

## **Introduction**

Revolutionary/guerrilla warfare, though ancient in its character and practices, its implications, brutalities and nuances have been painfully experienced, across the globe, in the post Second World War period. Spurt in violence perpetrated by partisans, in different forms, has shaken the fabric of coexistence and world peace. This disturbing trend has now found resonance amongst radical Islamist groups – Al Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, Taliban (in different hues) and now the Islamic State (IS). The rise of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India is causing grave concern to the internal security of the Nation. These outfits have enough military potential to combat the most modern armies of the world, to realise their political and ideological dreams. Regrettably, the leading armed forces, known for their military prowess and proven credentials, have failed to defeat this shadowy, dirty war. The US Army, first in Vietnam and later in Iraq and Afghanistan; France, in Vietnam and Algeria; Russians in Afghanistan and British troops (as part of the coalition forces) in Iraq and Afghanistan had to abandon their missions in the face of resilient, stubborn and defiant opposition offered by these ‘rag tag forces’.

In all insurgencies the population is the vital ground; so, to understand people’s needs and insecurities, you have to live among them.<sup>1</sup> Counter-insurgency (CI) operations are not only about killing of militants and recovery of weapons but also weaning away the civil population from the influence of the militants through sustained, transparent and carefully planned civic action programmes. This is, humanely called ‘Winning Hearts and Minds’, a term coined by Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner in Malaya, in early 1950’s.<sup>2</sup> Affected people are the major stakeholders in defeating insurgency and in finding an amicable solution to the conflict. The Armed Forces can play a decisive role in ‘winning hearts and minds’ due to their inherent characteristics of discipline, commitment, mobility, reach to the remotest areas and the immense resources at their disposal. It will be a futile exercise to list out measures that may be taken to win hearts and minds as these are invariably area/region/population specific. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to emphasise the significance of winning over the population trapped in a conflict zone.

## **Guerrilla Warfare, Politics and People**

The Clausewitzian theory – ‘war is simply a continuation of politics by other means’ – is equally applicable to all kinds of warfare, guerrilla being no exception. Mao Tse Tung, the great protagonist of revolutionary warfare, further emphasises, “politics is war without bloodshed and war is politics with bloodshed”.<sup>3</sup> Political mobilisation is the first step towards such a warfare and entails enlightening the population about the cause of the revolutionary struggle and to inspire the masses for their support for the rebellion. Guerrillas, through a carefully conceived strategy would like to portray themselves as protectors of the people and by extension, their direct or indirect representatives. Thus, they would try to assert their claim on the wholehearted support of the population in terms of bases, shelter, recruitment, rations, financial support, intelligence and a propaganda tool to show the government and security forces in poor light for their insensitivity or misadventure against the population. A careful analysis will show that every military action of the insurgents is generally aimed to draw political mileage in order to achieve their ultimate political aims and objectives. This interplay amongst guerrillas, politics and people clearly illustrates the overwhelming importance of the affected people. David Galula has very aptly amplified, “if the insurgent manages to disassociate the population from the counter-insurgents, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war; because, in the final analysis, the exercise of political power depends on the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness. Thus the battle for the population is, in essence, a major characteristic of counter-insurgency operations”.<sup>4</sup>

**LWE in India-Uprising from Abject Degradation.** LWE is a continuation of the Naxalite movement that erupted on 25 May 1967 because of a violent clash between the landless and the feudal lords, in Naxalbari, a village in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. As a political gambit, the incident was exploited by the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Marxist (M) and still remains the mainstay of LWE. It fired the imagination of the youth and the downtrodden and spread like wildfire in certain parts of the Country. A massive crackdown on the CPI (M) cadres and land reforms introduced in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh (AP) (the two worst hit states) subdued the movement. Its simmering discontent however remained in a few pockets and proved to be the fuel that lit the Naxalite fire in 1990. The scene has shifted to the central heartland of India, inhabited by the Adivasis, Dalits and the marginalised, who for centuries have been languishing in deplorable living conditions and abject poverty.

