

A Relook at OperationSadbhavana in J&K

Colonel Sandeep Kapoor@

“The constant threat of low intensity proxy war and terrorism has become a disturbing feature of national life. This constitutes the new face of war”.

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam,
Former President of India

Introduction

Winning hearts and minds’ is a concept occasionally expressed in the resolution of war, insurgency and other conflicts; in which one side seeks to prevail, not by the use of superior force but by making emotional or intellectual appeals to sway supporters of the other side. The concept was first used during the Malayan Emergency by the British to keep the Malaysians’ trust and reduce a tendency to side with ethnic Chinese Communists by providing medical and food aid to the Malays and indigenous tribes. Subsequently, the concept was employed on a number of occasions e.g. in the Vietnam War in 1960 and the Iraq campaign in 2003 by the US Army.

Military Civic Action (MCA) is integral to the Army’s counter-insurgency/counter-terrorist (CI/CT) operations doctrine. It envisages the limited use of military resources for the benefit of the local population without in anyway impinging on its operational effectiveness and/or the accomplishment of its primary mission. MCA seeks to demonstrate the humane face of the soldier. Simultaneously, MCA presents an opportunity for interaction with people and moulding of public opinion, a prime requisite in a CI/CT scenario. Operation Sadbhavana was introduced in the Northern Theatre in 1998, however, the true essence of the concept was developed as a model by 14 Corps in 2002. In June 2000, when Lieutenant General Arjun Ray took over as GOC 14 Corps, there seemed every likelihood of militancy spilling over to Ladakh from the troubled Kashmir Valley. However, owing to the GOC’s initiative to meet the aspirations of the local populace and to integrate them as part of the national mainstream, the situation in the region post the Kargil War has been ever peaceful.¹

Subsequently the concept of Operation Sadhbhavana picked up pace in other parts of J&K and has been able to promote national integration with a concerted focus on resolving local problems of the populace. The key areas addressed by Sadhbhavana projects have been development of remote and inaccessible areas where civil administration was barely effective; assuaging the feeling of alienation and moulding public opinion towards peace and stronger affiliation with the Nation.²

Current Situation

In the current situation elimination of terrorists, especially the leaders in hinterland, has practically rendered the terrorists organisations rudderless compelling them to regroup, survive and sustain themselves instead of operating with impunity. Although the militancy has reduced considerably (Please refer to Figure 1),³ the situation remains critical due to the threat of existing terrorist infrastructure in the neighbourhood, agitational dynamics, missing personnel/sleeper cells, rise in false human rights (HR) allegations, activism of vernacular media and the emergence of woman over ground workers (OGWs). As an offset of the changing dynamics in the State, wherein the security forces (SF) are the key players in the ongoing transitional phase of establishing public law and order and handing over the situation to the civil administration, there is a requirement to review the existing methodology of conducting Sadbhavana operations.

Focus Areas

The core concept of Operation Sadhbhavana is that “human security is the key element of national security, which can only be ensured through human resource and infrastructure development”. Accordingly, Operation Sadhbhavana initiatives have focussed on infrastructure development/improvement, quality education, women empowerment, health care, community development, integration tours and sports.⁴

| | Civilians | Security Forces | Terrorists | Totals |
|------|-----------|-----------------|------------|--------|
| 1988 | 29 | 1 | 1 | 31 |
| 1989 | 79 | 13 | 0 | 92 |
| 1990 | 862 | 132 | 183 | 1177 |
| 1991 | 594 | 185 | 614 | 1393 |
| 1992 | 859 | 177 | 873 | 1909 |
| 1993 | 1023 | 216 | 1328 | 2567 |
| 1994 | 1012 | 236 | 1651 | 2899 |
| 1995 | 1161 | 297 | 1338 | 2796 |
| 1996 | 1333 | 376 | 1194 | 2903 |
| 1997 | 840 | 355 | 1177 | 2372 |
| 1998 | 877 | 339 | 1045 | 2261 |
| 1999 | 799 | 555 | 1184 | 2538 |
| 2000 | 842 | 638 | 1808 | 3288 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2001 | 1067 | 590 | 2850 | 4507 |
| 2002 | 839 | 469 | 1714 | 3022 |
| 2003 | 658 | 338 | 1546 | 2542 |
| 2004 | 534 | 325 | 951 | 1810 |
| 2005 | 521 | 218 | 1000 | 1739 |
| 2008 | 349 | 168 | 599 | 1116 |
| 2007 | 164 | 121 | 492 | 777 |
| 2008 | 69 | 90 | 382 | 541 |
| 2009 | 55 | 78 | 242 | 375 |
| 2010 | 36 | 69 | 270 | 375 |
| 2011 | 34 | 30 | 119 | 183 |
| 2012 | 16 | 17 | 84 | 117 |
| 2013 | 20 | 61 | 100 | 181 |
| 2014 | 8 | 14 | 39 | 61 |
| Total* | 14680 | 6108 | 22784 | 43572 |

* Data of casualties till 8 Jun 2014
Source : www.satp.org

Figure 1: Showing Reduced Level of Militancy in J&K : 1988-2014

Steps Towards Nation Building

Infrastructure Development. Focus has been on small and manageable projects without recurring liability which include water supply schemes, construction/repair of schools/hospitals/health centres/community halls, development and construction of roads/tracks, bridges and electrification.

