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Managing Civil-Military Relations in Counterinsurgency Operations: A Review of the Malaysian Experiences

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"Without a reasonably efficient government machine, no programmes or projects, in the context of counterinsurgency, will produce the desired results."

Sir Robert Thompson

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ABSTRACT: *This paper addresses the Malaysian Army experience in managing the civil-military relations during the involvement in counterinsurgency operations against the Communist Party of Malaya. Counterinsurgency warfare is a war involving the people therefore it is pertinent that the war be led by the civil authority being the custodian of government resources. The civil authority is in a better position to plan, coordinate and implement all counterinsurgency activities effectively. In this respect, it does not mean that the military has no active role to play. The service of the military is still required to provide security for government development projects to be carried out successfully.*

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1. Introduction

The experiences of Malaysian Army fighting communist insurgents require much more than just a military effort. There is a need for coordinated efforts by the military forces together with government and civil agencies. Counterinsurgency warfare is a war involving the people therefore it is pertinent that the war be led by the civil power being the custodian of government resources. The civil power is in a better position to plan, coordinate and implement all counterinsurgency activities effectively. In this respect, it does not mean that the military has no active role to play. The service of the military is still required to provide security for government development projects to be carried out successfully. The government in 1970s has formulated a strategy known as the Internal Development and Defence (IDAD) concept (Arahan No. 11, 1980). This project is based on the need for creating a secure environment, this concept places more emphasis on development of the rural areas, aimed at improving the loyalty and the

living standards of the people of various races or ethnic groups. Tunku Abdul Rahman introduced his policy of "providing food and not bullets, housing and not barracks, clothes and not uniforms" (Zainuddin Maidin, 2004). The success of such programmes in eradicating the insurgents can be manifested by the fact that there have been little or no contacts or reports on the communist activities during that time in the particular areas.

This paper will only discuss the experience managing civil-military relations against the CPM insurgency which is only confined to Peninsula Malaysia, and will not touch on the experience and success against the insurgents in Sabah and Sarawak. The discussion will cover the following:

- a. A brief description of the Malaysian Army, its organization and capabilities.
- b. The military roles in counterinsurgency and the roles of the civilian authority.
- c. The command relationships between the military and the civilian authority in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.
- d. The principles used for planning civil-military operations. The need for close civil-military cooperation during counterinsurgency operations.

2. The Malaysian Army

Apart from the three services, there is a parallel civilian set-up which runs the Ministry of Defence headed by a Secretary General, whose position is equivalent to the Chief of the Armed Forces. Partly because of the organization, the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) has allowed civilian dominance over it.

2.1 Pre 1985 Posture

To address the question of the Malaysian Army and its counterinsurgency capabilities in which referring to the Army as it existed prior to 1985. After this period, changes have taken place towards the restructuring of the Malaysian Army for the 1990s up to the year 2000, necessitated by the changing threat situation and perception. The emphasis during that period is on conventional capability.

Until late 1970s, the major role for the MAF was internal defence. In other words it was less a conventional warfare type of Army. This was so because the newly independent government could rely on the British military presence for its external defence.

2.2 Post 1985 Posture

Since 1986, the Army has formulated a long term plan on force modernization which was continued until the year 2000. There was a progressive infusion of new capabilities for the Army to effectively transform it into a conventional force.

By the 1990s up to the year 2000, the Army consist of the following components:

- a. The Field Army which consisted of combat units, combat support, and combat service support.
- b. Framework Force. This force is composed of 20% regulars and 80% reservists. It is part of Field Army. During peace times these units will be manned only by regulars and reservists will be mobilized in times of emergency. During that time the Framework Force was made up of Territorial Units known as the 100/300/500 series which are infantry units.
- c. Infrastructure Force. This force will assist the Field Army, the Framework Force and other static units. This force includes garrison headquarters, staff station, training institutions, and logistics and personnel services units.

3. The Military Roles

Between 1948 and 1954, the communist insurgents followed a broad-based policy of terrorism, initially directed principally against European planters and their representatives, irrespective of their ethnic

origin. The military arm of the CPM was firmly controlled by the Party in accordance with Chairman Mao Tse Tung's well-known dictum that, "Power comes out of the barrel of the gun" (Stewart, 2004). In isolated plantations, the communist insurgents will attack the planters which resulted in death; this represented the stage of the communists' overall strategy of terrorism.

