

Roles of Assam Rifles in Border Management & Internal Security along the Manipur–Myanmar Border

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Abstract

India and Myanmar have always had good relations from an ancient time after when Emperor Ashoka send two of its Buddhist monks to preach Theravada Buddhism in Burma during the 3rd century BCE and started the trades between the two nations. Myanmar is strategically very important for India's Act East Policy (AEP) for its trades, connectivity to South East Asian countries and development of Northeast Indian states that shares border with Myanmar. India shares about 1,643 kilometers of land border with Myanmar. Four North-East Indian states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram shares its international border with three states of Kachin, Sagaing and Chin of Myanmar. This land border has always had a serious concern for the India's security perspectives because of the open border, trans-border ethnic linkage, geographically remote from the center political power and other illegal activities from across the border. Assam Rifles (AR) which is the oldest Paramilitary Force (PF) of India, raised by Britishers with just 750 men in 1835 as a "Cachar Levy" to safeguard of tea estate from the tribal raids. Presently, AR has a total of 46 Battalions with dual role of border guarding and counter insurgency headed by the rank of Lieutenant General from Indian Army on Probation with their Headquarter (HQ) in Laitkor, Shillong (Meghalaya). AR is the only force which has having its HQ outside Delhi. It is the only paramilitary force which having a dual structure of control. Operational control is with the Indian Army under Ministry of Defence (MoD) while administrative control by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). This paper examines the evolving role of the AR in border management along the Manipur-Myanmar border and different challenges faced by the AR after the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar, along with particular focus on surveillance, information gathering, managing illegal migration, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, insurgents' movements and coordination with the Army, state police, and civil administration.

Keywords: Assam Rifles, India-Myanmar Border, Border Management, Northeast India, Border Guarding, Counter Insurgency Operation.

Introduction

Both India and Myanmar signify for two central areas of the world, South and South-East Asia respectively, as well as the non-aligned nations of these regionsⁱ. India and Myanmar are always a good neighbor from the ancient time-shared trades, commerce, law, religion and culture. The economic and cultural exchange between India and Burmese region were started in third century B.C. when Emperor Ashoka sends two Buddhist emissaries to Burmaⁱⁱ. By the fourth century BC, Trade with India played an

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important role in the Mon Economy. They adopted Theravada Buddhism, spreading the practice throughout southern Myanmar and Pyu people migrated either from Tibet or India, establishing their first capital in the Irrawady River Delta. In the quest for trading businesses in Burma, the Portuguese and the Dutch were early winners. But they were gradually displaced by the British who gained ground. In the 18th century, Britain had attained supremacy in India by diplomacy where feasible, by war when necessary. Having taken control of India, the East India Company observed Burma from the west, and France, having made inroads into Indo-China and Siam, lusted for a slice of business and political control of Burma from the east. Burmese rulers' tendency to attack the easternmost parts of British India – Assam, Manipur, Cachar – and to pose threat to the security of mainland Bengal provided a strong reason to British colonialists to address seriously the Burma problem. During the 19th century, British rule was extended to Burma in the same way.

