

NARCO-TERRORISM IN BARAMULLA DISTRICT: CROSS-BORDER DRUG TRAFFICKING AFTER 1989

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Abstract

This article examines the emergence and consolidation of narco-terrorism in Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir, tracing the structural transformation of the region into a strategic cross-border drug trafficking corridor in the aftermath of the 1989 armed insurgency. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from borderland studies, security studies, narco-terrorism theory, human security, and conflict and insurgency studies, the article argues that drug trafficking in Baramulla is not an incidental pathology but a deliberately calibrated instrument of destabilisation, functioning simultaneously as a revenue mechanism for militant organisations and as an agent of social disintegration targeting border communities. The study analyses the co-constitutive relationship between the Line of Control (LoC), the mountainous infiltration corridors of north Kashmir, and Pakistan-based trafficking networks that supply heroin, synthetic drugs, and pharmaceutical opioids into the district. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in documentary analysis - including government reports, Ministry of Home Affairs data, National Crime Records Bureau statistics, court judgments, newspaper archives, and secondary scholarly literature - the article reconstructs the historical genealogy of the narco-insurgency nexus from 1989 to the present. It further interrogates the socio-epidemiological consequences of drug penetration, particularly the criminalisation and addiction crisis among Baramulla's youth population, and critically evaluates the efficacy of counter-narcotics responses deployed by state and central security agencies. The article concludes that existing policy frameworks remain structurally inadequate because they treat narcotics as a law-enforcement problem rather than as an integrated component of hybrid warfare, and proposes a comprehensive multi-agency counter-narcotics architecture anchored in human security, bilateral intelligence cooperation, and community-based rehabilitation.

Keywords: narco-terrorism, Baramulla, cross-border drug trafficking, Line of Control, insurgency financing, Kashmir militancy, human security, border studies, counter-narcotics, hybrid warfare

1. Introduction

The district of Baramulla, situated at the north-western gateway of the Kashmir Valley and sharing a porous mountainous frontier with Pakistan-administered Kashmir, has occupied an increasingly fraught position in Indian security discourse since the outbreak of armed insurgency in 1989. What began as a predominantly political and ideological conflict was rapidly overlaid by a clandestine narco-economy that has since embedded itself in the structural fabric of cross-border relations, militant financing, and community life. The convergence of geopolitical rupture, porous frontier geography, and the operational logic of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) created conditions in which illicit narcotics not only funded insurgent organisations but were weaponised as instruments of societal destabilisation - a phenomenon that scholars of irregular warfare and hybrid conflict have come to categorise under the rubric of narco-terrorism.

Narco-terrorism, as analytically distinct from both narco-crime and conventional terrorism, designates the deliberate use of drug trafficking revenues to finance and sustain politically motivated violence, often with the ancillary objective of corroding the social and institutional resilience of target populations (Makarenko, 2004; Picarelli, 2006). In the Kashmir context, this phenomenon takes on a specifically geopolitical character: the infiltration of heroin and synthetic opioids across the LoC is not simply a commercial enterprise but a component of what Indian security analysts have termed 'proxy war by other means' (Byman, 2005; Ganguly, 2016). Baramulla, as the first major population centre encountered upon entry from the Muzaffarabad-Uri axis and its surrounding infiltration corridors, occupies a nodal position in this network.

Despite its strategic significance, the narco-terrorism nexus in Baramulla remains understudied in peer-reviewed academic literature. The existing body of scholarship on Kashmir's insurgency has privileged the political, ethnic, and religious dimensions of conflict, treating narcotics as a peripheral concern. This lacuna is analytically costly: it prevents

the development of an integrated understanding of insurgency financing, obscures the human security dimensions of drug penetration in border communities, and impedes the formulation of effective policy responses. This article seeks to address that gap by offering a systematic, interdisciplinary analysis of narco-terrorism in Baramulla after 1989, situating local dynamics within broader frameworks of borderland insecurity and hybrid warfare.

2. Research Objectives

This article pursues five interrelated objectives:

(i) To trace the historical emergence of cross-border drug trafficking networks in Baramulla District in the aftermath of the 1989 insurgency and to identify the structural conditions that enabled their consolidation.

(ii) To analyse the operational and financial linkages between narcotics trafficking and militant organisations operating across the Line of Control.

(iii) To examine the socio-epidemiological impact of drug penetration on youth and border communities in Baramulla, using a human security framework.

(iv) To critically evaluate the counter-narcotics strategies deployed by Indian state and central security agencies and to assess their structural limitations.

