Insurgency in the North East India: Factors Behind it

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ABSTRACT: India's Northeast is one of South Asia's hottest trouble spots, not simply because the region has as many as 30 armed insurgent organizations operating and fighting the Indian state, but because trans-border linkages that these groups have, and strategic alliances among them, have acted as force multipliers and have made the conflict dynamics all the more intricate. With demands of these insurgent groups ranging from secession to autonomy and the right to self-determination, and a plethora of ethnic groups clamouring for special rights and the protection of their distinct identity, the region is bound to be a turbulent one. The aim of this paper is to study the insurgency of north east India and factors behind this.

Keywords: Insurgency, NorthEastIndia, NGO, socio-economic, ULFA.

I. Introduction:

The history of insurgency always remains witness of many factors working behind the raising of its ugly head. The members of the Insurgent groups become isolated in the long run and surprisingly it is forgotten that they were also at a time the indivisible part of the whole civil society. Like every man born free, similarly no man born insurgent. As the superior being of this planet, the human being inherits some positive qualities which usually inspire to be in the mainstream and restrain from going downhill. Notwithstanding these high moral attributes, people get tempted towards the path of insurgency for reasons best explained by them. Barring a few almost all the developing nations are suffering from the chronic of insurgency problem and India in general as well as the North-East India in particular has been suffering its age-old bitterness. Thus, it has become the need of the hour to identify the main factors behind these insurgent groups and to find out measures to tackle those accordingly[1].

Violence and conflict have been a traditional theme within political geography and geographers have been consistently arguing that violence and conflict, including insurgencies, are inherently geographic as they occur in particular place [2] and across geographical territory. The roots of insurgency in the North Eastern region are embedded in its geography, history and a host of socio-economic factors. Ninety-eight per cent of the borders of the region are international borders, pointing to the region’s tenuous geographical connectivity with the...
rest of India. While the population share of the region at around 3.90 crores is a mere 3 per cent of the national population, its rate of growth has exceeded two hundred per cent between 1951-2001, generating great stress on livelihoods and adding to land fragmentation. While, nominally tribals constitute 27 per cent of the population of the entire region minus Assam, it increases to 58 per cent for the remaining States. Percentages, however, do not adequately reflect the extensive diversity in the tribal population of the region which has more than 125 distinct tribal groups – a diversity not to be seen in States like Jharkhand and chhattisgarh where tribal populations predominate [3].

II. Objectives of the Study: The present study is aimed at the following objectives-

1. to study the insurgency of north east India.
2. to understand the factors behind this.

III. Study Area:

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, and because of the mountain range, NEI is the physical gateway between India, China and Southeast Asia. Strategically important to both countries, China also claims the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh as part of South Tibet. Despite a build-up of troops on both sides of the disputed border, it has been suggested that the opening of this passage is inevitable, and that when it happens it will be comparable in geopolitical and economic terms to the opening of the Suez Canal [4].

IV. Methodology:

The paper is writing mainly based on secondary data and information which is collected from various books, journals, news paper, and magazines and internet sources. The collected information is explained as descriptive method.

V. Result and Discussion:

Insurgency activities in Northeast India grew out of varied reasons and purposes with each of them having different agendas but a single thread runs through them all is the construction of homeland. Unlike other insurgent groups in India, the various insurgency movements in Northeast established basic ingredients for continued insurrection, namely, territorial and community-based group. These groups are armed, politically as well as militarily organized, while some of the movements are politically oriented towards the overthrow of present government. Emergence of such “groups politico-territorial identities” vying for separate territory within or outside India [5] has escalated regional conflict.

The northeast is the most ethnically diverse region in India. It is home to around 40 million people including 213 of the 635 tribal groups listed by the Anthropological Survey of India [7]. The population is predominantly rural, with only twelve per cent living in urban areas, and the region is extremely diverse in political and socio-economic terms. The
The indigenous population has much in common with the culture and traditions of their neighbours in Tibet, Burma and the countries of Southeast Asia beyond. All the major religions are present: Hinduism and Buddhism from India and Tibet, Islam from a sizeable Bengali population, and Christianity, brought by Missionaries.