Despite the considerable strength at the disposal of the CPM and the psychological impact of its acts of terrorism, the revolution never passed beyond the first phase of its aim; the reasons are: firstly, failure to obtain masses support; secondly, failure to mobilize major striking force and thirdly, failure to secure jungle retreats.

The failure of the insurgent operations was attributed to a major security measure devised by Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs. A resettlement scheme known as 'The Briggs Plan' had effectively curtailed these operations. Principally, the objectives of the Briggs Plan were as follows:

- a. To dominate the populated areas and to build up a feeling of complete security this would consequently result in a steady and increasing flow of information coming from all sources.
- b. To disintegrate the communist organization within the populated areas.
- c. To disrupt the supply line and the lines of communication.
- d. To facilitate operations by security forces as the communist insurgents would be attacked on their own ground.

In June 1950, the then British director of military operations, Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs, outlined a strategy aimed at gaining the support of the population and isolating the terrorists from their supplies and intelligence sources. In the Briggs Plan, the police concentrated on normal police functions, while the military would cover those areas which the Police could not. The civil service would ensure effective administration. The plan concentrated on winning the support of the population, rather than defeating the insurgents by force of arms and in confidence building measures. Key to its success was the twin goals needed to ensure an end to the insurgency: protection of the population and its isolation from the guerrillas (Lt Col James, 2007).

The Briggs Plan called for a unified command of the civil and military operations against the communist insurgents. The achievement of the military success in Malaya was vitally linked to the approach in which an efficient resettlement scheme was used to isolate one section of the population whose assistance was vital to the military operations against the insurgents. The isolation of the squatters from the insurgents had a strong negative effect on the latter in the pursuance of its struggle.

By 1950 there were 17 infantry battalions at the government's disposal, the police, regulars, specials and auxiliaries had expanded to well over 100,000; in addition there were Home Guards and Kampong Guards. The Communist Terrorists (CTs) never had more than 6,000 armed men and women in the jungle (Stewart, 2004). During this emergency the security forces lost 1,865 killed, 2,560 wounded; civilian casualties had never been even heavier 4,000 murdered or wounded and 800 missing (Stewart, 2004). By 1957 when Malaysia achieved its independence, the insurgents had already suffered considerable losses. Its strength was decimated to a mere 600 men who were forced to seek sanctuary in South Thailand. As mentioned by Chynoweth (2005), by 31st July 1960, the Emergency (imposed in 1948) was formally lifted and the insurgents were defeated. The Emergency had lasted for twelve years, and had cost the lives of about 12,400 people, some 60 percent of whom were terrorists.

4. The Communist Resurgence in The 1970s

Although the communist insurgency was defeated in the "First Armed Struggle", it is never lost sight of its aim to seize power by violent means. Officially the First Emergency came to an end in 1960 when every District in Malaya had been declared 'White', it was not until 1989 that the CPM renounced their absurd ambitions to turn Malaya into a Communist state. In June 1968, the CPM had issued a policy which called for a return to the armed struggle. Governor General Malcolm Macdonald presumed that "The communists' first aim was to get rid of the government" (Stewart, 2004). Paraphrasing Clausewitz, we might say that "Insurgency is the pursuit of the policy of a party, inside a country, by every means. The insurgency can start long before the insurgent resorts to the use of force" (Galula, 2008). Even such a large effort, however, cannot be expected to bring a complete end to the insurgency in the area: a few

guerrillas will still manage to survive. It may be interesting to note in this respect that in September, 1962, 14 years after the start of the insurgency in Malaya, 20 to 30 communist guerrillas were still holding out in the deep jungle inside Malaya, not counting 300 more operating on the Malaya-Thailand border (Galula, 2008). The CPM move into South Thailand was not the last desperate action of a defeated army but a logical tactical withdrawal with the promise of favourable long term strategic rewards (Aloysius Chin, 1994).

There was an increase in terrorist incidents in 1969 especially in Kedah and Perlis where they shot dead their former members who had defected, security forces convoys were ambushed, railway bridges were blown and police stations fired upon. Targets selected were those areas previously under their domination during the First Emergency, then termed as the "Black" areas. These were areas where former communist sympathizers and relatives resided and can be relied upon to provide the required support (Aloysius Chin, 1994). Their support comes from the Min Yuen work whereby Chin Peng quoted the experience gained in Selangor as an example: firstly, close contact should be maintained with the masses; secondly, prompt action must be taken to eliminate all traitors; and thirdly, carry out United Front Work in a correct manner.