North-Eastern India is connected to the rest of India only by a narrow 22km wide corridor called "Siliguri Corridor" or "Chicken Neck". India shares 1,643 km long land boundary with Myanmar and also shares about 725 km maritime boundary along the Bay of Bengal, Four North-Eastern States viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram shared their international land boundary with Kachin, Sagaing and Chin State of Myanmar along with Maritime Boundary in Andaman and Nicobar Island. The present land boundary of India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British Commissioners in 1834. Captain Pemberton and Major Grant from Manipur Side and Major Burney from the Burmese side. Thus, this line is also called as Pemberton Lineⁱⁱⁱ. The alignment of the border has been mutually agreed upon between India and Myanmar and has also been jointly demarcated on the ground, with a series of a number of pillars (BPs). After the Independence of India, Manipur was under a princely state and became a state in 1972. India is facing an example of multiple sub-national conflicts in North-East India, especially in the Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland where insurgent activities are still functioning. The 398 km unfenced border between Manipur and Myanmar serves as a primary corridor for illegal immigration, narcotic smuggling, and militants' activities, severely complicating the state's internal security. This geographical proximity alone has influenced their bilateral relations, making the two countries important strategic partners for one another. Myanmar has a larger population of Indian origin. Further, Myanmar is India's gateway to South-East Asia (SEA) and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) with which India seeking greater economic integration through India's 'Look East' later renamed as 'Act East' Policy passes through the Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) of Moreh of Manipur and Zorinpui of Mizoram. Myanmar also provides an alternative access route to the Northeast. Since the 1950's stood a scene of ethno-nationalist-driven, low-intensity conflict, deteriorating the state-to-state relationship. Cooperation in fighting transnational rebellious groups and Burmese attempts at curbing India-hostile rebels for many years has been lukewarm, at best. Soldiers from India's oldest paramilitary force, the Assam Rifles are in charge of patrolling along with these border areas. Assam Rifles was raised in 1835, it's often referred to as the "Friends of Hills Peoples" and the "Sentinels of the Northeast". The Assam Rifles personnel deployed to secure this vast frontier are hardly ill-equipped and sporadically deployed across the physically difficult terrain and in Counter Insurgency Operation (COIN). These Sentinels of the Northeast have a duty to counter everything from ethnic insurgency, arms smuggling, illegal trades, identification of illegal migrants and narco-trafficking to frontier security. These soldiers serving on the Myanmar border are overworked and criminally understaffed. The susceptibility of the India–Myanmar border to these threats and challenges is primarily due to the nature and location of the international border. Every year, tons of illegal items were recovered from border areas and arrested many locals and foreigners involved in illegal activities. The causes of security threats in border areas are such as, the insurgency is the easiest way to earn money, Political/Foreign support, improper land demarcation, open border fencings, ethnic ties, Unemployment, lack of development, Education Institutions, Alienation feelings from Governments, lack of coordination between the Security Forces and Locals etc.

The porosity of the international border stems from three factors such as open border, Free Movement Regime (FMR) and difficult terrain. Some parts of the border were divided by the Socio-cultural and economic landscape of the region. Even though the border follows the 'traditional' boundary of watersheds and rivers, its demarcation has left several communities divided. The tribes' people were allowed to carry items equivalent to a head load up to 16 Km to either side of the India-Myanmar Border. In addition, people from Myanmar could stay for 72 hours in India and Indians for 24 hours in Myanmar^{iv} but later on, On December 2024, after the ethnic clash of Meitei and Kuki brings Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to release the new FMR guidelines for the cross-border movements of peoples of border areas,

reduces the range of FMR from earlier 16 km to 10 km at present and a residents should take a "Border Pass" from Assam Rifles to cross the border and can stay upto 7 days on the either side of the border followed by their documents check-up and health check by the health departments. While the FMR helped the tribes continue maintaining their age-old ties, it has been observed that the provision was exploited by the Indian insurgents to cross over to Myanmar to receive training in arms, establish safe havens and re-enter India to hold out subversive attacks. The Cross Border Terrorism, Drugs Trafficking and Ethnic Clashes are the main factors for the Security Challenges. In the initial phase of the insurgency, the Naga National Council (NNC) had forged ties with the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) active in Myanmar which helped the Naga rebels establish contact with China for receiving training and weapons⁴. In addition to facilitating training, support and logistics, these bases also provide an opportunity for various insurgent groups to work together against the Indian establishment under a single banner. Due to the absence of Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) by the Border Guarding Forces in Manipur and Nagaland-Myanmar border, it was felt difficult to look over the illegal entry, arms-trafficking, insurgency movements and other illegal activities from across the border.

