

State and insurgency: Study on counter terrorism strategy in Assam

Bhaskar Bhuyan

Phulbari, Lakhimpur, Pin-787023

ABSTRACT: *Insurgency in North eastern states is laying in the deepest part of its Historical Geo-politics. Identity crisis regarding Land, Language and other social parameters between the middle class sentiments have been provoking to happen such insurgencies, like- NSCN, ULFA, NDFB, BLT, KLO etc. However Indian state mechanism has been trying to solve such insurgency movements by different ways to protect its Sovereignty. In this seminar paper, counter-terrorism strategies will be discussed by using the methodology of case study. The basic characteristics of insurgencies of Assam are bi-dimensional. Some insurgency groups, like ULFA and NDFB has been demanding for a severing state arrangement as well as other insurgency groups, like BLT are demanding for a separate state arrangement under the veil of Indian Territory. However the state mechanism has been trying to solve this situation by using both of Military strategies, like: Operation Rhino, Bojrong, All Clear as well as some Soft Strategies, like: 'Divide and Rule' policy, Peace Talk etc. Counter terrorism strategies taken by the State mechanism however has raised some serious issues, like Human rights violation in several parts of Assam. But the situation has not been normalized yet. In this seminar paper, the causes, historical link up as well as the basic scenario of insurgency will be analyzed.*

KEY-WORD: *Geo-politics, Insurgency, Terrorism, State mechanism, Counter Terrorism,*

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I. INTRODUCTIONS:

The last three decade of Assam is the three decades of Insurgency and Counterterrorism initiatives by both of the rebellion groups and the State mechanism. Assam now a day has been integrated with a minimum of nine insurgent rebellion groups, who either demand for sovereignty or special status. In this paper we will discuss with special reference to ULFA that how insurgent groups has emerged and the reaction of the state mechanism to handle the problem.

1.00 Insurgencies in Assam— A Historical overview:

Geo-political factor of North Eastern insurgencies is derived from the situation of its isolation. Silliguri Corridor is known as the connecting bridge between Indian mainstream areas and North east, which is a narrow stretch of land of about 22 kilometers. The silliguri corridor is popularly known as the 'Chicken Neck', by which North East become an integral part of Indian political map. However, Subir Bhoomik has mentioned that by the inner-line system and the 'Government of India Act of 1919' made Hill tribes differ from plain tribes of Assam¹. It has created a kind of Identity-sense between the hill tribes of North East. Naga and Mizo insurgencies were an outcome of this identity-sense, created by the British Indian circumstances. However in Assam the basic reasons of emergence of insurgencies are the Assam movement and illegal cross border migration from Bangladesh. In the era of colonial imperialism, a secessionist idea was grown under the structural power (i.e. Colonial power). British Government had proposed for a crown colony apart from India, named 'Kupaland'. But, Phizo, the Naga rebel leader has denied this proposal, as it was an extension plan of British imperialism². Though the proposal had failed, but Naga and Mizo peoples were motivated by the idea of separation from Indian mainstream. And so just after the Independence of India, the people of the northeast, particularly in Nagaland and Mizoram saw this as an opportunity to revert back to their old ways of independent living. They had never felt to be a part of India even under the British rule, and with independence, they saw no reason to be under the Indian government. Thus, when India attained her independence, the tribal leaders of the north-east raised the demand for autonomy to preserve, what was left of their tribal heritage. They wanted the British to leave the tribals to their own rule once they left. The threat perception to their culture and customs under Indian rule assumed significance with the imminent transfer of power to the new Indian government. N.N.C (Naga National Council) under the leadership of Phizo declared independence on 14th August of 1947 which was transferred into a plebiscite on 16th March of 1951. Result of the plebiscite was the favor for

independence. A few years later, M.N.F (Mizo National Front) on 1 March, 1966 declared Mizo district as the Independent Mizoram³.

