
Managing Internal Security: Case for a New National-Level Counter-Insurgency Force

Gurmeet Kanwal

Ad Hoc Employment of Forces

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 requisite steps are initiated to address the socio-political and socio-economic problems that lead people to militancy. Under the Constitution,¹ law and order is basically a state subject and, ideally, the constabulary and provincial armed police of the states infested by militancy should be capable of handling all but the most vicious forms of militancy with only short-term supplementary support from the central security forces. However, Pakistan's 'proxy war' and the level and intensity of the militancy in various states have led to the increasing involvement of the central government's police and paramilitary forces (CPMFs) and the Indian Army in bringing the situation under control.

The employment of the central security forces for internal security duties and counter-insurgency operations is mostly ad hoc and diverts their attention and resources from their primary roles. Besides regular infantry battalions and other units of the army, the Rashtriya Rifles (RR), the Territorial Army (TA) and the Assam Rifles (AR), which are under the army's operational control, have been deployed for internal security duties for over a decade. Other central government CPMFs include the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the erstwhile Special Service Bureau. Occasionally, elements of forces like the National Security Guards (NSG) have also been employed for internal security duties.

Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd.) is Additional Director, CLAWS and Editor, *CLAWS Journal*.

The employment of a plethora of forces inevitably results in lack of cohesiveness and dissonance in the execution of policy and is bound to lead to institutionally debilitating turf battles. To reduce the employment of the army for internal security duties, the capability of the police and paramilitary forces at the disposal of the state and central governments should be upgraded to enable them to tackle internal security problems. They must develop an army-like ethos and must raise their standards to match the army's levels of proven junior leadership, motivation and training. The army can assist in the gradual transformation of the CPMFs and state police forces provided these forces can overcome traditional inter-Service mindsets and learn to work together in the national interest. The army can provide training to police personnel selected as instructors at its training institutions like the Infantry School at Mhow, its Junior Leader Wing that conducts the famous commando course, the Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School at Vairengete and at its Corps Battle Schools in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the northeastern states. The army can also provide instructors for short duration teaching assignments at the various police training schools and academies. With the Maoist-Naxalite threat looming large on the internal security landscape, the time has come for the disparate central and state forces dealing with internal security to close ranks and face the challenge resolutely.

After the submission of the Kargil Review Committee Report (KRC), the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) had appointed a Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by the home minister to study its recommendations and advise the CCS on their implementation. The GoM, in turn, had appointed four task forces to look into the major lacunae pointed out by the Subrahmanyam Committee in the management of national security. These task forces on higher defence management, internal security, border management and intelligence submitted their reports in the year 2000. Perhaps a single task force on internal security and border management would have been more appropriate as the two issues are operationally interlinked.

The task force on internal security clearly had the most unenviable job of all the task forces. The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a spate of internal security problems, terrorism and insurgencies in Punjab, J&K and in India's northeastern states. Though law and order is a state subject, the level and intensity of the 'proxy war' sponsored by Pakistan led to the increasing involvement of the central government's CPMFs and the Indian Army in an ad hoc manner for internal security duties and counter-insurgency operations without adequate regard for their primary roles. This task force had identified

the CRPF as the most suitable force for reorganisation as the primary central government force for counter-insurgency operations.

In order to be successful in their new role, CRPF units must be suitably equipped with modern close quarter battle weapons and battalion-level support weapons. Their leadership should be drawn through lateral induction of volunteers from the army, as was done when the BSF was initially raised. Another aspect of necessary reorientation would be to ensure that CRPF units operate as

The employment of a plethora of forces inevitably results in lack of cohesiveness and dissonance in the execution of policy and is bound to lead to institutionally debilitating turf battles.

cohesive battalions under the direct command of the commanding officer (CO) and not as independent companies in penny packets, with the CO being given only administrative responsibility. The nomination of the CRPF as the national-level counter-insurgency force will also enable the other CPMFs like the BSF and ITBP to return to their primary role of better border management. Internal security and border management are inextricably interlinked due to the external dimension to India's ongoing insurgencies and Pakistan's proclivity to infiltrate mercenary terrorists into India through thousands of kilometres of open borders.