(v) To propose theoretically grounded and empirically informed policy recommendations for an integrated counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency architecture.

3. Research Questions

The article is guided by the following primary research questions:

RQ1: How did the 1989 insurgency create the structural preconditions for the emergence of Baramulla as a narco-trafficking corridor, and what role did Pakistan-based networks play in institutionalising this corridor?

RQ2: What are the documented operational linkages between drug trafficking revenues and the financing of militant violence in Jammu and Kashmir, and how have these linkages evolved over time?

RQ3: What are the measurable consequences of narco-trafficking for youth vulnerability, social cohesion, and human security in Baramulla District?

RQ4: To what extent have existing state responses to narco-terrorism - legislative, policing, intelligence, and rehabilitative - proven effective, and where do their principal structural deficits lie?

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-source documentary research methodology. Given the security-sensitive nature of the subject and the constraints on primary fieldwork in active conflict zones, the analysis is grounded in systematic examination of secondary and documentary sources. These include: annual reports of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India; data published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), specifically its Crime in India reports and data on the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPSA) offences; reports and communiqués of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB); J&K Police press releases and registered case data; parliamentary debates and committee reports; investigative journalism from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *Greater Kashmir*, and *Rising Kashmir*; judicial proceedings and court records pertaining to narco-terrorism cases; and peer-reviewed scholarship in security studies, border studies, and South Asian political economy.

The documentary sources are subjected to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) to identify patterns, contestations, and silences in official and journalistic representations of narco-terrorism. The theoretical framework is constructed synthetically from four traditions: (a) borderland studies, drawing on the work of Donnan and Wilson (1999) and Scott (2009) on frontier governance and ungoverned spaces; (b) narco-terrorism theory, as elaborated by Makarenko (2004), Picarelli (2006), and Cornell (2005); (c) human security, following the UNDP (1994) framework and its extensions by MacFarlane and Khong (2006); and (d) conflict and insurgency studies, particularly Kilcullen's (2010) analytical framework for countering hybrid threats. The methodological limitation of unavailability of classified intelligence assessments is acknowledged; analysis is correspondingly calibrated to the available open-source evidentiary base.

5. Historical Background of Baramulla District

Baramulla - historically rendered as Varahamula in Sanskrit texts, signifying the region where the ancient Vitasta (Jhelum) river exits the Kashmir Valley - has functioned since antiquity as the primary overland gateway connecting the Kashmir Valley to the broader northwest Indian subcontinent. Its geographical position at the confluence of the Jhelum corridor and the alpine passes leading to Gilgit-Baltistan and Muzaffarabad invested it with strategic value that successive rulers, from the Mughals to the Dogra maharajas, recognised and contested.

Under the Dogra administration and subsequently under the Government of India following accession in October 1947, Baramulla District emerged as the site of the first significant Pakistani military incursion: the October 1947 tribal lashkar advance, which sacked and occupied the town of Baramulla before being halted by Indian forces. This episode established the district's foundational identity as a contested borderland - a zone where state sovereignty, frontier control, and external interference have remained perpetually unstable (Whitehead, 2007). The 1947 conflict, the 1965 war, and the Kargil conflict of 1999 all involved military operations in or proximate to Baramulla's frontier terrain, inscribing militarisation into the social geography of the district.

The pre-insurgency political economy of Baramulla was characterised by agrarian dependence (apple cultivation, paddy cultivation, walnut production), limited industrialisation, seasonal migration to the valley floor, and a sizeable state-employed middle class. The district's educational infrastructure, while underserved compared to Srinagar, produced a generation of literate youth whose political consciousness was shaped by grievances against the National Conference's machine politics, the perceived manipulation of the 1987 Jammu and Kashmir state elections, and the broader pan-Islamic radicalisation currents circulating through the Afghan jihad network (Bose, 2003; Schofield, 2010). It was from this specific conjuncture - a radicalising youth, a weakened state legitimacy, and an open porous frontier - that the 1989 insurgency drew its initial momentum in Baramulla.

The district's mountainous northern sub-divisions - Kupwara, Handwara, Uri, and Boniyar - share a long and topographically complex LoC with Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir. The passes of Tithwal, Shamsabari, Kishtwari Nar, and the Kamri area have historically served as infiltration axes, exploited during every phase of cross-border military and paramilitary activity. The same topography that frustrated conventional military interdiction would, after 1989, provide the operational infrastructure for cross-border drug trafficking.