Education. To guide youth into the mainstream by establishment of vocational training centres (VTCs), education cum motivational tours, provisioning and training in Information Technology, conduct of awareness seminars, debates, establishment of women empowerment centres etc.⁵

Health. To promote health infrastructure in the region by organising medical and veterinary camps.

Sports. To promote national integration and provide a platform to the students to express their talent by conduct of inter district and intra district level sports competitions.

Perception Management. Special initiatives have been taken to project the humane face of the Army. The focus has been on conduct of rescue operations during calamities, youth employment generation schemes which include vocational training of youth for self-employment, management of neglected societies to include Gujjars/Bakarwals and conduct of various social awareness campaigns on education, communal harmony etc.

Potholes in the Path of Goodwill

MCA initiatives are required to be dynamic in nature and therefore must be under continuous review. A few irritants which highlight the necessity of reviewing the core concept periodically are mentioned below :-

- (a) **Trigger for Riots.** The separatists have played a dominant role in triggering negative vibes amongst the people against the role of SF and this needs constant monitoring. The civil administration has not been very effective in maintaining calm under such situations.
- (b) **Upkeep and Maintenance of Infrastructure Projects.** Follow-up action by the administration is essential to ensure long term benefits to the affected populace.
- (c) **Education.** Army Goodwill Schools are limited to big towns and the number of eligible students is less due to financial constraints of the family and remote location of villages. More so, there is a mismatch in the medium of education in government schools and schools located in remote areas which focus on Islamic curriculum of education.
- (d) **National Integration Tours.** The present Bharat Darshan tours have mainly focussed on the students. Only 20 students on an average get a countrywide exposure per tour. Although the expenditure on conduct of tour is high, the benefits are short-lived. Hence, the concept is less viable in terms of tangible results. Alternatively, sponsoring a student for lifetime education is a more viable option.
- (e) **Health.** The medical camps do not cover people living in remote areas as camps are conducted in urban areas where primary health centres (PHCs)/hospitals already exist. Camps have literally turned out to be free medicine doling ventures.

General Shortcomings

Some of the important shortcomings noticed in the conduct of Operation Sadbhavana are :-

- (a) Lack of incorporation/integration of intelligentsia, sarpanches, panches, village elders, locals and media.
- (b) Lack of commitment and affiliation of the civil population.
- (c) No follow-up action or maintenance machinery after the project is completed.
- (d) Minimum signature of civil administration in the project; hence they lack interest.
- (e) Lack of synergy between SF and civil administration.
- (f) Inadequate visibility/signature of contribution by the Army.
- (g) Lack of focus to convince stakeholders that something new and credible is afoot.
- (h) No continuity and innovation in application of projects.

Need for Change

In the present scenario we already have a nearly effective civil administration functioning in the State which is fairly evident from the ongoing development projects. The proposed methodology envisages maintaining high visibility of the contribution being made by SF through a well-planned media campaign.

Way Ahead

Infrastructure Projects. Dual use infrastructural development projects along the border areas to be incorporated; e.g. construction of roads and tracks, minor bridges and culverts, electricity and water supply schemes, bore wells, storage tanks and store shelters which facilitate military/operational/administrative plans. Benefits from these projects can be reaped by own troops in addition to locals. Efforts should be made to seek the participation of local MLAs, village/block committees' members, civil administration officials and public stakeholders to share initial costs and maintenance of the projects. Limited new projects to be initiated in hinterland and emphasis be given on consolidation and improvement of existing assets. Employment related projects should be initiated which during construction and after completion provide employment and livelihood to the locals.

Education. An Army Goodwill School to be established at the District level with the running and maintenance responsibility being shared by the civil administration also. The schools should employ adequate number of Muslim lady teachers with an aim of encouraging girl students to join them. Maulvis should also be incorporated as teaching staff in the school. In addition to providing education, the schools should also be actively involved in helping the students in their future studies. The utilisation of VTCs needs to be optimised by using the infrastructure for conduct of training capsules based on aptitude to facilitate gainful self-employment. Assistance be provided to village elders/maulvis in terms of computers, books and other training aids for their establishments to facilitate effective linkages. Such measures would help in making inroads in their set-up and moulding opinion in favour of the SF.

Steps to Promote National Integration. Integration tours for key players such as village elders/sarpanches/maulvis to the mainland be organised with an aim of showcasing the well-established civil administration running in various parts of the Country. Sponsoring of students assists in the overall upgradation of living standards of the entire family and also reduces their financial burden. Within the total expenditure incurred on tours to the mainland, approximately 10 to 15 students can be provided lifetime free education, which would also secure their future. It will also bring about societal and education reforms in the local populace. The vast pool of educated youth in the villages will create a positive environment in the upliftment of the society. The venture will have a long-lasting impact on the local populace and will project a positive image of the Indian Army.