For high-grade insurgency operations with foreign support, the Assam Rifles (AR, in the northeastern states) and the Rashtriya Rifles (RR, in J&K) are being employed at present. Both these forces are army-led and are organised into cohesive sector-level headquarters and battalions. The regular army should not be employed for internal security and counter-insurgency duties unless it becomes absolutely unavoidable due to the presence of well-trained and well-armed foreign militants and secessionist tendencies become evident. Even then, it should only be for short-duration surgical operations under the umbrella of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act or its new *avatar* to stabilise the situation, hand it over to the state and, where necessary, the central forces, and return to the barracks. However, the employment of the army for internal security must not be politically motivated, nor should it be contingent on the whims and fancies of state governments. A classic example in this regard is that of Assam with its 'on-off' policy of whistling-in the army and then ordering it back to the barracks before calling for its services again at short intervals. The ill-conceived launching of Operation Bajrang and

Operation Rhino in Assam and then the termination of these operations on political considerations well before the aim could be achieved, are examples of how politics must not interfere with military operations.

Though some BSF battalions in J&K were replaced by CRPF battalions in 2003-04, the central government continues to repose its faith in a 'mix-n-match' policy of committing almost all types of central police forces like the BSF, CRPF and ITBP, along with the army, in counter-insurgency operations. Each of the forces has been raising new battalions in an ad hoc manner. This policy has not produced results commensurate with the force levels employed, as counter-insurgency operations require a very high degree of specialisation and higher-level coordination. There is, of course, a possibility that the central police organisation (CPOs) may eventually achieve greater maturity in handling at least home grown insurgencies and militancies, even if they remain inadequately armed, structured, equipped and trained to fight foreign-sponsored ones effectively. Dealing with the various insurgencies threatening India's security requires a holistic inter-ministerial and inter-departmental approach. Above all, it requires political courage and vision to evolve and implement a comprehensive national policy.

Hazards of Prolonged Employment for Internal Security

A large army force continues to be deployed in counter-insurgency and internal security duties. In May 1998, the defence minister had stated in the Parliament that a total of 1,19,000 army personnel were deployed for counter-insurgency and internal security duties and this figure has remained more or less the same. In reply to Dr. Jayanta Rongpi's Unstarred Question No. 205, answered in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) on May 28, 1998, Mr. George Fernandes had stated:²

At present, 72,000 defence personnel are directly deployed in counter-insurgency/ internal security in J&K, while about 47,000 are deployed in north eastern states. In addition, there are also personnel of supervisory and other formations who are involved in supervisory roles whose number is not included in the above figures.

Prolonged employment of the army for such duties, besides adversely affecting the army's preparation for its main task also imposes an extra burden on the defence budget which, in turn, affects the army's modernisation programmes. In addition, casualties suffered by the army in peacetime affect the morale of the army personnel...

The consistent policy of the government in this regard has been that the

defence forces should be deployed for internal security duties very sparingly and only if the state government is not in a position to handle the situation and the deployment of defence forces becomes absolutely necessary. The Rashtriya Rifles was sanctioned by the government to relieve the army, to the extent possible, from counter-insurgency duties. This has, however, helped only to a limited extent in view of the increased commitment of the army in counter-insurgency operations.

Overall, about 170 regular army and army-led para military battalions are actively engaged in counter-insurgency operations and internal security duties.

At an average of about 900 men per battalion, the figure of 1,19,000 means that approximately 132 infantry battalions are deployed for counter-insurgency and internal security duties. Of these, about 60 battalions are RR battalions. In addition, five to eight infantry battalions of the Territorial Army³ and about 25 to 30 battalions of the Assam Rifles have also been employed for active operations within the country. Overall, about 170 regular army and army-led paramilitary battalions are actively engaged in counter-insurgency operations and internal security duties. To this list, details of the units of CPOs, which are being employed for similar tasks, need to be added to get an overview of the enormity of the effort involved in combating militancy which is mainly Pakistan-sponsored, aided and abetted.