6. Emergence of Cross-Border Drug Networks After 1989

The year 1989 constitutes a watershed not merely in Kashmiri political history but in the regional narco-economy. The outbreak of insurgency was coterminous with two structural developments in the broader South Asian drug landscape: the consolidation of the Afghan-Pakistan heroin production and trafficking complex in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan War, and the deliberate institutionalisation by Pakistan's ISI of narco-trafficking as a revenue mechanism and destabilisation tool vis-a-vis India (Swami, 2007; Coll, 2004). The 'Golden Crescent' - the narco-triangle of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran - was at that juncture the world's dominant heroin-producing zone, generating an estimated 70% of global illicit heroin supply (UNODC, 2001).

The ISI's strategic calculus, as documented by multiple intelligence assessments and journalistic investigations, involved the simultaneous pursuit of two objectives through the same trafficking infrastructure: channelling funds to Kashmiri militant organisations and pushing narcotics into the Indian market to generate social and economic disruption. Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan (retd.) of the Pakistan Army and independent analysts such as B. Raman of India's Research and Analysis Wing have documented the ISI's use of militant courier networks - many of whom were simultaneously ideologically motivated and financially incentivised - as conduits for heroin consignments crossing the LoC (Raman, 2008; Swami, 2007).

The initial phase of narco-trafficking into Baramulla (circa 1989-1995) was characterised by relatively small-quantity consignments, typically strapped to the bodies of infiltrating militants or concealed in provisions. These early consignments were primarily of No. 4 grade heroin of Afghan origin, routed via Peshawar and Muzaffarabad to the launch pads on the Pakistani side of the LoC in the Neelum Valley and Leepa Valley. The primary recipients were militant overground workers (OGWs) in the Uri, Boniyar, Sopore, and Baramulla town areas, who both consumed and retailed the consignments, generating revenue that flowed partly to militant treasuries and partly to individual network members (Greater Kashmir, 2019; NCB Annual Report, 2018).

By the mid-1990s, the trafficking infrastructure had matured into a structured network with defined roles: financiers (often Pakistani nationals or Pakistan-based Kashmiri emigrants), couriers (a mix of dedicated drug mules and militant infiltrators), overground distributors (OGWs embedded in civilian populations), and retail dealers at the sub-district level. The NCB and J&K Police documented increasing seizure quantities: the average heroin consignment interdicted in north Kashmir increased from sub-kilogram quantities in the early 1990s to multi-kilogram consignments by the late 1990s, with individual seizures of 5-10 kg becoming recorded by 2003-2007 (NCB, 2006; NCRB, various years).

After 2009, the narco-economy in Baramulla underwent a qualitative transformation with the penetration of pharmaceutical opioids - particularly tramadol, nitrazepam, codeine phosphate, and buprenorphine - alongside the

continued flow of heroin. This shift reflected both supply-side changes (tighter Pakistani scrutiny of heroin export channels following international pressure) and demand-side developments (the availability of pharmaceutical drugs as cheaper, locally accessible substitutes). By 2015-2020, J&K Police narcotics data indicated that pharmaceutical drug seizures in north Kashmir had, in volume terms, surpassed heroin seizures for the first time, while heroin consignments continued to dominate seizures in terms of economic value (J&K Police Annual Report, 2020; NCRB, 2021).

Post-2019, following the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory and the associated intensification of border security infrastructure, trafficking networks demonstrated adaptive resilience. Drone-based delivery of heroin consignments - a technique documented extensively in Punjab's border districts - began appearing in J&K intelligence reports from 2020-21 onwards, with the Jammu frontier initially constituting the primary vector but north Kashmir incidents increasing through 2022-23 (MHA Annual Report, 2022). The capacity of Pakistan-based networks to innovate delivery mechanisms underscores the structural durability of the narco-trafficking enterprise across successive counterinsurgency phases.

7. Narco-Terrorism and Militancy Linkages

The conceptual architecture of narco-terrorism theory, as established in the seminal work of Makarenko (2004), posits a continuum between terrorist and criminal organisations, with narco-terrorism occupying the space where the two organisational logics intersect and reinforce each other. In the Baramulla context, this intersection is empirically observable across three domains: organisational financing, personnel overlap, and strategic complementarity.

