

## **PROPAGANDA AS A WEAPON OF INSURGENCY**

**Lecture delivered at a Seminar organised by Jammu University**

**As part of Silver Jubilee Celebrations**

**On**

**Issues in Jammu and Kashmir (June 9-11, 1995)**

Propaganda has long been recognised as a weapon of war, but it was, perhaps, the Germans who first made a well organised and effective use of it in the Second World War. Hitler based his tactics as much on the theory of attack by propaganda as on the normal theory of attack by the velocity of striking power; his aim being to strike at the enemy's civil will to fight, not physically but intellectually. Explaining the role of propaganda in war further he once said "why should I demoralise him (the enemy) by military means, if I can do so better and more cheaply in other ways." Unfortunately, interesting though it is, it is not possible for me to go into the manner in which Hitler put into practice his theory of using the "intellectual weapon" to break the enemy's civil will to fight, for fear of transcending the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the effective use that he made of this weapon is now a well recognised fact.

If propaganda could be used effectively in a regular open war, it could be used even more so in the irregular warfare adopted by the insurgents. For, if war is "nothing but cunning, deception, delusion, attack and surprise", as Hitler put it, guerrilla war is even more so; thus providing tremendous scope for the use of propaganda as its most potent weapon. As a matter of fact, Mao Tse Tung, the great exponent of guerrilla warfare, while enunciating his famous theory of substitution, has gone to the extent of advocating employment of propaganda as a substitute for guns – both possessing the potential of breaking the enemy's will to fight through demoralisation. This aspect of the use of propaganda has been distinctly highlighted by the US Army Special School in its pamphlet on "insurgent Activities and Counter Measures in Urban Areas" issued on the basis of experience gained from insurgencies in Venezuela, Algiers, Philippines, Malaya, and other parts of the world that have been inflicted with insurgencies at one time or the other. The pamphlet has listed four main objectives that the insurgents seek to achieve through propaganda. Firstly, establishing a rallying cry for the insurgency in the area of operation as the ground-work for recruitment and gaining support of the local population; secondly, discrediting the government and building up the people's resentment against it, for depriving it of their active support; thirdly, drawing attention of international community for gaining its support and sympathy; and, fourthly, destroying psychologically the will of the armed forces by "deluging" them with false and unfounded allegations and causing their demoralisation. However, for propaganda to be able to achieve its objectives, it must be supplemented by the process of "general disruption" caused by terror and sabotage – the twin weapons of violence in the armoury of the insurgents. Now let us see what all this means in practical terms.

According to the US Army Special Warfare School, "the under-ground will", as part of this programme of general disruption, "organise demonstrations, incite riots, and generate labour strikes" even as the "population will be urged to boycott government sponsored programmes and functions". The security forces will be "deluged with false tips and unfounded denunciations", while the "government authorities will be harassed and threatened". As a matter of fact anything that will tend to distance or slow down the normal routine in business or government will be undertaken". Sabotage, on the other hand, is considered to be "particularly disturbing to the

established government”. The amount of damage caused is considerable and while sabotage “is extremely difficult to prevent, the population is apt to blame the government for its failure to do so”.

Terror that is employed in urban insurgency is of two types – selective terror and indiscriminate terror. While selective terror is used “to coerce cooperation and to neutralise actual or potential individual enemies” indiscriminate terror is, according to the veteran French fighter and author, Roger Trinquier, a “particularly appropriate weapon” for “bringing the populace under control”. A shattering effect of indiscriminate terror on the population is caused when, as Trinquier puts it, “in the street, at work, at home, the citizen lives continually under the threat of violent death” and “in the presence of this permanent danger surrounding him, he has the depressing feeling of being an isolated and defenceless target”. The fact that the public authority and the police are no longer capable of ensuring his security adds to his distress. Consequently he “loses confidence in the state whose inherent mission it is to guarantee his safety” and gets “more and more drawn to the side of the terrorists”, who alone seem to be able to protect him. Trinquier also explains why it is difficult to catch the terrorist. The terrorist, he argues, kills without personal interest and without the motive that could provide the police with leads, while he is surrounded by a vast organisation which prepares his tasks and assures his withdrawal and protection. To top it all “he runs practically no risks, neither that of retaliation by his victims nor that of having to appear before a court of justice”; it being “quite easy under the existing laws to escape the police”.