Besides the casualties being suffered almost on a daily basis and their adverse impact on morale, the army's prolonged involvement in counter-insurgency operations has several other major disadvantages. The financial costs of sustaining a successful counter-insurgency campaign are staggering. It was estimated in 1998 that the army spent approximately Rs. 2,500 crore (US \$ 600 million) out of its annual budget on counter-insurgency operations.⁴ This was about 13 per cent of the army's 1997-98 budget of Rs. 19,000 crore approximately (Revised Estimates). The outcome was that the army spent almost 57 per cent of its budget on pay and allowances, about 40 per cent on the maintenance of equipment and the replenishment of ammunition and other essential stores being consumed for counter-insurgency operations, and was left with only 3 per cent for modernisation, including capital acquisitions.⁵ Even the expenditure on the Rashtriya Rifles, amounting to approximately Rs 500 crore annually, was incurred from the army's budget for many years. Quite obviously, the army can ill afford such a high expenditure on counter-

insurgency operations from its budget without its operational efficiency for its primary task being significantly impaired. As the defence minister informed the Parliament (see text of the minister's statement above), the army's modernisation programme has been adversely affected by its prolonged and continued involvement in counter-insurgency duties.

The prolonged employment of troops is bound to have deleterious effects on their morale in the long run. Given the fact that approximately 1,19,000 personnel are involved in exacting and sometimes exasperating and psychologically unsettling counter-insurgency operations and internal security duties, it can be stated that the army has borne the rigours of prolonged employment in these operations stoically and resolutely. The nature of low intensity conflict (LIC) is such that it exacts a heavy mental toll due to the absence of a clearly defined uni-directional threat and the assumed omnipresence of armed militants who may suddenly open fire from the least expected direction. Maj. Gen. Arjun Ray has written: "Troops who operate for protracted periods under stressful conditions are bound to suffer from psychological problems as well as disorders."⁶ There have been several news reports of a number of CRPF personnel deployed in J&K having been afflicted by mental disease. These need to be taken note of as the reported incidents may be advance indicators of a larger malaise.⁷

After 15 years of fighting militancy and terrorism in J&K, the present situation can only be described as a "strategic stalemate." While the army and other security forces undoubtedly achieved notable success in the war waged by proxy by Pakistan by keeping the arteries open and ensuring that trade and commerce could carry on virtually unhindered and the schools, colleges, banks, hospitals and markets could be kept open, the fact remains that the battle of hearts and minds is still far from being won. Clearly, the army needs to review its present counter-insurgency doctrine that is now producing only diminishing returns. Greater reliance on invisible and quiet special forces (SF) operations, marked by surgical strikes based on precise and trustworthy intelligence gathered by the SF personnel themselves, will yield greater dividends.

Possible Solution: Permanent Counter-Insurgency Force

In the near term, the army will continue to be called upon to intervene to establish control over the deteriorating internal security situation and must formulate a long-term strategy to progressively extricate itself from this commitment. The army will need to take a view on whether it should continue to maintain a Rashtriya Rifles force of about 70 to 80 battalions continuously

over the next few decades for internal security operations or demobilise 20 to 30 battalions as the situation improves and retain the option to remuster them if the need arises. As the army is unlikely to get additional funds for internal security operations, it will be more prudent to adopt the latter option so as to be able to utilise the saved funds for qualitative upgradation.

As the experiment to nominate the CRPF as the primary counter-insurgency force of the central government does not appear to be succeeding, a better alternative would be to raise a new national level counter-insurgency force as a strike force for counter-insurgency operations and internal security duties, with the army's ethos and training. Such a force should be raised under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as an armed force of the union (similar to the coast guard) and should be placed under the army's operational control wherever deployed. This will ensure that unity of command is maintained during combined operations and that the regular army is called out less frequently for such operations. Quite obviously, suitable candidates for such a force are the existing Rashtriya Rifles force and the Assam Rifles force. The RR had 54 battalions in early 2004 and has expanded since⁸ and the AR has about 35 battalions and is expected to have 45 battalions at the end of the present restructuring exercise. Lt. Gen. Rostum Nanavatty (Retd.), former GOC-in-C, Northern Command, and a well-known expert in internal security and border management is of the view that the creation of a "third force" for internal security between the CPMFs and the army will reduce "the dependence of the states on the army... (and) provide the government with the option of a flexible and calibrated response... (its role) should be to assist the army to counter internal threats to national security... In the AR, the nation already has an LIC operations capable IS force with a proven record... The AR should be redesignated and should assume responsibility for IS operations countrywide."⁹

The advantage of such a force will be that the army can once again devote itself to its primary role of safeguarding India's territorial integrity. Conventional military operations require a lean, lethal and wired army with revolution in military affairs (RMA) capabilities for conventional operations under a nuclear overhang, whereas internal security duties require a different type of organisation at the battalion and sector levels, specialised weapons,

As the defence minister informed the Parliament, the army's modernisation programme has been adversely affected by its prolonged and continued involvement in counter-insurgency duties.

surveillance and communication equipment and entirely different training, with emphasis on winning the battle of hearts and minds. However, the army will need to continue to remain prepared for its secondary role of providing aid to civil authority for internal security in case the overall situation places greater demands on the new national-level counter-insurgency force than it can effectively handle. Judicious management of resources should ensure that such employment is only for short durations.