Till recently, the Central government perceived the uprising as a socio-economic or a law and order problem (a state subject), failing to gauge the ground swell that had attained alarming proportions and had manifested into a full grown insurgency. In the last 20 years or so, it has spread in a large swathe of the Country covering 223 districts (out of 626) across 23 states – roughly 40 per cent of the geographical area and 35 per cent population.<sup>5</sup> North Bihar and hinterland of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, AP (undivided) and Karnataka are the worst affected, a virtual ‘Red’ bastion where the writ of the Maoists runs large. National response to this menace has been somewhat ambivalent, whether to defeat insurgents first and then undertake development or address both concurrently. The first defies the basic characteristics of this warfare, it being protracted in nature, and hence may not be achievable in a predictable time frame. The second needs clarity and focus. Militants cannot be defeated by saturating the embattled area with untrained, ill equipped forces who will be an easy prey for the guerrilla hawks and a drain on the national exchequer.<sup>6</sup> It requires a highly skilled counter guerrilla task force with good leadership, equipped with state of the art weaponry to carry out surgical operations, based on reliable and actionable intelligence. Greyhounds, raised by AP police have achieved remarkable results in degrading the military potential of the Maoists in their area of responsibility. The aim should be to defeat militancy and not just militants. Priority must therefore be accorded to address the real cause of the uprising – extreme poverty and pathetic living conditions.

## Predicament of the Civil Population

The biggest sufferers in such a warfare are the innocent people trapped in the crossfire between the security forces and the insurgents. Recent surge in violence in the strife torn Af-Pak Region, Middle East and a few African countries, at the hands of radical Islamists, has displaced millions and countless numbers have been killed. In addition, thousands of people who have been maimed and incapacitated are now seeking refuge in various European countries. Heart-rending scenes of unabated miseries have been witnessed by these unfortunate ones staring at an uncertain and a bleak future. Regional and super powers have failed, so far, to arrive at a common platform because of their vested political, economic and religious interests in containing and defeating this growing menace.

Tall claims made by General Vo Nguyen Giap, in his book 'People's War People's Army,' are not substantiated by historical facts.<sup>7</sup> Thousands who opposed the communist led Viet Minh were terrorised, coerced, intimidated and tortured to accept the Communist diktat. Majority of Vietnamese wanted freedom from France, but free of Communism. Had the French granted independence to Indo-China, as it had declared in 1946 and 17 times thereafter, lives of millions who perished in the war may have been saved and this part of the world may not have witnessed Communism. The French would have also saved themselves the ignominy of their worst defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh in the battle of 'Dien Bien Phu' (07 May 1954), the death knell of French rule in Indo-China. The French ignored the masses that were left to the mercy of the Communist guerrillas and instead concentrated solely on military actions to defeat Viet Minh.

This writer had the opportunity of serving in Naga Hills and Tuensang Areas (NHTA - as it was then called) during his formative years (1968-1970), when insurgency reverberated in the State because of the return of 1100 fully armed and trained guerrillas (allegedly by the Chinese), under the leadership of self-styled General Mao Angami. The people were certainly dazed to see swarms of security forces milling around their villages, hamlets and homes. The majority had no clue of what was happening. What to talk of supporting the cause of the rebels (secession from India), they had little or no knowledge of their National or State identity. The Nagas, comprising 16 different tribes, each with a distinct language, customs, rituals and traditional inter-tribal rivalries, could not have overwhelmingly supported the rebel cause. Marginal support, willingly or under duress, was understandable. They lived in ramshackle houses in filthy environment bereft of all amenities and development. Despite this backwardness the locals had no complaints against the administration as long as they were left to themselves to romance in their tribal freedom, customs and traditions. Obviously the Nation had failed to integrate them into the national mainstream. Had the people been accorded a sympathetic and humane approach at the initial stages of insurgency, course of events could well have been different. Despite suffering the trauma lasting over sixty years, the people have played a pivotal role in the recent framework for the Nagaland Peace Accord signed on 03 Aug 2015. Immense contribution made by the Indian Army in creating conducive environment in which the warring factions, locals and the Government could freely exchange views towards finding a lasting solution to this complex issue is indeed laudable.