Insurgency in the northeast is the product of more than one factor. There is significant evidence to testify to the volatile pre-conditions, which existed prior to the actual armed outbreak. The underlying factors, prevalent as they were, required just a spark to ignite the tension ridden atmosphere. The culmination of latent and immediate factors resulted in successive wave of insurgency across the northeastern region [2].

a) Political Mileage:

   It is widely objected particularly by the civil society that many separatist outfits in the North-east India were born and grew at the behest of the myopic political leaders. This allegation has been vindicated many a times in the particular cases of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. For example, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), an insurgent group of Assam came into existence on the 7th April, 1979 and became able to be the first-ever most dreaded outfit of Assam only during the regime of the first Assam Gana Parisad (AGP). It was widely alleged that the AGP government provided tacit support to the outfit with the hidden intention to remain ever winner in the power politics of Assam. Similarly, the S. C. Jamir government of Nagaland was held responsible even by the Governor that Mr. Jamir was providing support to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), one of the most powerful insurgent groups of Nagaland. In Manipur, almost every party is busy in cultivating underground insurgent groups to strengthen their bargaining position with the Central government. In Tripura, the Communist Party of India (CPI) under the leadership of Dashrath Dev is still criticized for sowing the seeds of insurgency during 1948-51. The evidences are ample clear of being running a hidden insurgency-politician nexus only with the intention of gaining political mileage.

b) Mal-Practice of Bureaucrats:

   The news papers very often carry the shocking news of insurgent-civil servant nexus to the grave dissatisfaction of the whole civil society. The reports of secret agreement between the civil servants including the IAS officers and the insurgent leaders are coming to light from time to time. These are unequivocally alarming to the growth and continuity of a good-governance. There are some examples of this kind from the perspective of Assam. Two IAS officers of commissioner and secretary level were quoted having maintained hidden rapport with the ULFA. The situation even went to the extent that one Chief Secretary of Assam became compelled to write to the Ministry of Home Affairs of India inviting action against three Commissioners of Assam for allegedly maintaining nexus with the ULFA. On the other hand in Manipur, the public distribution system was
paralyzed by the insurgent groups by virtue of the strength procured from their linkages with the politicians. The diverted rice was partly supplied to the militants’ camps and partly to the black markets. Almost all the public contracts were forcefully assigned to the militant groups at gunpoint. Only half of the work was done but the Executive Engineers showed full execution in their measurement book. Such type of misuse of public money continued to happen in other departments as well. In the first place, the politicians started the process of siphoning out large scale public funds in collusion with the bueaurocrats. Afterwards the insurgent groups started procuring a major share of the deal. There are examples of warning by the Central leaders to many state governments of the NE region against the payments of the developmental funds to the insurgent groups.

c) **Police-Insurgent Link:**

One of the most striking features of the North Eastern insurgency is the secret pact made with the police administration. There are examples galore to establish the secret understanding between these two naturally opposite wings. For example, some Assam police personnel were involved in illegal trade of arms supply to the ULFA cadres. There was media report of the sale of arms to the ULFA insurgents from an armory in Sibsagar district of Assam by two constables in September 1992. It was reported that the ULFA cadres got prior information about the probable army operations solely from the Assam policemen. Similarly, in Nagaland, a large number of arms and ammunitions were captured by the NSCN-IM insurgents from the police custody in 1995. It was possible only due to the collusion between the local police and the insurgents.

