

Insurgency As a Spoiler: South Asian Context

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Issues Meriting Importance

At the outset it should be clear that there is no international definition for insurgency. It is commonly agreed that it is an organised armed struggle by a section of the local population against the State, usually with foreign support. The possible causes of an insurgency could be as under:-

- Ideology.
- Ethnic differences.
- Politico-socio economic reasons.
- Fundamentalism.

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- Extremism.
- Interference by external forces or poor handling of the situation may accelerate the movement.

“There is no clear or meaningful difference between insurgency and civil war or between national terrorism and civil war for that matter”

Anthony H.Cordesman

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Insurgencies generally fall into one of the four broad categories. They could be politically organised, militarily organised, traditionally organised or urban.² There are some insurgencies which have characteristics of more than one type. The primary objective of any insurgent group is the domination of a country. To reach the primary objective there are intermediate objectives which are achieved through military and political means but these are essentially political, as stated below:-

- Limit the ability of the Government and enhance the capability of the insurgents to provide public services.
- Obtain the support of neutrality of critical segments of the population.

- Isolate the government from international diplomatic and material support and increase international support for the insurgents.
- Increase domestic and international legitimacy of the insurgent organisation at the expense of the Government.
- Destroy the self-confidence of Government leaders and cadres, causing their abdication of withdrawal.
- Reduce and if possible, neutralise government coercive power while strengthening insurgent coercive capabilities.

Counter Insurgency is termed as COIN by the State Department of the United States. It deals with comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency.

Insurgency as a Spoiler in South Asia

Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives are the countries commonly included in South Asia.³ Most of these nations are beset with problems of insurgency which acts as a spoiler to the growth and development. Naturally they are all involved in Counter Insurgency (COIN). In Afghanistan, the United States is doing its utmost to tackle the situation created by insurgents who mainly comprise the Taliban. The other elements are the Haqqani Group and ISIS. Pakistan is a key player and seems to have the ability to regulate the situation. Peace talks are on between the United States and Taliban at

Doha and things have moved towards a temporary settlement. ⁴It is creditable on the part of the Security Forces (particularly the sacrifices made by the Afghan National Army) to bring the Taliban to the table. The situation is a long drawn affair and would be tough for the Afghan Government and the United States. An agreement has been reached with Taliban which is gradually witnessing the reduction of forces by the US to from 4500 to about 2300. This is in the preliminary stages and yet to get into action.

Pakistan has its four states involved in movements which are unique in their own way. There an insurgency in Khyber Pakthunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh. Further terrorist activities are occurring in the state of Punjab. The insurgency in Khyber Pakthunkhwa also known as the war in North West Pakistan, which is an armed conflict involving Pakistan and armed militant groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban, Laskar e Islam, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and various other groups. The armed conflict began in 2004 and sporadic actions continue. Operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched on 08 June 2014 and Operation Radd-ul-Fassad on 22 February 2017. Despite best efforts insurgent conditions remain. Balochistan on the other hand continues to brew as a low level insurgency by Baloch nationalists demanding greater control of the province's rich natural resources. They are demanding currently greater provincial autonomy. ⁵Similarly Sindh has a low level insurgency which exists between Sindhi nationalists and the

Government of Pakistan. The Punjab province is an area for development of forces to generate insurgency in the Indian subcontinent.

The violent situation in Bangladesh has been under control by the present Awami League Government of Sheikh Hasina. This stability has led to Bangladesh recording a high economic growth. However, Bangladesh has to control internal and external funding to terrorism which requires greater coordination.⁶The Tamil insurgency was brought under control about a decade ago but the struggle for justice continues and it is expected that the Government takes steps in the right direction. The Islamic terrorist attacks on 21 April 2019 is being dealt with and the Government has taken steps to avoid recurrence. The FBI of the US assisted Sri Lankan authorities and loose ends are being tied up.⁷ In Nepal we have democratic Government in power but the Communist faction led by Netra Bikram Chand (Biplav) is opposing the present structure of the Government. The impact is minimal and may not lead to severe disruptions. Maldives is in a stable state with the new Government but must stop its citizens from joining ISIS. Bhutan remains by and large peaceful and there is relative peace between the groups of people residing in the country. The Nepalese population has been integrated suitably keeping their aspirations in mind.