The government took swift measures to combat the resurgence by the use of security forces as one of the means to eliminate the militant group. To further reinforce the military punch, the joint border agreement between Thailand and Malaysia which was formulated in October 1964 was reviewed and updated in 1970. Through this review the cooperation took the form of combined operations, exercises and exchange of intelligence and operational teams in the respective forward headquarters. At the same time the government embarked on a programme known as 'IDAD' which stands for Internal Development and Defence. This concept is to counter the insurgency menace. The idea was basically similar to the Briggs Plan which has been mentioned earlier. It is a modification of the Briggs Plan to suit the situation. All these measures brought about success as indicated by the reduction of communist activities in respective years.

Some of the typical roles of the security forces were as follows:

- a. Police and Para Military roles: first, maintenance of law and order; second, defence of new villages, estates and mines whereby this defence was not static, but by aggressive patrolling by day and close ambush by night; third, collection, collation and assessment of all intelligence; fourth, maintenance of jungle "forts" to protect and dominate the aborigine areas;
- b. Army roles: firstly, conduct the offensive operations against the insurgents, secondly, to assist the police and para military forces in framework operations, thirdly, the Army was to maintain framework operations to contain the insurgents in non priority areas and lastly, the Army was to carry out offensive operation in deep jungle. It must be emphasized that the security forces that are in support of the civilian government were coordinated through combined operations. As a consequence, civil clearance had to be obtained for military operations, except in the cases of extreme urgency. The clearance is necessary in order to avoid accidents or damage to civilian population and property.

A system called 'war by committee' is to ensure that there was coordinated action at all levels. In the event of irreconcilable differences, the matter is referred to the next higher committee for a decision. In practice it is never necessary to take local matters to this level. The system was most effective, and success was ensured by making the committee, as a body, fully responsible for its actions. With the success of Peace Agreement signed in Haadyai on 2nd December 1989 marked the end of 41 years of armed struggle by the CPM and their members who laid down their arms as follows: the nationality of Thai (670), Malaysian (494), Singaporean (21), Japanese (2), Indonesian (1) and total (1188); according by races are Thai Malays (497), Thai Chinese (184), Thais (7), Malaysian Chinese (402), Malaysian Malays (77), Singaporean (21), Japanese (2), Indonesian (1), Orang Asli (13), Indian (2), Undetermined (3) and total (1188) (Aloysius Chin, 1994).

5. The Civil Authority Roles

The concept of internal development is to prevent the outbreak or escalation of insurgency through political, social and economic means. The objective is to remove those conditions which give rise to

insurgency. As such the activities of internal development are geared towards the attainment of a balanced social, political and economic development through the implementation of the internal development programmes by the various civil agencies. Civil roles can therefore be summed up as follows:

- a. To facilitate security forces operations and to eradicate the communist threat.
- b. To win the hearts and minds of the people in order to support the legally constituted government.
- c. To improve the socio economic status of the people especially those in the rural areas so as to enhance national resilience.

For the socio economic development, there have been many projects implemented in support of this strategy. Most of these projects are long term and ongoing programmes. Combating insurgency has tested a government to its maximum capability. To succeed, the government must bring to bear all the elements of national power (political, military, and social) in a coordinated campaign (Ladwig, 2007). The absence of such coordination can result in a lack of clear authority, inadequate intelligence analysis, poorly integrated efforts by civilian agencies, and military operations that fail to achieve their desired effect.

The British achieved effective integration in a host of successful counterinsurgency campaigns through the employment of an executive-committee system. Among these campaigns was the Malayan Emergency, a British-led campaign against Communist guerrillas that lasted from 1948 to 1960. The Malayan Emergency is an example of a successful coordination between the civil and military elements of government as well as between multiple nations. Making war by committee is not usually the best approach to military operations, but the British experience in Malaya is a case of a successful counterinsurgency effort conducted against the backdrop of a complex political arrangement (Ladwig, 2007). It demonstrates one method of achieving close coordination and effective management of civil and military resources.

With the military in command, a country could be transformed into a wasteland of war in which civilians counted for nothing and were not even left with the one last human emotion of hope. Briggs immediately formed a small War Council consisting of himself, the Administration heads, Police, Army and RAF (Barber, 2004). They would plan policy. Each state had a similar council, headed by the State Chief Minister, and each District also had War Executive Committee – always under the chairmanship of the local civilian British District Officer. Thus, at these daily meetings referred to as morning prayers, the civilians were in control.

