



NE Insurgent Groups and the Strategic Encirclement

11 Jan, 2011 [Jaideep Saikia \(Senior Fellow, VIF\)](#) [View823](#) [Comments 0](#)

One of the most important reasons for the continuance of insurgency in the North East is the region's proximity to outer lands. The strategic encirclement the expanse with a conduit to countries such as China, which welcomed number of insurgent batches from Nagaland, Manipur and Assam, but also bases for and launching pads for operations against India. This has been seen in the case of Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and even Bhutan, the last of which is a protectorate of India.

Therefore, although the primary motivations for the beginning of an insurgency may range from underdevelopment, social alienation and geographical factors that allows an insurgency movement to grow is the presence of efficient conditions by way of a neighbourhood that is either hostile or indifferent to Indian interests. The hostile neighbourhood provides insurgent groups waging war with the Indian state a variety of sustenance including the crucial aiding of effort for such movements, a move that can be particularly embarrassing for New Delhi. To put the matter of internationalisation into perspective, it was the entry of Unrepresented Nations and People's Organisation in January 1993, which met in the Hague, Netherlands, that began the process for a serious political reconciliation. In July 1997 a ceasefire was signed.

Historically, hostility has showcased itself by way of East Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) and China, with Myanmar providing the corridor for various Indian insurgent groups especially in their efforts to seek aid from the People's Republic of China. Indeed, the Naga insurgents were the first to reach China, when "some time in the late 1950s and Muivah with their tired men reached Yunnan" (as retold in Nirmal Nibedon's *Nagaland: Night of the Guerrillas*) after a 97 day trek through the Myanmar terrain. Later, the footsteps of the Naga insurgents were to be retraced by ULFA "chief of staff" Paresh Baruah and his "staff officer" Lohit Choudhury on admission to the author on 15 August 2000 after his surrender to the Assam Police provided details about ULFA Missions Lachit and Chilarai to China, where they met with Chinese officials as well as functionaries of an agency that Paresh termed as "Black House". Research conducted by the author in the aftermath of the ULFA's entry into China to unravel the provenance of "Black House," but several years later it has come to some light that "Black House" is in all probability a Chinese arms and ammunition depot. In Mandarin, "Black House" translates into "Hei Shehui," which simply means "Black Market." The arms manufacturing factories of China, primarily the one in Kunming, Norinco, it is reported, provides the bulk of the weaponry that make up the Indian Insurgent Groups' arsenal. This is done by selling off the obsolete weapons even as PLA shapes itself into a more modern army.

Therefore, Chinese support for Indian Insurgent Groups is part of recorded history, especially in the aftermath of the border war of 1962. But despite observations seem to be of the opinion that China stopped its support to Indian Insurgent Groups since the late-nineteen eighties (which roughly coincides with the visit to China in 1988), recent anecdotal accounts seem to state that groups such as People's Liberation Army of Manipur and ULFA have been seen in Yunnan report suggesting that ULFA has a "base" in one of Yunnan's prefectures. ULFA's need for opening up new channels with China was perhaps necessitated by the situation facing in Bangladesh, with almost the entire leadership of the organisation being handed over to India by the Bangladesh authorities. Indeed, it was fear of the manner in which other members of his organisation were taken into custody and subsequently handed over to India—that led ULFA "chief of staff" Paresh Baruah to Yunnan, where he is reportedly attempting to revive his floundering organisation. This has become necessary in the face of the almost certain split in ULFA, to be engineered by a) releasing the incarcerated leadership of ULFA and b) by expecting the released leaders to come together as an executive council for the reconciliation process with the government. The process would almost certainly be leaving out Paresh Baruah, who has made clear his stand against dialogue were it to be without a discussion of "sovereignty of Assam" on the agenda. In a statement emailed to the Press in late December 2010, Baruah has stated that he was kidnapped in Bangladesh and tortured in order to make him reveal Baruah's whereabouts, as also to force him to the negotiating table. The intransigence of the strongman can be gauged from the manner in which he made his press statement. He wrote that he was ready to sacrifice his son for the cause of 'freedom' and would never compromise on ULFA's 'sovereignty' demand. The man who visualises himself as a modern day Lachit Barphukan (the Ahom general who successfully fought against the British from Assam) would now be at his belligerence best and would, if necessary, join hands with every conceivable anti-India force, be it the Pakistani ISI, the Bangladesh army and DGFI or the Chinese MSS.

At any rate, the present scenario, by way of the strategic encirclement has changed considerably since the subterfuges that characterised the days when the Indian insurgency, Angami Zapu Phizo of Khonoma near Kohima first made his way into East Pakistan in the early nineteen-fifties. A pro-Indian Awami League government in Dhaka, and as aforesaid, it has acted against the Indian Insurgent Groups, with (at the time of writing) the last of the important actions being carried out in Bangladesh when Bangladesh Border Guards busted ULFA hideouts in Sherpur, which is also the HQ of ULFA's 109 Battalion. Although the action by Dhaka against the Indian Insurgent Groups have been somewhat of a piecemeal affair, with handing-over, camp-busting etc coming in instalments, the fact of the matter is that the Bhutan-style all-encompassing operation is perhaps not possible, primarily because ULFA's paraphernalia in Bangladesh is scattered throughout the country and not clustered in one general area that was the case in Bhutan. Moreover, Sheikh Hasina does not yet have complete hold over the Bangladesh army or the DGFI services of the Detective Branch of the Bangladesh Police as well as the Rapid Action Battalion to combat Islamist militancy, war criminals and the Indian Insurgent Groups is to her credit that she is doing so despite great odds, and India has much to be grateful for.

But, Myanmar is another story. Indeed, despite the successes of the high level visits between India and Myanmar, the sought for clamping down on the Indian Insurgent Groups has yet to happen. But to be fair to India's eastern neighbour, Myanmar has not been able to act in the manner that New Delhi has expected it to because many of the north-western Myanmar are not quite in the control of Naypyidaw. The ethnic groups have considerable influence in the region, and despite the cessation of the Myanmar government and the ethnic groups, many groups have refused to comply with the border guards' proposal that was mooted by the government during the reconciliation process. Also, there is some reason to believe that the lower echelons of the Myanmar army have tacit understanding with the Indian Insurgent Groups. They have in the past aided such groups by providing early warning about impending raid via the local population in the region. This results in such groups breaking up and moving to safer locations.

But, all that may soon change. The two-day 16th Home Secretary Level meeting that began on 30 December – represented by Indian Union Home Sec Myanmar Deputy Minister for Home Affairs, U Phone Swi – saw not only India seeking to sign a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT), but also renewing mount operations against the Indian Insurgent Groups. The MLAT would, it is reported, enhance the ability of the two countries to pursue their corr enforcement, thereby to anvil a legally binding mechanism that would enable law enforcing agencies in both the countries to cooperate and provide assist matters relating to investigation, prevention and suppression of crime, including insurgency. It is hoped that with the signing of MLAT, India would be provi pressure Myanmar to decisively act against the Indian Insurgent Groups. Indeed, the accent must now shift to coordinated joint operations, in the m: undertaken in the mid-nineteen nineties, when Op Golden Bird was put into operations, an operation that resulted in the apprehension of a large numb Group cadres and arms and ammunition.

Certain Myanmar and Bangladesh specific recommendations vis-a-vis, possible action against the Indian Insurgent Groups are provided below:

1.As aforesaid, ULFA elements are scattered all over Bangladesh, rendering some difficulty to Dhaka to apprehend/bust such interests in a single apprehension of important ULFA leaders, information about important names, places and links would have come to light. Although it is certain that suc shared with the Bangladesh authorities, a mechanism must be evolved whereby joint operations can be conducted on real time scenarios bypassing tradition have had to be activated in ordinary circumstances. Institution of such a mechanism would save precious time and would not lead to possibilities of the "bir action is initiated.

2.Certain important functionaries of the Bangladesh army and the DGFI—who are close to the erstwhile BNP-Jamaat regime—are trying to not only shield i with groups such as ULFA (especially in light of the exposures such as the Chittagong arms haul of 2 April 2004, when among others a former National Sec has been apprehended), but have reportedly aided Paresh Baruah's exit from Bangladesh even as a dragnet was being organised to ferret him out. O agencies must provide the necessary details of the politician-bureaucrat nexus to the Awami league government so that it can act with greater spee Pakistanis inside Bangladesh.

3.In the search to net the big fish, the small fish tends to escape. It must be understood that ULFA would continue to be an insurgent organisation to reck are not either apprehended or neutralised. Indeed, it is the lower level cadres (for instance of the organisation's Sherpur based 109 Battalion) which hav case of NDFB must be a pointer in the direction, where all the top leaders are either in jail, or in ceasefire mode. Yet it was the lower level cadre, guided b i/c of NDFB's Bangladesh based 3 Battalion) that was not only responsible for the IED blast that killed CRPF personnel, but over 20 innocent, mostly Hindi lower level cadres of ULFA must, therefore, be netted.

4.As for Myanmar, it is the only intact sanctuary left for NSCN (K), ULFA and certain Meitei groups. But they are well-entrenched in the camps. The reaso existence of the Indian Insurgent Groups in Myanmar have already been mentioned above, as is the need for a mechanism that would witness a coorc against the insurgents. Indeed, in the event of a joint operation, the Indian security forces, comprising primarily the Assam Rifles, would guard the 1,600 Kr while the Myanmar army raids the camps. However, it must be understood that unlike Bhutan where the operation had to perforce result in ULFA-ND over to the Indian side (where they would be caught by the Indian security forces, despite the fact that ULFA chairman made an urgent plea to China to let which was disallowed), the Indian Insurgent Groups can go deeper into Myanmar territory and into the safe sanctuaries that about the Sino-Myanmares hands of the Kachins that have affinity with such groups. Appropriate military arrangements must be made to avert such a possibility.

5.ULFA's 28 Battalion HQ camp in Myanmar closely abuts the GHQ of NSCN (K). Since NSCN (K) is in a ceasefire mode with New Delhi, it is almost certain would not be disturbed, especially as NSCN (K) chairman, S.S. Khaplang, a Hemi Naga, himself reside on the Myanmar side. The possibility that ULFA c: "Bravo" company could spirit away into the NSCN (K) camps in the event of an attack is high. This aspect must be taken into consideration when plannin ULFA. It must also be understood that NSCN (K) and ULFA have a natural kinship, and the cadres belonging to the former would almost certainly aid the lat resided in each other's proximity for long.

6.The Myanmar army's senior officials must ensure that the traditional bonhomie that has been characterising the army's lower echelons with the Indian I not come in the way of a coordinated operation. Earlier operations have amounted to only jungle-bashing for reasons that have been alluded to above.

7.Traditional minders of such aspects must ensure—and well in advance—that the local populace in the area that house the Indian Insurgent camps are corr a manner that does not permit it to either provide early warning to the Indian Insurgent Groups, or give them direction or shelter away from the operation.

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