## Compassion - A Key to Winning Hearts

**Approach.** Often the security forces are rushed into insurgency affected areas as a consequence of the total collapse of the civil administration in somewhat alien environment - difficult to distinguish between friends and foes, "la guerre sans front"<sup>8</sup> - a war without fronts as the French called it. In such a state of flux, the ire of pent-up frustrations is, generally, suffered by the civil population. This must be avoided at all costs. Few basic rules of this game merit elaboration. Firstly, everyone must be on board to understand the basic characteristics of this warfare as relevant to the area/region and the CI strategy. This is particularly so for the junior leaders as they play a decisive role in this war. Secondly, it is a protracted war and there are no quick fix solutions. Hence, there is a need to avoid rushing into events in a bid to produce instant results. In any case, a few tactical victories are irrelevant in this long drawn campaign. Patience is a prerequisite. Thirdly, intelligence about the civil population is as important as military intelligence in order to address their basic needs and insecurities. Fourthly, physical and psychological security of the civil population from hostile threats is the prime requirement in regaining their trust and confidence. Fifthly, follow the dictum of General Giap, "respect people, help people, defend people."<sup>9</sup>

**Comprehensive Analysis of the Civil Population.** General David Petraeus (Retd), US Army, after his bitter experience in Iraq said, "CI operations are 90 per cent political and economics and only 10 per cent military".<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, after taking over the command of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in Afghanistan in 2008, he was surprised to find that there was no intelligence available at his headquarters about the civil population. The entire intelligence at hand was military related. Once this anomaly was corrected there was greater flow of actionable intelligence and the drone strikes against Taliban became more effective.

**Malay Campaign (1948-1960).** It is a classic example which changed the complexion of CI operations in that country. At the commencement of hostilities the ethnic Chinese population was approximately 38 per cent (excluding the Chinese population of Singapore). The guerrilla warfare was spearheaded by the Chinese communists, on the popular support of the ethnic Chinese. The majority ethnic Malaysians, though wanted independence, but certainly not under the Red banner of Chinese communists. In 1952, when General Sir Gerald Templer took over as the British High Commissioner and Supreme Commander of all forces in Malaya, he, after a careful analysis of the demography of the peninsula, appreciated that there was a wide, political, social and cultural void between the ethnic Chinese and the majority ethnic Malaysians. A two pronged strategy was conceived - one to win over the majority ethnic Malaysians and second to break the nexus between the rebels and their supporters. In a masterstroke of diplomatic sagacity and political acumen, the British assured the nation of complete independence once the Communist guerrillas were defeated and Communism eradicated from the State. This declaration won the sympathy and loyalty of the ethnic Malaysians. As the second part of this strategy, a follow up of "Brigg's plan",<sup>11</sup> the two potential sympathisers/supporters of the Communist cause were identified - Chinese 'Squatters'<sup>12</sup> (four to five lakh Chinese who had fled to the jungles due to economic distress and Japanese occupation during Second World War) and the 'Sakai Aborigines' (who lived deep inside the forests). The 'Squatters' were completely isolated from the rebels by regrouping

them in temporary villages, under strict observation and security of the establishment. The aborigines were kept under surveillance by establishing a number of “Jungle Forts”<sup>13</sup> deep inside the forest. This strategy worked with resounding success. Communists were defeated by 1959. The British left Malaya in 1960 after granting complete independence and self-rule to the Malaysians. Incidentally, Communists failed to win even a single seat in the first ever free and fair election held in 1960.

**Philippines.** Similar analysis in Philippines paid dividends. Historically, the Muslim dominated southern islands of the country had remained neglected because of the indifferent attitude of the Central Government. This provided an ideal platform for the Abu Sayyaf Group to raise the banner of revolt against the Government. In 2002, the southern island of Basilan was recognised as a safe haven for the Abu Sayyaf Group. While the national security forces concentrated on military operations, the “US Joint Special Operation Task Force”<sup>14</sup> (JSOTF-P) , operating in the area, focussed primarily on civic action programmes after carrying out a detailed survey of the needs of the people. The task force carried out extensive development work – construction of roads, medical facilities, water supply, better educational infrastructure, building mosques etc. Within two years the presence of Abu Sayyaf Group was eliminated.