6. Psychological Warfare

The primary objective of psychological warfare is to influence the minds of the communist insurgents such that when affected by physical factors such as shortage of food, pressure by security forces or internal dissension, they defect to the side of the government. These are forms of civil counter measures which play a vital role in counterinsurgency and have been widely used in Malaysia. The main base of a successful psychological warfare campaign will depend on a clear and precise government surrender policy towards the insurgents. Such a policy has three main aims: firstly, to encourage insurgent surrenders; secondly, to sow dissension between insurgent rank and file and their leaders; and thirdly, to create an image of government both to the insurgents and to the population which is both firm and efficient but at the same time just and generous (Thompson, 1972). Sometime in 1958, Chin Peng announced the Party's policy of "Folding up the banner and silencing the drums" i.e. to discontinue the battle and to lie low. The directive emphasized that under the present situation the armed units should lie low and if possible not to attract the attention of the masses and security forces (Aloysius Chin, 1994). For example: firstly, the size of the camp should be scaled down. If a camp was built to accommodate 200, the sleeping berths, arranged in decks, should be dismantled and the event of discovery by security forces, to give the impression that the camp could only accommodate about 50 personnel; secondly, while a unit was on the move, a combatant should be assigned to cover up all footprints; and thirdly, to contact only elderly members of the masses in their house.

One of the many activities of psychological warfare is 'civic action group.' It consists of officials from civil agencies such as agriculture, labour, registration and information who go round to selected areas to

render their respective service to the people. The services may be minor in nature but contribute greatly towards enhancing the government's image in the eyes of the public. Consequently, such actions assisted in winning the people to the side of the government. The frequent physical contacts made by government officials with the population deep in the interior have created a close rapport between the people and the government. The government can be seen to be functioning and a sense of belonging between the people and the government is created. By 1951, leaders of the CPM realized that they had lost the initiative in the armed struggle and their expectation of a quick victory had been thwarted (Aloysius Chin, 1994). Militarily, the Malayan National Liberation Army had suffered serious casualties and the armed units were being cut off from their sources of supplies due to the Government resettlement and food denial schemes.

7. Civil-Military Shared Roles

There is no purely military battlefield in counterinsurgency warfare and the campaign can only be won by combined civil-military efforts. Many military measures cannot be effective without the support of the civil authorities and conversely, civil development programme cannot succeed without the military providing its security. Inspector General of Police, Tun Mohd Haniff Omar and the Malaysian Chief of Armed Forces, Jeneral Tan Sri Hashim Md. Ali mentioned to the press after the signing ceremony of the Peace Accord with the CPM, "We have won; the morale of the army has not been compromised but has instead been elevated because we have won. We wanted peace and we got peace" (Zainuddin Maidin, 2004).

The excellent civil-military understanding in Malaysia has demonstrated that it is a decisive factor in defeating the insurgents. For some years, there has been no contacts or reports on communist activities towards the end of Second Emergency. Areas where communist activities were previously prevalent are now replaced by wide stretches of rubber or palm oil plantations, with the settlers tilling their land not under fear or intimidation any more, but with inspiration and better economic expectation of the future. Tun Dr. Mahathir in a statement made after the Peace Accord, "The success is the result of the bravery, contributions and sacrifices of many parties, especially the members of the security forces, which are the Army and the Police. In this context, the contributions of the public during the early years of the emergency through the Home Guard and Special Constable, popularly called the SC, and other parties, are invaluable, but will still be treasured by the nation" (Zainuddin Maidin, 2004).

8. Command Relationships Between Military And Civilian

All counterinsurgency forces have certain essential requirements. One of these essentials is a joint command and control structure. It is different from conventional warfare in several ways and is not sufficient merely to adapt conventional warfare methods to meet the special conditions of counterinsurgency campaigning. The British High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney, who recognized that their battle against communism in Malaya should not be a strictly military affair (Khong Kim Hoong, 1984). In the final analysis, this was a political war where the 'hearts and minds' of the people had to be won over. While the military warfare against the guerrillas in the jungle was maintained, a new approach was made to deal with the civilian population.

Similarly, there are many points on which civil and military are liable to disagree, due to the differing viewpoints that they each tend to have of the situation. The military commander is primarily concerned in defeating the enemy as soon as possible and at the same time to protect the lives and maintain the morale of his troops. As a result, he will at times feel that his freedom of action is being unduly restricted by political considerations.