With the Military take over the Myanmar and overthrew the democratic elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD (National League for Democracy) in February 2021 has united the various Myanmar based insurgents' groups and act against the military in entire Myanmar and this created a major setback to the part of India's Manipur region also, as due to the open border, it arises the illegal cross-border activities and increases the illegal migrants from across the border. And apart from this ethnic clash between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities of Manipur from 3rd May 2023 has boost up the insurgency activity and arms-trafficking in both the hills and valleys areas of Manipur resulted to hundreds of deaths and thousands displaced and forced to stayed in different reliefs camps. To halt the illegal migrants and illegal arms trafficking from Manipur-Myanmar border, Mizoram-Myanmar border and Nagaland-Myanmar border, Ministry of Home Affairs has decided to fence the entire India-Myanmar border and upgraded the FMR rules and regulation to some extent but the Nagas of Nagaland and Manipur, Kuki-Zo of Manipur and Mizo of Mizoram are against the decision of Government order of permanent border fencing as it brings the division of their old age ties and their ethnicity whereas Meitei's has supported the government order. India's Look East Policy which was launched in 1991 by the former Prime Minister of India P.V. Narashimha Rao with an object to develop the political, economic and security cooperation with the Southeast Asian Countries. Later on, in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Act East Policy as the successor to the Look East Policy based on 4'C governance model such as Commerce, Culture, Connectivity and Capacity Buildings. But after the Myanmar Military coup and Meitei-Kuki conflict, the AEP project has become slowed the infrastructure development as from blockades of roads, insurgency activity and the movements of trucks which is needed for the development of projects. And from Myanmar AEP project has slowed after the Myanmar rebels has taken control over the entire border region where India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highways has passing through Sagaing Region and India's Kaladan Multi Modal Transit project from Rakhine and Chin State of Myanmar.

History of Assam Rifles

Northeast India was not a part of India till 1826. In the late 18th and 19th century, Assam and Manipur experienced Burmese invasions. Burmese occupation in Assam and Manipur continued until the British intervened in the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824, concluded with the signing of Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma (now Myanmar) and transferred Assam and other territories from Burmese to British control that marking the beginning of British rule in Northeast India. With the British take-over of Assam, they need to improve the administrative set up, prosperity and economic growth in the region. By the late 18th century, tea become popular in Britain and almost all tea was imported from China but to less dependency on China's tea monopoly and profit from the plantation agriculture, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General of India in 1834, set-up the Tea Committee to see the sights for tea cultivation in India. Later on, British officially confirm the tea (*Camellia Sinensis* var. *Assamica*) can be grown in Assam indigenously, and were not imported from China. Charles Bruce was appointed Superintendent of Tea Culture in Assam. And other natural resources like coal and oil deposits were highly found in this region. Assam thus became prosperous, and new settlements came up in different places offering attractive targets for the trans-border forays of the tribals. Thus, the tribals raids became a serious threat to the British Industries and plantation in Assam. In order to meet the threat created by the tribals to the tea gardens and to safeguard

of military installations, it was decided to raise a 'Militia' body or 'Levy' as a separate force under the civil government recruited from the Regular Army of the Gorkha Rifles and the Armed Police. The first unit was raised on 24 March 1835 by Mr. Grange, the civil officer in charge of Nowgong named as "Cachar Levy" comprising of 750 soldiers^{vi}. The duty of Levy was to perform military duties and to replace some of the regular army units in certain tribal border areas. Later on, due to the frequent tribal raids into British administration plains, limited intelligence over the tribal movements and attacks on tea garden, the Britishers has decided to expand their dominance towards the hills and occupied the tribal areas. They adopted the "forward Policy" and changed from defensive role to a positively offensive and changed the name of the Force as "Frontier Police" in 1862. In 1882, the Force has again changed the name from "Frontier Police" to "Assam Military Police", under the territorial titles of "Naga Hills Military Police (MP) Battalions (now 3 Assam Rifles, oldest battalions of the Assam Rifles), Surma Valley MP battalions in 1898 was renamed as Lushai Hills MP battalion (now 1 Assam Rifles), and Lakhimpur MP battalion (now 2 Assam Rifles)"^{vii}. And lastly, In 1917 after the recognition of meritorious services rendered by the Military Police Battalions during the WW1 (1914-18) in Europe and Middle East, the Force has finally changes its name to "The Assam Rifles"^{viii}.

