

APPROACHES TO ANALYZE COUNTER INSURGENCY PARADIGMS IN THE POST COVID WORLD ORDER

1.Rosie Kalita, 2.Dr. Riju Sharma,

1. Phd Scholar, 2.Head of the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities
Social Sciences and Humanities,
Assam Don Bosco University, Guwahati, India.

Abstract : Approaches to analyze counter insurgency paradigms in the post covid world order.

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of COIN (Counter Insurgency) is not just containing or subduing the insurgents militarily but employing a wide range of strategies other than militaristic. Such a mix of strategies defines the comprehensiveness of COIN approach which includes all the aspects of military, political, economic and psychological or the civic action programs. The latter is related to the term 'winning hearts and minds' which has got significance since fighting an insurgency is as much political as it is militaristic. One needs to examine holistic solutions and deploy the best in class communication tools as well as technology led strategies to take COIN into a new orbit as far as the post covid era is concerned. The past year has seen the world in turmoil, with Covid 19 having reached every country in the world/ With 131 million cases and 2.84 million deaths, we are facing an unprecedented crisis on every single front, ranging from health, education, livelihoods, economy, in fact survival itself. There is a skew as well in the global vaccine distribution and that too is a variable which would very likely extend the life of the pandemic. In the context of the global conflict as well as insurgency situation let us examine the way the crisis has been panning out, especially in the context of prevalent insurgencies as well as counterinsurgency responses. This paper will attempt to carve out strategies keeping the entire context in place and lean on history to learn and undertake scenario building to visualise the society which the world is transforming into.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper explains the phenomena both with quantitative and qualitative natures. It is based on the secondary data derived from books, journals, articles, websites and government sources as well, along with the author's personal experience as a PhD scholar and senior law enforcement professional. Observational method is also used for analysing the data.

III. OBSERVATION

The past year has seen the world in turmoil, with Covid 19 having reached every country in the world. With 131 million cases and 2.84 million deaths, we are facing an unprecedented crisis on every single front, ranging from health, education, livelihoods, economy, in fact survival itself. There have been over 80 million job losses globally, according to ILO and with the new phases of the pandemic, fuelled by mutants, the crisis is far from over. There is an askew as well in the global vaccine distribution and that too is a variable which would very likely extend the life of a pandemic. In the context of the global conflict as well as insurgency situation, let us examine the way crisis has been panning out.

UN Secretary General Antonia Guterres in March 2020 called for a global ceasefire in response to Covid-19, and for all parties to instead focus efforts on the "true fight of our lives", namely Covid-19. Many countries in the West have struggled to keep the crisis at bay and with the second or third wave; these issues have only been exacerbated. There continues to be widespread concern as to how conflicts in poorer regions such as Syria, Somalia, Yemen etc would pan out and there would be a major issue in ensuring timely help and medical supplies to the needy. The secretary general's call had a mixed reception. It has gained broad support from governments, regional organizations and NGOs in some contexts. The National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) seem to be concerned by the health and economic risks Covid-19 poses, and express concerns that lockdowns or any other form of curtailment of movement and economic activity would negatively impact citizens and have declared a ceasefire.

Others have refused to reach any such compromises ensuring conflict rages on– the ELN's unilateral ceasefire declaration has not been reciprocated by the government, or Colombia's other armed groups – and continued to perpetuate violence. Some militant groups have placed conditions on their adherence to the ceasefire, or imperfect ceasefire arrangements. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces has declared a ceasefire, but it's not clear whether this includes attacks against Turkish forces in Syria for which it does not take responsibility. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia declared a unilateral ceasefire after years of conflict and it could very well be in this situation, there could be a strategic imperative to exit this conflict and have a lasting peace. The response from within the UN Security Council has been equally mixed. Negotiations over a UN Security Council Resolution backing the call for a global ceasefire have now lasted for many months, and have been unsuccessful so far in garnering support from the US, China and Russia – three of the five UN Security Council Permanent Members. Supposedly, the US has resisted any positive reference to the WHO and its work on the pandemic until the present Biden administrations expresses overtures to work together, whereas China is pushing for one. In reality it is likely that many countries would be looking at the possible impact on their counter insurgency or counter terror operations.

In India, the Maoist insurgency does continue in spurts with the recent operation in Sukhma being a flashpoint and the insurgencies in the North East, especially the ULFA are nearly at an end.

