

M A Gandhian and Peace Studies

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4008 Understanding Conflict: Basic Theories

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Understanding Conflict: Security Perspective

'Why does the armed conflict occur'; 'what are the root causes behind the existence of an armed conflict'; and 'what could be effective antidote to tackle the armed conflict'? Many researches have been done on these questions, but,

multifarious reasons behind an armed conflict and because of the lack of our lucid understanding about the armed conflict no any perspective or theory can claim that it thoroughly propounds the reasons for the recurrence of an armed conflict – a violence phenomenon. Armed conflict is the use of armed violence by groups of insurgents to resolve disputes or fulfil demands that have a political/economic/cultural/social origin. In this write up we will discuss on an oldest theoretical understanding which is perhaps exists since the beginning of human civilization and remain as the foundation of our studying of armed conflict. 'The governments, from the different canner of the world, use several strategies and paradigms to tackle insurgencies and armed conflicts but the dominant strategy is based on the security

paradigm, which consists of maintaining the status quo and putting down insurgencies with the use of the force to regain control and establish law and order along with development projects and welfare schemes like employment generation, loan waivers and attractive surrender policy. After brief discussion on Security Perspective, which develops our understanding about different conflict across the world along with India's biggest security challenge – the Maoist violence, we shall discuss the limits of this perspective and propose the criticism.

'Why does the armed conflict occur'?

'What is the root causes behind the existence of an armed conflict'?

'What could be effective antidote to tackle the armed conflict'?

This write up discusses on the oldest theoretical understanding of the conflict which is perhaps exists since the beginning of human civilization and remain as the foundation of our studying of armed conflict – Security Perspective.

Security Perspective to Understand the Conflict:

Since the beginning of human-society the security concerns was become prominent and it could be easily assumed that the very first measure what would have been used to get secure was nothing but undoubtedly muscle strength. From the age of muscle power to the present time of sophisticated weapons, the notion of security has been remained constant. From individual to community and society to the modern state, this notion of security is sustaining. Across the world, conflicts are, primarily, seen as the challenge to established law and order by the governments and it is being tackled and dealt with the understanding of law-and-order problem and challenge.

- From the age of muscle power to the present time of sophisticated weapons, the notion of security has been remained constant.
- From individual to community and society to the modern state, this notion of security is sustaining.
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The modern state looks at armed conflicts through the paradigm of national security perspective. National security is the primary concern of the modern state and is the basis of its domestic and foreign policy. The paramount task of the state is perceived as creating and maintaining political, economic, social and other structures to ensure its survival. Realist theories provide the dominant, mainstream theoretical foundation security perspective by arguing that 'since the state is the primary provider of security, an individual's security is ensured by virtue of membership of the state. The individual's security is tied with the state's because the latter is bound to protect and preserve the social order, and to protect individuals from outsiders and from internal strife. In other words, individual security 'trickles down' from the state security. Apart from

realists, Max Weber wrote in '**Politics as a Vocation**' that, a fundamental characteristic of statehood is the claim of monopoly of the legitimate to use of the violence. His expanded definition was that something is "a 'state' if and insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force' in the enforcement of its order." According to Weber, the state is that "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory." The public police and military are its main instruments, but

private security might also be considered to have "the 'right' to use violence" so long as the sole source of this perceived right is state sanction.

Security perspective spots the insurgents (involved actors in a conflict) as illegal settlers or trespassers who disturb and profane the peaceful atmosphere and the government employs counter-insurgency tactics to combat the conflict and regain the control over the land and resources, for instance, the Indian

government has employed a series of law-and-order approaches during the four plus decades of attempting to combat the Naxalite movement. When the state to resort to the security perspective to tackle an armed conflict, it uses its coercive apparatus i.e. police, paramilitary forces, military forces and sometimes private vigilant groups.

Case Study from India:

The first set of Indian Army and paramilitary counter-insurgency operations against the Naxalites between 1969 and 1972, combined with the national State of Emergency later in the decade, successfully suppressed the movement' and by 1970s this movement came to an end for all its political purposes but this was achieved by the use of same tactics of terror which the Naxals do, and did not respect the human rights which are guaranteed under the law. Extra-constitutional means, such as; illegal detention, police torture, 'encounters' killings, and extrajudicial murder, were tactfully used by the state and 'hinged on the often brutal repression of the peasants, during which many innocent people lost their lives'. Though the *Naxalbari Movement* was end in body, its spirit became beacon for next generation peasant-

tribal revolt in a new and more lethal flavour.

Criticism:

1. National security centric understanding to tackle the armed conflict is challenged by a sections of the intellectuals and scholars who see the armed conflict as a socio-economic problem, arises from deprivation, loss of livelihood, lack of employment opportunities and abject poverty. They argue that the 'national security threat' term is used by

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the government as a ruse to justify the rise of the security centric state, with its repressive laws infringing genuine democratic voices and dissent.

2. The main failure of this approach was its firm belief in violence and taking the armed conflict as only law-and-order problem while the conflicts have some social and economic dimensions also. This approach spots the insurgents as lawbreaker and attempted to turn them into law-abiding people by use of the force.
3. This perspective restricts the meaning of security to colonial definition of keeping peace and encompasses the extra-constitutional measures to 'defend national interest'. This rhetorical phrase 'to defend national interest' provides legitimacy to the use of violence and in its shadow the state commits to massive human rights violation. In the first phase, for instance, of counter-insurgency operation against the Naxal in India, many innocent tribal, indigenous people and even blue bloods lost their lives. The movement stopped but not for good.