Cachar Levy soldier during the formation in 1835



Source: Assam Rifles 1835-2010.

Famous British Expedition towards the Hills and Tribal Areas

Name of the British Expeditions	Year of Expeditions
Assam Expedition (1 st Anglo-Burmese War)	1824-26
Naga Hills Expedition	1839, 1879-1880
Dafla Expedition	1850
Lushai Hills Expeditions	1871-72, 1880-1890, 1896 and

	1917-19
Kuki Expedition	1880-82 and 1917-19
Chinglong Naga Expedition	1882-83, 1910-1911
Akka Hills Expedition	1883
Akka (Daphla) Hills Expedition	1885-1886
Frontier/Manipur-Burma Expedition (Anglo-Manipur War)	1886, 1891 and 1894
Apatani Expedition	1887
Abor Expedition	1893-94, 1911-12
Mishmi Expedition	1899-1900, 1911-12

Source: Guardian of the Northeast: The Assam Rifles (1835-2002).

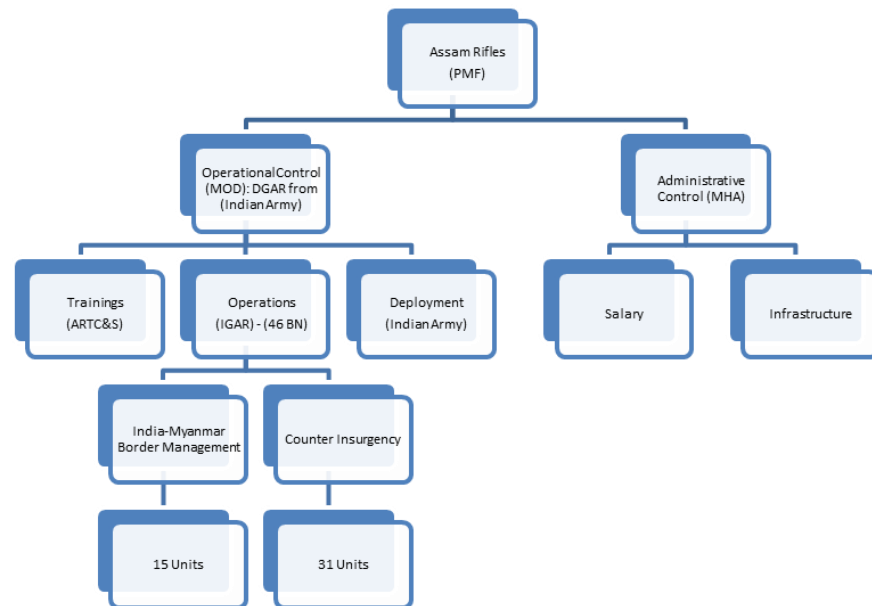
During the WW2 (1939-1945), there was a growing need for the regular infantry battalions trained for conventional warfare therefore, in 1941, the Assam Regiment was raised as a regular infantry regiment of the Indian Army and their personnel, officers, and recruits were drawn largely from the Assam Rifles. After the Japanese forces advance in 1942 towards the Western front of Burma and overthrow the presence of Allied Forces in South-east Asia, the Assam Rifles were given a task to counter or to stop the Japanese invasion along the Indo-Burmese Border. This group was known as 'Victor Force' and was formed from platoons of the Assam Rifles to fight in the defensive around Kohima and Imphal. The 4th Battalion of Assam Rifles were trained as airborne troops and dropped near the Sittang River behind the Japanese lines. The Japanese attempt to take Imphal and Kohima failed and were halted due to the lack of supplies line and strong presence of Allied forces in the region^{ix}.