**Population ‘Regrouping’ - A Dubious Option.** Regrouping of population into temporary villages/camps is a circumspect option to isolate the people from the rebels, thereby denying the latter any recruitment, logistic support, intelligence and propaganda against the government. Due to its inherent contradictions, however, more often than not, it becomes a self-defeating exercise. As such its efficacy must be realistically assessed against the backdrop of the size of the population to be replaced , economic/logistic viability, humungous effort required to provide hygiene, sanitation, water, electricity and above all an elaborate security arrangements around these camps. Success of this operation in Malay is attributed to two main reasons. First, the majority ethnic Malaysians had cast their loyalty with the Government. Secondly, a relatively small segment for regrouping – ‘the Squatters’ – was manageable and resettlement executed to the minutest detail. But a similar operation in South Vietnam, Algeria and nearer home in Mizoram met with disastrous consequences. Creation of ‘strategic hamlets’ in South Vietnam under the care of ill equipped, untrained militia failed as they were no match to the skilled, wily guerrillas who could break the security network with impunity.<sup>15</sup>

**A Failed Experiment (Relocation).** Indian Army, too, carried out this controversial population relocation plan to curb the rebellion launched (Nov 1966) by Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Mr Laldenga, seeking secession from India. For two years (1967-1969) approximately 80 per cent of the civil population was relocated in temporary villages, euphemistically called regrouping into “progressive villages”.<sup>16</sup> After vacating them, villagers were asked to torch their permanent houses to deny shelter to MNF guerrillas. This forced living, miles away from their permanent habitat, had infuriated the masses who felt it was inhuman, an infringement on their freedom and violation of fundamental rights. In the face of mass protests and resentment the operation had to be called off within two years. The population control had become a bigger headache than the control of the rebels. It was indeed political sagacity of the Indian Government that granted statehood to Mizoram in 1986 to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. Today Mizoram is the most peaceful State in the Northeast.

### **Role of Junior Leaders in ‘Winning Hearts and Minds’**

Junior leaders can play a decisive role not only in winning hearts and minds but towards a final resolution of the conflict. They are the ones who frequently come in contact with the people and are the best emissaries of the Nation and the security forces. It may be a tall order, but the call of duty demands that they should be prepared to wear many hats – a diplomat, a teacher, a preacher, a friend and a guide of the population; at the same time be ruthless towards the insurgents. CI is a war of ideas. As Nathaniel Fick, a former US marine, with rich experience of this type of warfare said, “counter-insurgents must excel at finding creative, non-military solutions to military problems”.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the soldiers need to be trained, motivated and indoctrinated to defeat a guerrilla at his own game. It may often be a painstakingly slow, frustrating struggle, with odds packed against the security forces due to the intrinsic elusiveness of the insurgents with their ‘shoot and scoot’ tactics and deadly, ghastly strikes. As a result of such frustrations the soldiers at times tend to lose their sense of propriety and judgment and vent their fury on innocent people.

My Lai massacre (South Vietnam) is an apt example to drive home the above point. On 16 Mar 1968, in broad daylight, “300-500” unarmed, innocent civilians including women, children and the aged were done to death, from hell to hurt by the US troops, on a bizarre and senseless order of their company commander, Lieutenant William Calley.<sup>18</sup> That was the doomsday for the US CI operations in South Vietnam leading to a humiliating defeat at the hands of Viet Cong. There also have been instances where individuals and even subunits, have taken recourse to unlawful, inhuman acts – torture, fake encounters, custodial deaths, extra judicial killings, to earn brownie points and gain professional advancement. Such wanton acts must be dealt with expeditiously and in an exemplary manner as these not only tarnish the image of the armed forces but also offer an unwarranted fillip to the hostile propaganda. In this context, ten commandments for Indian troops engaged in CI operations issued by the COAS are an excellent example of the rules of engagement to be observed.<sup>19</sup> These are reproduced below :

