.*

Bilal says that the ikhwan generally turned the militant landscape into a business venture: "Ikhwanis started to destroy the forest, selling trees and making money. When this became evidently lucrative, active militants also got involved in these activities. They ruined the forests and ruined Kashmir in the process." The second factor prompting Bilal's continued psychological disengagement post-militancy was what he viewed as the complete loss of control over militants: "Once this culture of personal gain set in, it was impossible to maintain discipline. If ikhwanis were out of control, so were militants. Nobody could be controlled." What upset Bilal most was the fact that militants often targeted ordinary Kashmiris:

> *In the name of azadi, militants looted shops, and also kidnapped and extorted people. Looking at it now, I can think of several militants who didn't have a second set of pyjamas then and now you can find them living in big homes. This all happened because they were willing to misuse the gun. Kashmiri people became the real victims.*

Today, Bilal – who makes a living driving people in his van – still wants azadi but only if it can be achieved peacefully: "If we can get azadi on the table, politically, then it is fine. I don't want azadi if it involves cutting people's throats." Bilal acknowledges that his views have evolved and that he was of a different mind when he joined militancy in the late 1980s:

> *We were misled. Everyone held a gun back then, without even the most basic understanding of why they were holding it. Those motivating us to join the movement told us that we were kept from saying our prayers. But that wasn't true. Nobody ever stopped me from going out to pray. Before militancy began I could go out whenever I wanted. Now many people feel unsafe going out in the evenings. What kind of azadi is this?*

Sitting beside Srinagar's Shankaracharya Temple, Bilal says he would like to see Kashmir become peaceful so that it can attract tourists as it once did: "I want normalcy to be restored. Many years ago hundreds of people would visit this temple each day. I want them to come again."

Bilal is no fan of the Valley's separatist leadership. Terming Syed Ali Shah Geelani an 'opportunist', Bilal claims he only left mainstream politics when it became clear to him that the business of separatism was more lucrative: "Geelani was in government. He was a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). But when militancy began he realised that much money could be made by becoming a separatist." As Bilal sees it, separatists make money by siphoning off funds intended for militants, and martyrs' families:

> *Initially, all funds for militancy used to come directly to militant commanders. Nowadays, it all comes to Hurriyat leaders like Geelani Sahib, Shabir Ahmad Shah, and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. These people receive funds intended for active militants in the Valley. If these separatists receive INR 100,000, however, they only hand out a small portion of this sum. During Eid, money is sent for the families of martyrs. Each family is supposed to receive INR 11,000 or so. Where exactly it comes from I do not know. But that the intended recipients do not get their full share, that I am sure of.*

Bilal has no doubt that the Valley's "so-called separatists" are co-opted by the Indian state:

> *Look, if I were to receive money from Pakistan, I would hide and maintain a low profile to avoid being caught by the Indian government and its security forces. India says these people receive money from Pakistan, and every newspaper says so too. But these separatists operate in the open. They run offices in well-known locations. If India believes these men are enemies and that they are responsible for killing people, why does India let them roam freely? And that too with so much respect. If a small person like me opposes the government, I am viewed as a terrorist. Why then are these Hurriyat leaders treated like VIPs?*

Bilal believes "separatism" as represented by Hurriyat leaders is a charade: "There is currently no real platform for azadi. This is all drama. It is a game." Although Bilal – whose initial psychological disengagement

prompted voluntary physical disengagement and continued ideological reorientation – exhibits disaffection towards Islamabad, New Delhi, and the Valley's separatist leadership, he does not appear bitter. He instead remains positively focused on continuing to correct course and improve the condition of ordinary Kashmiris: "I am fully aware that I made mistakes as a militant. I now want to redeem myself by contributing to the restoration of peace. I want to undo the damage we have caused to our people."