After the Independence of India in 1947, Colonel Sidhiman Rai, MC, was appointed the first Indian DG of Assam Rifles. The role of Assam Rifles continued to evolve as a key force in the country's internal security and border management framework and took part in several major wars and conflicts, providing critical support to the Indian Army during the uprising of Naga Insurgency in 1956, Escorting of His Holiness Dalai Lama from Tibet onto Tawang of Arunachal Pradesh by the 5th Assam Rifles, Sino-India War of 1962, 1966 Mizo National Front (MNF) Uprising, 1988-90, Op Pawan in Sri Lanka as IPKF, Counter Insurgency Operations in J&K (1991).

Structures of Assam Rifles

The AR works under the dual command, making it unique from other Central Armed Police Force (CAPF). The command divides operational and administrative authorities between Ministry of Defence (MoD) (Army) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The operational command under the MoD (Army) includes the command and control during the operations, trainings, tactical deployment and operational planning, intelligence coordination and integration with Army formations during the operations. Administrative and Financial control of AR are under the MHA, and in which, it includes the recruitment and personnel policies of AR, pay allowances, pensions, and welfare, infrastructure development of barracks, roads and housings, budget allocation and financial sanctions and policy formulation and cadre managements. AR works under the operational command of Director General, the three stars Lieutenant General of Indian Army for duration of 3 years on deputation. Approximately 85% of the AR Officers Cadres are taken from different units of the Indian Army on deputation basis for 3 years and remaining 15% officers are taken from the own AR Cadre as Assistant Commandant after the commission^x. The Headquarter of Assam Rifles (DGAR-HQ) is situated in Laitkor, Shillong (Meghalaya) and it is the lone HQ of any Armed Forces which is situated outside of National Capital (Delhi). An IGAR (Inspector General Assam Rifles) which is commanded by the two star Major General of Indian Army, responsible for both operational command and administrative control of AR units in his sectors. There are 3 IGAR HQ namely IGAR (North) in Kohima, Nagaland, IGAR (East) in Silchar, Assam and IGAR (South) in Imphal, Manipur, where Assam Rifles Training Centre & School (ARTC&S) located in Sukhovi, Nagaland. Presently, there are about 46 battalions operated under each Sector of AR and out of which 31 battalions were deployed for the Counter Insurgency Operations (COIN) and remaining 15 battalions were deployed as a Border Guarding of 1,643 km long India-Myanmar Border and one additional battalion of NDRF in J&K.

- **Structure of Assam Rifles**



Assam Rifles as a Border Guarding Force (BGF)