- (a) No rape.
- (b) No molestation.
- (c) No torture resulting in death or maiming.
- (d) No military disgrace (loss of arms, surrender, loss of post or imbibing of an un-army like culture).
- (e) No meddling in the civil administration (i.e. land disputes or quarrels).
- (f) Competence in platoon/company tactics in counter insurgency operations.
- (g) Willingly carry out civic actions with innovations.
- (h) Develop media interaction modus (use it as a ‘force-multiplier’ and not as a ‘force-degrader’).
- (i) Respect human rights.
- (j) Only fear God, uphold dharma (ethical mode of life-the path of righteousness) and enjoy serving the Country.

### **Conclusion**

Wining hearts and minds, may sound philosophical even theatrical, but when viewed in the context of a revolutionary war or CI operations, its complexities and dimensions magnify into a humungous task. In essence, it entails accepting the ground realities and then taking concrete, deliberate steps to draw people out of neglect, deprivation and poverty, and addressing their genuine political, social or religious grievances, if any, and finally to assimilate them into the national mainstream. Soldiers, by their exemplary conduct can set the pace of this process by respecting the dignity, self-pride, religious beliefs, social customs and traditions of the local population. "Insurgency is a two dimensional war fought for the control of the population".<sup>20</sup> Both sides, insurgents and counter-insurgents, will be working zealously to gain the favour and sympathy of the population. The rebels cannot afford to have a large neutral population and would ensure maximum participation by any means possible – persuasion, terrorism, coercion, intimidation, psychological warfare, to make the revolution a success. On the other hand, the government, with the help of security forces and various administrative agencies, will have to adopt a more humane and conciliatory approach – rehabilitation, reconstruction, development and a carefully orchestrated counter hostile propaganda to thwart the designs of the rebels. In a subtle but cautionary remark, General Patreaus has said, "every army of liberation has a half-life, beyond it, it turns into an army of occupation. This half-life can be extended through humanitarian work".<sup>21</sup> The tide of CI turns in favour of the government when the security forces and the people are seen on the same side of the fence. The counter-insurgents must appreciate that insurgency is a protracted war and moves at a painfully slow pace and must set the momentum accordingly.

## Endnotes

- 1 Edited David Richards and Greg Mills, Victory Among People : Lessons from Counter Insurgency and Stabilizing Fragile States, Foreword.
- 2 Harry Miller, Menace in Malay, p. 218.
- 3 Mao Tse Tung, On War, M/S Naryandas & Sons, Dehradun, May 1966, p. 136.
- 4 David Galula, Counter Insurgency Warfare – Theory and Practice, p. 7-8.
- 5 Edited Arun Kumar Dixit and Dr Pankaj Kumar Verma, Naxalism Issues – Challenges and Alternative Approaches, p. 24.
- 6 Ibid. p. 37.
- 7 Gen Vo Nguenien Giap, People's War People's Army, Foreword by Roger Hilsman
- 8 Bernard B Fall, Street Without Joy, p. 16.
- 9 Lt Col John J Mccuen, The Art of Counter Revolutionary War, the Strategy of Counter Insurgency, US Army, p.60.
- 10 Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan : Beyond the Crisis State, p. 93.
- 11 Harry Miller, Menace in Malay, p.134.
- 12 Op. Cit. 9, p. 91.
- 13 Ibid, p. 93.
- 14 David Richard and Greg Mills, Victory among People - Lessons from Counter Insurgency and Stabilizing Fragile States, pp.103-104.
- 15 Op. Cit. 8, p. 346.
- 16 Bertil Litner, The Great Game n the East, p.115.
- 17 Nathaniel Fick, Warfare without Shooting, published in the Tribune, 18 Aug 2007, by Arrangements with LA Times, Washington Post.
- 18 Stephen L Carter, My Lai Revisited, published in News Week, 26 March 2012.
- 19 Official website of the Indian Army [www.indianarmy.gov.in](http://www.indianarmy.gov.in).
- 20 Op. Cit. 4, p.32.
- 21 Fred Kaplan, The Insurgent, p. 141.

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