

“Indian Army’s Counter-Insurgency Doctrine”

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The Indian Army has been one of the most important component of the Indian Armed Forces and is a very important aspect of National Security and International diplomacy and politics. As far as the Indian Army is considered, it’s the largest component of the Indian Armed forces in terms of its active and reserve personnel. The Indian Army is placed 4th on a global index that has ranked 122 countries on the basis of their global military prowess. Indian Army

consists of various units and regiments which have their own diverse history as well as cultures and traditions, yet, they all share a common objective which is to ensure and maintain national security, unity and defending the nation from the external aggressions and internal threats. The capabilities and potential of the Indian Army are unquestionable. The number of battle and theatre honours with which the Indian Army has been decorated before and after the independence of India, speak volumes about it.

One of the major issues which the Indian Army has been combating since Independence are the internal threats like the Naga Insurgency (1956), The Mizo Insurgency (1966), LTTE Insurgency (1987) and most importantly the militancy in Kashmir brought about by terrorist organizations like the *Lashkar-e-Omar*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammad*, *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*, *al-Badr*, *Hizb-ulMujahideen*, *Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front*, etc. The Indian Army deals with such internal threats through its Counter Insurgency Doctrine, which contains certain aspects on which the strategies of counter-insurgency operations are formulated and brought into play. There is also a special school in Srinagar which imparts special training to the troops for counter-insurgency operations in an urban setting.

The Counter-Insurgency Doctrine of the Indian Army can be analysed through the operations conducted by the Indian Army which not only tells us about the reasons for its origin but also the course it took after its implementation. The Intervention of the Indian government in Sri Lanka and the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord in 1987, led to the formation of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF), which had to serve an entirely different purpose as compared to the rest of the army. The Indian Peace Keeping Forces, which consisted of the 36th, 54th and 57th Infantry Division and 4th Mountain Division, which were supported by the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy. Later an element of the Indian Special Forces was also deployed for sophisticated and covert operations. The main deployment of the IPKF was in northern in eastern Sri Lanka. The IPKF were sent to Sri Lanka to curb the LTTE insurgency and disarm the other rebel groups. Initially, the IPKF didn’t expect any significant combat due to the explanations and briefing provided to them by the Indian High Command. In the beginning, almost all the rebels surrendered themselves to the IPKF except for one, which was the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam). The IPKF got involved in a battle with the LTTE, one can imagine this conflict by substituting the US Army with the IPKF, the

Vietcong with the LTTE rebels and Vietnam with Jaffna. The IPKF was successful in controlling the insurgency to an extent, which was bought with the price of a large number of casualties, but they failed to curb it. This can be said as the 1st large scale guerrilla war encountered by the Indian Army. Although, the Indian Army had been engaged in a guerrilla war with the Naga and Mizo rebels, but the Sri Lankan conflict was a totally different scenario because, despite of the large casualty figure of the IPKF, the nature of weapons which were used by the LTTE were almost similar to that used by a conventional army. Other than that, the Indian Army became very unpopular among the local population due to the LTTE propaganda and they started looking the presence of the Indian Armed Forces as a foreign occupation. However, in case of the Naga and Mizo insurgencies, the firepower didn't include the use of heavy weapons (Rocket Launchers, Mortars, Heavy Machine Guns, etc.) and the Indian Army was not seen as a foreign occupation in Nagaland and Mizoram (at least not to that extent as they were seen in Sri Lanka). One of the reasons why the Indian Army lost this war was due to the lack of a proper strategy and a professional approach towards handling these kind of insurgencies, in an urban area. It is for this purpose, why a proper analysis and assessment of the Counter-Insurgency ops was required. When we are dealing with a guerrilla force, the conventional war strategies and methods become inefficient. Let's talk about the Deccan Conflict during Aurangzeb's reign. The guerrilla army of Chatrapati Shivaji came out to be victorious despite of the strength of the Mughal army. This was because the Mughal army did not modify its traditional war strategies according to the change in the nature of the battlefield, terrain as well as the pattern of operations of the Maratha army. The Indian Army is suffering from the same problem which the Mughal army encountered in their Deccan campaign, which are the effects of a conventional war bias of these armies towards the strategies for countering guerrilla warfare and insurgencies. This is also a reason for the ineffectiveness of the Indian Army's Counter Insurgency Doctrine.