Border Guarding is carried out by different Armed Forces along the International Border such as Border Security Force along Pakistan and Bangladesh, Indian Tibetan Border Police Force along Tibet, China, Sashastra Seema Bal along Nepal and Assam Rifles along the Myanmar Border. Out of 46 AR battalions, 15 battalions are deployed to look over the 1,643 km of land border starting from the easternmost point of India-Myanmar-Tibet Tri-Junction, place called Chaglagam in Anjaw District of Arunachal Pradesh. IMB follows through the Dapha Bum and Namcha Barwa range, with part along the Lohit River and moves towards southwards, touching Nagaland, Manipur to Mizoram's India-Myanmar-Bangladesh Tri-Junction place called Zochachhuah village in Lawngtlai district. This border running between the India's northeast states of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km) BP No. 156 to 185, Nagaland (215 km) BP No. 131 to 155, Manipur (398 km) BP No. 33 to 130, Mizoram (510 km) BP No. 1 to 32 and Myanmar's Kachin (40 km), Sagaing (795 km) and Chin state (808 km). AR primary role of Border Guarding along the India-Myanmar Border (IMB) is to guard against the insurgents, illegal migration, gun running, drugs trafficking, illegal trades and look over the mobilization of peoples/locals along the Integrated Check Posts (ICPs). The units of AR are deployed in Company Operating Bases (COBs) and Platoon Operating Bases (POBs) along the border. These COBs/POBs are located about 3 to 15 km from the International Border (IB) unlike BOPs, in other areas of the country, which are located as close as possible to the IB. The challenges that faced by the AR are; 1) the threats arises from the insurgents groups which are known to have their camps close to the border in Myanmar. These insurgents came from across the border and they conduct their attacks or ambush to the security forces and they looted their weapons after that they easily cross the border without any hurdles. 2) The terrain of the India-Myanmar border comprises with the river lines, hilly terrains, unpaved road that becomes muddy during the monsoon so this restricts the mobilization of troops and use technology solutions to help guard the border^{xi}. 3) The ethnic similarities of peoples and the Free Movement Regime (FMR) that allow the free movement of locals of border areas to travel, trade, and work to the either side of the border within 10 km of radius without any passport or visa. They need to take an Entry Permit from authorized Police Outpost, AR Outpost or from Customs department of that area. But most of the time this FMR was misused by the locals and insurgents to do their illegal activity and insurgent activity from across the border, so to counter this threats, the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) in February 2024 has decided to scrap the FMR between India and Myanmar to secure the border and addressing security concerns, though formal scrapping is pending in states like Nagaland and Mizoram have voiced opposition, while Manipur supported it due to ethnic violence. 4) The Open Border along the India-Myanmar border creates security, administrative, and social problem for India to control Insurgent Infiltration, drugs trafficking,

arms smuggling, lack of border fencing and clear boundary demarcation and illegal migration or Refugee Influx. 5) Manpower Shortage and Dual Responsibility of AR personnels are leading to fatigue and overworked during the patrolling shifts in inhospitable conditions. 6) The 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar forced civilians and ethnic minorities to flee into Indian Border States such as in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh and this intensified the illegal migration risk, forcing Assam Rifles to balance humanitarian obligations with border security, while facing heightened threats of infiltration, identity fraud, and internal instability.

Assam Rifles as a Counter Insurgency (CI) Force

Before the India's got Independence, Britishers kept the Northeast region separated from the mainland India for the strategic, administrative, and economic reasons due to the buffer region to protect their core Indian territories from the external threats so that it rival the colonial power and the British believed tribal societies should be kept "protected" under the Gol Act, of 1935, and isolated from nationalist movement. This helped to prevent the spread of the Indian freedom struggle into the frontier areas. But after the India got Independence from British rule in 1947, Gol moved quickly to integrate the Northeast got national unity and security. Manipur and Tripura princely states were merged through instruments of Accession. The Naga National Council (NNC) of Naga Hills declare independence in 1947, a day before India and rejected the Indian authority, arguing they were never part of British India and this led to the first major armed insurgency in independent India in early 1950s, followed by the Mizo Insurgency in 1959 due to negligence by the Assam Government during the Mautam famine, and in Manipur in 1964 demanding sovereignty due to a sense of betrayal and Maharaja signed the merger agreement under the pressure of Gol in 1947.