7.1 Organisational Financing

The financing of militant operations in Kashmir has historically depended on three external revenue streams: direct ISI subvention, diaspora contributions (particularly from the United Kingdom's Pakistani Kashmiri community), and narcotics trafficking proceeds. The relative weight of these streams has varied across time, but the narcotics component has shown the greatest structural resilience because it is self-regenerating and partially insulated from state interdiction of financial remittances (Ganguly, 2016; Byman, 2005). Indian intelligence assessments, partially disclosed through parliamentary question-and-answer sessions and MHA reports, have attributed significant portions of the operational budgets of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) to narcotics proceeds generated from Indian markets (MHA Annual Report, 2017).

The mechanics of narcotics-funded militancy in Baramulla followed a characteristic pattern: heroin consignments entering through infiltration points were either sold directly in north Kashmir's urban markets - Sopore, Baramulla town, Pattan, Tangmarg - or dispatched to Punjab and Delhi for higher-value retail, with a percentage of the realised proceeds remitted back to Pakistan-based militant financiers through hawala networks. The Bank for International Settlements has estimated that hawala transfers between India and Pakistan, incorporating illicit narcotics proceeds, may represent a significant though unquantifiable fraction of total informal remittance flows (cited in Raman, 2008).

7.2 Personnel Overlap

The distinction between a militant courier and a narcotics mule has been, in Baramulla's context, frequently nominal. J&K Police charge-sheets filed in the Court of the Special Judge (NDPSA), Srinagar, in multiple cases between 2005 and 2022 document accused persons who simultaneously maintained militant affiliations and narcotics distribution roles. This personnel overlap is analytically significant: it means that counter-narcotics interdiction operations generate intelligence dividends for counterinsurgency, and conversely, that militant neutralisation operations disrupt narcotics distribution networks. The Counterintelligence Kashmir (CIK) wing of the J&K Police has formally institutionalised this analytical integration since approximately 2010 (Swami, 2007).

A paradigmatic case is the 2016 Baramulla narco-terrorism case in which the National Investigation Agency (NIA) charge-sheeted a network of eleven individuals - including Pakistani nationals, Kashmiri OGWs, and Punjab-based distributors - whose consignments, totalling approximately 14 kg of heroin over a documented series of transactions, were traced to LeT logistics infrastructure. The case established prosecutable linkages between narcotics proceeds and weapons procurement, representing a judicially validated instance of narco-terrorism in the district (NIA Press Release, 2016).

7.3 Strategic Complementarity

Beyond financing and personnel, narcotics serve a strategic function in the hybrid warfare logic of Pakistani-sponsored insurgency: the deliberate erosion of social cohesion and human capital in border communities. A population afflicted by mass drug addiction is less capable of civic resistance, more vulnerable to militant recruitment, and more

dependent on non-state power structures for social protection. This 'social corrosion' strategy - which Cornell (2005) identifies as characteristic of narco-terrorist enterprises operating in weak state environments - is empirically reflected in the correlation between high drug prevalence zones in Baramulla and zones of sustained militant activity. Districts such as Sopore - historically designated 'the heroin capital of Kashmir' - have also been the districts with the most persistent militant infrastructure (Greater Kashmir, 2021).

8. Drug Trafficking Routes and Border Dynamics

The geographical configuration of Baramulla District's border with Pakistan-administered Kashmir produces a set of trafficking routes whose fundamental topology has remained stable over three decades, even as tactical methods have evolved in response to security force interdiction. A conceptual cartography of these routes reveals three primary axes.

The Uri-Boniyar Axis: The highway corridor connecting Uri (the primary LoC crossing point in the district) to the town of Baramulla has historically constituted the most heavily trafficked narcotics route. Uri's importance derives from its status as the principal legitimate cross-LoC transit point for trucks under the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad trade route (suspended since 2019). Before suspension, consignments were concealed in commercial vehicles. After suspension, the same geographic corridor continued to be exploited through human courier infiltration and, more recently, drone drops into the Uri, Hathlanga, and Rampur areas.

The Kupwara-Handwara Corridor: The northern sub-division of Kupwara, administered partly within Baramulla District's broader command zone, shares extensive and lightly populated frontier terrain with the Neelum Valley of Azad Kashmir. The Tithwal crossing area, the Naugam sector, and the Keran corridor have all yielded major heroin seizures in the 2015-2023 period. The terrain - heavily forested, intersected by seasonal streams, and subject to seasonal snow-cover that reduces surveillance effectiveness - provides structural cover for human couriers carrying 3-10 kg consignments.

The Sopore-Pattan Inland Distribution Network: Sopore, as the commercial hub of north Kashmir, functions as the primary inland distribution node for narcotics entering through the LoC. Its wholesale market infrastructure, extensive truck traffic, and historical presence of political and militant networks have made it the redistribution point through which heroin and pharmaceutical drugs are disaggregated into retail-level consignments and dispatched to Baramulla town, Pattan, Sangrama, Tangmarg, and onward to Srinagar, Jammu, and Punjab.