Let's have a short discussion about the 4 major aspects of the counter-insurgency doctrine, on the basis of which, the strategies for Counter-Insurgency are formulated.

(i) **Political Imperatives:** Since these insurgencies come under the ambit of internal threats, it's very important to keep up the morale of the troops as well as the local population because they are engaged in a fight between their fellow countrymen, so there is a psychological effect of this which can be harmful to the execution of the counter-insurgency operations. Rajesh Rajgopalan who is an eminent writer and thinker with respect to the policies of National Security, has described this as the "hearts and minds" approach in his book "Fighting like a Guerrilla". These kind of strategies were also implied by the US Army in Afghanistan and Iraq.

It's very important to adopt such kind of strategies in a counter-insurgency operation. This was a very effective and innovative solution adopted by the Indian Army in case of Naga and Mizo insurgencies, which eventually, ended up through a political solution. Issues like counter-insurgency operations are very delicate considering the fact that after the conflict, the reconstruction of these places becomes a very difficult task. This is the reason why there cannot be a military solution for any insurgency. Eventually, the Indian Army acknowledged these factors and implemented initiatives like Operation Goodwill which aims to provide humanitarian relief and aid to the insurgency effected areas in Jammu and Kashmir.

Firepower: Most of the counter-insurgency operations are carried out in an urban setup like a town, village or a city. It is important to channelize the intensive firepower possessed by the army, in order to avoid collateral damage which is usually in the form of damage to civilian property and loss of civilian lives. The whole concept of counterinsurgency is like a chain reaction, where, excess of any element can lead to the failure of the experiment, and, the result will be the same if there's a shortage of any element. That's why controlled use of firepower by the army is required. The conventional war bias of the army is again the source of conflicts in the control of firepower. The army is trained primarily to fight a war which involves the use of heavy firepower like machine guns, mortars, rocket launchers, artillery, etc. which is why it faces difficulty in regulating the amount of firepower to be used in a counter-insurgency operation. However, if we see the weaponry used by the terrorists, it has almost every equipment used in a conventional war. The terrorists use rocket launchers (usually RPGs), Improvised Explosive Devices and other weapons like heavy machine guns. The soldiers have to deal with all this through light weapons like assault rifles, submachine guns and light machine guns. The army has to put a lot of effort to overcome these obstacles, which result in heavy casualties. However, despite of all these facts, the Army has been using heavy weapons in many Cordon and Search Operations. For e.g. if there's a cordon and search operation in a village, the army will first isolate its target to prevent civilian casualties, the next thing will be to assess the strength of the militants and the nature of their firepower, after which the final assault plan is made. Now, if the officer in charge starts the assault which results in the casualty of his soldiers, he will order the troops to use a rocket launcher and demolish the house. This seems to be justified to an extent as the officer in charge cannot risk the lives of his soldiers, for two or four militants. The aftermath of such operations leave a deep impact on the local population, who are sandwiched between the army and terrorists. The officer in charge made a decision which caused the loss of a civilian's property, he could have eliminated the terrorists without using a rocket launcher also. However, the conventional war bias toward counter-insurgency became too dominant which led to such consequences. This also hinders the 'hearts and mind' approach of the government and instigates discontentment in the civilian population. Practically, nobody would have risked the lives of his soldiers, but at the same time, but the use of the firepower in a controlled manner is necessary and Indian Army should work in this direction to devise new strategies and incorporate them in the training programmes of their soldiers.

