

# Indian Army In Counter Insurgency Operations: Search For That Elusive End State

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*Abstract: The Indian Army has been deployed in counter insurgency (CI) operations at some place or the other since independence. Most of the time, the Army has been called in as a knee jerk reaction generally when the situation went out of hand as far as the civil administration was concerned. In every case, the Army has not been spelt out a clear and well defined end state which can act as indicator to whether the mission has been achieved and if not then is the Army moving in the right direction.*

*The article attempts to analyse if any end state has been spelt out to the Army as far as CI operations are concerned. In the absence of any directive from the government, the article examines if any end state for CI operations has been laid in the Indian Army Doctrine as well as the Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations. The article also examines as to where does the Army stand in CI operations on points which would have been part of a CI end state – had there been one.*

*It should be understood that the primary task of the Army is conventional war fighting. CI operations also forms part of the constitutionally mandated tasks of the Army, but the Army should endeavour to pull out of it as soon as possible. When to pull out is what the end state will give out.*

***A long time ago, in a town, a thief snatched the purse of a lady and started running away. While the Police did nothing, a chivalrous athlete (a long distance runner) started pursuing the thief. After running for about two kilometers, the runner came across some passersby who told him that no thief had crossed them and perhaps he was running in the wrong direction. To this the runner replied that, “Of course not, I overtook the thief a kilometer back!”***

This rather poor joke somehow gives out the present situation in which the Indian Army (IA) finds itself while carrying out Counter Insurgency (CI) operations in J&K as well as the North East. The IA has gone much beyond containing the insurgency but seems oblivious about where to stop, pass the baton to the law enforcement agencies and revert back to its primary task of conventional fighting. This is perhaps because no End State has been given out to the IA. Without a well defined End State, it is impossible to know whether the objective has been achieved and if not then whether one is heading on the right course or not? Lack of a well defined End State leads to misplaced priorities during conduct of operations in the short run and this itself will lead to wasted effort in the long run. Military operations of any sort is a national effort and therefore it is incumbent that before launching troops into operations, an End State is given out by the political authority after having duly conferred with the military top brass. This end state becomes the guiding star which gives the military at all levels the direction in which to prosecute operations.

The IA traditionally has been the last resort for varied tasks in India ranging from safeguarding the borders to pulling children out of sewers. This therefore explains why the IA has continuously been employed to fight insurgencies which more often than not were due to local grievances born out of political apathy towards a particular region/ people, the same being abetted by neighbouring countries. Without further digressing from the main topic by trying to fix the blame for the insurgency, it will only be stressed that while conventional operations will have a well laid out objective (End State) each and every time, CI operations can go on for years, trudging through many cycles with no end in sight. There will come many milestones and opportunities for the IA to pull out but they go by just because one failed to recognise them. However, to recognise those milestones, it becomes imperative to clearly define the End State. This article aims to ascertain if a CI End State has been laid down for the IA or not? The article will also attempt to explore if the IA has contained the insurgency to an extent that the civil law and order agencies can take on the responsibilities.

For the purpose of writing this article the search for the CI End State has been carried out by

referring to two authoritative documents released by the IA – The IA Doctrine 2010 and the IA Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations 2013.

To start with, this article will analyse the IA Doctrine 2010. First things first – Sub Conventional Operations (as CI operations is being referred to) have been placed under the head of Military Operations Other than War. This implies that CI operations are transient in nature and that the IA should pull out of CI operations at the first opportunity – the time when that opportunity arises is what the laid down End State will determine. Para 5.2 of the Doctrine states – ‘When employing the Security Forces in Sub Conventional Operations, **conflict management** rather than **conflict resolution** will be the political objective.’ It then goes on to say that operations should be conducted to achieve a ‘qualitative improvement in the situation’. The paragraph comes nowhere near stating what a ‘qualitative improvement’ implies be it any facet – military, political, administrative etc. Para 5.4 in the first sub-paragraph states that the Armed Forces are to **act as facilitators** to bring down the level of violence such that a political process can be initiated and also allow other elements of national power to operate without fear. This is perhaps the nearest the IA Doctrine 2010 has come towards defining the End State albeit without quantifying the same. The doctrine could have perhaps briefly dwelt upon the indicators of normalcy which will enable pulling out of the IA from CI operations.

