



SECURITY OF NORTH EAST REGION OF INDIA : FACTORS, MEASURES AND WAY AHEAD

Geography

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ABSTRACT

The security issues in North East India have both internal and external consequences. The internal consequences are political, economic, social-ethnic dimensions. The external consequences include intentions and potential role of countries surrounding Northeast India and their impact on foreign relations. This article discusses the factors causing insurgency and measures to counter these factors, AND a comprehensive way ahead.

KEYWORDS

Insurgency, North East Region, NER, Look East Policy, Act East Policy

INTRODUCTION

Security problems in the North East has come a long way ever since India gained its independence in general and in particular after 1953 which continue to persist even today in one form or another with very little scope for solution that would hold the key to the restoration of peace and stability in the region. The region presents itself as one of the most troubled and vulnerable area of our country wherein the security of life is under severe threat. Insurgency has spread its tentacles wide, enveloping practically the whole region and giving rise to an endless cycle of bloodshed. Insurgent outfits of the North East region are posing serious threats to the peace and security of our country in general and in particular to the security and development of the region.

FACTORS OF INSURGENCY

There are four major factors causing insurgency, namely; Geographical, Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political.

Geographical Factor. The North-Eastern region of India lies in the North-Eastern extremity of the country and the region is surrounded by foreign countries on almost all sides and the only link with the rest of the country through a narrow corridor running under Bhutan foot hills is in North Bengal. The NER states have links with neighbouring countries who fuel insurgency, as they do not want to see India as a powerful and prosperous nation. Most of the insurgent groups have their advance bases in these countries across international borders.

Socio-Cultural Factors -

As an expert, Trith Nath Mishra put it in his book, 'Insurgency or Ethnic Conflict' that the lack of social and cultural homogenization is a product of such diversity. In certain border and are found to feel affinity and kinship towards them and cannot be restricted to sentiments of patriotism based on political boundaries. Their major hideouts are found among these foreign people. In the North-East region the government of India reorganized the territories of the provinces of Assam under constant pressure yielded by the tribal people. The Govt. created new political units to appear the tribal political leaders who managed to essence political power and serve their interest at the cost of the poor people. In fact, these political leaders, keeping in view their own political ambition and economic prosperity, become blind followers of the Indian political leaders, Moreover; they began to misappropriate the central funds provided for rapid economic growth of the newly created political units. The political instability and confusion at the central level during the recent years due to political parties, and also the growth of regional political parties, have create the feeling among the insurgent leaders of the North-East India that the Indian federal system would not survive for long.

Economic Factor. The economy of the states of the region is one of the most backward and it is one of the most impoverished regions of India, on most economic indicators, its performance is less than that of all India average. This gives rise to apprehension among the local people that they may not get any gainful employment unless the economy exhibits rapid structural change. The per capital income accruing to persons (ordinary) ordinarily resident in the region, would be somewhat less than income transfers out of the region, since the region is rich in resources. Thus we see that the insurgency in Assam and other states is further compounded by the lack of economic development.

Not only the lack of agricultural and industrial development is low, the provision of infrastructure is so inadequate, and people don't foresee any prospect in the coming future.

External Factors. External involvement takes place in the form of safe haven and transit; financial resources; direct military support; additional base for recruitment; training; dissemination of propaganda and arms and material, including ammunition, food and fuel. Trans-border linkages of the North-Eastern insurgent groups had, in fact, started developing right in the first decade of India's Independence. The key actors which are involved in the prolonged issue of insurgency problem in the region are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar. Other than this, Bhutan and Nepal is also the preferred destination for other insurgent groups like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO). The insurgents take advantage of the difficult terrain along the borders, plus lack of adequate controls along the borders help them to carry out attacks with a well planned strategy designed from beyond the borders.

COUNTERING INSURGENCY HOLISTICALLY

The roots of insurgency are found in political, cultural, and economic domain warrant dealing holistically. The suggested measures are discussed below.

Political Measures. At the political level, there is an urgent need for a much stronger political commitment to tackle the issue in the proper manner which has survived for the last many decades. The people of the region feel dejected over the step motherly treatment meted to them. They feel that they are being systematically exploited and suppressed. As a result of which, they do not consider themselves as equal partners of the Indian Union. They even blamed the constitution for being discriminatory in the sense that they have no equal representation in the Council of States.

Socio Economic Measures. Measure must be undertaken at the socio-economic level to address the security concerns in the North East. Most of the Northeast states affected by insurgency issues are among the poorest and underdeveloped and are inhabited by the tribal population comprising of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura. Economic and social compulsions have rendered the region prone to insurgency and other security related crisis. Efforts must be made at the State level which must be supported by the Central government to create a climate suitable for development and economic growth in the areas which are insurgency prone areas. As has been pointed above that large scale of economic underdevelopment, socio-economic alienation and the dissatisfaction with the widening economic inequality are the root causes of insurgency in our country.

Military Measures. Other than politico-economic and social measures, the state and central government will need to take up military measure to tackle the insurgency problem in North East. The government will need to show military commitment to tackle the problem. The decision of the Government to engage in peace talks with any militant outfit which is involved in killing of innocent civilians is a welcome development. This resolve of the government was witnessed with the launch of full-scale military operations against the NDFB-S, leading to the death of one of its senior commanders and arrest of more

than 30 hardcore cadres of the outfits, including some of its top commanders.

NORTH EAST SECURITY: WAY AHEAD

With the present political situation in the North East, peace still seems to be a far cry. Uneven development, regional deprivation, internal colonialism, cultural oppression and lack of integration are some of the major root causes behind most of the conflicts and insurgencies in the region. The Indian governmental measures to combat insurgency have largely been reactionary rather than conciliatory. Following measures should be undertaken to holistically improve North Eastern Security:-

- Ensure proper maintenance of law and order situation in the region. This will not only bring safety of people of Northeast but also ensure long-term development in the region.
- Ensure that law enforcement is efficient enough to create disincentives for armed groups to continue arming themselves;
- Ensure good governance free from the virus of corruption.
- Increase involvement of local people in economic development and long-term planning and change of economy towards industrialization.
- Give enough emphasis on Look East policy and promote cross-border trade. This has vast economic potential of promoting growth and employment in the region.
- Provide better infrastructure facility in the region.
- Manpower development and employment generation.
- Strengthening the local self-government and institutions.
- Engage in a political dialogue between the government and the insurgents' group.
- State and central government will need to give special attention to remove the ill feeling of alienation and neglect that has been festering for long.

CONCLUSION

Peace and development are the need of the hour for the people of the North East which is good for the national interests of our country. Enhancing the rate of growth and employment and incomes in our North-East would have a positive political impact. The initiation of the Look East policy has brought very little success for the security of the region which is still reeling under the pressure of insurgents. Under development in the region has been fuelling insurgency. Security and development of the North East must also be given utmost significance under the scope of AEP. By bringing lasting security, stability and development in the region, one can erase a sense of neglect and frustration that persists among the people of the region. To deal with the rising concerns of insurgency problem, India must strengthen its efforts at the individual and at bilateral level (in cooperation with the neighboring countries such as Myanmar and Bangladesh). Since, various insurgent groups are active along the roads connecting Northeast India to Southeast Asia, unless security network is not good along these routes, the future of connectivity through these routes will face a question mark. Thus it is imperative to address the security concerns of NER holistically for enduring effectiveness of AEP.

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