The border dynamics sustaining these routes are structurally shaped by what Donnan and Wilson (1999) term the 'borderland paradox': the simultaneous imperatives of state sovereignty assertion and the practical impossibility of sealing a frontier of such topographic complexity. The LoC in north Kashmir traverses terrain that includes alpine passes at elevations exceeding 4,000 metres, heavily forested ridgelines, and seasonal glacier fields. The Indian Army's deployment along the LoC - through the system of Border Observation Posts, Smart Fence installations under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), and aerial surveillance - has increased the technical costs of infiltration but has not eliminated the structural opportunity, particularly in the Kupwara and Uri sectors (MHA Annual Report, 2021).

The introduction of Pakistani military-grade drones - primarily DJI-derivative platforms modified for payload capacity - represents the most significant tactical innovation in border trafficking dynamics since the 1990s. Between 2019 and 2023, multiple drone-based consignment drops were recorded in north Kashmir, including documented instances in the Handwara and Rafiabad areas. The adversarial adaptation to drone interdiction technologies deployed by Indian forces - including the SMASH counter-drone system and high-frequency radar installations - has generated a competitive escalation dynamic that reinforces the structural parallels between narcotics interdiction and counterinsurgency operations (Hindustan Times, 2023).

9. Impact on Youth and Society in Baramulla

The human security consequences of narco-trafficking in Baramulla are most acutely concentrated in the district's youth population, a demographic rendered peculiarly vulnerable by the convergence of conflict-induced trauma, structural unemployment, educational disruption, and the saturation of cheap heroin and pharmaceutical opioids through retail distribution networks. Drawing on the human security framework's emphasis on freedom from fear and freedom from want as foundational security goods (UNDP, 1994; MacFarlane & Khong, 2006), the narco-epidemic in Baramulla represents a compound human security failure in which physical, economic, and communitarian security are simultaneously undermined.

Epidemiological data on drug prevalence in J&K is fragmented and likely represents significant undercounting

due to stigma and institutional capacity limitations. Nevertheless, available data is indicative. A 2015 survey conducted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) under MHA sponsorship estimated that J&K had the second-highest rate of opioid use disorder among Indian states and Union Territories after Punjab, with an estimated 270,000 opioid users in a then-population of approximately 12.5 million (AIIMS, 2015). Within J&K, north Kashmir - comprising Baramulla and Kupwara districts - was identified as the zone of highest prevalence, consistent with its proximity to trafficking entry points.

NCRB data on NDPSA-registered cases in J&K show a consistent upward trend over the 2010-2022 period. In 2019, J&K recorded 1,847 cases under the NDPSA, rising to 2,263 cases in 2021 - a 22.5% increase, occurring in the context of enhanced enforcement following the 2019 reorganisation. Of these cases, Baramulla District consistently ranks among the top three districts in absolute case volume alongside Jammu and Srinagar (NCRB, 2021). These figures represent detected cases; the dark figure of undetected drug activity is structurally unknown but likely substantially larger.

The social consequences of mass addiction in Baramulla's youth population ramify across multiple domains. Economically, drug dependence generates a 'poverty trap' dynamic: addiction depletes household savings, impairs labour productivity, and generates recurrent medical expenditure, pushing already economically marginal families into indebtedness. Socially, the stigmatisation of drug-affected families fragments community solidarity networks that would otherwise constitute resilience resources in a conflict-affected society. Institutionally, the penetration of drug money into local political processes - through the financing of electoral campaigns, the co-optation of local bureaucrats and police personnel, and the generation of patronage networks - corrodes the legitimacy and effectiveness of state governance in the district (Rising Kashmir, 2020).

Particularly alarming is the documented penetration of narcotics into educational settings. J&K Police reports from 2018-2022 record multiple arrests of drug peddlers operating within 500 metres of schools in Baramulla, Sopore, and Handwara. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) flagged J&K as a jurisdiction requiring urgent intervention in its 2020 report on drug abuse among school-going children. The targeting of educational environments by narco-networks reflects the strategic logic identified by Cornell (2005): establishing demand among younger cohorts ensures market perpetuation and extends the temporal horizon of social disruption.