Situation in India

India is a diverse country with numerous tribes, religions and languages. However, diversity in a free and democratic set up leads to often unfulfilled aspirations which turn into armed struggles. Insurgency in India can be currently termed as proxy war cum state sponsored insurgency/terrorism. It is primarily attributed to the Jammu & Kashmir terrorism, the North East Indian insurgency and the Maoist insurgency. Each has different dimensions and is peculiar in its outlook. Insurgency has been a spoiler in the path of development

The Jammu and Kashmir insurgency can be traced back to the year 1947 when India became independent. The state formally acceded to India and Pakistan has been fuelling the insurgency. Since then three Wars and the Kargil conflict have been fought resulting in gradual improvement of the situation. Further stability has been added by the Government of India recently. On 05 August 2019, the Government of India abrogated Articles 370 and 35 A of the Constitution. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has been bifurcated into two Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The same has been implemented and demarcation of the boundaries and the new constituencies is being undertaken. The situation is stable and internet as also mobile telephones have been restored in most places. Being a democratic country every issue is challenged in Court and the Supreme Court has been listening to the Public Interest Litigations as also passing

interim directions which are making life easier in the region. Post the abrogation, members of the European Union Parliament as also Ambassadors from 16 countries (including the United States) have visited the region and observed the normal conditions. It may be pertinent to note there has been no major insurgent activity during this period. Pakistan has not been able to raise the ante despite best efforts.⁸

The North East problem dates back to 1956 while the Jammu and Kashmir issue dates back to 1989. The reasons for the problem have been articulated by number of authors each giving their point of view. However, the major factor is Alienation. There is a feeling of alienation from the rest of the country due to differences in ethnicity, culture or even a feeling of neglect. This has often been described as periphery complex by experts. The alienation factor has been suitably exploited by insurgent groups. Alienation has been converted into victimhood as stated by Colonel Gautam Das in his book, “Insurgencies in North East India-2013”. This victimhood is more imagined than real. The issue of victim hood keeps the insurgency alive by painting India as the villain for every problem and assists in converting people to the cause. It also helps in covering up the deficiencies of the ethnic group by blaming India for all the evils.⁹ The insurgency is currently on the wane with the surrender of about 1200 militants on 23 January 2020.

As regards Maoism, it is a socialist problem caused primarily by poor governance. Socio economic development with precise operations by security forces will transform the attitude of the people, who in turn will gradually resist the insurgent thereby paving the way for normalisation of the problem. The problem is now primarily confined to about 30 districts.¹⁰ There are about seven states which are vigilant. Steps by the Government and the Security Forces have resulted in socio economic improvement which has kept the movement under check.

Recommendations

The entire South Asian region except Bhutan and Maldives is impacted by insurgency. Out of these Afghanistan, Pakistan and India are affected more in comparison to other countries. While all are addressing the internal issues, the external factor is only one country, Pakistan. Pakistan has been craftily supporting these insurgencies to ensure it has an upper hand with respect to Afghanistan and India. Both these countries have left no stone unturned to diplomatically make Pakistan understand the need for focusing on economic growth rather than spend its time and money on fuelling insurgencies. The Pakistan Army calls the shots with regard to these affairs. They listen to only two countries United States and China. China in many ways benefits from the stance taken by Pakistan. The country that can make the difference is United States. While the United States is working on a plan for Afghanistan, similar efforts need to be made for India. A

former US Defence Secretary, Leon E. Panetta,¹¹ called India a natural ally. By reining in Pakistan the insurgency affecting India would be controlled, benefiting both US and India as also the entire South Asian region.

End Notes:

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³ Jugdeep.S.Chima, "Book Review Ethnic Sub nationalist Insurgencies in South Asia", Routledge, London & New York, 2015, www.tandfonline.com. Accessed on November 05, 2020.

⁴ Ezzatullah Mehrdad, " Will Afghanistan's Long-Delayed Peace Ever Arrive?", The DIPLOMAT, July 25, 2020, www.thediplomat.com. Accessed on November 05, 2020.

⁵ Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Abstract on Insurgency and Violent Extremism in Pakistan", www.tandfonline.com. Accessed on November 5, 2020.

⁶ Iftexharul Bashar," Bangladesh's Long Road Ahead in countering terrorist funding", The DIPLOMAT, September 15, 2020, www.thediplomat.com. Accessed on November 06, 2020.

⁷ Bureau of Counterterrorism," Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Sri Lanka", Department of State, USA, www.state.gov. Accessed on November 06, 2020.

⁸ India Today Web Desk," Envoys of 17 nations, including US reach Kashmir for 2-day visit to assess conditions since shut down", January 9, 2020. www.indiatoday.in. Accessed on November 06, 2020.

⁹ Gautam Das, "Insurgencies in North East India". CLAWS, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2013.

¹⁰ The News Scroll, "89% of Maoist violence in 30 districts in 2018: MHA (IANS Special) ", Outlook, October 31, 2019, www.outlookindia.com. Accessed on November 6, 2020

¹¹Leo E.Panneta, "Partners in the 21st century", Key speeches, Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, June 06, 2012, www.idsa.in. Accessed