
Indian Army's Contribution to Internal Security

Sushil Pradhan

Introduction

The domestic dynamics of India's internal security are reflected in its socio-political milieu, the main feature of which is its diversity. It is reflected in the variety of its communities and castes, races and ethnic groups, languages and dialects, religious beliefs and customs and traditions, with different manifestations of culture, all operating in a dynamic environment. Unfortunately, the rise of contentious politics based on sectarian, ethnic, linguistic or other divisive criteria, is primarily responsible for the many communal and secessionist movements flourishing in India. Therefore, our internal security scenario will continue to be complex and varied. While problems will intrinsically rest on domestic roots, external factors will play a major role in aggravating these.

Although the internal security situation in India has shown overall improvement due to the multi-pronged military-politico approach adopted by the government, the economic disparities, corruption, rising unemployment and unfulfilled material aspirations create a feeling of deprivation and discontent in the society. This sentiment is being successfully exploited by forces inimical to the nation for systematically bleeding it through covert operations.

The scope of internal security in India includes emergency preparedness and response (both for terrorism and natural disasters); insurgency and left wing extremism; domestic intelligence activities; maintenance of law and order in aid to civil authority; protection of critical infrastructure and public safety; border security, both land and maritime borders; transportation security (including aviation, maritime and terrestrial transport); protection against chemical,

Lieutenant Colonel **Sushil Pradhan** is currently posted at the Mechanised Infantry Regimental Centre as a staff officer.

biological and radiological threats; humanitarian assistance, and maintenance of essential services.

While the basic responsibility of the army is to safeguard the territorial integrity of the nation against external aggression, the army is often required to assist the civil administration during internal security disturbances and in the maintenance of law and order, in organising relief operations during natural calamities like floods, earthquakes and cyclones and in the maintenance of essential services. As per the stated doctrine of the Indian Army, assisting the government to cope with internal threats is its secondary role.¹ Demands on the army have increased manifold due to continuous deployment of its forces in intense counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the northeast parts of

the country. Due to external abetment, India's armed forces are involved in internal security functions on a relatively larger scale than is normal; requiring a force structure that will be able to cope with it.

However, internal security should not be viewed as exclusively or even primarily a military task. Securing the "domestic battlespace" (a highly complex environment) requires government departments and agencies, state and local governments, the private sector, and individual citizens to perform many strategic, operational, and tactical level tasks in an integrated fashion. Success will depend largely upon the nation's ability to achieve unity of effort at all levels of government. This paper will dwell upon the nation building contribution of the Indian Army by way of assisting in maintaining India's internal security.

The internal security instability in the country is characterised by the continued political turmoil, power gaming, electoral exploitation, and regional and autonomous secessionist struggle among various states, population segments and political ideologies. Perpetuation of caste, class, religious and ethnic turmoil manifests in communal disturbances, volatile impatience, fascist tendencies, violent civil disturbances and frequent breakdown of law and order, growing politicisation and ineffectiveness of police and paramilitary forces (PMFs). Gathering violence in the form of insurgency, terrorism, communal riots, disruptive civil disturbances, sabotage, subversion and sponsored armed

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uprising is the order of the day. Thus, the problems in most parts of the country are due to a mix of political, social, economic and religious issues.²

India's internal security threats are rooted in its history, geography, colonial legacy, burgeoning population, social and economic disparities and complex socio-cultural and ethno-religious traditions.³ The situation in areas of J&K and the northeast remains turbulent and fragile. External interference by way of proxy war, demographic invasion and exploitation of minority sentiments by vested forces further complicates the already complex situation. These regions have their intricate peculiarities impacting the security situation.⁴ Amongst the multifarious challenges to our internal security, the home minister, has prioritised three; terrorism, insurgency and left wing extremism or Naxalism.⁵ The salient facets of the prevailing situation are summarised in the succeeding paragraphs.

Jammu and Kashmir

The security situation in J&K has shown perceptible improvement. The surge in tourism and other normalcy indicators are a manifestation of the aspirations of the common Kashmiri people for a peaceful and prosperous life. The elections to the State Assembly in 2009 were an important benchmark in J&K's return to normalcy. Militancy has declined, even while seditious politics is on the rise. However, the separatist elements in the Valley have not disappeared, and the situation remains precarious due to growing Islamic radicalisation in Pakistan.⁶ The Pakistani support to Kashmiri militants continues unabated, and the likelihood of higher levels of infiltration cannot be ruled out.

Northeast

The security matrix in the northeast is different in nature from J&K. There are no palpable religious or fundamentalist biases. Though military-politico efforts, dialogue with dissident groups and follow-up agreements have paved the way for a fragile peace in most areas, the situation in Manipur and Assam still remains volatile. Several insurgent groups remain active in the region. Many of them have taken recourse to extortion, drug running, arms trafficking, etc. to keep themselves relevant. The progressive criminalisation of the insurgent groups is a major development in recent years. The demographic imbalance due to shifting population within and from the neighbourhood is emerging as a serious concern. Illegal immigration and effect of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh in particular is another factor impacting the security environment in the northeast.