With the trail having gone cold in the IA Doctrine 2010, the focus now shifts to the Doctrine for Sub Conventional Operations 2013 which is the seminal document giving out the method by which the IA intends to carry out CI operations. IA is the first Army in the world to have released a doctrine of this kind. This was first released in 2006 and thereafter reviewed in 2013. To start with, the foreword by the then COAS states – **‘The overall concept of sub conventional operations by security forces revolves around an endeavour to restore a sense of normalcy from where the civilian authority can assume its responsibility ...’** Thereafter, while enunciating the principles of sub conventional operations, the second sub paragraph of paragraph 3.1 states – **‘The political authority must lay down well-defined, militarily achievable objectives. These should be framed in consultation with senior military commanders.’** Laying down of the desired objective by the political authority is in consonance with the primacy of the civilian authority and that is how it should be but the moot point is – **Has the political authority laid down an objective for the Armed Forces to achieve?** If not, then it is high time that the political authority be approached to lay down the CI objectives in both J&K as well as the North East. As given in the Doctrine, the objective should be militarily achievable and framed after due consultation with the military commanders. If the objective has been laid down, then the IA should make this known to the rank and file in this very doctrine. Each CI formation will then be in a position to lay down the specific tasks within its Area of Responsibility. Laying down of a well defined military objective in CI operations will ensure a focused effort by the IA while carrying out operations to its logical conclusion. A well defined military objective will also preclude the possibility of any inadvertent ‘exceeding the brief’ by the IA.

From the information accessed in the public domain, there are enough reasons to believe that no military objective (End State) has been laid down as of now, by the political authority for the IA, as far as CI operations are concerned. In that case, how should the IA gauge its progress in CI operations? To find an answer to the question, we may go back to the foreword by the COAS in the Sub Conventional Operations Doctrine which talks of a requirement to restore a sense of normalcy wherein the civilian authority can assume its responsibility. The concept of ‘Normalcy’ has been given as part of paragraph 3.3 which states that normalcy is a contingent upon four factors:-

- Security.
- Population Integration.
- Development.
- Legality – the rule of law.

Of the four, the IA would be responsible for bringing about a sense of security in the area of responsibility primarily through sustained domination and kinetic means if required. To this end, it can safely be said that the IA has been successful in bringing about a sense of security within the affected areas. This has also enabled the other three determinants of normalcy to manifest. They may not be at their best but the conditions are also not anarchical by any measure. Elections, which are the biggest determinant of legitimacy of the Indian Constitution in the eyes of the population, have been a tremendous success both in the J&K as well as the North East. The voter turnout in the recently concluded State Assembly elections in J&K has been as high as 65% (comparing favourably with the rest of India). The voter turnout in the North East during the 2014 Lok Sabha Elections has been very high (almost 100% at places). The administration not taking its rightful place and

discharging its duties is more due to inertia and apathy rather than an inimical security situation. While no end state has been laid out for the IA, it can still be stated that conditions which would have logically comprised the End State (had they been laid down) have been achieved in great measure. The improved security situation has also been brought out in paragraph 3.92 of the Doctrine. The civil administration should now take on the mantle and address the twin issues of security as well as governance. The IA should now restrict its role to help the civil law enforcement agencies build tactical capabilities to discharge their duties.

The IA has done a yeoman service to the nation as far as CI operations are concerned. The IA has done a lot to restore adverse situations which at times threatened the sovereignty of the Nation over a particular area. Except for intervening periods of hot war, the IA has been said to be 'Officially at Peace' [1] as it has spent a better part of the past almost seven decades since independence fighting various insurgencies including some which are still on in spite of the fact that the nation is not at war. This protracted deployment which has spawned a lot of problems for the IA has largely been due to lack of a stated End State which should have been well defined by authorities at the apex level. Lack of the same has also resulted in misplaced priorities thus causing friction with the civil administration which could have and should have been avoided in the first place. It is therefore of utmost importance that a CI operations end state for the IA be laid down at the earliest and the same be promulgated within the IA through the Doctrine of Sub Conventional Operations. This will help the commanders at all levels calibrate the CI operations within the given framework as well as create conditions for the IA pulling out of CI operations at the earliest thus enabling it focus on its primary task – preparing for and executing conventional operations.

*Views expressed are personal.*

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