2.00 Emergence of ULFA: A legacy of Ambikagiri to Assam Movement:

We have discussed that a secessionist thought process was grown under the veil of structural power of Pre-Independence. After the Independence of India, in Assam cross border migration from Bangladesh was the immediate cause of emergence of ULFA as an insurgent group. But, we can define a numbers of root causes of emergence of ULFA. These are like:

A) Historical Cause: Assam has its own civilization, based on the mighty river Brahmapura, which has not a profound relationship with Indian mainstream. So, historically Assam is not a part of India. In 1826, the Yandavu Treaty between Burmese ruler and Colonial ruler has happened. But importantly, Assamese common masses were unaware about such kind of treaty. A part of Ahom elite society revolted against the British ruler to rescue independence of Assam.⁴

B) Colonial Factors : Migration: By the Waste Land Grant Rules of 1838, Old Assam Rules of 1854, Fee Simple Rule of 1874 and Lease Rules of 1876, the Colonial ruler occupied a huge amount of lands in the name of Tea estates. However it was an intra-border migration was happened from Bihar, Odisha, Banga, Central Province, United province and Madraj due to the high demand of Labour in the then tea estates. The tea worker migration was being continued to the mid of 1931. Apart of Tea worker migration, there were two important migrations to Assam, who have changed the societal and demographical scenario of the then Assamese society. These were the poor muslim peasants from East Banga and a middle class Hindu-bengali migration from mainstream India. Importantly the then Assamese middle class society accepted Tea worker migrators and Poor muslim peasants, but linguistic as well as identical clashes had been began with the Middle class Hindu-Bengali Migrators⁵.

In 1837, Bangla language was recognized as the court and Educational Medium language in Assam, by which Assamese middle class was quite disappointed. It was Anandaram Baruah and Missionaries, who effort a lot to re-establish Assamese language. However, in 1874 it was happened. Bhimbar Deuri, the spontaneous tribal leader of Assam has organized a synergetic political party in 1945, named- "Assam Tribes and Races Federation", by which he has demanded for stop migration, implement inner-line system and finally demanded for a sovereign Assam. He has demanded that- "In view of the fact that the past history of Assam proper being never like that of the rest of India, this convention urge upon government that Assam be separated from the rest of India, where there are a number of divisions like Pakistan, Hindustan, etc. and let Assam's destiny be guided by the people of India."⁶ Simultaneously a demand for sovereign Assam was raised from the chair of Sivasagar summit of Asom Sahitya Sabha in 1944.

C) Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri : the spokesperson: Ambikagiri Raichoudhuri was the first spokesperson of Sovereign Assam. He had represented the thinking of Aggressive Assamese Nationalism. Raichoudhuri, from the banner of Jatiya Mahasabha had been urged for the Sovereign spirit of Assam, which was summarized on 4th January, 1948. Raichoudhuri said that: "Assam should come out of India and become an independent country like Burma or any other country"⁷. The basic deference between the then Assamese nationalist leaders and Ambikagiri was very vivid. Ambikagiri represented the concept of Bor Asom, even he demanded to make a tribal language as the state language; but in the same atmosphere other Assamese nationalistic leaders were quite conservative. Ambikagiri was against of both of the British rulers and Indian hegemony. He used armed protest against colonial rulers as well as organized "Assam Atmorokhyi Bahini"⁸.

D) Student Organizations : Satra Santha, Lachit Sena etc.: Industrial backwardness, depriving in the field of employment and unlimited exploitation on the resources of Assam made Assamese young society quite disappointed. To articulate their anguishes on 8 August of 1967 "All Assam Students Union" was emerged. Simultaneously "Sodou Assam Nirdoloyo Satro aru Jubo Sontha" was emerged in Guwahati in the month of September of 1967. "Sodou Guwahati Satra Santha", "Assam Jatiyatabadi Dol" and newly formed AASU were merged and expressed their anguishes towards Delhism. They exhorted to boycott the Republic Day of India. 'Lachit Sena', the newly merged organization (May be called as the violent wing of AASU) had played a violent role in the boycott program.