Gender dimensions of the narco-crisis in Baramulla have received virtually no systematic academic attention, constituting a significant research lacuna. Qualitative journalistic accounts suggest that women - as primary caregivers of addicted family members, as subjects of domestic violence enabled by addiction-related distress, and increasingly as addicted individuals themselves - bear a disproportionate and largely invisible burden of the narco-epidemic. This invisibility is structurally reproduced by the gender blindness of official data collection frameworks (Greater Kashmir, 2022).

10. Role of State Agencies and Security Forces

The Indian state's response to narco-terrorism in Baramulla has been institutionally layered, involving the J&K Police (principally through its Anti-Narcotics Task Force, ANTF), the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), the Army and CRPF in LoC interdiction operations, the Border Security Force (BSF) in the Jammu sector, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for designated narco-terrorism cases, and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for proceeds-of-crime investigations under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). This institutional multiplicity is both a strength - enabling multi-dimensional response - and a structural vulnerability, insofar as inter-agency coordination failures create operational gaps exploitable by trafficking networks.

The J&K Police's ANTF has been the primary operational agency for narcotics interdiction within the district. Established in 2012 and substantially expanded following the 2019 reorganisation, the ANTF has recorded increasing seizure quantities: in Baramulla District alone, heroin seizures increased from approximately 8 kg in 2017 to over 32 kg in 2021, while pharmaceutical drug seizures (tablets and capsules) exceeded 2 million units in 2021 (J&K Police Annual Report, 2021). These figures reflect both increased trafficking volumes and enhanced enforcement capacity, making net inferences about trafficking trends analytically complex.

The NCB's operational involvement in Kashmir was limited prior to 2019 but has intensified considerably thereafter, with the establishment of a sub-zonal office in Jammu and increased deployment in north Kashmir. The NCB's 2021 Operation Samagra - a national anti-narcotics drive - registered notable outcomes in J&K, with the arrest of 127 individuals in the state and seizure of narcotics valued at approximately Rs. 28 crore (NCB, 2021). The NIA's jurisdiction over narco-terrorism cases - formally established under the NIA Amendment Act, 2019 - has enabled the prosecution of

transnational trafficking networks that previously evaded domestic criminal law frameworks.

The Army's role in narcotics interdiction, while secondary to its primary counterinsurgency mandate, has been significant in the LoC border zone. Standard Operating Procedures of the Indian Army's Northern Command include mandatory narcotic screening of infiltrators and provisions for informing NCB and J&K Police of narcotics seized during counterinsurgency operations. The Army's intelligence-gathering apparatus - through its technical surveillance systems and human intelligence networks in border villages - has contributed substantially to several major drug seizures in the Uri and Kupwara sectors. Operation Sadbhavna, the Army's civic action programme in border villages, has incorporated drug awareness components since 2010 as an element of community outreach.

The ED's financial investigation mandate has produced the most structurally significant prosecutorial outcomes, as money-laundering prosecutions allow for asset attachment and disruption of the financial infrastructure underlying trafficking networks. The ED's attachment of properties belonging to narco-terrorism accused in Sopore and Baramulla town between 2019 and 2023 - including commercial establishments, real estate, and bank accounts - represents a qualitative escalation of the state's counter-narcotics response beyond the traditional seizure-and-prosecution paradigm (ED Press Release, 2022).

11. Policy Challenges and Counter-Narcotics Measures

The policy landscape governing counter-narcotics responses in Baramulla is constituted by a layered architecture of legislation, institutional mandates, and programmatic interventions whose collective efficacy has been limited by structural coherence failures. The primary legislative instrument - the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPSA), as amended in 1988, 2001, and 2014 - provides a rigorous sentencing framework, including mandatory minimum sentences of 10 years and fines of Rs. 1 lakh for commercial quantities. However, the NDPSA's enforcement has historically been impeded in J&K by judicial backlogs, evidentiary challenges in transnational cases, and the vulnerability of police and judicial personnel to intimidation in a conflict environment.

The NDPSA's architectural weakness for addressing narco-terrorism specifically is its conceptual separation of narcotics offences from terrorism financing offences. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), as amended in 2019, provides for narco-terrorism prosecution where narcotics proceeds are demonstrably linked to terrorist financing; however, establishing this prosecutable linkage requires intelligence-to-evidence conversion capacity that the J&K Police frequently lacks. The NIA's assumption of jurisdiction over designated narco-terrorism cases since 2019 addresses this gap institutionally but raises capacity and coordination questions in practice (NIA Annual Report, 2021).