The civil authorities, for their part, have their eyes primarily on their 'long term settlement based on the goodwill of the people.' They are liable to feel sometimes that they are being pressured by unreasonable military demands into action which is prejudicial to this aim. It is always the priorities and these priorities will themselves change constantly as the situation changes. To overcome these difficulties, Malaysia has a unified command set up comprising of four essential characteristics i.e. a director of operations; a joint committee structure; a secretariat and a joint operation room. In this way,

complete mutual confidence between civil and military can be ensured and a firm control of the campaign well maintained.

One of the first steps taken by Briggs was the creation of the Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee in May 1950. This committee coordinated the collection, analysis, and distribution of intelligence on insurgent locations, activities, and plans from whatever sources – civil, police, or military. This same spirit of “jointness” in the counterinsurgency effort inspired the creation of the Federal War Council to coordinate all civil, police, and military counterinsurgent efforts. The Federal War Council, whose members included the Chief Secretary of the Federation, the General and RAF commanding in Malaya, the Commissioner of Police, and the Secretary of Defence, was replicated in District and State War Executive Committee throughout Malaya (Nagl, 2002). The problem of efforts pulling in opposite directions had been solved.

9. Civil-Military Cooperation

The main prerequisite for any form of insurgency is that it must enjoy a considerable amount of mass support. To succeed, it is important for the government in power to concentrate its main efforts to achieve this aim. The “Malaysia Experience” has clearly shown that insurgency cannot be successfully countered unless the people of the country are with the government. Military action is support the civil authorities plan for social reform and economic development throughout the country. Success in counterinsurgency lies “not in pouring more troops into the jungle but in the hearts and minds of the people”. Tun Mohd Haniff Omar, retired Inspector General of Police, his foreword in the book title “The Communist Party of Malaya-the inside story” mentioned that, “Pursuit of counterinsurgency in Malaysia was always a national effort controlled by a civilian government although the brunt of the Emergency rested with the Royal Malaysian Police and with the Armed Forces in support” (Aloysius Chin, 1994).

Khong Kim Hoong (1984), mentioned under the Emergency Regulations, proclaimed that in June 1984, that the government was empowered to: order the detention of any person without trial for a period of two years; prohibit the publication, sale, issue, or circulation of any documents, poster or placards which in the opinion of the police had a seditious tendency; take possession of any building or vehicle; control all movements on the road; disperse any assemblies; impose curfews; arrest any person without warrant; impose the death penalty for possession of arms; impose punishment on any individual who in the opinion of the police disseminated false reports; take over businesses where the profits were likely to be used to aid the communists; order the detention of residents in any village or area where the High Commissioner was satisfied that the people have aided, abetted or consorted with the communists, suppressed evidence relating to the unlawful possession of arms, persistently failed to give information to the police concerning the communists or persistently failed to take steps to prevent their (communists’) escape; use all force necessary, including the use of lethal weapons to arrest persons who were suspected of carrying firearms or consorting with such persons; and evict persons occupying state lands.

10. Conclusion

The lesson learnt is that in the fight against insurgency, due attention must be given to the socio economic well being of the people. The government must be sensitive towards the people’s need. Issues that can cause dissatisfaction amongst the people must be resolved, or else it can be exploited by the insurgents. Unless positive measures are taken, the people will be very vulnerable to the insurgent propaganda and indoctrination.

The Briggs Plan of resettling 500,000 Chinese into new villages can be considered to be one of the most effective counter measures to defeat the insurgents. It involved not only the security forces effort alone, but also the combined efforts of the civil power and military. The success was due to the segregation of the masses from the insurgents – not the direct use of military force.

Realizing the importance of the need for security and development to go hand-in hand, the government in 1970, formulated a strategy known as the Internal Development and Defence (IDAD) concept. Beside the needs for creating a secure environment, this concept places more emphasis on development of the rural areas, aimed at improving the loyalty and the living standards of the people of

various races or ethnic groups. It is very encouraging to note that the previous and present leaders recognized this philosophy.

Consequently, intensive national development programmes have been implemented. The success of such programmes in eradicating the insurgents can be manifested by the fact that there have been little or no contacts or reports on the communist activities during that time. All these draw only to one conclusion – Malaysia can be said – has the right blend of relations between civil authorities and the military to face its counterinsurgency problem. However, Malaysia must continue to be sensitive especially facing the security issues in today environments, and develop its force roles and structure accordingly. Lessons of the past should not be forgotten or ignored, but should be applied or modified for the future.

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