

A Model Counter-insurgency Framework

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Introduction

India has faced many insurgencies. The first virtually started a day before Independence, on 14 August 1947. This was when the leader of the Naga National Council (NNC), Angami Zapu Phizo hoisted the national flag of an Independent Naga country at Kohima. A day later, when India's Independence was announced and the Indian flag was being hoisted at Kohima, no Nagas attended the function. The actual Naga insurgency started later when an 'underground army' was created by the NNC and began attacking the Police stations and other Government offices. Later in 1955, Angami Zapu Phizo secretly crossed into East Pakistan and sought help from the Pakistan Government to arm and train the Naga cadres to fight the Indian Government.

Later in March 1966, the Mizo insurgency broke out. The next wave of insurgency was in Manipur. Here there were incipient insurgencies from the 1960's, but the first serious wave came in mid 1970's when the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Revolutionary Army of Kangleipak (PREPAK) began attacks on Police stations. Insurgency in Assam broke out in 1985. This was followed by an insurgency of the Bodos in Udalguri, Assam- the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). There were a few minor insurgencies in Meghalaya, North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. The next major insurgency was in Kashmir that began in 1989. This was directly abetted by Pakistan irregulars infiltrating and assisting the local insurgents and also fighting directly with the Government forces. The last insurgency is the Maoist insurgency of the Adivasis and scheduled castes demanding land and forest rights.

In any insurgency, the root causes must be first identified. These should be addressed, while armed measures are adopted against the insurgents, who have taken to arms against the State. Regrettably in most cases, the State has not cared to identify and address the just grievances of the insurgent groups and the insurgencies have festered for years sapping the energies and wealth of the Country. In some cases, the State has consciously ignored the rights of the people, thereby directly provoking the distressed concerned people to take to arms. Such was the insurgency in Assam and that of the Maoist insurgency in Central and South India.

I have had a long experience of insurgencies in the Northeast; particularly the insurgencies in Manipur, the insurgency of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Naga insurgency and the prolonged insurgency in Kashmir. I also did a course in Guerilla Warfare in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, where I got a chance to study some of the insurgencies worldwide. I studied the insurgency of the Huks in the Philippines, the insurgency of the Communist guerillas in Malaya, the insurgencies in North Viet Nam and South Vietnam, the terrorist insurgency of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, the insurgencies in Kenya, Algeria, and Cyprus. I also studied the Cuban insurgency and little known insurgencies of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and of the Shining Path in Peru.

From this background knowledge and practical experience, I have synthesised a 'Doctrine of Counter-insurgency' which I feel may be useful for forces deployed in such operations. The doctrine is practical and I have implemented many of the points as Inspector General Operations in Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino in Assam in 1990-93 and in the counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in 1993-95.

The Preparatory Phase

In any insurgency which is caused by disaffection among the populace of the region there are clear indications of a preparatory phase before insurgent groups are formed and they take to arms. An alert intelligence unit of the Government can easily discern this phase and should warn the Government to remove the constraints causing the disaffection. If, despite the warnings from the Intelligence units of the field formations, the Government persists with status quo policies, an insurgency will follow as surely as night follows a day.

Take the example of the looming insurgency in Assam. It was the year 1982. I was

posted as the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police in the Northern Range in Assam. The foreigners agitation had started in 1979 and there were daily processions, blackouts, and bandhs. From the inception of this agitation our sources of information started drying up. A time came when the Superintendent of Police and the DIG had to personally recruit sources and run them! We could just manage to barely have one or two sources between us. Robert Thompson has clearly stated in his book 'Defeating Communist Insurgency' that one sign of an incipient insurgency is the drying up of sources. I warned the Director General of Police in Guwahati accordingly, quoting Robert Thompson, but there was no one to listen. I got no response to my letter too. It was clear the Police leadership had become sycophants of the Political leadership. There were many such signs. The All Assam Students Union (AASU), spearheading the movement issued calls for a bandh. The Police wireless network and the Telephone exchange would convey this information to all the districts without their officers knowing. The populace knew about the bandh call well before the Government or the Police. They would know only when the AASU announced the bandh call. By this time in each town, respectable ladies would move quietly from shop to shop, each lady covering one street and acting as if they had come to buy something, would quietly tell the shopkeeper that there would be a bandh the next day. No shopkeeper would ever tell the Police about the ladies who had visited his shop. Here was a classic sign of the unity of the Assamese people, a clear warning sign to the Government that an insurgency was a step away.