Assam Rifles has actively taken part in Counter Insurgency Operations (COIN) along with the Indian Army and State Police. This has been a defining role of the force after Independence. CI operations are the battle for heart and minds of the population. The aim and objective of insurgents are generally focused to get sovereignty, independence, and self-determination, change of government, religious chauvinism, ethnic subjugation and domination^{xii}. Currently, 31 AR battalions were deployed for the CI Operations in Northeast and J&K region. There are about two-fifth of the personnel are recruited from the Northeast and surrounding border areas, so this local recruitment strengthens civil-military cooperation and provides the force with critical terrain intelligence cultural familiarity, thereby improving operational efficiency. AR has a vast experience of counter insurgency operations and NE profile through an active role by multiplying small team operations^{xiii}. The Meitei-Kuki ethnic clash of 2023 has placed AR under extraordinary tension, forcing it to operate in a politicized, ethnically charged and heavily armed environment. The large scale of looted weapons from the state police armories during the Manipur ethnic clash between the Kuki and Meitei escalate internal security threats by enhancing militant firepower, enabling cross border trafficking, prolonging insurgency, and increase to locals and security forces personnels and installations, thereby complicating counter-insurgency and border management operations. AR is trained primarily for COIN and border security, not prolonged for riot-control duties and this ethnic clash also effect the community-based intelligence networks weakened and locals hesitant to share information due to fear of reprisals. This ethnic clash diverted the role of AR from its duty to law-and-order duties, protection of relief camps, and escort mission. This reduced sustained pressure in insurgents groups, allowing them to regroup and regain influence in Manipur.

Surveillance Architecture in Assam Rifles

Surveillance architecture refers to a complete framework that combines personnel, technology, infrastructure, and command-and-control systems to monitor, detect, and respond to security threats effectively. For the Assam Rifles, this architecture is essential for managing borders and conducting counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, especially along the difficult India-Myanmar border. It is built around three main components: ground-based surveillance, aerial surveillance, and integration of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR). Ground-based surveillance is the backbone of the Assam Rifles' monitoring capabilities. The force operates Company Operating Bases (COBs), permanent border outposts, and temporary camps located near vulnerable border areas. It employs regular foot and vehicle patrols, particularly in forested and mountainous regions where fencing is not practical. This forward presence helps in early detection of infiltration, smuggling, and insurgent activity. To complement patrols, electronic surveillance systems have been introduced. These include Unattended Ground Sensors (UGS) for movement detection, Night Vision Devices (NVDs), thermal imagers for low-visibility conditions, Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV)

systems at key points, and Battlefield Surveillance Radars (BFSR) for detecting intrusions. These technologies enable constant surveillance, improve night-time capabilities, and reduce reliance on human observation. Additionally, biometric and checkpoint surveillance systems have been set up at designated crossing points. Biometric verification and QR-based documentation under the Free Movement Regime (FMR) help regulate cross-border movement, strengthen identity checks, and improve tracking of individuals. Aerial surveillance has become an important asset for the Assam Rifles. The introduction of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) has improved surveillance and reconnaissance, especially in hard-to-reach areas. UAVs are used for real-time intelligence collection, monitoring insurgent movements, tracking smuggling routes, and providing operational support during search, cordon, and COIN missions. Local drone development and partnerships have further boosted the effectiveness of these platforms. Drones allow for reconnaissance of challenging terrains, continuous tracking of threats, and quick assessments of operational zones, which enhances decision-making and reduces risks to personnel. However, the increased use of drones by insurgent groups for reconnaissance, communication, and potential weapon delivery has created new security challenges. In response, the Assam Rifles has established counter-Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) capabilities. These systems are built to detect, jam, and neutralize hostile drones, which helps deny insurgents the benefits of aerial surveillance and protects sensitive sites and operations. The effectiveness of surveillance architecture improves significantly through strong Command, Control, and Intelligence integration under the C4ISR framework. This integration provides real-time situational awareness, smooth information flow, and quicker decision-making, which are essential for successful COIN operations. Surveillance data from ground sensors, UAV feeds, patrol reports, and human intelligence (HUMINT) sources are systematically gathered and shared with forward headquarters, sector-level formations, Inspector General Assam Rifles (IGAR) headquarters, and joint operations rooms with the Army and state police. This integration allows for coordinated responses, joint planning, and intelligence-led operations. In counter-insurgency efforts, the combination of technical surveillance and HUMINT is especially crucial. The Assam Rifles' surveillance architecture aids in targeting insurgent leadership, maintaining area control, monitoring routes, and preventing cross-border insurgent movement. This integrated method allows security forces to carry out focused operations with minimal collateral damage, helping maintain operational legitimacy and local support. Despite significant progress, the surveillance architecture of the Assam Rifles faces challenges. Thick forests and rugged mountains often limit the effectiveness of sensors and surveillance equipment. Adverse weather, including heavy rain and fog, can impact UAV endurance and reliability. The porous border, along with strong ethnic and family connections on both sides, makes monitoring and identification more complex. Furthermore, the high cost of advanced surveillance technologies and the need for compatibility with other security agencies are ongoing challenges. Looking ahead, enhancing the surveillance architecture of the Assam Rifles requires a proactive and flexible strategy. Expanding local UAV and sensor deployment can decrease reliance on external sources and improve sustainability. Greater incorporation of AI-based analytics would boost data processing, pattern detection, and predictive skills. Improved satellite and secure communication support is critical for seamless information transfer in remote areas. Enhanced intelligence sharing among agencies will further strengthen coordination and operational efficiency. Lastly, ongoing training and skill development for personnel are vital to ensure the effective use of advanced surveillance systems and maintain operational readiness.