Tours from students of reputed institutions of the State shall provide exposure to the entire District vis-à-vis 20 odd students being sent for Bharat Darshan tours. Such tours shall end up being more cost effective, promoting awareness and strengthening the cause of joining the mainstream. On an average the proposed tours should provide exposure to approx 700-800 locals and students in comparison to exposure of merely 20 students for each tour to other parts of the Country (Please refer to Figure 2 and Figure 3). During organised tours from other parts of India to J&K, aspiring students could be selected for admissions in reputed institutions. A counselling programme aimed at identifying talented students and ensuring their placement in institutions countrywide, could be initiated accordingly (Please refer to Figure 4).

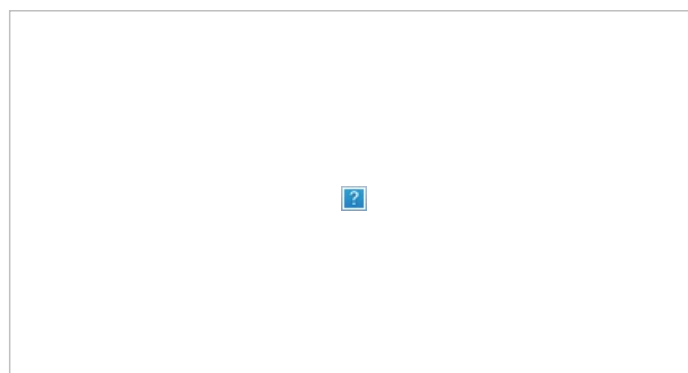


Figure 2 : Exposure through Bharat Darshan Tours



Health. Preference should be given to areas having pro-nationalistic population. Holding of remote medical clinics (RMC) at farthest locations at regular intervals, would result in delivery of health care to a set of populace, which stands deprived of requisite medical care. The said concept shall ensure greater hold of company commanders in their respective area of responsibility. There should be a mechanism that a patient screened initially from RMC, having major medical/surgical illness is referred, seen and managed at tertiary hospitals like Base Hospitals. This will go a long way in earning goodwill by ensuring quality treatment to a patient. Mini diagnostic centres with a dual purpose could be established at remote locations which shall not only benefit the local populace but also cater for medical infrastructure of our own soldiers.

Sports Centres/Nodes should be established at various places by the Army to provide guidance/coaching to youth interested in pursuing sports as a career.

SF Friendly Projects. Operation Sadhbhavana should serve as a major platform for the perception management efforts of IA by showcasing the good work undertaken by them. Some of the suggested projects should include seminars to encourage students to join the IA e.g. seminar on communal harmony, Service Selection Board training for selected students etc. Effective media campaign to include branding and marketing of various projects through intelligent integration across domains could also be incorporated. Optimum utilisation of print, electronic and cyber facilities should be harnessed to showcase and achieve desired objectives. Scope of mid-course correction by means of regular assessments should be carried-out to assess the utility of the project to carry-out necessary modifications. Region based aspirations should be tailored and applied with due diligence and passion after understanding the cultural sensitivities and aspirations of the people in a given geographical area. The project should consist of a mix of activities addressing the local people and the neglected community of gujjars / bakarwals.

Incorporation of Corporate Sector. Owing to the relentless operations conducted by the IA over the past two decades the State is presently undergoing a number of developmental projects to include construction of roads, railways, bridges, hydel projects etc. A number of private companies are presently involved in various developmental projects and are providing job opportunities for the local youth. The same companies could also be major contributors to the cause of Operation Sadhbhavana in terms of corporate social responsibility which is a routine norm followed nationwide by the Corporate Sector.

Conclusion

Operation Sadhbhavana was launched to meet the aspirations of the people affected by insurgency when the State administration had failed and there were no means of providing succour to the local population. Now with the State government having successfully established its law and order machinery as well as undertaken development projects in various fields, it is necessary to ensure a smooth transition of handing over the responsibility / onus of projects which were being undertaken by the Army under Operation Sadhbhavana to the State. The time has now come to reinvent a strategy keeping in view the existing dynamics to ensure retention of goodwill generated by Operation Sadbhavana which could become a mode of normal governance in the State.

Endnotes

1 Lalitha Sridhar, 'Mission Possible: Operation Sadbhavana', India Together, July 2002

2 Aditi Malhotra, 'Operation Sadbhavana : Winning Hearts and Minds', Centre for Land Warfare Studies, # 768, 233, January 26, 2012.

3 Notes on J&K at www.satp.org.

4 IDSA Occasional Paper No 19 on 'Counter-Insurgency and Operation Sadbhavana in J&K by Arpita Anant.

5 Article by Aditi Malhotra published in Indian Express on 15 Jan 2012.

@Colonel Sandeep Kapoor was commissioned into 5th Battalion, the Gorkha Rifles (SHINGO) in Dec 1996 and later commanded 23 Rashtryia Rifles (RAJPUT). Presently, he is Director (Coord and PP) Concepts Section, Directorate General Information System, Integrated HQ of MoD (Army).

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CXLV, No. 600, April-June 2015.