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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

How the Pahalgam Attack Forced a Radical Security Grid Overhaul in J&K

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SECURITY & DEFENCE**POLITY****GS3****GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE



"One year after the Pahalgam attack, India's counter-insurgency grid in J&K has been restructured. Has the shift from urban to forest-based operations changed India's counter-terror doctrine — and what remains unresolved?"

THE CORE ARGUMENT

The **Pahalgam terror attack (April 22, 2025)** — in which gunmen killed 26 tourists at Baisaran meadow — marked a tactical inflection point in J&K's insurgency. Unlike earlier attacks concentrated in urban areas or security force camps, Pahalgam targeted civilians in a high-altitude, forest-surrounded meadow — exposing critical gaps in India's tourist security grid and revealing that militants had shifted their base of operations from border infiltration routes to deep interior forests. One year later, the security architecture has been fundamentally restructured: jungle warfare training has been intensified, drone surveillance extended to high-altitude terrain, and forest-based military posts established across Pahalgam's Anantnag district and adjacent areas.

THE PAHALGAM ATTACK — CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

What Happened — April 22, 2025

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Location	Baisaran meadow, Pahalgam, Anantnag district, J&K
Casualties	26 killed (25 tourists + 1 local guide); 17+ injured
Perpetrators	Pakistan-backed Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operatives
Method	Targeted attack on tourists at a popular high-altitude tourist spot (~2,100m)
Security gap	No CRPF/police post within 5 km; no mobile connectivity; no CCTV

The attack was the deadliest civilian terrorist strike in J&K since the **2019 Pulwama attack** (40 CRPF personnel killed) and the worst targeting of tourists since the **2000 Amarnath Yatra attack**.

Strategic Significance

Why Pahalgam?

- ❶ **Soft target:** Tourist areas deliberately keep heavy security invisible to avoid dampening tourism
- ❷ **High-altitude terrain:** Emergency response time 45+ minutes from nearest security post
- ❸ **Symbolic:** Tourism recovery was India's key metric of normalisation post-Article 370 abrogation (2019)
- ❹ **Media impact:** International visibility maximised

The attack directly targeted India's **J&K tourism narrative** — tourism revenues had rebounded to ₹12,000+ crore in 2024-25, the highest since the 1990s insurgency peak.

THE SECURITY GRID BEFORE PAHALGAM

Architecture (Pre-2025)

J&K's security grid was primarily designed for:

- ❶ **Counter-infiltration:** Covering LoC (Line of Control) with fencing, sensors, and infantry
- ❷ **Urban counter-terrorism:** CRPF deployment in Srinagar, district headquarters, sensitive installations
- ❸ **Counter-IED:** Roadside bomb mitigation on national highways

4 **Cordon-and-search:** Grid-based operations in villages for hideout neutralisation

Gap: The security grid assumed militants would transit quickly — infiltrate, strike urban targets, and be neutralised. The new pattern of **prolonged forest residence** — where militants sustain themselves in high-altitude forests for months — was not adequately addressed.

Terrorist Tactics Shift

EARLIER PATTERN (2010-2023)	NEW PATTERN (2024-25 ONWARDS)
Quick infiltration via LoC	Extended stay in interior forests
Urban/town-based attacks	High-altitude meadow/tourist area attacks
Known hideout villages (OGW network)	Forest hideouts without Over Ground Worker (OGW) dependence
Technology-dependent (mobile communication)	Communication blackout compliance
Small arms only	Improved weapons + reconnaissance drones

THE SECURITY RESTRUCTURING — ONE YEAR LATER

1. Jungle Warfare Training Scale-Up

- **Jungle Warfare School, Vairengte (Mizoram):** Capacity doubled; J&K-deployed battalions now complete mandatory high-altitude jungle warfare training
- State police Special Operations Groups (SOG) trained in forest tracking, night navigation, and drone-assisted pursuit
- Army's **Rashtriya Rifles** (primary counter-insurgency force in J&K) operating in multi-week deep forest deployments

2. Forest-Based Forward Operating Bases

- Temporary forward operating bases (FOBs) established in forest areas of Anantnag, Kulgam, Kishtwar, and Doda districts
- Each FOB supports 2-week rotation of 30-40 troops with air resupply — eliminating the need for long supply lines
- FOBs equipped with helipad, drone control stations, and satellite communication

3. Drone Surveillance — Extended to High-Altitude Terrain

SYSTEM	CAPABILITY
TAPAS (Indian-made MALE drone)	Medium Altitude Long Endurance; 18+ hour loiter; thermal + optical sensors
Heron TP (Israeli-origin)	High-altitude MALE drone; above 3,000m operation
Commercial micro-drones	Squad-level ISR; soldier-carried
AI analytics layer	Movement detection in forest canopy; change detection over 48-hour satellite imagery

4. Tourist Area Security Protocol

- **Tourist Security Posts (TSPs):** 200+ new posts established at meadows, trekking routes, and high-altitude tourist spots across Kashmir valley
- **Mobile connectivity mandate:** Telecom operators required to provide 4G coverage to tourist areas >100 metres altitude above treeline by 2026
- **CCTV + facial recognition:** 50+ tourist spots now covered under AI-surveillance grid
- **Tourist registration:** Mandatory registration via J&K Tourism app before visiting high-altitude areas

WHAT REMAINS UNRESOLVED

1. The Forest Sanctuary Problem

India's forests have tribal habitation rights under the **Forest Rights Act 2006**. Gujjar and Bakerwal nomadic communities seasonally use high-altitude forests — their presence complicates military access and creates difficult trade-offs between security and tribal rights.

2. Pakistan's Continued Support

The structural driver of J&K insurgency — Pakistan Army's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) support for LeT and JeM — remains unchanged. Security infrastructure improvements are **tactical**, not strategic, solutions.

3. Over-Ground Worker (OGW) Network

Despite security improvements, the OGW network — locals who provide logistics, intelligence, and shelter to militants — has not been fully dismantled. Civil society engagement and economic integration remain critical but underinvested.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

PROVISION/EVENT	RELEVANCE
Article 370 abrogation (Aug 5, 2019)	J&K reorganised into 2 UTs (J&K and Ladakh); direct central governance
J&K Reorganisation Act 2019	Created UT of J&K with legislature; UT of Ladakh without legislature
Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)	Primary legal tool for counter-terrorism prosecution
National Investigation Agency (NIA)	Leads investigation of major terrorist cases
Unified Headquarters (UHQ), Srinagar	Army + Police + Paramilitary coordination body for J&K operations

UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Security	Counter-terrorism, J&K security grid, drone warfare, jungle warfare
GS3 — Security	Infiltration, LoC management, Rashtriya Rifles, CRPF
GS2 — Polity	Article 370, J&K reorganisation, UAPA, NIA
GS2 — IR	India-Pakistan relations, cross-border terrorism, ISI-LeT

Mains Keywords: Pahalgam attack, Rashtriya Rifles, UAPA, NIA, counter-insurgency, jungle warfare, Article 370 abrogation, J&K UT, Forest Rights Act, Lashkar-e-Taiba, over-ground workers, drone surveillance

Probable Question: “Terrorist attacks on civilian tourists in J&K represent a tactical shift requiring new security doctrines. Examine the challenges and India’s response.” (GS3 Mains)

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