The next step to the insurgency was after the terrible elections forced on the people of Assam, where more than 6000 people were killed in communal clashes. Shortly after this the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), conceived in 1979 was activated. The leadership moved to Dimapur, contacted the NSCN who organised the training of the ULFA cadres in the Kachin area of Burma. We got no clue to all this. Shortly thereafter, young boys were missing from the villages and towns. Where were these boys? The conclusion was obvious that an insurgency was brewing. The Government, both at the State and the Centre, by its myopic policy had neutralised their Intelligence agencies. The Government woke up only after the cadres returned in 1985 and started extortions on a massive scale. By that time the political party ruling the State had changed and was protecting the insurgents! What was the Central intelligence agency doing all this while? The Central intelligence had completely identified itself with the Party in power in Delhi and refused to see the writing on the wall! There was not one professional officer who had the courage to stand up and inform the Government. There was one, a Joint Director in Shillong who did inform the Government, but he was sent packing to his home State. The lesson from all this is very clear. You must have professionals loyal to the Country, manning all important positions, not sycophants of the party in power!

The Active Phase of the Insurgency

Once the insurgency starts, the steps to be taken are many. We are now proceeding on the premise that the Government has woken up and have a team of professionals at the helm. What should they do? The first step is to list out the personnel manning crucial posts in the Law and Order template. All officers at the crucial levels should be listed, from the Director General to the IG's, DIG's, SP's, Additional SP's, DySP's, Circle Inspectors, and SHO's. They should be selected for their impartiality and professionalism and posted to all the key Districts, Ranges and HQ's. The Deputy Commissioners and Additional DC's and Sub Divisional Officers should also be listed on the same criterion of impartial behaviour and posted accordingly. Discussions should be held with the Chief Justice of the High Court and the Supreme Court of India at the highest level and Magistrates, Chief Judicial Magistrates and Session Judges of known impartiality should be posted in all crucial positions, so that bail is not granted on frivolous grounds, but as per the merits of each case. All Judicial officers should be guarded with the best Para Military Force (PMF). This is very important. One incident happening, like the killing of the judge who sentenced a militant to death, as it happened in Kashmir, will render the Judiciary too afraid to deal with arrested militants strictly as per law.

As the insurgency develops, the PMF, and the Army if it has been called out, will be deployed in the towns and countryside. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) should be promulgated in the concerned area. Immediately a number of Police stations should be opened in the rural areas, so that the Armed Forces deployed will be able to produce arrested militants quickly at the Police stations. Needless to say each Police station should be heavily guarded. Preferably all Police stations should have a second

storey on which a watch tower is erected for all round observation. Directions should be given to all the Army and PMFs deployed, that the militants they arrest should be produced within 24 hours to the nearest Police station. Here the SHO should inform the next of kin of the arrested militant to visit the Police station and talk to their ward in the presence of the Police. In the explosive insurgency of the PLA and PREPAK in Manipur in 1978-79, Major General (later Lieutenant General) VK Nayar was the GOC of the Division deployed in Manipur. He ensured that all boys or men picked up by his troops would mandatorily produce them the same day at Kangla Fort, where the GOC had established his detachment HQ's. Here the GOC had positioned a Police officer who would ascertain the details of the next of kin of the detained boy or young man. Then he would summon the next of kin and ask them to come to Kangla fort and meet their ward. In the meeting the parents of the detained boy would be told about the evidence against their ward and then the suspect would be forwarded to judicial custody. If there was no evidence against him, he would be released to his parents or legal guardian. Lieutenant General Nayar was revered by the people of Manipur for this strictly impartial approach.

Magistrate Courts should be opened for a group of three or four Police stations and the arrested militant should be produced within 24 hours of his arrest and taken in Police custody as per the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPc). In all districts a joint interrogation cell must be established and all important militants arrested and taken in Police custody should be forwarded. Here the militant should be interrogated by a joint team of officials of the Army, the Intelligence Bureau, CID, and PMF operating in the area. The interrogation reports should be copied and sent to all the forces operating in the area. After interrogation all important militants who are first to third grade in importance should be sent to 'Special' jails located in areas inside the perimeter where either the Army or PMF are camping. This is very necessary, as there will definitely be attempts to rescue arrested militants from the standard jail in the district. This was done in Assam in 1991 to hold grade one and two leaders of ULFA when they were arrested.

Conduct of Operations

The Army and PMF deployed may conduct operations in conjunction with the Police or independently. They must however ensure that when conducting operations, they are scrupulously legal. If fired upon, they should retaliate, but if the militant surrenders, there should be no question of not taking him alive, based upon the old adage that the best militant is a dead militant! Once this is resorted to, then the force concerned loses its credibility and soon they will not know when they are to stop. It must be clearly understood at this stage that if the judiciary is weak and releases arrested militants on bail, the force deployed should not conclude that it is best to eliminate the militant than risk his coming out on bail. In such circumstances, it is best to use the Acts that are in force for detaining persons, for example, like the Public Safety Act of Kashmir, where a known suspect can be detained for upto one year. If such Acts are not available, then such Acts should be Notified by the Centre.