Naxalism/Left Wing Extremism

Naxalism is a classless violence surpassing ethno-linguistic barriers, caste wars or religious animosities, which has emerged in the absence of effective administration and political institutions, exploitation of economically backward communities and socialist ideology. The Naxalites are anti-development and have targeted the very instruments of development—school buildings, roads, telephone towers, etc. The prime minister has rightly cautioned the nation that left wing extremism posed the “single biggest internal security challenge” to India.⁷ With the creation of the Maoist controlled ‘Red Corridor’ and one-third of districts in India affected by some form of Naxalism, in the larger internal security construct, Naxal violence poses a major challenge. The recent killings by Maoists and media-induced hysteria about the need to involve the army entail the need to closely follow the various trends and developments, and be prepared for such an eventuality.

Terrorism

In India, terrorism occupies an increasingly broad spectrum of conflict from crime to conventional terrorism in support of political objectives, to trans-national terrorism as a means of proxy war. While the majority of terror attacks have been by insurgent groups or Pakistan sponsored terrorist organisations in continuation of their proxy war, there has been increasing involvement of religious terrorism, criminal organisations and trans-national terrorist groups. The army has been, and will continue to be, called in as a first responder in such attacks, as was evident in the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai.

Proxy War

Proxy war has been used by Pakistan as an asymmetric tool against India in Kashmir to begin with; and, subsequently, targeted the rest of the country. While the primary means have been the funding, training and equipping of insurgent and terrorist groups, this has also taken other forms such as money laundering, aiding criminal activity and subverting government machinery.

Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism has emerged as a prominent tendency within religious communities and embodied in certain representative individuals and movements. Believers, who attempt to preserve their distinctive religious identity, fortify it by selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. In

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a multi-religious nation like India, Sikh, Islamic, Hindu and even Christian fundamentalists have led to, and will continue to, foster violence; which, in turn, is aided by external agencies and political opportunists.

Divisive Politics

Numerous socio-economic and religious conflicts exist within Indian society and forging unity in a diverse society, especially where conflicts generate violence, is no mean task. Different communities fiercely assert their caste identities leading to caste wars, thanks to vote bank politics of quota reservation.⁸ These conflicts unleash violence that results in massive loss of life and property.

Deployment of the army only prevents escalation of the situation and seeks to alleviate this suffering in a short-term scenario.

Demographic Migration

The relative economic prosperity of India in the subcontinent and its liberal democracy have served to attract large masses of poverty ridden population, be it from Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar or even Sri Lanka. While mass migration can cause societal threats, 'anti-state' migrants can cause greater harm. These are essentially criminals, terrorists, anti-national elements, jail breakers and refuge seekers who operate incognito in our hospitable and accommodating society; and create mayhem. They have illegal trafficking links, run crime networks, drug cartels, money laundering and gun-running rackets.⁹

Weapons of Mass Destruction

New terrorist groups are more violent and more willing to use more destructive weapons, with the aim of attracting maximum attention. With the easy availability of nuclear, chemical and biological agents in the post-Cold War proliferation, illegal technology transfers, ubiquity of knowledge of such weapons on the internet,¹⁰ coupled with technologically proficient terrorists this threat is increasingly plausible. The recent Kaiga radioactive contamination case highlights the possible gaps in our security and the potential for lapse.¹¹

Maritime Terrorism

The spectre of maritime terrorism and piracy on the high seas has a profound impact on the security of shipping in the Indian Ocean Region, protection of vital off-shore oil exploration assets and safety of island territories. The linkages between drug-smuggling, gun-running, human-trafficking, piracy and international terrorist groups enhance the vulnerability to Indian shipping and off-shore assets.

Organised Crime

The mafia has already demonstrated its ability to influence the construction, mining, real estate and film industries; and its nexus with politicians and corrupt elements of the bureaucracy. Money laundering, narcotics, proliferation of small arms and human-trafficking are all interconnected to the growth of terrorism and criminalisation of society.

Border Management

India shares 3,323 km of land borders with Pakistan and 3,488 km with China.¹² The situation along our borders with China and Pakistan has witnessed periods of calm interspersed with hostilities. The border security scenario is marked by cross-border terrorism, narcotics, arms and counterfeit currency smuggling, illegal migrations and aid to separatist movements.¹³ The existing reality of border issues will continue to be a security concern. Poor border management also inevitably leads to a volatile internal security situation in the border areas of the country.