E) Language Politics : Vasha Movement: Assamese middle class society is very serious in the matter of Language. History shows us that the basic reason of the communal tensions between Hindu Bengali and Assamese is the hegemony of Bangla language. Census report of 1971 shows that the Assamese speaking people of that decade was 60.89%, whereas Bengali speaking people was 19.71%.⁹ Assam Sahitya Sabha set the year 1960 as deadline to implement Assamese language as the medium of instruction. So, finally the then Chip Minister of Assam Mr. Bimala Prasad Chaliha introduces the "Assam Official Language Act" and made the Assamese language as the medium of instruction.¹⁰ Bipan Chandra has rightly

observed that- “This effort to impose the Assamese language became one of the factors which hampered the process of evolution of the Assamese identity”¹¹

2.01 Immediate Cause:

Cross and intra border migration and Assam CArgoitsas tbioonrd: er influx from Bangladesh (Popularly known as the Bangladeshi) has led to the Assam Agitation. Bipan Chandra has mentioned that, “After 1971 there occurred a fresh, continuous and large-scale influx of land-hungry Bangladeshi peasants into Assam. But land in Assam had by now become scarce, and Assamese peasants and tribals feared loss of their holdings. However, this demographic transformation generated the feeling of linguistic, cultural and political insecurity...”¹² From 1951 to 1971, the scenario of cross and intra border influx to Assam can be figured like below—

Religion	Number of Influx
Hindu	13,75,000
Muslim	2,47,000
Christian	30,000
Chakma	65,000
Others	40,000

Data Source: Demographics Trends in Assam, Dr. Tushar Kanti Choudhuri¹³

By the above statistics, it is very vividly manifested that the demographic scenario of Assam was completely changed due to the cross and intra border influx from 1951 to 1971. Assam agitation (Popularly known as the Assam Andulon or Assam Movement) was the spontaneous output of such type of demographic changes.¹⁴ During the Assam agitation, a military wing was formed within the then AASU to boost up the agitation, which was turned into ULFA on 7th April, 1979 with the cader strengths of 5000. ¹⁵

The then Home Minister of India has observed that there were militant groups within the AASU, who want a sovereign state arrangement. Mrinal Talukdar has observed that there were two factions within the agitation. The first faction had believed in the democratic procedures of Indian state mechanism as well as another faction manifested a model of ‘Swadhin Assam’.¹⁶

2.02 Emergence of NDFB and BLTF— an output of Language Politics :

Vasha Andulon (Language Agitation) has played the key role to emerge other ethnic insurgency groups, like: NDFB and BLT. Consciousness of Identity and self-determination is mainly derived from the language politics and demographic scenario of an ethnic group.¹⁷ The then hill tribe leader Captain Williamson Sangma in the Assembly debate of 1960, has said, “...It was no because we disliked Assamese brothers and sisters. But we are considered that by accepting Assamese as the official language we shall be handicapped...”¹⁸ NDFB and BLTF were the direct outputs of the Bodoland Agitation led by ABSU (All Bodo Student’s Union) and Bodo Security Force, known as BdsF. BdsF was the militant wing of ABSU. After the Bodoland Accord signed by ABSU, Bodo People Action’s Committee and Assam Government, the Bodo agitation was concluded. But BdsF denied accepting the treaty as according to them, it was an imperial policy of Indian state mechanism.¹⁹ BdsF renamed them as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, i.e. NDFB and started their activities by an ethnic cleansing campaign. However in the mid of 1990, NDFB has confronted a resist power, named BLTF (Bodo Liberation Tiger Force), who believed that agendas of NDFB were impractical and Utopia. BLTF demanded more autonomy within the veil of Indian state mechanism.²⁰ some critics want to say that BLTF were a strategic operation of Indian state mechanism to weak NDFB. However, BLTF surrendered themselves in 2003 with their achievement of formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council, i.e. BTC.