d) **The Media Support:**

The blind support of the so-called media for the cause and ideology of any insurgent group has turned out to be another powerful ground for flourishing insurgent activities in the NE India. A large number of media persons tend to share any kind of particular ideology and hence tend to report an insurgent activity accordingly. Another group of intellectuals share the principle of national self-determination and they are always prompt to explain an insurgent activity to be the natural rights of the son of the soil. On their own ideological bases, the media men or the intellectuals are professing the causes of the insurgency problem in the region. Without having thorough knowledge of the problems at hand, some media men create havoc when they attempt to advocate on behalf of the terrorists. In Assam, there were some reports of arrest of some media men by the police only for their ardent support to the demands of ULFA.

e) **Ngo & Human Rights Group:**

The insurgents particularly in the NE India are getting support in any form from many non-government organizations. In other words, these NGOs are working as the over-
ground and political wings of the underground insurgent groups. The Naga Students Federation is well-known for its support to the insurgents. Many NGOs in Manipur run their activities as per the dictum of the terrorists. There are available reports of extending support to the ULFA by a UK based NGO named the Assam Watch. Similarly, there are some human rights groups as well behind almost all the insurgent groups to plead in support of the insurgents whenever any crisis arises. It is alleged that these human rights organizations are very conscious against the least violation of the human rights belonging to the insurgents who have already spoiled the utmost human rights of many innocent civilians.

f) Transnational Assistance:

There are reports of external assistance to the NE insurgents which is posing a serious threat to the law and order situation of this region. The NE insurgents receive funds, arms and ammunitions, training and shelters in the surrounding foreign countries. The leaders of these militant groups are supplied fake passports and visas to travel in different countries so as to help them organize their underground activities. In this context, the name of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar are mentioned very often. Such type of networking amongst the insurgent groups has practically posed a serious challenge to the governmental machineries as well as the civil society of this region as a whole.

g) Factional in-Fightings:

Another factor behind the growth and development of the North Eastern insurgency problem is identified to be the in-fighting among the insurgent groups. Such a volatile situation arises due to the emergence of factionalism at the top leadership level. During the long journey of insurgency, it is seen that insurgent groups fail to keep their united character as it is seen beforehand. This situation gradually starts to give birth divergent factional insurgent groups in the same region. It is the immediate fallout of quarrels taken place from time to time among their top leaders. The main reasons for such displeasure, quarrel, hostility or whatever among the leaders are primarily money laundering, arms consignment, ideological etc. As a result, the imminent consequence appears to be the more intense in-fighting amongst them in order to replace one another from the path of future course of their lucrative insurgency programs. Such competitions among the factions yield no positive outcome rather than more owes to the innocents and dismay for the civil society as a whole.

h) Other Factors:

In addition to the above factors, there are some other factors as well which are influencing the North-Eastern insurgency problem to a very formidable extent. Most of the insurgent groups at their nascent stages try to exploit the public sentiments by applying the policy of Robin Hood image and become popular among the masses. What they
understand from the ground reality of insurgency seems remain different from what they present in front of the public view. The main intention behind this strategy is to gather public support for their unlawful activity in the name of ushering in a new dawn. But what is more ironic is that the government machineries having in-built apparatus like the CID, Intelligence bureaus etc. shows alertness only after the event caused by the insurgents is over.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation:

There are numerous seminars, workshops etc. have been conducted on this particular issue and attempts are still on to coin out effective measures to tackle the age-old insurgency problem in the North-East region of India. Deliberating on the issue, the intellectuals propose to suggest the following measures:

a. The word North-East itself is a misnomer which is assimilating and confusing the problems instead of understanding the problems in the different perspective of the particular north-eastern state.

b. There is a latent actor in and around India which is very actively conducting its hidden agenda to keep the country destabilized either in the North-West or in the North-East.

c. The central government should formulate proper policy regarding the ethnicity and insurgency related problems of this region.

d. The political parties and the civil societies of this region should keep vigil on the proper utilization of the funds meant for the developmental planning of this area.

e. The combined efforts of the police forces of this area may also be effective in checking insurgency in the whole North-East of India.

References: