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India's Internal Security Challenges

*Pushpita Das**

India has been facing multiple internal security challenges for more than 60 years. These challenges have assumed five forms: ethnic/tribal insurgencies in the North-East variously demanding secession or autonomy; left-wing extremism (LWE) seeking to overthrow the democratic political system; militancy arising out of perceived politico-religious grievances in Punjab; a combination of an insurgency actively fuelled by Pakistan and terrorism perpetrated by Pakistani terrorist groups in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K); and Islamist terrorism in the hinterland. Despite sustained police/military operations as well as social, economic and political measures to address perceived grievances and empower estranged sections of the populations in these areas, many or most of these challenges have continued to persist. These internal security challenges have endured, and sometimes increased, due to a combination of factors unique to each case.

To begin with the North-East, which has been experiencing insurgency for the longest period of time, two factors in particular have frustrated successful peace-building efforts in the region: (a) fragmentation of the principal insurgent groups; and (b) resort to insurgency by lesser tribes because of both inspiration provided by the insurgencies of dominant tribes and the imperative of preserving own interests in the wake of the power devolved upon the dominant tribes as part of the process of the

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latter's political accommodation. The operation of these factors is most evident in two cases: the Naga insurgency and the multiple insurgencies in the state of Assam.

In case of the Naga insurgency, peace efforts by successive Union governments (1961, 1975, 1997 onwards) have not been able to resolve the issue mainly because of the fragmentation and proliferation of Naga insurgent groups in the run-up to or in the aftermath of political negotiations. Thus, when the Naga National Council (NNC) concluded the Shillong Accord with the Union government in 1975, one section, led by Issak Chishi Swu, Th. Muivah, and S.S. Khaplang, broke away and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) in 1980. The NSCN, in turn, split into the Issak–Muivah (IM) and Khaplang (K) factions in 1988. In subsequent years, these two factions suffered further divisions. Out of the NSCN-IM emerged the NSCN-Unification in 2007, while the NSCN-K fragmented into three, with the NSCN-Khole–Khitovi emerging in 2011 and the NSCN-Reformation in 2015. What caused such a fragmentation? Was it a result of a deep commitment among some sections to the original ideal of an independent Nagaland (Nagalim)? Or was it driven by the desire to safeguard clan or subtribe interests? Or, did the personal ambitions of individual leaders compel them to continue the 'struggle' by forming a different insurgent outfit? An understanding of this aspect is imperative, especially in the context of the Framework Agreement that has been concluded between the Union government and the NSCN-IM in 2015.

In Assam, the Accord of 1985, instead of bringing peace, sowed the seeds for a series of violent separatist movements. On the one hand, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) took up arms arguing that the Accord did not fully address Assamese aspirations and, on the other hand, the Bodos resorted to armed violence to attain autonomy in order to safeguard their interests vis à-vis the newly empowered Ahoms. Inspired by these rebellions of the Ahoms and Bodos, the Karbis and Dimasas subsequently began their own respective armed separatist movements in the 1990s. Given that Assam is home to numerous tribes and subtribes that are in a persistent state of competition, if not conflict, with each other, will the accommodation of the interests of one tribe always lead to disaffection in another tribe, thereby triggering an unending cycle of violence and peace efforts?

Thirteen years ago, LWE was termed as the 'biggest internal security challenge' by the then prime minister. The Union government responded

to this challenge by launching a five-pronged strategy comprising security, development, grant of forest rights to tribals, good governance and perception management. The resultant decrease in violence and an increase in surrender of Maoist cadres have been read as signs of success. However, violent incidents have persisted, albeit in a sporadic manner. A recent instance was the March 2018 ambush of a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) patrol in Sukma. Further, given the fact that the Maoist Central Military Commission is intact, it is imperative to understand what factors sustain this movement. Finance is often considered the oxygen for insurgent and terrorist movements as it enables them to recruit cadres, buy arms and explosives and sustain operations. By choking Maoist finances through the effective tracking and disruption of the flow of funds, law enforcement agencies would be able to achieve greater success. While a counter terror finance strategy has been in place for several years now, an evaluation needs to be undertaken to identify additional measures to make the strategy more efficacious.

Yet another potent internal security challenge is the current unrest in Kashmir, which continues to simmer because of the combined challenge posed by domestic militancy and Pakistan's cross-border terrorism. Even though counter-insurgency operations brought down violence levels and paved the way for the political process to resume in 1996, two factors have contributed to the persistence of the problem: Pakistan's stranglehold over both the militant (Hizbul Mujahideen) and political (Hurriyat) leaderships of the separatist movement; and Pakistan's transformation of what was a local insurgency driven by local political concerns into an Islamist jihad and terrorist campaign carried out by Pakistani terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The resulting inability to reach a deeper political accommodation has left Kashmiri aspirations unaddressed. As a result, pent-up anger and frustration have been periodically bursting out in the form of mass protests since 2008, even laying the ground for a new generation of Kashmiris to take up the gun. These developments, in turn, have given Pakistan a new handle to highlight the Kashmir issue in international forums and persist in its sponsorship of the activities of local insurgent and Pakistani terrorist groups.

Finally, the rise of Islamist terrorism in the hinterland has been a product of both domestic political developments affecting inter-community relations as well as the rise to prominence of global jihad and international jihadist terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic

State (IS). While the challenge posed by the Indian Mujahideen and its precursor groups going back to the 1990s has been successfully dealt with, the emergence of groups such as the Base Movement in southern India and the attraction that groups such as al-Qaeda and the IS appear to hold for some Indian youth, even if the numbers are quite few, highlight the importance of undertaking measures to prevent the re-emergence of this challenge.

