

Maoist Threat, Deploy Babus, not Army

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The Big Picture

Confronted with the Maoist menace, Civil Administration's incompetence is making mountain out of a molehill by suggesting induction of the military.

The threat posed by the Maoists to the Union cannot be compared to the LoC in Kashmir or the Northeast. On borders, there is direct support of the external players. Both, in terms of creeping invasion by Islamic fundamentalists that results in demographic changes, as well as, to infiltrate fundamentalists to equip and train the local sympathizers to subvert the Civil Administration. Couple this with the military threat posed by China and Pakistan directly. If the military dilutes its vigil on the volatile borders, Union of India will soon lose major chunks of its territory. This constitutes the primary role of the army.

The clamor by many to bring in the Army and the Air Force to resolve the Maoist threat ignores the key question: Is the threat posed gigantic enough to warrant deployment of the army? Or is the Civil Administration creating mountain out of the molehill because its level of incompetence is now beyond redemption? The schedule and the resources required to host the Commonwealth Games by India were well considered at the time of bidding for the games. With barely 60 days left, we are not prepared. There was no threat posed by the Maoists, the Northeast insurgents or the terrorists to disrupt the preparations. Yet the Civil Administration flounders despite a well-defined objective and demands induction of 300 military personnel.

The same incompetence is visible in other aspects of the civil administration. Millions of ton of wheat procured at the taxpayer's expense for distribution to the poor segment of society was allowed to rot in the rains.

A state within the Union creates 'counter insurgency' school for the police without basic facilities like firing range and skilled officers to train personnel. Two courses pass out and declared ready to take on the Maoists! If the CRPF or the state police personnel remain unskilled, untrained and underequipped, and led by 'incompetence', casualties are bound to be high. There are no bad units, only bad officers!

The security threat posed by the Maoists to the Union is relatively small compared to the externally supported insurgency and terrorism faced by the army in Kashmir and the Northeast. The known external support to the Maoists is very little, possibly because their activity is centered in the interior of India. They are more of a rag tag bunch that largely fight with weapons looted from the police armory, or are country manufactured. Due to Civil Administration's abdication of authority, they successfully manage to loot police stations for weapons, attack jails and free inmates and run armament factories. These concessions conceded under duress amounts to dereliction of duty by the Civil Administration. In the military such negligence will invite immediate court martial.

The Maoist threat rated as 'biggest' to the Union is not because the Maoists are better armed and financed than the Jihad Factory on our borders but due to the threat posed from within that disrupts the growth of the nation. A family or a nation that lacks harmony within is incapable of handling external threats. In somewhat similar circumstances, the Chinese conquered Tibet and the Maoists are poised to capture Nepal. With the American led Western Forces slated to withdraw from Afghanistan in July 2011, defence of India's borders will demand extra military muscle. Nevertheless, India's potential to outmaneuver both its adversaries is immense, provided the Civil Administration learns to govern efficiently.

In the first place, if the Civil Administration which implies the 'Executive' was moderately competent, delivered justice, was responsive and enforced 'rule of law,' and did not allow the gradual slip of territories in to the hands of the miscreants, the problem would not have arisen. The state true to the prevalent culture of 'logic of convenience' abdicated its responsibility by distributing arms to the locals to fend themselves in the garb of 'Salwa Judum'. The common man, out of fear is forced to support the Maoists, in absence of protection from the legitimate local administration. The Maoists are made to look very tall due to the ineptitude and callousness of the administration. The poor generalship in 1962 by the military and the political leadership made the Chinese look very tall. The

historical truism is that the Chinese have never won a war.

The second key question: In the near future, in addition, will we ask the Indian Army to take over the running of Municipality, Commonwealth Games, health services, policing, or Kerala that is emerging as a terrorist hub, besides tackling the Maoists who almost control forty percent of the Union's territory? Or do we take strong corrective measures to set right the Civil Administration, which is practically falling apart?

Our adversaries are aware that the Union of India is as strong or as weak as its army. They will be delighted to see the Indian Army diverted from its primary external role to resolve the internal strife. Such diversion will help the forty-two terrorist training camps running in PoK to shift to Srinagar! In any case, army with huge shortage of officers is already in an overstretch and any further deployment against Maoists will result in an extraordinary strain.

Two beefed up army divisions with integral air element is adequate to dismantle the Maoist infrastructure within one year. The civil administration projects it at seven years. This seven-time magnification is approximately the level of incompetence acquired since independence.

The third key question: After the army brings the situation under control- what next? Once the army in a short time manages to restore the adverse situation, will the Civil Administration take over its responsibility to renew its writ and relieve the army for the more urgent primary role? The idea behind the induction of the Indian Army in the Northeast and J&K was again to restore the adverse situation and thereby create conducive environment for the political process to start. This was an enabler, but the Civil Administration spurned the gains. The Civil Administration in Kashmir, and not the army should carry out 'Sadbhawana' movement. The Indian Army initially met many reverses, but persevered, and finally got on to 'top-of-the-situation'. However, the Civil Administration till date fails to take charge. The end result is that the Indian Army finds itself in a quagmire. It is mired in a role that is not primary to it.