The RR is a specialised counter-insurgency force of the Indian Army and is organised into Force HQ (commanded by a major general) and Sector HQ (commanded by a brigadier) and battalions. The Force HQ that have been raised are the 'Delta' (for Doda district), 'Kilo' (Kupwara, Baramulla and Srinagar), 'Romeo' (Rajouri and Poonch), 'Uniform' (Udhampur) and 'Victor' (Anantnag, Pulwama and Badgam).¹⁰ The nucleus of the new force in J&K should be based on the existing Force HQ, Sector HQ and 60 to 65 battalions (80,000 personnel) of the Rashtriya Rifles.¹¹ For the rest of the country, including the northeastern states, the Assam Rifles that has about 35 battalions, should provide the nucleus, as it is now a force with an all-India composition.

The new force should be headed by a serving lieutenant general of the army with the designation and status of an army commander, that is GOC-in-C. The size of the force need not be constant and could be varied, depending on the requirement, which should be reviewed periodically by the National Security Council (NSC). In the present situation prevailing in the country, the strength of the force would need to be enhanced progressively to approximately 120 to 150 battalions so that a corresponding number of army battalions can be relieved for their primary role. The new force must be staffed with army personnel on deputation providing leadership so that the ethos, motivation and training standards of the army can be inculcated. The officers could serve on a fixed tenure basis. The rank and file of the force could initially consist of volunteers on deputation from the army and, subsequently, should be recruited directly for a shortened colour service period of seven years. On the expiry of their colour service, all willing personnel must be absorbed in the CPMFs and a firm commitment should be given by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in this regard.

The new force should be organised into its own Force and Sector HQ, as the RR is at present, and should operate under the control of the Command HQ responsible for counter-insurgency operations in the concerned state, just as the coast guard comes under the command of the Indian Navy during operations. The defence budget will need to be augmented by about Rs 2,500 crore per annum to sustain a Rashtriya Rifles type force of 120 to 150 battalions. While this may seem

like a large amount, it would be a small price to pay for the more efficient management of various insurgencies and militancy movements that are gnawing away at the nation's innards and for providing limited relief to the army from prolonged employment in counter-insurgency operations. It needs to be noted that in the case of the coast guard, funds are provided to the MoD by the Department of Revenue and Banking, Ministry of Finance, and are not included in the defence budget. Such an arrangement could be worked out for the new force.

Being a permanent force, the new force will need to station one-third to half of its battalions in peace stations for which the requisite infrastructure will need to be created. Also, the force will need its own recruitment and training centres, records and pay and accounts office. The force will need to be logistically self-contained during peace-time, though it could be dependent on the army's existing logistics infrastructure in forward areas. The force should be raised under a separate Act of Parliament, as in the case of the coast guard, Assam Rifles and the National Security Guards. The terms and conditions and the pay and allowances of the personnel of the force should be akin to those of army personnel. Additional hardship allowances should be sanctioned where necessary.

A better alternative would be to raise a new national level counter-insurgency force as a strike force for counter-insurgency operations and internal security duties, with the army's ethos and training.

Intelligence Coordination

It is a measure of the national seriousness in tackling festering insurgencies that despite almost 50 years of experience, not enough investment has been made to streamline the intelligence apparatus for gaining intelligence about the plans and movements of various militant organisations and their linkages with foreign benefactors. Each type of force involved in counter-insurgency operations has its own intelligence agency and is loath to share information and intelligence with other forces. This results in a disjointed and uncoordinated approach and increases the human and material costs of conducting successful operations. The Unified Command must establish institutionalised intelligence gathering, analysis and dissemination structures at the directional, operational and functional levels so as to achieve synergy in the conduct of operations. The communications must be made compatible and must be secure.