Once a Company has been given an area for domination, the Company Commander should visit each village and town in his area and befriend the villagers and towns people. The Company Commander should ensure that his troops behave respectfully towards all the people in his area of operations. If he has information that militants have entered a particular village, he should arrange to cordon the village, asking for additional troops, if required and then call out the Headman of the village and include him in the search of each house after calling all the residents to come out and keeping them in a safe place away from the line of fire. If exchange of fire takes place he should arrange to recompense the village for any damage done to individual houses etc.

When arrested militants are interrogated, an attempt should be made to win over the militant to the Government side. If he agrees, he should be kept with the unit as a scout, paid from SS funds and allowed to move freely and bring back information. He should never be given arms and allowed to fight with the Company. This was done very successfully when I was the Inspector General Operations in Assam during Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino, along with TP Chakravarty, the then Superintendent of Police, Guwahati. We had persuaded about a dozen junior cadres of the ULFA who had been arrested by us to work for us, and recruited them as constables in the Special Branch. They were never given weapons. They were deployed as spotters to inform us of the movements of middle and senior ULFA cadres. This modus-operandi led to the capture

of several second and third tier ULFA cadres, and one frontline cadre.

In contrast, when the Chief Minister heard of our success, he stalled the surrender of ULFA cadres, and directed that all surrenders should be made before him only! He took the surrenders of several front line cadres of the ULFA, like Sourabh Gogoi, the killer of the Superintendent of Police of Dibrugarh and allowed them to retain their weapons. Then he organised them into a "Cooperative Society" which in essence was nothing but a mafia who extorted money at will from business men and companies, using their guns to terrorise their victims. The Police had to look the other way as these thugs operated on the orders of the Chief Minister! They were sarcastically labelled as the SULFA or 'Surrendered ULFA' by the press.

In actual encounters, the force deployed should ensure that they fight clean. If, for example a group of militants have taken shelter in a house in a locality of a town, after identifying the house it should be quietly cordoned off. The inhabitants of that and surrounding houses should then be told on a loud hailer to leave the houses with their hands raised in obedience. These vacant houses should then be taken over by our troops and the militants addressed through the loud hailer and they should be warned to surrender. At this stage if the militants reply that they have come to be martyrs and hence will not surrender, the force can fire on the house and try to kill the militants. They can use tear smoke to literally smoke out the militants. If the militants throw down their weapons and come with their hands in the air as a token of surrender, the force deployed should never shoot the group in cold blood. Shooting unarmed men who have surrendered is a dishonourable act and an insult to the uniform that the force is wearing. In one such disreputable action the force will be disgraced forever.

In conclusion I am quoting from the writings of veterans of successful Counterinsurgency campaigns.¹

"Hardly if ever has a counter-insurgency campaign been won strictly by waging war. Military action has an important role in overcoming guerillas, but the philosophy espoused by the guerillas must also be defeated and this requires a well reasoned combination of political reform, civic action and education of the population. In addition, it is absolutely necessary that troops involved in counter-insurgency operations be well trained to differentiate between the population at large and guerillas, who may hide among the population. CI campaigns lend themselves particularly to atrocities if careful control is not exercised over troops carrying out military operations, in close proximity to the civilian population. Often the inability to tell friend from foe, or more correctly, foe from neutral can lead frustrated troops, who are poorly trained and poorly led, to slaughter innocent members of the population on the assumption that they are guerillas or guerilla supporters. As a result martyrs are created to the general cause and support for the government is eroded even more.

There are differences between guerillas and terrorists. If Mao's classic paradigm for the successful guerilla warrior is used, it can be seen that the true guerilla cares for the population that forms the sea, in which he has to swim. The terrorist on the other hand may claim to be fighting for an oppressed segment of society, but through the use of terror against civilians, he generally shows little concern about members of the population.

The definition of Julian Paget in his book CI Operations - Techniques of Guerilla Warfare is concise and to the point; a special form of warfare based on mobile tactics by small lightly armed groups, who harass their opponents rather than defeat them in open battle.

In this context it is good to study guerillas in history. The Red Indians in North America were masters in guerilla war. In the American Revolution, the white frontiersman who had learned his skill from his Red Indian brothers made extensive use of field craft to wage unconventional war. Francis Marion, known as the Swamp Fox wove some kind of magic around the English forces. They said that Marion fought neither like a soldier, nor like a Christian!"

It is a wise commander who lays down the following guidelines for his troops in a CI war:

Be polite.

Be fair in all dealings.

Return everything borrowed.

Pay for everything damaged.

Do not bully the people.

Do not damage crops.

Do not flirt with women.

Do not ill treat prisoners.

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