Case 5: When initial disengagement is followed by recidivism and renegadism

Caught in the wave of pro-azadi sentiment that was sweeping across the Valley, Zaffar joined militancy in 1990: "I was inspired by the initial batch of young Kashmiris who had become militants. I believed that [azadi] was our right and that it had to be pursued. I was determined to fight for the cause and that is why I chose to become a militant."[15] Zaffar joined Al-Jihad, crossed the LoC to train at militant camps in Gaddi Dupatta and Machis Factory, and returned to Indian-administered Kashmir in 1991. Although Zaffar suggests his trainers in Pakistan sought to convince recruits that it was in their interest to merge with Pakistan after seceding from India, Zaffar claims his view – that the Indian- and Pakistan-administered parts of Kashmir should join to form an independent state – was not altered during training. According to Zaffar, the militant landscape at the time was characterised by natural alliances between ideologically similar groups: "Al Umar and HM were the two groups that sought Kashmir's merger with Pakistan. JKLF and Al-Jihad were instead committed to azadi. [Al-Jihad militants] got along best with members of JKLF because we wanted the same thing. We did not want to stay with India and did not want to go to Pakistan either." Zaffar remained active with Al-Jihad for two years until 1993, when he was captured, along with three fellow operatives, in an army crackdown. He was briefly held at detention camps in Srinagar before spending the next three years in prison – two years at Kot Bhalwal Jail and some nine months in Kathua Jail. Following his release from Kathua Jail, Zaffar says he was re-arrested and

sent to Kot Bhalwal for another 45 days before he was permanently released.

Zaffar returned home after his release from prison. Before he could settle into his new environment, militant commanders from his former group would come to his house and pressure him to re-join. Succumbing to this pressure, Zaffar joined Al-Jihad but – realising he did not have a good chance of avoiding re-arrest – decided to leave after a few weeks. He returned his weapons to his commanders and told them that he had just been released from prison and could not afford to go to jail again. Zaffar returned home and began looking for a job. Not long after, members of the ikhwan came to his home, picked him up, and held him at a camp in Pampore for roughly a week. According to Zaffar, these ikhwanis said they had information he was actively involved in militancy again and asked him to join the ikhwan's anti-militant campaign. As Zaffar explains, the simultaneous pulls exerted by renegades on one hand, and former militant colleagues on the other made it difficult to leave the world of militancy behind:

> *Members of my former group, Al-Jihad, were also after me to re-join and these ikhwanis were also pressuring me to join them. Some HM militants also approached me and asked me why I had joined the ikhwanis despite the fact that I hadn't done so yet. What was I to do? My life was threatened either way. Members of my family were also not immune to these pressures. People from Al-Jihad would come home, as would members of the STF.*

Zaffar then decided to join the ikhwan: "I felt pressured to join and thought this would offer me some form of protection." As a new member of the ikhwan, Zaffar was sent to a camp in Jawaharnagar, where he was asked to join another 12 men in targeting active members of militant groups. Although ikhwanis fought alongside government security forces, Zaffar says they did not have any uniform and looked more like militants. According to Zaffar, he and his fellow ikhwanis were initially paid between INR 8,000 and INR 10,000 a month. Gradually, however, many ikhwanis –

including himself – were inducted as Special Police Officers (SPO) and paid a reduced monthly salary of INR 1,500. This monthly wage was supplemented with an attractive arrangement of incentive-based compensation: "Apart from their salaries, SPOs were promised a share of the bounty for killing militants. There were three reward bands – INR 50,000, INR 100,000, and INR 200,000 – depending on the targeted militant's status." Zaffar's stint as an ikhwani ended in 1997, when he was shot in the leg during an encounter with HM militants in Budgam District's Chadoora area. Following this incident, Zaffar underwent five surgeries over a span of three years as doctors tried to save his leg; in the end it had to be amputated. Despite his disability, Zaffar continued to serve as an informant from 2003 until 2009, using his network of (mostly ikhwani) contacts in the field to alert members of the police to the presence and movement of militants in different localities in the Valley.

Zaffar – who is married with three children –has not had any work since his role with the police ended in 2009: "I cannot engage in physical labour because I don't have a leg and I am not qualified to do any office work since I didn't study past the 8th class." Zaffar's wife works as a maid and makes anywhere between INR 2,000 and INR 3,000 a month: ""If it weren't for her, my children would starve. I would be nowhere." Zaffar accuses the government of engaging in a policy of "use and throw" towards militants who were compelled – in his case by a perceived need for protection – to switch sides: "Many other people joined the ikhwan to seek revenge for HM's killing of their relatives. The government exploited this fact and used us to crush militancy. Once militancy was defeated, they threw us away."