This is one of the many reasons as to why the army should not get deployed to resolve the Maoist problem spread over forty percent of the land within. In such an eventuality the Civil Administration will never ever gear up to make itself competent, accountable and responsible for its primary task. The only reason that would justify army's deployment is a scenario wherein the Maoist threaten to territorially split India from inside. Panic buttons are being pressed unnecessarily, due to a magnified illusion created out of sheer ineptitude. Luckily, time favors the Civil Administration to acquire and hone the essential skills to resolve the

problem, since the menace largely has internal dimensions.

The final question: How to resolve or minimize the internal security threat to avoid a divided house while confronting the two front external threats?

The Blueprint

The lopsided Indian pacifism may be good for an individual's soul but has proved to be suicidal for the nation's security. The wobbly Civil Administration for decades is on the withdrawal mode with its influence shrinking on the external periphery as well as within. They leave their posts in the interiors and hide behind fortifications preferably in the state capitals or in New Delhi. The Maoists or similar forces occupy the vacuum.

To overcome the 'withdrawal' culture of the state, there is the need to inject offensive orientation in the otherwise pacifist approach of the Civil Administration and the political class. This requires import of military thinking and skills to create the necessary administrative ability to positively influence and dominate the ground. Notwithstanding the bureaucracy's apathy towards the armed forces, because of the burden of pacifism, such skills can only come from the military.

First, to reclaim the situation in favor of the state, the army should make the Maoist affected districts as the area of annual training at divisional level. Two division level exercise conducted for forty-five days each in turns, for a period of one year continuously, will make an enormous difference.

The army by its sheer presence will facilitate the Civil Administration in restoring the Union of India's writ in the affected areas. In case the military is fired upon, it will fire back to defend its assets and carry on with conduct of the exercise, without getting involved in the nitty-gritty of local administration. It may be underscored that between 'existence of state' and anarchy, military is the decisive instrument. Military power, therefore, needs to be employed intelligently and must be given a free hand to ruthlessly restore the writ of the state.

Military wherever deployed, keeps its eyes and ears glued to the ground to gather local intelligence for its own security. This intelligence can be shared with the Civil Administration to counter the Maoists. Army can very well dismantle the Maoist bases located inside the thick forest by its sheer presence while conducting military exercise.

Large-scale army exercises are hugely beneficial to the local economy. Moreover, it instills confidence in the local people and the administration.

From this very core where military exercises will be conducted, the Para-

military, the police, the District magistrate etc. can begin to restore the writ of the Union. The Civil Administration should expand outwards in the interior of the districts on the 'hub and spoke' principle.

Second, to simultaneously leverage the impact of the army presence, the Civil Administration should handpick a team of officers known for their integrity and the ability, to be inducted in the affected areas. The truth is that the army can only create an environment conducive to civil governance. If the bureaucracy cannot supervise, insurgency will reappear.

Third, militarization of the Indian mind, particularly in the Civil Administration to restore a balance between extreme form of pacifism and action is essential. BSF was raised by military officers initially and did well. The Assam Rifles (Para-military) officered by Army is effective in the Northeast. It is the operational wing of the NSG, on direct deputation and officered by the army that delivered in Mumbai 26/11. Therefore, the need to propagate military skills in the civil is essential. This will equip the Civil Administration to deal with the internal armed threats as also govern with efficiency. Whenever the civil set up choose to be militarized, it succeeded in neutralizing the threat—KPS Gill during insurgency in Punjab and the Greyhound Commandos of Andhra Police delivered.

The lateral induction of military personnel into the Civil Administration will benefit on multiple counts. First, it will keep the military young which is an operational necessity. Second, it will bring military skills and ethos in the IAS, IFS and Police and Para-military. The turf wars to keep the military authorities at bay by the civil setup must stop, if they desire to ensure that the writ of the Union runs throughout the nation. Putting a retired Major General in the advisory board of the Unified Command to tackle the Maoists is being neither here nor there! The soldiers' color service in the army should be reduced to ten years from seventeen and he should be inducted subsequently into the Para military and the police. This would keep the army young and beef up the skills in the civil.

The police and the Para-military should get at least hundred new recruits from each state trained every year for the next five years at the nearest Army Regimental Training Centre along with the army recruits. Similarly, at least a hundred police, Para-military and IPS officers should be trained with the Officer Cadets in the Officer Training Academy every year. This manpower should form the nucleus of the Armed Police Constabulary, both in the states and the centre in future. In the short term, a Lt General, seconded to the Home Ministry from the Army, should head the CRPF. He must be allowed the freedom to induct retired

military officers and soldiers on attractive terms of service to make the CRPF fighting fit on 'war footing.' In pacifist India, unfortunately, decision-making on 'war footing' translates in to forming a committee – an endless endeavor, followed by a GOM! We need to learn the art of 'flat decision-making' to face the internal and the external challenges. Quick, bold, fair and accurate decision-making is vital for the good health of the state. The biggest threat to India today is by the Indians and not by the Chinese or the Pakistanis. Just, efficient and firm administration is the foremost necessity. Otherwise, India may soon become a replica of the failed state, Pakistan.

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