The role of the police in dealing with internal security challenges has always been crucial. Given the reluctance of the army to get involved in internal security matters, as well as the fact that its hands are already full in terms of dealing with the situation in Kashmir and the North-East, the CRPF is increasingly being deployed for counter-insurgency operations in conflict-ridden states. But problems of multiplicity of command and lack of coordination with the state police, together with organisational shortcomings, have prevented the CRPF from functioning effectively.

With regards to the state police, they have been an effective force in combating militancy and LWE in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. Unfortunately, the police in other states have not modernised and transformed themselves. In general, the police are seen as unresponsive, biased and corrupt. The shortage of manpower and constant political interference have further prevented them from functioning efficiently, independently and objectively. Even the Supreme Court has identified a series of measures that state governments need to undertake with respect to police modernisation. While the Union government allocates funds for police modernisation, most states have not utilised these for the intended purpose.

Against this backdrop, this special issue brings together five articles and two perspective pieces on some specific issues that impinge on India's internal security. These contributions by scholars and practitioners provide an in-depth analysis of the problems and highlight the factors which cause these problems to persist or mutate. Basing their enquiry on experience and research, the authors also suggest remedial measures for policymakers to consider. In his biting critique of the Indian approach to addressing internal security challenges, G.K. Pillai censures the political elite for viewing internal security through the narrow prism of political gains. Such an approach has only aggravated the various internal security challenges. To prevent the persistence of this state of affairs and help policymakers adopt a more national approach, Pillai urges the formulation of a National Internal Security Policy and emphasises the requirement to

begin a nationwide discussion to educate the public as well as the elite on matters internal security.

Analysing the Naga insurgency, Pradeep Chhonkar reiterates the fact that tribalism and factionalism among the Naga tribes, constitutional issues and missed opportunities have contributed to the transformation of the insurgency into an intractable problem. Chhonkar cautions that unless solutions to existing challenges are found, it will be difficult to implement the recent Framework Agreement and finally resolve the Naga insurgency. In his view, as long as a consensus among various stakeholders regarding the agreement remains elusive, the Naga insurgency will continue to fester.

Meanwhile, P.V. Ramana discusses Maoist finances and claims that the Maoists have been collecting funds to the tune of Rs 140 crore per year to fund their movement. Most of the money is generated through coercive tactics such as kidnapping and extortion from various sources, such as mining industries, Public Works Department and gatherers of tendu leaves. Arguing that while it is not possible to completely choke the finances of the Maoists, Ramana recommends close monitoring of known sources of funds and registering criminal cases to help curb Maoist finances.

On the issue of the current unrest in Kashmir, D.S. Hooda writes that youth alienation, political issues and a sense of neglect are responsible for the widespread discontentment among the people of Kashmir, which the Pakistani establishment has successfully exploited to cause the present imbroglio. He emphasises the need to deal with Pakistan in a tough manner, while simultaneously winning over the people of Kashmir and bringing the situation under control.

In the same vein, Syed Jaleel Hussain also highlights the importance of engagement with the people of J&K and asserts that Kashmir has remained peaceful whenever the peace processes between the Union government and the concerned stakeholders in the state have been initiated. It is in the absence of such an engagement that the people of Kashmir feel alienated, which culminates in distrust and discontent. Hussain recommends that for lasting peace in the state, the Union government should reinitiate the process of dialogue with stakeholders from across the political spectrum, including the regions of Jammu and Ladakh.

Analysing the phenomenon of radicalisation, Adil Rasheed states that even though India is home to the third-largest Muslim population,

it has been largely immune to the lures of jihadism, as evidenced by the fact that only a minuscule number of Indian Muslims have joined al-Qaeda and the IS. But attacks in the country by home-grown terrorists in recent years indicate that the situation is fast changing as more and more individuals are getting radicalised. According to Rasheed, there are three sources of radicalisation: radicalisation from within; from the Afghanistan–Pakistan region; and global jihadist radicalisation. He further argues that given that jihadist radicalisation is a clear and present danger, the government needs to develop an effective indigenous counter-radicalisation programme involving all sections of the society, civil groups, etc., and employ strategic communications to spread an effective counter-radicalisation narrative.

In his article on the CRPF, P.M. Nair analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the force which has been designated as the premier force in matters of internal security. Commenting on the strengths of the CRPF, Nair states that it is a truly national force in character and substance, and its resoluteness enables the force to successfully operate in conflict zones under trying circumstances. He, however, laments that the state governments in whose aid the CRPF is deployed do not extend the required cooperation, causing coordination problems and failures. Further, large-scale recruitment without proper training, uninspiring leadership and improper deployment have adversely impacted the effectiveness of the force. Nair avers that the CRPF is at its best when it is in perfect synergy with the state police.

This issue also contains incisive reviews of three books on the role of police in counter-insurgency operations, structural constraints to internal security and India's national security. Mathew S. Simon reviews Kuldeep Kumar's book titled, *Police and Counter-Insurgency: The Untold Story of Tripura's COIN Campaign*; Brigadier Ghanshyam Katoch (Retd) reviews the book, *Keeping India Safe: The Dilemma of Internal Security*, by Vappala Balachandran; and S. Samuel C. Rajiv reviews *India's National Security Annual Review 2016–17*, edited by Satish Kumar.

While this issue has tried to cover some of the important internal security challenges that India is facing today, it is by no means an exhaustive one. A number of topics, such as the simmering discontent in Assam, the role of the state police in counter-insurgency and counter terror operations, security and management of the land and maritime borders and structural and institutional impediments to achieving complete internal security, could not be included due to a variety of

reasons. Nevertheless, I hope these contributions will help deepen the general understanding of various underlying factors and processes that impact the country's internal security. I also hope that this issue will generate further debate and discussion among scholars, policymakers, policy shapers and the public in general, which would add to the existing knowledge on matters of internal security.