Isolating the Militants: According to many military thinkers, this aspect of was incorporated into the counter insurgency strategies of different armies and police forces of various countries along with India, due to the influence and interpretation of Mao's theory of insurgency and the British theory of counterinsurgency¹. This aspect of the Counter Insurgency Doctrine is related to the second aspect of the Indian Army's Counter-Insurgency Doctrine. If we are successful in isolating the militants from the civilian population, the army can also operate without controlling much of their firepower. The strategies based on isolating the militants from the civilian population, also helps to reduce the spread of their propaganda among the local population. The Indian Army usually carries out these strategies usually in the following manner:-

(a) Usually the Indian Army tries to evacuate the villages, which fall in the conflict zone, and shift the local population to camps which are guarded by the soldiers. This was incorporated into the training of counter insurgency operations as a result of the war between the British Army and the Indian National Army, in the North-East Frontier of the British India (present Nagaland and Myanmar) during the World War II. The INA, which had less number of soldiers in comparison to the British Army, adopted guerrilla warfare as one of their main strategies and even slowed down the movement of the British Army by indulging them in a guerrilla warfare. Since, the locals were well motivated because of the struggle for freedom they supported these guerrilla fighters by providing supplies, money and safe passage. In order to counter this the British Army started evacuating the villages and shifted the locals to camps. This a very good strategy which the Counter Insurgency Doctrine emphasizes on.

(b) The second tactic adopted by the Indian Army is of conducting ‘Cordon and Search Operations’. This is a very good method of dealing with the insurgents in an urban setting. Although, even these measure doesn’t guarantee a 100% success, there have been many instances where these kinds of operations resulted in a disaster, claiming the lives of many innocent civilians.

(iv) **Superiority of Forces:** As pointed out earlier, the Indian Army’s Counter-Insurgency Doctrine has emphasized a lot on the mobilization of forces, which is directly proportional to the magnitude of area domination. As one can notice, this, again is a situation where the army has upheld its conventional war bias towards counter-insurgency operations. Mass mobilization of soldiers in a battlefield during a war as it portrays an army as powerful in terms of manpower and also imparts a dominating effect on the enemy forces, psychologically. This aspect of the doctrine comes into play during the counter-insurgency operations. It was observed during the Naga insurgency that, the Indian Army deployed company sized unites which consisted of 100+ soldiers. The purpose of doing so, was to avoid the attacks ambushes conducted on the army by the guerrilla fighters in their jungle posts and patrol parties. Although, the number of soldiers is an important factor for maintaining the superiority of forces, but there are many other ways in which the army can exert its superiority over the militants. For e.g. the Special Forces operate in small teams, which are task specific, like demolition, rescue, raid, etc. It is very difficult to train the army in that manner, but, we can overcome this conventional war bias by training some specialized units of the army in this manner. The introduction of Rashtriya Rifles can be related to this. It was a good initiative by the government of India to deal with counter-insurgency operations. Earlier, during the Naga and Mizo insurgencies, the army introduced the concept of “Light Infantry”. The purpose of light infantry battalions was to deal with the counter-insurgency operations. Several such battalions were formed around 1968, but, this experiment was shut down around December 1970 after which these battalions were ordered to convert back to standard infantry battalions.

Thus, after analysing all the aspects of the Indian Army’s Counter Insurgency Doctrine, one can easily say that by the time the Indian Peace Keeping Forces went to Sri Lanka, they had

developed a counterinsurgency doctrine which could have been effective, but due to the presence of a conventional war bias in the doctrine as well as the training of the soldiers, it wasn't that much productive. Every element of the doctrine, except the limitation on the use of force, which was imposed by the political leadership, exhibited bias. Despite of the evolution and modernization of the doctrine, the bias remains as it is. Even after the Sri Lankan operations, the counter insurgency doctrine exhibited this war bias. For e.g., though the introduction of Rashtriya Rifles was an innovative measure to fight the guerrilla war with the militants and participating in the counterinsurgency operations, the change lied in its organizational structure. There was very little doctrinal effect on this innovation and even while recognizing the need to innovate in order to meet the modifications for counterinsurgency, the innovative part of the army stopped with organizational changes, as the doctrinal changes were too hard to be met by the army and execute them in daily life. If the Indian Army is able to overcome this problem, it will definitely get them the desired results in the counterinsurgency operations, especially in Jammu and Kashmir. Even if we take the example of the National Security Guard Commandos. They comprise of a Special Action Group, which conducts operations like counterinsurgency and hostage rescue. Most of the members of this Special Action Group are from the Indian Army, but through a specialized training they were able to overcome the problem of conventional war bias. Therefore, evolution of the counterinsurgency doctrine can be very beneficial for the army and is the need of the hour, considering the shift which has been brought about by technology in field of urban warfare.

