

Extremism, Security and Development in the North-East

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History and geography do live together and in case of North East of India, we must not try to deal with the problem of insurgency or extremism that engulfs the region today, without considering the geographical location of the region and the history of the region together. The North East, barring Assam and Tripura, is mostly a region with hilly areas and at the same time is an area of almost separate history from the rest of the country, whether we talk about independent kingdom ship or culture of the ethnic groups that the region have, which are in distinctly different form the rest of the country. Even Assam and Tripura has a history of long independence and autonomy rule with least interference from outside. The modernity of history touched the region rather late and though British rule did bring unity and modernization in administration, the feeling of commonality with rest of India did take time to sink in and still there are groups who feel 'dominated by outsiders'. There is a psychological barrier, particularly, among distant ethnic groups and it requires deep understanding of politics and history of the people before the state machinery puts all its might and force as a measure of control on those who rebels. Geographically too, North East is tagged in a corner really with five foreign countries, not friendly necessarily, surrounding the region, but also it is connected with the mainland of India with a very 'thin neck' of just 20 km wide, which too give a 'feeling of a separation' from the rest. The surrounding countries, China, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, is adding to this feeling of alienation by their hostile attitude to India and sometime 'overfriendliness' to those groups who are going against the interest of unity and integrity of the country. North East, is therefore a complex problem and cannot be or should not be just treated as a 'law and order' problem only. The problem of insurgency, extremism or terrorism, whichever way we brand it, is to be tackled with not just strong hand, but with strong mind and understanding too. There comes the question of economic development also. For example, generate gainful employment to all youths, discontentment will go at least hslfway. Let us first see the background.

At the time of independence, Assam, as it was then a combination of six states, all independent states within India now, had a per capita income four percent above the national average. Today, combined or severally, North East states are among the poorest lots in India. The Central Government's apathy towards this region for a long time after independence or rather till the insurgency made its mark, is one reason for the feeling of alienation of the people of North East. Secondly, there seems to have a conflict between politics and security as we see the problem of mass scale infiltration of unauthorized people from the neighboring country Bangladesh. This issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh, mostly to Assam is not only changing the demography of the state of Assam, but also it is becoming a great security threat for the country as a whole. Immigration and extremism are two different matters, but still they are connected, more so, for the unabated and unchecked influx from Bangladesh to the North East States, having an access for the militant groups to cross over.

The Islamic militant groups like HUJI or LeT are not only seeking their root in Bangladesh, but even ISI of Pakistan seems to have established a strong base in that country. It yet to be proved that change of Government has brought change of heart and change of policy all together. The Bangladesh still remains the refuge of many militant groups. It should be appreciated and understood that it is not Kashmir, but North East today, which can be major centre of activities where Islamic fanaticism may take its root. Added to it, whether it is ULFA or BODO militant group, they are getting patronization from Bangladesh and that country has become the sanctuary of many terrorist groups from North India, at least till recently. As it stands now, Pakistan is trying to carry out its operation from North East rather more with help from our neighbor through induction of Arms, Ammunition and fund. Even the number of civilian death due to terrorist activity in North East, in last three years counting from this year of 1910 is more in North East than in J&K. The Centre and state must act together in its effort to wipe out terrorism and a common program has to be evaluated and placed in position. Sophisticated threat must be met with sophisticated state machinery and honest diplomacy. Here comes the question of economic development. As mentioned briefly above, employment generation among educated youths should be the first aim. Establishment of few gigantic industries with sophisticated modern technology is not the answer. We must try to encourage medium and small industries where young entrepreneurs gets chance to use their talent and to be 'master' than to be just employees. North east and particularly Assam has the scope to develop industry like handloom, textile, fruit processing, horticulture etc, where employment generation opportunity is high. It is not suggested that large industries will not help the region, but what emphasis we must give more to the question---who generates more employment to local boys and girls. Youth power has to be channelised.

With effort for economic development, we cannot , at the same time neglect the necessity of all upgrading our Police force and modernize it both from human resource point of view and weaponry it holds. The Police Force, dealing with terrorism or extremism must have a separate specialized training program and cannot be clubbed up with the normal police training. The Police needs support, both physical and moral from local population as much as they need uninterfered support from the Government. We also must remember that left wing extremism and insurgency in North East is more home- grown and that is where the understanding of psychology and causes for feeling of alienation should be appreciated. Police, though, must act firmly, but must not be perceived as symbol of 'state terrorism'. Insurgency in the North East has been fuelled by increasing proliferation of small arms in the region and support received from external militant outfits. It is a complex issue where there is restlessness and frustration among local youths and at the same time subversive assistance from alien countries.

Military operation should be taken as the last resort, but more than that, the Centre should have willingness and a desire to recognize and appreciate the regional and ethnic aspiration of the people of the area concernrd and meet them to the extent possible, without sacrificing the sovereignty and integrity of the nation, though. Winning heart through a genuineness of feeling of under standing and on ground action for economic development of the region must go hand in hand. Special development in North East

through investment and also through local based institute like Hill Council in Meghalaya to meet the aspiration of the people is equally important. We talk about dialogue and discussion with militant groups and the process with some groups, in fact, is in progress, but we must remember that discussion should not be considered as a sign of weakness. The State must not be terror driven, but must show understanding of genuine problems the people may have. Economic development process, with involvement of local people, is one 'most fruitful weapon' to tackle terrorism in North East opr Assam in particular.

There are three kind of challenges to internal Security—Insurgency, Naxalism and Terror groups. The security and sovereignty cannot be compromised and the Security machineries of the state must be modernized, motivated and trained with latest weapons, no doubt, but the Government must also understand the cause and origin of the discontentment. That does not in anyway mean that state can slacken the effort to control any damaging activities resorted by the extremist group. Considering the threat to the human, economic and national security that the extremism poses, it has become very important to re-examine the strategy presently adopted in the North East and it has become all the more important to bring about alternative counter insurgency plan. As we have tried to impress upon, that while the psychology and cause of discontentment has to be appreciated, the Police cannot take back seat or be shifted back. Sense of fear for the Police is important for the state and the people, but Police also must understand that they are part of the society and must be considered friend of the law abiding people. Rough treatment to the total population of suspected area and indiscriminate third degree method may cause fear, but cannot wipe out root of insurgency. 'Be tough, but understand your fellowmen'—should be the guiding factor. Military deployment leaving the Police in the back seat may have disastrous consequence. Firstly, Military is really not trained to deal with civilian law breakers and secondly, Military should not be exposed to the local civil population too much and too frequent, because that does affect its operational role when called upon by the country. One other aspect which has become a hindrance to effective counter insurgency operation is rampant corruption among Government officials. The people must understand that extremists will take advantage of this menace of the society.

The Police or the state machinery to control extremism has grown in size and education, but at the same time the extremist groups, whether we call them insurgents or other militants, are also getting modernized and equipped with new arms, technique and equipments. The hand from the foreign countries, more prominently, Pakistan in our case, is adding to the challenges that we are facing. Not only our Police should have separate dedicated wing to face extremist groups with all modern gadgets, equipments and weaponry, but our Army too should have a specialized wing to deal with the terrorists groups when ultimately called up. At the same time the Police, particularly, must be trained to understand the psyche of the terrorists. Even Indian Air Force is planning to deploy Unarmed Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to combat insurgency in North East as a new step towards meeting the terrorists group hidden in thick jungles. The Army is, in fact, upgrading its anti-insurgents training every day. It is felt that Police of the North East states should have a separate training establishment in direct liaison with Army where anti- terror and anti extremism training can be imparted with absolute professionalism. A common forum for intelligence sharing among the North East States' Police forces is also