During the period up to 2025, the internal security situation is likely to escalate unless concerted and well thought out measures are implemented to arrest and counter these tendencies.¹⁴ The army is more often than not likely to be drawn in to meet these challenges; and must analyse the nature of engagement and the type of tasks that it may be called upon to undertake.¹⁵ Only then can it be prepared to squarely undertake its role with professionalism.

Indian Army's Contribution to Internal Security

The Indian approach to tackling internal security challenges is different from the Western way, primarily due to differences in strategic perspective; and the contextual variation in cultural, social, historical and military proclivities.¹⁶ The Indian strategy has been a mix of the use of calibrated force; and a range of political measures, both administrative and institutional, to address the grievances. The

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combined military-politico strategy seeks to convince the populace of the futility of violence and separatist agendas.

The crux of military strategy has been to bring the situation under control through minimal use of force and simultaneously isolate violent elements from the population through effective resource control and people friendly operations. India is perhaps one of the few countries in the world that uses the Criminal Justice Model with a concern for the human rights of the terrorists and their sympathisers; and due processes of the law.¹⁷ This model lays stress on preservation of democratic principles even at the expense of reduced effectiveness of operational measures, as against the War Model which the US, Sri Lanka and Russia use.

As opposed to the Americans in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan and the Russians in Afghanistan and Chechnya, India has followed a “manpower-intensive approach”, and lays emphasis on winning hearts and minds (WHAM). Self-restraint, so important for success against violent elements, is emphasised in training the soldier. There is no doubt that purely from the military point of view, this entails taking additional casualties. It is the price India has paid to create the strategic effect required for the desired political outcome. Recognising the centrality of the people, the Indian approach has been to emphasise the imperative of undertaking all measures possible to address local grievances that fuel support for the movement. Operation *Sadhbhavana*, undertaken by the Indian Army, is a prime example that entails the planning and supervised execution of people’s welfare projects in areas that are difficult to access by civil authorities.

Thus, the cardinal aspects of the Indian Army’s approach to countering internal security threats are:

- Restraint in use of firepower.
- Constant dialogue between the political and military leadership at multiple levels.
- Working in conjunction with, and in support, of the civilian administration.

- Restraint in actions against cross-border sanctuaries.
- People-centricity and intelligence.

As defined by the India Army Doctrine, the secondary role of the Indian Army is to assist government agencies to cope with proxy war and other internal threats and provide aid to civil authority when requisitioned for the purpose. Thus, out of its various mandated tasks, amongst the most routinely performed ones in peace-time are military operations to counter proxy war, insurgency and terrorism; and that of providing aid to civil authority for maintenance of law and order, humanitarian aid and assistance during disasters and calamities; or maintenance of essential services.

Notwithstanding its multi-front obligations, the Indian Army has been repeatedly called in as the first responder for internal crises, whether it was in Mumbai, in the Gujarat agitation or for earthquake relief. In addition to being the primary counter-insurgency force, it is also today instrumental in strengthening police and paramilitary forces (PMFs) in various states by providing them training, establishment of counter-terrorism schools and intelligence. Some of the aspects which have distinguished the Indian Army's performance in such non-conventional roles are;

- High degree of professionalism and high rate of success.
- Speed in response and deployment.
- Military operations dovetailed in the overall response system of the government.
- People friendly operations aimed at separating the insurgents/terrorists from the populace with minimum inconvenience to the locals (WHAM).
- Strictly apolitical dealing with the civilian administration, police forces and the people.
- Use of minimum force (iron fist in a velvet glove), within the framework of the constitution.
- Traditional approach based on democratic values of our country, which give primacy to dialogue, democratic political process and rule of law.
- Constructive contribution to development activities (Operation *Sadbhavana*).

The Way Ahead

In the prevailing scenario, counter-insurgency and anti-terrorist operations are likely to remain a key component of India's security arena. Security operations

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coupled with socio-economic development and political measures constitute three dimensions to successfully address internal security challenges. Our future strategy must be to address the causes and not merely the symptoms. Despite reluctance in employment in internal security duties, the Indian Army will continue to play a significant role in combating such threats, given the limitations of the police and PMFs. However, there is a requirement to review our current approach in keeping with the shifting levels of violence.

Coherent National Strategy

The prevailing internal security environment demands an astute national level conflict management strategy, comprehensive multi-departmental policy formulation and vigorous implementation, while simultaneously ensuring that the requisite steps are initiated to address the socio-political and socio-economic problems that lead to such instability. The response to terrorism and sub-conventional warfare cannot be limited to the conventional categories of 'military', 'police' or 'security' responses, but must be widened to embrace every aspect and agency of the government and every resource available to the nation. There is a need to formulate a comprehensive internal security doctrine at the national level as part of the overall security policy, applicable to civil administration, paramilitary forces, police and defence forces.