For the purpose of this paper, insurgency is defined as a political-military campaign by a non-state actor/s who seeks to overthrow a government or secede from a country through the deployment of unconventional or sometimes conventional set of strategies and tactics. In Galula's acclaimed book *Counterinsurgency: Theory and Practice*, he outlined three basic laws of Counterinsurgency which have been widely deployed in 21st century.

1. Support of the population is as necessary for the counterinsurgent as well as the insurgent, to achieve this objective the counterinsurgent must reach out to the relevant population and derail the entire insurgent operation. Let us consider this in the light of the emergent crisis, Globally this represents an excellent opportunity for governments, may they be the Nigerian government acting against the Boko Haram or Israel acting against the ongoing insurgency or any others to communicate the care of the state in terms of covid relief, vaccination, support on employment, reskilling etc to stamp out the secessionist agendas of any of the prevailing insurgent groups in the region.
2. There is a need, as Galula says to actively woo a favorable active minority to become in a manner of speaking in this context of leveraging a compassionate COIN (Counter- insurgency) strategy to be the bridge to a neutral majority and set the stage for deployment of force against elements of a hostile sub group who are not willing to get back on to the road to being rehabilitated. This could be very well through leveraging word of mouth communications on government efforts and using leaders who have surrendered as spokesperson for the initiative. One needs to be very careful that the source is the government and not the insurgents themselves. In Afghanistan the Taliban have been conducting public health awareness camps and have been using the pandemic as an opportunity to legitimize their control over specific regions
3. It is of course critical that the announced measures are deployed at the ground level so as to maintain a high degree of trust which would set the stage for future strategies in the realm of counterinsurgency. This been an issue in the Saudi Yemen conflict which needs to be kept in mind so that no mismatch occurs between the stated strategy and the ground level implementation program. Islamist insurgents in one of the hot zones of insurgency, Mozambique are capturing hearts and minds of the population in the north. Cabo Delgado is the province with the highest rates of Covid-19 infections, a fact which the insurgents are further using for propaganda material, as well as providing local populations some tangible benefits such as incomes for recruits and the provision of public services where the state has failed to provide.
4. The fourth and final law of counterinsurgency is regarding the "intensity of effort and vastness of means." Because counterinsurgency requires a large concentration of effort, resources and personnel, it is unlikely that it can be pursued effectively everywhere at once. Rather, action should be taken in select areas, and resources moved as needed. Thus, according to the laws of counterinsurgency, it is important to continuously make efforts at gaining and maintaining the support of the populace in distinct areas by leveraging an active minority. In our context this implies that we need to focus our "compassionate Coin" approach in select areas, or among select groups of the populace where the difference could be leverageable to the maximum, for example among the vulnerable groups such as older people, women and children. One also needs to keep in mind that the counterinsurgency forces are themselves grappling with the pandemic so this would take a relatively back seat.

It is not to say that this paper is advocating the Coin strategy as being a purely relief and rehabilitation one. There would be a need to deploy force as needed and with the vulnerability of the hostile insurgent this too would have optimal leverage as evidenced by ongoing Coin operations globally. A case in point was President Biden's airstrike in Syria on February 26th 2021 where multiple hostile facilities were destroyed thereby reducing the intensity of the conflict. ICMs director Ajai Sahni says "The logistics and network of insurgents got disrupted during the lockdown, while the government channels have been functioning. In India, counterinsurgency operations were intensified across all conflict zones with considerable success during this period. Galula (1964) wrote about the critical role of civilian population who tends to be largely neutral in the conflict and shifts its support to insurgents or counterinsurgents depending on perceived benefits and outcomes of such a support. The population's support also depends on the actions, such as assistance or violent reprisals, taken by either side toward the population. Malayan insurgency (Nagl, 2002) offered the evidence that insurgency loses its strengths when population is physically separated and protected against the insurgents; when counterinsurgents offer economic benefits, security from violence, and political conciliation to the population. In addition, counterinsurgents benefit when they are able to attract a large fraction of population by exploiting ethnic and other differences. Indigenous counterinsurgent forces are more effective than foreign counterinsurgency forces in gaining a population's loyalty. In the present case the Covid pandemic would offer governments' the opportunity, leveraging relief, vaccine etc to swing the population as stated earlier.