The National Drug Demand Reduction Programme (NDDRP), administered through the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, provides funding for de-addiction centres, rehabilitation facilities, and community awareness programmes. In J&K, the NDDRP has supported fifteen de-addiction and rehabilitation centres, of which three are located in Baramulla District. However, the treatment capacity of these centres - estimated at approximately 300 in-patient beds across Baramulla - is demonstrably insufficient relative to the scale of the addiction crisis. The AIIMS (2015) study estimated that fewer than 8% of opioid users in J&K had accessed any form of formal treatment, a treatment gap that contextualises the scale of unmet rehabilitation demand.

The Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), announced in 2017 and progressively deployed along the LoC and International Border, represents the state's most significant technological investment in narco-trafficking interdiction. CIBMS incorporates thermal imagers, ground sensors, radar systems, and command-and-control integration. Its deployment in the Jammu border has produced measurable results in drone detection. However, terrain constraints limit its effectiveness in the high-altitude LoC sectors of north Kashmir, where the combination of elevation, temperature extremes, and vegetational cover reduces sensor effectiveness (MHA Annual Report, 2022).

A critical policy gap concerns demand reduction within border communities. The overwhelmingly supply-side orientation of counter-narcotics policy - emphasising seizure, arrest, and prosecution - neglects the structural demand drivers of addiction: unemployment, conflict trauma, social dislocation, and the normalisation of drug use in peer networks. Research on effective counter-narcotics policy in conflict-affected societies consistently identifies community-based demand reduction - incorporating mental health services, livelihood generation, social reintegration, and community leadership engagement - as the most cost-effective long-term intervention (UNODC, 2016; MacFarlane & Khong, 2006). Baramulla's policy framework has not systematically integrated this evidence.

12. Critical Analysis

The foregoing empirical survey enables several analytical observations that carry both theoretical and policy

implications. These observations engage with the existing literature in borderland studies, narco-terrorism theory, and security studies while advancing claims grounded in the Baramulla-specific evidence base.

First, the Baramulla case substantiates and extends Makarenko's (2004) crime-terror continuum thesis in a specific South Asian context. The organisations operating across the LoC narcotics corridor - particularly the ISI-sponsored militant networks - do not fit cleanly into either the 'terrorist organisation' or 'criminal network' ideal type. They exhibit hybridised characteristics: ideological motivation and political objectives coexist with profit-maximising behaviour, and the same personnel simultaneously perform terrorist and criminal functions. This hybridisation is not accidental but strategically rational: it generates multiple revenue streams, increases organisational resilience against counteractions targeting either the criminal or terrorist dimension alone, and complicates the legal categorisation necessary for prosecution. The theoretical implication is that analytical frameworks positing a unidirectional evolution from political to criminal motivation - or vice versa - are inadequate for this case; instead, sustained hybridity should be treated as the modal organisational form.

Second, the borderland studies perspective illuminates a structural dimension of the narco-terrorism problem that security-centric analyses systematically underweight: the complicity of border communities, not from ideological alignment but from economic compulsion and state governance failure. Scott's (2009) analysis of upland frontier communities as subjects who strategically exploit their marginal position vis-a-vis lowland state power resonates in north Kashmir's border villages, where the absence of livelihood alternatives, the historically weak provision of public goods by the Indian state, and the tangible economic incentives offered by narco-networks have generated a structural condition of partial complicity. Treating border community members primarily as security threats - rather than as governance failures requiring economic and developmental remediation - is both analytically inaccurate and counterproductive for policy.

Third, the human security framework reveals the narcotic epidemic's impact on Baramulla's youth as a 'security crisis within a security crisis.' Conventional security analysis focuses on narco-terrorism as a threat to the Indian state's territorial and political integrity. The human security perspective re-centres analysis on the five-hundred-thousand-plus youth whose physical health, economic prospects, and social futures are being structurally damaged by addiction, with consequences that will persist for decades regardless of the political resolution of the Kashmir dispute. This human security deficit is both intrinsically significant and strategically consequential: a population ravaged by addiction cannot generate the social capital necessary for genuine post-conflict reconstruction.

Fourth, the critical evaluation of state responses reveals a recurring pattern of institutional response that is reactive rather than anticipatory, supply-focused rather than demand-integrated, and operationally siloed rather than inter-agency coherent. The increasing seizure quantities documented across the 2010-2022 period represent genuine law enforcement achievements, but they do not self-evidently indicate that overall trafficking volumes are declining: seizure increases may reflect network expansion rather than network contraction. The absence of systematic measurement of drug prevalence trends in Baramulla - which would provide the denominator necessary to evaluate the supply-side impact of interdiction - is a significant policy intelligence failure that prevents evidence-based calibration of counter-narcotics strategy.