A Joint Task Force on Terrorism was set up to overcome centre-state jurisdiction problems in combating terrorism during the tenure of Mr. Brajesh Mishra as national security advisor (NSA) in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. This task force has identified 56 vulnerable places all over India. In each of these, a Special Action Group (SAG) has been set up. Each SAG comprises six hand-picked state police officials and two Intelligence Bureau (IB) officials for rapid action on information becoming available. The SAGs can draw on the resources of the Multi-Action Group (MAG) at the national level that also has military representation and is in the process of drawing up a data bank on terrorism. However, it has been reported that the SAGs have withered under the present NSA.

Conclusion

Prolonged, large-scale employment of the army for counter-insurgency operations has considerably eroded the army's conventional deterrence capability as it has affected operational preparedness, hampered training for conventional operations and slowed down the army's modernisation plans. This has emboldened Pakistan to continue and even step up its proxy war against India as it perceives the Indian Army to be unprepared to fight and win a conventional war. It is imperative that the involvement of the army in such operations is gradually reduced to manageable limits so that India's conventional deterrence can again be made potent enough to thwart Pakistan's proxy war designs. The CPMFs, with their present structure, are not capable of countering insurgency with secessionist tendencies. A viable solution to the problem is to either designate a revamped CRPF as a national counter-insurgency strike force or raise a new nationallevel force for such operations as a new armed force of the union as part of the MoD, under the army's operational control, to act as a specialised strike force for counter-insurgency operations. The BSF and other CPMFs must go back to their primary roles. The system of a Unified Command needs to be clearly established and arrangements made to share intelligence at all levels within the state.

Finally, all out efforts need to be made to find political solutions to the ongoing insurgencies. The nation's decision-makers would do well to understand that there cannot be a military solution to a socio-political and socio-economic problem. The army and other security forces can only achieve temporary military control over the law and order situation and facilitate a semblance of normalcy to return. Such control lasts only as long as the forces remain *in situ* and, even then, brazen acts of violence by *fidayeen* suicide squads cannot be eliminated. The root

causes of insurgencies require sensitive political handling for resolution and long-term strategies that are not based on vote bank politics.

Notes

1. Law and order is included in the State List under Schedule VII of the Constitution. However, Article 355 enjoins the union to protect the states against “internal disturbances” and “armed rebellion”. It is from this Article that the central and state governments draw their authority to call upon the armed forces to provide aid to civil authority.
2. Members of Parliament have been increasingly expressing their concern at the army’s continuing and increasing involvement in counter-insurgency and internal security duties in J&K and the northeastern states. Heightened tensions along the LoC during 1997-98 and the increasing frequency and intensity of artillery engagements, particularly consequent to the nuclear tests conducted by both India and Pakistan in May 1998, have also been noted with concern by the members of Parliament.
3. “Territorial Army Celebrates 49th Anniversary,” *Sainik Samachar* (New Delhi), November 16-30, 1998.
4. Dinesh Kumar, “Kashmir: Pro-active Policy Needed Along Line of Control,” *The Times of India* (New Delhi), July 21, 1998).
5. Kumar, *Ibid*.
6. Maj. Gen. Arjun Ray, VSM, *Kashmir Diary: Psychology of Militancy* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1997), p. 199.
7. A report in the *Business India* Index states that “the number out of every 100 CRPF personnel deployed in J&K who are suffering from mental illness is 13.” The statement is attributed to Mr. Gautam Kaul, former additional director general, CRPF, Jammu, and quotes a study undertaken by the Department of Psychiatry, Nair Hospital, Mumbai, *Business India* (Mumbai), January 11-14, 1999.
8. Rajat Pandit, “Army Gunning for RR Growth in J&K,” *The Times of India*, March 22, 2004.
9. Cited with permission from Lt. Gen. R. K. Nanavatty from his paper entitled “Low Intensity Conflict in India: Restructuring and Reorganising the Army,” presented at the CLAWS seminar on Low Intensity Conflict held at New Delhi on March 23-24, 2006.
10. Rajat Pandit, “Army Raising New RR Battalions for J&K,” *The Times of India*, February 20, 2003.
11. “The army is looking at an increase in Rashtriya Rifles battalions... from 54 to 60 by September (2004) and 66 by June (2005),” in “Army Examines New Doctrine,” *Statesman*, April 15, 2004.