Some writers and students of insurgency contend that the use of terror will not lead to ultimate victory of the terrorists. These people believe that its use will so alienate the population that eventually their “resentment will over-ride their fear and they will begin to inform on the underground; leading to its destruction”. We also have the Punjab example to support this contention. It is, however, generally accepted that “the under-ground organisation must be destroyed before terror will cease”.

A survey of insurgent activity in Kashmir would show that the insurgents are religiously following the text book as far as the employment of the propaganda weapon is concerned. Consequently they have been able to achieve the usual objectives of propaganda with phenomenal success. They have succeeded in establishing self-determination, with its known universal appeal, as the “rallying cry” for insurgency, even as their real objective is accession to Pakistan as willed by their mentor – Pakistan. It is also due to the success of their propaganda, duly boosted with well organised disruptive activity, that the State Government today stands totally discredited before its people. So much so that even the nationalists have begun to believe in it and are demanding the change of the Governor, which in fact is the requirement of the insurgents for not only bringing about general demoralisation in the administration but also for causing a break in the continuity of counter-insurgency operations. Very few appreciate the Government’s predicament in the situation of insurgency where its two requirements of providing good administration and successful conduct of counter-insurgency stand arranged in a vicious circle – one depending on the other. Good administration is necessary for stamping out insurgency but good administration is not possible so long as insurgency continues.

The insurgents have met with a fair amount of success in their third propaganda objective also through the concerted efforts of Pakistan. Although Pakistan failed to manipulate direct international intervention, suffering much humiliation in the process, it did manage to advertise the issue sufficiently enough for the international community to take notice and exert pressure on

India, even if covert, to come to terms with the insurgents – making some deal, some compromise, in the interest of peace and tranquillity in the region.

The insurgent propaganda has, however, been most successful as far as its objective of maligning the security forces is concerned. Indeed, the insurgents have succeeded in projecting the best disciplined Army in the world, (remember the praise that it earned both from the UN force commanders as well as the inhabitants of Somalia for their discipline, dedication and human approach to problems), as pack of wild brutes moving about as sex fiends outraging the modesty of every other women that comes their way even as they performing their duty and risking their lives.

In the furtherance of these objectives the insurgents have made effective use of their twin weapons of terror and sabotage. Both selective and indiscriminate killings have been carried out not only for silencing dissent but also for ensuring positive support of the intelligentsia for their cause. Indeed even as there is a long list of intellectuals killed by the insurgents for refusing to follow their dictates, there are a lost more of them, who, though at one time on the hit list of the insurgents, have bought their lives through written assurances of such support as may be demanded of them. These are the intellectuals in the Valley who speak up for the insurgents and, who, while lending dignity to every insurgent activity, make wild allegations against the Government and the Security Forces; if only for discrediting the two as per dictates of the insurgents.

Unfortunately, apart from the support that the insurgents have been able to extract from the people of the Valley in lieu of being permitted to live, they also seem to have influenced a section of the Indian intelligentsia outside the Valley; the nationalism and patriotism of these people notwithstanding. Apparently due to the intellectual's usual reprehension of Machiavellian state craft, (which all governments are obliged to follow without admitting to be doing so), and his love of being associated with the upholding of high ideals and fair play, some of the ilk have been led to lap up the insurgent's propaganda without subjecting it to any close scrutiny. Much damage to the national cause has, inadvertently, been done by those among them, who, because of their association with the writing profession, have been instrumental in spreading the insurgent's message.

Psychological warfare involving propaganda and counter-propaganda, is a specialised job, that is required to be handled by personnel especially trained for it; preferably by intelligence/counter intelligence agencies. While it is known that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) is handling the psychological aspect of insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, one wonders who in India is responsible for this aspect of the on-going counter-insurgency operations. Perhaps, every one in general and none in particular.