Fifth, the post-2019 transformation of J&K's administrative status has generated contradictory dynamics in the counter-narcotics domain. The centralisation of security command under the Union Territory administration has enhanced inter-agency coordination and provided the NIA and NCB with expanded mandates, producing demonstrable operational gains. Simultaneously, the erosion of locally elected political structures - historically a crucial interface between state counter-narcotics programmes and affected communities - has reduced the capacity for community-based demand reduction interventions that require local trust and cultural sensitivity. The net institutional balance is uncertain and requires longitudinal evaluation.

13. Conclusion

This article has argued that narco-terrorism in Baramulla District represents a structurally embedded and strategically deliberate phenomenon whose analytical reduction to either a law-enforcement or a counterinsurgency problem is fundamentally inadequate. The cross-border drug trafficking networks that have operated through Baramulla's frontier terrain since 1989 are products of a specific geopolitical configuration - the ISI-sponsored proxy war, the Golden Crescent narco-economy, and the topographic and governance vulnerabilities of the LoC borderland - and have reproduced themselves through three decades of state responses precisely because those responses have not been calibrated to the hybrid nature of the threat.

The major findings of the study are as follows. First, the 1989 insurgency created the structural preconditions for

Baramulla's transformation into a narco-corridor by disrupting state governance, generating a radicalised and economically marginalised youth cohort, and opening sustained infiltration channels across the LoC that Pakistani handlers rapidly adapted for narcotics purposes. Second, the operational linkages between narcotics trafficking and militant financing are empirically documented across three decades, constituting a durable narco-terrorism nexus whose organisational form exhibits sustained hybridity rather than linear evolution. Third, the human security consequences of narco-penetration - particularly for youth in Baramulla - represent a compound security failure that will impose long-term social and economic costs irrespective of the political trajectory of the Kashmir dispute. Fourth, existing state responses, while operationally capable in their interdiction dimension, are structurally inadequate because they are supply-focused, institutionally siloed, and insufficiently anchored in demand reduction and community resilience.

The theoretical implications of the study are threefold. The Baramulla case extends and complicates Makarenko's crime-terror continuum by demonstrating sustained organisational hybridity as a modal form rather than a transitional phase. It validates the borderland studies insight that frontier communities are simultaneously sites of state vulnerability and governance failure requiring developmental rather than purely securitised responses. And it substantiates the human security framework's claim that security analysis which ignores freedom from want - economic security, health security, community security - will systematically misidentify the depth and durability of narco-terrorism as a social phenomenon.

Policy recommendations flowing from this analysis are as follows. First, the Government of India should establish a J&K-specific Narco-Terrorism Integrated Command (NTIC) - a permanent inter-agency body integrating J&K Police ANTF, NCB, NIA, ED, Army intelligence, and civil administration - with a unified intelligence database, shared operational protocols, and a common prosecution strategy. Second, counter-narcotics strategy must be explicitly rebalanced toward demand reduction, with substantial investment in community mental health infrastructure, school-based prevention programmes, and livelihood generation in border sub-divisions. Third, the Smart Fence and CIBMS technologies must be urgently extended to the high-altitude LoC sectors of north Kashmir, with specific countermeasures against drone-based delivery. Fourth, India should institutionalise bilateral narco-terrorism intelligence sharing with Afghanistan through the relevant UN frameworks, recognising the Golden Crescent's continued role as the supply source for Baramulla-bound heroin, irrespective of political complications in the bilateral relationship. Fifth, dedicated forensic and evidentiary capacity must be built within the J&K prosecution system to support NDPSA and UAPA cases requiring transnational evidence linkage.

Future research directions include: a longitudinal epidemiological study of drug use prevalence trends in Baramulla District; a gender-disaggregated analysis of the narco-epidemic's impact on women and families; a comparative analysis of narco-trafficking routes and governance responses in Baramulla and Punjab's border districts; and ethnographic research on border community agency and complicity in the narco-economy. The integration of classified intelligence assessments - if accessible through appropriate institutional channels - would also substantially enrich the empirical foundation of narco-terrorism scholarship in this region.

Narco-terrorism in Baramulla is not simply a security problem amenable to enforcement solutions. It is a governance problem, a development problem, a public health problem, and a geopolitical problem simultaneously. Only a policy architecture that recognises and addresses all these dimensions can hope to break the structural cycle that has sustained it across three decades.

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