Informed by his own involuntary and protracted experience of physical disengagement, Zaffar believes it is difficult to leave militancy without external intervention: "Militancy is like a train that won't stop. Once you're on it, something needs to derail you. It is difficult to leave unless you are killed or arrested. When you have a gun in hand, it is difficult to make sense of things. But when you're disarmed and in jail, it is easier to see things clearly." His subsequent recidivism and SPO stint notwithstanding, Zaffar

claims he experienced a significant degree of ideological reorientation while in prison:

> *Half of the senior militant commanders turned out to be thieves. They sent us out to get killed and chose to surrender themselves. Even from my own group, Al-Jihad, senior commanders like Shabir Ahmad Shah and Sheikh Abdul Aziz did some deals with the government and managed to occupy comfortable roles. This was all beginning to happen while I was an active militant. But I was so zealous that I wasn't able to see any of this. Then when I went to jail, I gradually began to understand what was going on. I saw who had surrendered, what everybody was up to, and who was working with the government. I realised that many senior militants were busy protecting themselves while they threw people like me into the fire.*

Today, Zaffar's desire for azadi remains intact but he does not see any scenario in which he could condone its violent pursuit:

> *I want it but only through talks; not through violence. We need to do it at the table, and by staging peaceful protests. We want to do it without the loss of life [...] I would not support a violent campaign. I have suffered a lot because of militancy. I lost my leg, I squandered my youth, and I have more or less ruined the future of my children as well.*

Like the other former militants spoken to for this study, Zaffar condemns what he considers a corrupt separatist leadership: "All these leaders – Yasin Malik, Shabir Ahmad Shah, Naeem Ahmad Khan – have complexes all over the place, even in Lal Chowk. Look at Javed Ahmad Mir of JKLF. What property did he have before? And look at him now, look at all the property he owns today." Employing an analogy similar to the one Shafqat presented earlier, Zaffar likens the Hurriyat Conference's exploitation of militants to a shopkeeper's handling of his inventory:

> *Hurriyat is running a shop. While normal shops are stocked with rice, wheat, oil, and other supplies, Hurriyat's shop is stocked with men like us. Their shop's shelves are filled with young boys who are*

involved in militancy. Even the stone pelters who are active today are commodities in Hurriyat's shop. Hurriyat leaders sell us. As long as we continue to be sold, the shop will continue to flourish, the shop will remain nicely stocked. Once the supplies run out, the shop will cease to exist automatically.

"If you forced me to take up arms today," says Zaffar, "I would first target Hurriyat and only after that think of turning my attention towards India. First I would want to beat these guys up." Zaffar does not welcome the suggestion that by serving as an ikhwani, he is as guilty of "selling out" as the separatist leaders he views so negatively: "People will say that I am a traitor because I collaborated with the government, but they forget that these senior militant leaders were traitors much before that. They quietly surrendered behind closed doors while sending us out to fight." Zaffar's story shows that even when involuntary physical disengagement permits sufficient psychological disengagement (as Zaffar experienced in prison), an individual can easily slide back into a violent life. Circumstances – in this case characterised by the simultaneous pressures imposed by militants and renegades – may make it difficult to leave militancy and instead prompt recidivism and a switching of sides. Indeed, full and permanent physical disengagement for Zaffar did not occur until he lost his limb and mobility. Insofar as Zaffar's ideological reorientation is concerned, it is fair to say he joins Shafqat, Fawad, and other former militants in exhibiting omnidirectional disaffection: he was never a fan of Islamabad, remains wishful of azadi from Indian rule and resentful of his "exploitation" by Indian security forces, and loathes the Valley's separatist leadership.

Case 6: When family pressures accelerate ideological reorientation, post-disengagement

Having dropped out of school in 6th class, Irfan was working in a shop when he decided to join militancy as a 17-year-old in 1992.[16] Young JKLF operatives from his locality of Habba Kadal had crossed the LoC and

returned to attract new recruits to the movement. Like Fawad, Irfan trained locally at a house abandoned by Pandit emigrants, and remained involved in militancy for four years. Irfan suggests his initial commitment to militancy was primarily driven by a desire for azadi: "I was young and believed that the struggle for azadi would continue the way it was when I joined." As he explains, however, three factors combined to prompt his psychological (and subsequently physical) disengagement from the movement. The first factor was the destructive antagonism that ensued between his group, JKLF, and rival militant outfit HM: "Fighting between groups was common. Members of one outfit would target people just because they belonged to another. Sometimes, JKLF members would be shot if they went to areas under HM influence. This made me dislike militancy." If inter-group rivalry caused him to consider leaving, Irfan's disillusionment was also guided by the impact ikhwanis had on the movement. After the STF was formed, says Irfan, many militants left their respective groups to become ikhwanis: "When militants became ikhwanis, it became very difficult to operate without fear. You couldn't tell if a fellow militant was a militant or an informant. Nobody could be trusted and everyone had a gun." According to Irfan, once the ikhwan culture was established, militancy lost its discipline: "Everybody was trying to make money. They would go to people and demand money and nobody could stop them. I didn't do this. I could have but I thought it was wrong." While Irfan did not need any further encouragement to leave, a decisive incident in 1996 triggered his physical disengagement:

