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TIME FOR JOINT OPERATIONS WITH MYANMAR ARMY **TO FLUSH OUT INSURGENTS?**

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It is a well known fact that Insurgent groups of North East India like ULFA, NSCN-K, People's Liberation Army, United National Liberation Front, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak have been using Myanmar as safe sanctuary and have set up bases there. The insurgents often come from these hide outs to North Eastern states to carry out subversive activities and flee back to escape action by security forces. And if these Insurgents were forced to close down their camps by the Myanmar army, it would drastically improve the security scenario in the North East India. India has been raising its concerns about these Insurgents operating out of Myanmar. The presence of insurgent groups in Myanmar has been the single most important security issue for India at every bilateral negotiations between India and Myanmar.ⁱ The issue was discussed between Sushma Swaraj, India's Foreign Minister and President of Myanmar U Thein Sein and Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung at the sidelines of ASEAN countries Foreign Ministers meeting held at Naypidaw on 11 Aug 2014 as Sushma Swaraj said on her arrival at New Delhi "I raised the issue of Indian insurgent groups and told them that though the political leadership is again and again saying that their territory will not be used for terrorist activities, but on the ground, the situation is different."ⁱⁱ

Myanmar on its part has been promising to take action and never allow any of these insurgent groups to use their territory against India. "If India gives exact information about the location and other information (about the militant training camps), then Myanmar is ready to take action against them," U Ye Htut, Myanmar Information Minister told PTI in an interview.ⁱⁱⁱ However due to the inaccessibility of the area and porous border it is extremely difficult to exert control over the region by security agencies of both the countries. These ultras have taken advantage of



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inhospitable terrain along the international boundary for all their nefarious activities and escape from actions of security forces by crossing over international as well as state boundaries.

Myanmar has also expressed its concern about frequent to and fro movement of these insurgents across the border. Unless peace is restored in the region real development will not be able to take place. Centre's conscious efforts to integrate economic interest of Northeast with Look East Policy will be meaningless until the insurgency issue is resolved. While at one hand development activities as well political dialogues should continue with all insurgent groups willing to talk over the table. But is there a case of coordinated operations against various groups who are not willing for a dialogue? The Chief Ministers of Northeast states sought the Centre's help in launching coordinated action against insurgents taking shelter in various states as well as neighbouring countries.^{iv}

This is perhaps the best occasion when India with a fresh mandate and making right noises from Look East Policy to Act East Policy should step up in asking Myanmar Govt to carry out joint operations by both the security forces. India on its part has been raising concerns with neighbouring countries to destroy the training camps. In December 2003, under considerable pressure from India, the Royal Bhutan Army launched military operations against camps in southern Bhutan along the India-Bhutan border. Some 30 camps belonging to the ULFA, the NDFB and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization and others were closed down and about 600 insurgents were killed.^v Similarly both India and Myanmar share the history of cooperation between its security forces in counter-insurgency operations since mid 1990s. However there has been limited cooperation from Myanmar Army as it appears that it is less willing to accept India's overtures for joint operations in the past. The few cases of cooperation are:-

- (a) In 1995, Myanmar and India launched "Operation Golden Bird", with 57 Indian Mountain Division blocking a large rebel column of more than 200 NSCN, ULFA and Manipuri fighters who had picked up a huge consignment of weapons south of Cox's Bazar (on the Bangladesh coast) and was moving through the Mizoram-Burma border towards Manipur. However the Burmese junta pulled out of the joint operation, allowing the trapped rebel column to escape citing



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diplomatic reason of awarding Nehru Peace Prize to Aung Sang Suu Kyi. ^{vi} Even it had released scores of apprehended insurgents.

(b) There were few actions despite an agreement to conduct joint operations in 2000 in exchange of military equipment. An exception was a 2001 raid on Manipuri camps that resulted in the capture of 192 insurgents. All were inexplicably released the following year, much to the chagrin of the Indian Government. ^{vii}

Although security agencies of both countries alert each other of impending counter insurgency operations in their soil, it has not given the desired results. India will not be able to wipe out the insurgency in North East if its neighbouring countries continue to provide safe sanctuaries and training camps in their soil. Therefore it is in India's interest that it encourages the Myanmar Government in carrying out joint operations against the hideouts in Myanmar. The only negative fall out could be sucking in of Indian Forces not only fighting Indian Insurgents in Myanmar but their allies among Myanmar's ethnic rebel groups. However the prospect of a developing North East India free from insurgency, is worth putting this option through a detailed review ?

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

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ⁱ Northeast insurgents using Myanmar as safe sanctuary; rediff.com 28 Aug 2012
<http://www.rediff.com/news/report/northeast-insurgents-using-myanmar-as-safe-sanctuary/20120828.htm>

ⁱⁱ Press Trust of India; Aug 12 2014 <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/sushma-swaraj-describes-myanmar-visit-as-very-successful-574493>

ⁱⁱⁱ Myanmar ready to act against NE Insurgents; Nagalim Voice Aug 25, 2014
<http://www.nagalimvoice.com/news/myanmar-ready-to-act-against-ne-insurgents/>

^{iv} Coordinated action needed against insurgents: Northeast CMs; PTI Jun 5, 2013

http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/coordinated-action-needed-against-insurgents-northeast-cms_853065.html



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v Indian troops poised to enter Myanmar by Sudha Ramachandran Asia Times Jul 21, 2005
http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GG21Df04.html

vi Subir Bhaumik ; Guns, Drugs and Rebels <http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/550/550%20subir%20bhaumik.htm>

vii India, Myanmar: Reluctant brothers in arms: By Brian McCartan // www.worldaffairsjournal.org/content/india-myanmar-are-reluctant-partners