2.03 Other Insurgency groups of Assam:

According to the South Asian Terrorist Portal, in Assam, there are 9 insurgent groups along with ULFA-I. These are like—

- i. United Liberation Front of Assam- Independent

- ii. IK Songbijit faction of National Democratic Front of Bodoland
- iii. People's Democratic Council of Karbi-Longri
- iv. Rabha National Liberation Front
- v. United People's Liberation Army
- vi. United Democratic Liberation Army
- vii. Tiwa Liberation Army
- viii. Rabha Viper Army
- ix. Karbi Land Protection Force

3.00 Counter insurgency initiatives:

Reaction of Indian state mechanism towards ULFA was turned into violent in the end of 1990. AGP government had showed a soft heart towards ULFA as they belong to the same historical background. On 23rd May of 1986, the first arm encounter between ULFA and State mechanism was happened within the range of Sonari Outpost of Sivasagar district²¹. But it was ULFA, who had been dominated the entire Assamese society for a decade.

The immediate cause of Central government's intervention was the issue of the tea estates. Swaraj Paul, former chairman of Assam Frontier Tea Estate was killed by ULFA on 9th April of 1990.²² Research and Analytic Wing (RAW) had carried Non-Assamese officers of "Dumduma India Limited" on 8th November of 1990. Simultaneously a political changing was happened, when National Front resigned from the power. On 28th November of 1990, under the article 356 of the Indian constitution, the then president R. Vanketaraman had announced Assam as a disturbed area and simultaneously enacted Arm Forces Special Power Act, which is popularly known as AFSPA.²³ ULFA and NSCN were banned and announced them as illegal.

3.01 Operation Bojrong :

Operation Bojrong was the first army operation against ULFA. It was a systematic part of declaration of the Presidential rule, which led to a direct encounter between Indian Army and ULFA cadets. However Lieutenant General Kuldeep Singh Brar (Eastern Commander) had led the operation. To the date of 20th April of 1991, more than 2,800 ULFA cadets were arrested, while fifteen cadets were died, 1,208 numbers of weapons and five crore Indian currency were arrogated.²⁴

However, the Operation Bojrong was concluded on 19th April of 1991 with a green signal of ULFA to the peace talk.

3.02 Operation Rhino:

On 30th June of 1991, Hiteswar Saikia became the Chip Minister of Assam along with his other fifteen Ministers. Suddenly ULFA had re-boosted themselves and kidnapped fifteen government and high profile officers within 24 hours and used them as hostages to release arrested ULFA cadets during the operation Bojrong.²⁵ Sergei Gritchenko, the Soviet coalmine expert was one of those abducted peoples, who was unfortunately killed (As ULFA said he was died) in the custody of ULFA.²⁶

On 9th August, freedom fighter and journalist Kamala Saikia, on 23rd August, Chabnam Kalita (5 years old) and T.S. Raju in September were killed by ULFA.

Circumstances had submissived Indian State mechanism to start a new army operation against ULFA. Operation Rhino, under the leadership of Lieutenant General Ajay Singh had achieved the biggest victory.²⁷ Twelve ULFA camps were raided where more than 2,875 members were arrested and other 237 members surrendered themselves.²⁸ The greatest achievements of Operation Rhino were Anup Chetia (Golap Boruah), Pravat Saikia, Raj Boruah, Pradip Gogoi (Vice Chairman) and Javed Borah- the topmost leaders of the then ULFA, who were arrested by the Westbengal Police and Indian Army.

However, on 19th December of 1991, Arabinda Rajkhowa, the then Chairman of ULFA had announced a unilateral ceasefire declaration to made stop the operation. Rajkhowa had fevered to the negotiation table, which was the greatest achievement of the Operation Rhino.

3.03 Operation All Clear:

Operation All Clear was conducted by the Royal Bhutan Army, with the help of Indian Army between 15th December of 2003 to 3rd January of 2004. The operation includes ULFA along with NDFB, BLTF and KLO.