> *A woman came to our group and asked for INR 2000, saying that her son – a JKLF member – was locked up and that she did not have any money. When the woman asked for money, one of the JKLF men who was there – we used to call him Bombai – slapped the woman. This woman was old enough to be our mother. I intervened and told Bombai to leave her alone.*

When Irfan asked Bombai why he hit her, Bombai took another operative's gun and shot Irfan in the leg. Despite his injury, members of his

group did not even bother to help him. "I had had enough," he says. "It made me hate militancy. It made me hate JKLF." Irfan captures the reasons for his physical disengagement using a simple analogy: "When something decays and becomes rusty, it is difficult to like it and best to throw it away."

Following his shooting and subsequent recovery, Irfan's father convinced him to go to Assam and work at his cousin's shop. While, as he claims, Irfan never participated in militancy again, he also did not immediately sever ties with active JKLF operatives. Irfan would stay in Assam for a little over a year, occasionally visiting family in Srinagar. During one such visit home, Irfan agreed to keep two rifles for a JKLF commander he was still in contact with. Irfan says he made the mistake of telling another person about the fact that he was storing the weapons; this individual turned out to be an informant. Soon after, his father was picked up by security forces and interrogated about Irfan's whereabouts over the course of a four-month-long detention in Budgam. Irfan was subsequently found and arrested in 1997. He spent six months in Srinagar Central Jail before being transferred to Kathua Jail in the Jammu region, where he would stay for another three years.

Although Irfan briefly considered joining Hurriyat following his release from prison, his parents strongly opposed the idea:

> *When I was released from prison, my mother and father explained to me that I had ruined my life. I had gone to jail, and my brother had been tortured. My two sisters – who were yet to get married – had spent years sleeping at our neighbours' homes. My family had endured years of visits by the security forces. My parents told me what I was doing was wrong and that I might as well poison them if I wanted to continue down this ro*ad.

Irfan took his parents' advice, got married, and has since worked at a private company as a clerk. Today, Irfan no longer supports militancy and has no interest in azadi: "I am doing a different kind of jihad, a very important jihad. I love my wife and children and that's it. I get up in the morning and go to work. I return in the evening and spend time with my

family. Everything I do, I do for them." Unlike other former militants whose stories are told in this study, Irfan's focus on family has made him relatively apolitical. He does not exhibit any pronounced disaffection towards Kashmir's disputing parties and claims not to concern himself with the activities of separatist leaders: "I don't think about Hurriyat at all. Nothing good, and nothing bad."

Evidently, Irfan's disillusionment with militancy – prompted by inter-group rivalry, militant indiscipline, and his shooting by a fellow JKLF operative – was completed to a considerable degree when he left the militant movement in 1996. If Irfan harboured any lingering interest in the pursuit of azadi following his release from prison—as suggested by his willingness to consider joining the Hurriyat Conference—the pressures of family and its attendant responsibilities ensured that all his political commitments would soon fall by the wayside.

CONCLUSION

In its management of militancy and popular discontent, the Indian state might benefit from acknowledging, and responding to three interrelated findings that emerge from the narratives presented above.

Omnidirectional Disaffection

The former militants interviewed in this study show that their disaffection does not have a zero-sum character. It is true that their experiences during and after militancy caused five out of the six sampled former militants to develop unfavourable attitudes towards Pakistan and the Valley's separatist leadership. They blame Pakistan for derailing what started off as a struggle for azadi, and accuse separatist leaders of pretending to represent the Kashmiri people while serving only themselves and – in the process – New Delhi. Importantly, however, disaffection towards Islamabad and the separatist leadership has not displaced the negative views respondents hold towards India. Rather, their growing dislike for avowedly anti-India entities has only supplemented their enduring

antipathy to the Indian state. Rather than drawing comfort from the fact that they no longer represent the exclusive target of resentment, policymakers in New Delhi must recognise the dangers of unchecked omnidirectional disaffection.