Leites and Wolf (1970) pointed out that insurgency declines when deprived of resource inflows (such as munitions, food and ration supplies, finances) and when its organizational structure and competency are disrupted by counterinsurgents. Given restrictive travel and impaired free movement of goods, this would be relevant if governments leverage this aspect to starve the insurgents of resources. With the issues of migration it would be worth noting that studies have shown a large pool of displaced persons or refugees can become a highly productive recruiting ground for insurgents as well as an opportunity to skim the foreign food aid (Cuny and Hill, 1999).

One of the most important factors is the prevailing mindset of insurgents/potential insurgents in the present context. A research conducted by the author in surrendered ULFA camps revealed a high level of disillusionment with the organization. The proportion of dissatisfaction with the leadership is 35.4 per cent while 64.6 per cent proportion of pro-talk members responded that their expectations were not met by the group. They were not even acquainted with the leadership and there was a deep schism in the organization. It is only to be expected that this would be further exacerbated in this crisis and even recruitments not only to ULFA but other groups would be at a temporary halt.

It is however important to note that this sensitive period does not become an opportunity for insurgents to fan the flame of resentment and provoke imagined grievances and fan the flame of existing ones. A carefully coordinated strategy and focused communication along with the visibility of tangible relief measures in sensitive areas would go a long way in adding on a critical dimension to global Covid strategy.

Suggested Measures – Observations and Strategic Directions

1. **Hearts and Minds** - Counterinsurgency theory and practice suggests two broad approaches, the first being a conventional military approach which regards the insurgent as an adversary and then focuses on decimating them through a war of attrition and inflicting critical damage to their leadership and resources. This has been deployed in several theaters of conflict ranging from Vietnam to Boko Haram in Nigeria. The second which is of exceptional relevance here is the hearts and mind approach, alluded to earlier which would at the first level be a targeted communication approach reaching out to the populace and in this case through the route of public health measures so as to build trust.
2. **Stemming the “reproduction rate” of the insurgency virus.** As in the pandemic, the spectre of insurgency could be infectious as well - with a variety of means adopted by recruiters to bring in gullible youth into the fold. There are two ways here to deal with this. In technology terms, proper tracking and social media listening tools as adopted globally would help in stemming the R0 (reproduction rate). More importantly building a group of influencers and highlighting case studies of people who have come back into the fold, such as the Surrendered ULFA cadres, ex insurgents etc would help ebb this movement. In the pandemic context, communication could be appropriately engineered to this aspect.
3. **Offer a counter vision to be seen and believed** - It is critical to offer a counterpoint to the narrative the insurgents offer. They may also use the power of the pandemic as a leverage point. The counterpoint would need to be not just stated but visible too, eg vaccine camps in affected regions etc. and awareness of government schemes /benefits to citizens who the insurgents would like to be unaware of.
4. **Soft power** is obviously not the silver bullet that will eradicate all insurgency or terrorism. However, employing soft power in the right environment in subtle ways along with hard power capabilities may deter those who are susceptible to join radical groups as well as isolate the hostile minority that is the fuel behind these movements.
5. In Assam, the banned outfit, ULFA has reduced to a pale shadow of its former self and the numbers are dwindling rapidly. There is an issue of funds and logistics as well. The pandemic has further ensured that possibilities of future recruitment would be at a near standstill. The key lies in ensuring a sustainable strategy that the youth remain committed to the mainstream and do not even stray into the direction where their vulnerabilities be exploited by enemies of the state. Only a holistic approach of hard as well as soft power appropriately and judiciously deployed would ensure this.

References:

1. What happened to the UN Secretary General's Covid 19 ceasefire call, Relief web 16 June 2020.
2. Galula, David, Counterinsurgency -Theory and Practice, PSI, 2006
3. “The other menace - How the covid lockdown aided counterinsurgency” Economic Times, 28 June, 2020
4. F.C. Cuny and R. B. Hill, “Famine, Conflict and Response: a Basic Guide,” Kumarian Press, West Hartford, Connecticut, 1999
5. Kalita, Rosie, Counterinsurgency PhD thesis research, Assam Don Bosco University, 2020
6. Leites, Nathan and Wolf, Charles. Rebellion and Authority: An Analytical Essay on Insurgent Conflict. Arlington: RAND Corporation, 1970 (R-462-ARPA).
7. Van es, AA, Mozambique- Insurgency in the era of Covid 19, Linked in, 23 June 2020