The establishment of the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) to unify and analyse the intelligence from various agencies is a step in the right direction, as is the legislation of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008, and the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008. What needs fruition now is the operationalisation of a National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) as proposed by the home minister and a slew of coordination measures for border management.¹⁸ The National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) can be made the core agency to deal with technological threats. There is, thus, a need for coordination and cooperation among various organisations to tackle multi-polar internal threats, keeping in view the hydra-headed national security organisation that exists in our country. A good example to follow is the US Department of

Homeland Security that was created post the 9/11 attacks. It could be in the form of a separate Ministry of Internal Security under whose control both the Ministries of Defence and Home Affairs can place specifically earmarked resources.

Rethinking the Role of the Army

The Indian Army's involvement in its secondary role has been overemphasised and is a matter of concern, since excessive and continuous employment of the army is neither good for the army nor for the nation. The government needs to introduce certain doctrinal and organisational changes to improve the synergy of all instruments of the state, and the capability of the state police, central police and PMFs in dealing with the threats to internal security. While significant organisational and equipment reforms have been instituted in the last five years, the weaknesses lie in the areas of political and administrative accountability, transparency, supervision, training and people's participation.¹⁹

The PMFs should gradually be geared to take on the lead role, in particular relieving the army of the mundane policing duties. Similarly, anti-terrorist operations should focus on the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) as the primary force in aid of the state police, with the National Security Guard (NSG) as a specific 'strike' force for special circumstances. At the same time, the civil administration must become more effective and exploit the gains made by the army in the civic action field. In future, the army should be employed as the last resort and not the first option. The army can assist in the transformation of these forces by providing training (rather, training the trainers), setting up schools of instruction, providing instructors for short duration assignments and providing leadership by lateral induction of volunteers from the army. The army should thereafter be used only when absolutely unavoidable, and then too only for short duration surgical operations. It may be well worth considering amalgamating certain forces under a central authority in the form of an internal security force²⁰ to exclusively take on the challenges of internal security and border management, that "will reduce the dependence

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of the states on the army, yet provide the government with the option of a flexible and calibrated response”.²¹

Doctrinal Changes for the Army

The Indian Army serves as the ultimate instrument for maintaining the unity and the integrity of the nation in the face of internal unrest and disturbances. The revolution in technology, enhanced media scrutiny, increased involvement in internal security duties, evolving internal security threats and the need to preserve the strictly apolitical and secular image of the army necessitate the need for doctrinal and structural changes. Our framework for homeland security will need to comprise preparation, detection, deterrence, preemption, defence, and response.²²

Our doctrinal orientation should, therefore, focus on²³:

- Continuous situational awareness and capability of induction at any stage with minimal information.
- Employment of multi-pronged approach/strategy and use of multiple agencies to deal with issues in an integrated manner.
- Integrated approach coordinated vertically and horizontally with added emphasis on intelligence and diplomacy.
- Economy in use of force by exploitation of advanced technology.
- Adaptability to integrate more skilled civil interface.
- Perception management and proactive use of the media to own advantage.
- Psychological conditioning for prolonged operations with minimum political support.

Conclusion

India’s real autonomy in working out its destiny as an independent centre of power would lie in its internal strength and cohesion. The Indian Army, as part of the defence forces, comprises an important component of India’s comprehensive national power, and has always responded to every challenge successfully. Combating internal security threats is an intricate multi-dimensional task, for which the army has been used as the ultimate tool. Till the time the central and state government machinery and the other security agencies are adequately empowered to become the lead agencies for countering internal security threats, the army shall continue to remain the only dependable and effective means of ‘first response-last resort’; and, thus, contribute positively to the onerous task of nation building.

Notes

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3. AK Singh, "Homeland Security: A Multi-faceted Challenge," *SP's Military Yearbook*, 2009.
4. *Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations*, (ARTRAC Publication, 2006).
5. Opening statement of the Union Home Minister, P Chidambaram, at the Conference of Chief Ministers on Internal Security on August 17, 2009, at New Delhi; Press Information Bureau, Government of India; available at www.pib.nic.in.
6. Policy Brief on "Internal Security," Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi, June 2009.
7. Prime minister's speech at the chief minister's meet on Naxalism, April 13, 2006, New Delhi, available at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=311>.
8. "India's National Security: Internal and External Threats", at www.livemint.com.
9. Rahul K Bhonsle, *India's National Security: The Asymmetrical Challenges* (New Delhi: Knowledge World Publishers, 2004), p.235.
10. Terrorists may acquire such capabilities by:
 - (a) State sponsorship from Pakistan, China or even Myanmar.
 - (b) Chemical, radiological and biological stockpiles possessed by a large number of states, proliferated through countries like China or Pakistan.
 - (c) Manufactured by the groups themselves, though this requires hardware, expertise and finance.
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 18. P Chidambaram, “A New Architecture of India’s Security,” 22nd Intelligence Bureau Centenary Endowment Lecture on December 22, 2009.
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