One way in which omnidirectional disaffection among Kashmiris could conceivably express itself in the future is by promoting affinity for transnational jihadist groups. While ISIS and Al-Qaeda have thus far failed to find a significant following in the Valley, the societal landscape could evolve to become more permeable to their ideologies. The emergence of such a scenario will require the continued development of two trends – both of which already appear underway to differing degrees.

The first is the gradual breakdown of the elite-centric arrangement that has prevailed in the Valley since the early 1990s. While they acknowledge that the majority of Kashmiris do not yet share their negative attitudes towards the Hurriyat Conference, Shafqat and Zaffar claim that support for separatist leaders is on the decline: their "influence is simply not what it used to be. When they call for boycotts, less and less people respond. People are slowly telling them that they are no longer with them."[17] The fact that separatist leaders retain the capacity to orchestrate disruptive street noise may veil the simultaneous possibility that a growing proportion of Kashmiris are losing faith in their sincerity and effectiveness and, by extension, in the viability of the regionally-confined objectives they claim to promote. Indeed, the legitimacy of separatist leaders could erode more quickly once a critical mass begins to question their relevance, choosing instead to entertain messengers of alternative aspirations.

A development that could catalyse the breakdown of separatist legitimacy, and thus facilitate the influx of foreign ideologies, is the successful exploitation of the Internet to promote narratives beyond those currently in vogue. In this regard, recently killed HM commander Burhan Wani and his associates in South Kashmir set an important precedent by publicising and glamorising their militant activity on social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp. Needless to say, the

effective dissemination of online content by Wani and his comrades was made possible because of steadily increasing Internet penetration in the state. While roughly 3 percent of Jammu and Kashmir's population had ready access to the Internet in 2011, government figures estimate more than 27 percent of the state's residents are Internet users today.[18] Coupled with the demonstrated ability of young, tech-savvy, and violence-prone individuals to leverage the power of social media, growing access to online content could serve to increase the menu of pull factors drawing potential recruits toward violent campaigns of varying ideological stripes. While Wani and his comrades sported HM fatigues, copycats might apply their skills toward promoting other organisations and objectives, including those associated with the global jihadist movement.

Together, effective exploitation of the Internet by violence-prone entrepreneurs, continued Internet penetration, a gradual breakdown of traditional power structures, and unchecked omnidirectional disaffection could thus flip the page onto a new chapter of violence that is at once less predictable, less organised, and more difficult to police through familiar and well-rehearsed methods.

Governmental Myopia

That the Indian state is interested in curbing militant violence without addressing underlying problems of disaffection is clear from the tenor of its remunerative rehabilitation schemes. The 2004 version of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir's rehabilitation policy, for example, opens with the following objective: "[...] to offer facility to those terrorists who undergo a change of heart and eschew the path of violence and who also accept the integrity of India and [the] Indian Constitution."[19] Ideological reorientation to the degree that includes "a change of heart" and a willingness to "eschew the path of violence" is certainly a reasonable expectation. While it may have taken some time to come about following their physical disengagement, a firm renunciation of violence is expressed by five of the six respondents in this study. However, the expectation that

'surrendering' militants will also have experienced sufficient ideological reorientation to permit an endorsement of the Indian Constitution is misplaced. Apart from Irfan, who remains relatively apolitical, all of the respondents in this study – including those who 'surrendered' and fought alongside Indian security forces – continue to cling to the political ideologies that prompted their involvement in militancy many years ago. Four respondents remain wedded to the idea of azadi from Indian rule, while the fifth favours implementation of Nizam-e-Mustafa. By giving the impression that all 'surrendering' militants "accept the integrity of India," the rehabilitation policy mischaracterises their states of mind. Our respondents clearly show that pro-India sentiment is not required for a militant to disengage and embrace a normal life, and that positive feelings towards India – if at all they emerge – may be the final milestone on the long road of ideological reorientation. The language of the rehabilitation policy allows the Indian state to prematurely declare "mission accomplished," and to shirk any responsibility of investing the effort required to effect further ideological reorientation. That New Delhi is more interested in achieving quick rather than long-term successes is also clear from its liberal use of the word 'surrender' in the text of the 2004 rehabilitation scheme. A form of the word appears 43 times in the nine-page document, making it impossible for disillusioned militants to renounce violence without also submitting to India's authority. This study's interviewees suggest that New Delhi's poor choice of semantics also has practical implications, deterring would-be candidates who do not want to be stigmatised for adopting the 'surrendered' prefix. If the Indian state is at all serious about addressing the disaffection that pushed former militants into combat years ago, and preventing the next generation of young Kashmiris from toeing their line, it must recognise each instance of disengagement not as a victory, but as an opportunity to initiate sustained engagement.