490 cadets were arrested, where 160 cadets were killed. However the operation was concluded with the achievement of liberate Bhutan Borders from insurgent groups.

3.04 The Soft Policies: Split and Secret Killing :

After the unilateral ceasefire, declared by Arabinda Rajkhowa, ULFA had decided to negotiate with the government. But Paresh Baruah, Commander-in-Chief of ULFA had denied the proposal, which compelled ULFA to refuse the negotiation. However it was a vivid split of ULFA on the basis of the variances between Paresh Baruah and some other members.

The split within ULFA had created a sub group, derived from ULFA, i.e. Surrendered ULFA or SULFA. From 18th August of 1992, the notorious Secret Killing was started and had been continued for the last decade. According to the Justice K.N. Saikia Commission of enquiry, around 400 people were killed during the black era of the secret killing by some unidentified murderers.²⁹

In the last decade, a numbers of ULFA leaders along with Arabinda Rajkhowa, Sasadhar Choudhuri, Chitaban Hazarika and Raju Boruah were arrested in different parts of South Asia. Simultaneously the 28 number battalion of ULFA had declared ceasefire situation. As the 28 number battalion was the most active battalion of ULFA, by which ULFA become more passive. Circumstances compelled Arabinda Rajkhowa to come to the stage of Jatiya Avibartan, led by Dr. Hiren Gohain, the highly celebrated intellectual, who tried to make a resolution of the situation. However all these efforts have vividly divided ULFA on 22nd November of 2011 into two factions— First one is known As the ULFA Independent (ULFA-I), led by Paresh Boruah and second one is known as the ULFA-Pro talk (ULFA-PT), led by Arabinda Rajkhowa.³⁰ Now a days, ULFA become too weak due to these operations and soft policies, which was started by Hiteswar Saikia.

4.00 Human right violation by State mechanism (During the operations):

Human right violation during the operations as well secret killings is a serious issue, created by the state system. Professor Noni Gopal Mahanta has rightly observed that, “the Government of India is adopting a lot of draconian laws which blatantly violate the human rights by giving sweeping powers to the police and the army. Some of these laws are the NSA, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 and the TADA, which lapsed in 1996.”³¹ In 2011, 183 alleged fake encounter death registered, whereas the then home minister P. Chidambaram has said that the highest encounter murder accident is happened in Assam.³² During the operations, Indian Army tortured common masse and raped women as a kind of strategy, which was against of human rights.³³ Indian army had killed Debajit Moran (6 years old), Bhanimai Dutta (14 years old), Dr. Suresh Phukan, Sarat Sonowal and a numbers of registered or unregistered common innocent masses.³⁴ According to Asia Watch, AFSPA was being misused by the Indian Army.

II. FINDINGS:

- i) Insurgency in Assam is emerged due to its own geo-political factors and endless exploitation by the state mechanism. So in a way, insurgency is a political phenomenon, which has to be solving by political initiative.
- ii) Behaviour of the state system against the insurgencies are two dimensional— Militant and Soft Policy. In comparatively, Soft Policies become more hurtful to the Assamese society, as it created secret killings.
- iii) Arm operations were successful, but human rights were violated in a large scale, which cannot be reconciliation.
- iv) Cross and intra-border migration should be stopped within a very immediate time.
- v) Economic infrastructure should be structured in a positive dimension, including Assamese society.
- vi) Peace-talking negotiation have to be organized by the both of the State and Insurgent groups.

III. CONCLUSION:

Insurgency in Assam is emerged due to its own geo-political factors and endless exploitation by the state mechanism. So in a way, insurgency is a political phenomenon, which has to be solving by political initiative. Behaviour of the state system against the insurgencies are twodimensional— Militant and Soft Policy. In comparatively, Soft Policies become more hurtful to the Assamese society, as it created secret killings. Arm operations were successful, but human rights were violated in a large scale, which cannot be reconciliation.

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