If the government's rehabilitation policies are poorly conceptualised, they have also been plagued by problems of implementation. Administrative malaise, systemic disinterest in engaging with individuals

who have already disengaged, and diffusion of responsibility between the centre and the state have combined to ensure a significant gap between what is promised and what is delivered on the ground.[20]

Former Militants as Partners

While some individuals will be incapable of reform and remain prone to recidivism, New Delhi must recognise that many former militants represent a potential force for good. Apart from Mushtaq, all individuals interviewed in this study are adamantly opposed to violence, even in pursuit of the objectives they hold most dear. In the coming years, the Indian state will be faced with the unenviable task of keeping the Valley's youth bulge (more than 70 percent of its population is below the age of 35) from becoming a demographic bomb (an estimated 48 percent of Kashmiris between the ages of 18 and 30 are unemployed).[21] Even if it makes right choices across the board, New Delhi will likely contend with a significant pool of young men eager to give their anti-India ideologies violent expression. To help neutralise this threat, Indian policymakers ought to positively engage with, and give voice to, former militants who once chose a violent path and emerged with a clear message of caution: bad decisions, even if made early, can impose great and lasting costs on oneself, one's family, and even on the very community one set out to serve. Rather than co-opting them and turning them into another class of perceived 'agents', New Delhi should enable former militants to retain legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of their target audience, allowing them to honestly express their disaffection towards India while also effectively opposing the pursuit of destructive means. The Indian state has partnered with former militants before, exploiting their propensities for violence. Now is a good time to leverage their penchants for peace. ORF

ENDNOTES

1. " Selected works covering the subject of disengagement from violent movements in various conflict zones include: Omar Ashour, The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements (London: Routledge, 2009); Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan, (Eds.). Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement (New York: Routledge, 2009); John Horgan, Walking Away from Terrorism (New York: Routledge, 2009); Rohan Gunaratna, Jolene Jerard, and Lawrence Rubin, (Eds.). Terrorist Rehabilitation and Counter-Radicalisation: New Approaches to Counter-terrorism (New York: Routledge, 2011).
2. The phrase "leaving militancy behind" was borrowed from the title of a book on disengagement. See, Bjorgo and Horgan, Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement.
3. For definitions and a more elaborate explanation of disengagement's physical and psychological components, see John Horgan, "Deradicalization or Disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation," Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 2, Issue 4 (2008): 3-8. Note, Horgan includes in his notion of physical disengagement behaviours that do not involve exiting the violent movement, such as intra-group role changes.
4. Ibid.
5. The phrase "walking away from militancy" was borrowed from the title of John Horgan's book. See, Horgan, Walking Away from Terrorism.
6. John Gerring, Case Study Research: Principles and Practices (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
7. John Horgan, Walking Away from Terrorism (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 141.
8. All interviews were conducted by the author in person in December 2014.
9. Ibid., p. 15.
10. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
11. A.S. Dulat and Aditya Sinha, Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years (HarperCollins India, 2015), Kindle edition.
12. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
13. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
14. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
15. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
16. Personal interview with author, December 2014.
17. Zaffar, Personal interview with author, December 2014.

18. Derek O'Brien, "Burhan Wani and The Power of The Internet Misread In Kashmir," NDTV, August 12, 2016; The Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators: January – March, 2016, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, August 5, 2016.
19. Rehabilitation Policy, Government of Jammu and Kashmir Home Department, Government Order No. Home-55/H of 2004, 31 January 2004.
20. Shah Abbas, "A Policy Failure," Kashmir Life, October 28, 2013; Baba Umar, "Return to Paradise?," Tehelka, April 7, 2012.
21. "Youth Entrepreneurship in Kashmir: Challenges and Opportunities," Mercy Corps (2011). Available at http://www.mercycorps.org.

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