Coordination of Assam Rifles with Army, State Police and Other Central Agencies



Source: "Assam Rifles and police commandos conduct joint operation, recover arms and ammunition in Manipur's Thoubal". WEBDESK (10 Dec 2023).

Assam Rifles work under the operational command of Indian Army with a key role in border guarding of Indo-Myanmar border, counter insurgency and maintaining law and order in the northeast. Assam Rifles is the only force amongst the Central Armed Police Forces with a primarily area of deployment confined to the northeast and in disturb areas and, it assist the Army from the front during the war and peace time. 'This force act as penultimate interventionist force of the Central Government in Internal security situations, under the operational control of the Army, when the situation goes beyond the control of the Army, when the situation goes beyond the control of the Central Police Organisations (CPOs)^{xiv}. The Army and AR frequently conducted joint military exercises in Lekhapani, Assam to enhance the joint operation for the coordination between the two forces during COIN operations and to intercept militants to prevent violence that could trigger unrest. AR also assists the state police force and other central armed police force in maintaining law and order in the state and in riot control during the ethnic clashes or civil disturbance, conducts joint operations with the state police along the National Highways in Northeast and J&K and to intercepts individuals that attempting to transport illegal arms, fake currencies, cross international border illegally and other illegal activities from the border areas, monitoring of border entry check points or Integrated Check Points (ICP) with the Customs and Excise personnel's to identify the illegal settlers, helping the state police and Narcotic Control Bureau (NCB) to stop the illegal poppy cultivations and drugs trafficking racket, and to provide security to the Officials and workers of Border Road Organisation (BRO) or Border Roads Task Force (BRTF) and Survey of India (Technical Teams) that indulging for the construction of border roads, border fencing and border demarcation work along the India-Myanmar Border. Effective intelligence sharing among the Territorial Army (TA), Indian Army, Assam Rifles (AR), and State Police is a crucial part of India's counter-insurgency (COIN) and internal security strategy. In regions impacted by insurgency, like the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir, the success of search and cordon operations relies not on the strength of any one force but on the smooth integration of intelligence gathered, verified, and acted upon by multiple agencies working together. At the grassroots level, the State Police, especially the Special Branch (SB) and Criminal Investigation Department (CID), serve as the first line of intelligence collection. Their close ties with the local community help them gather essential human intelligence (HUMINT) from informers, village defense groups, surrendered militants, and routine law enforcement interactions. This intelligence often offers early warnings about insurgent movements, logistical networks, extortion efforts, and the presence of support personnel. However, given the sensitivity of these sources and the risk of misinformation, all inputs must be verified before they are put into action. The Assam Rifles holds a distinctive role within India's internal security structure, acting as a connector between the Army and civil administration. Operating along the India-Myanmar border and in areas prone to insurgency, AR units collect intelligence through persistent patrols, border monitoring, community engagements, and interrogating captured insurgents. Their long presence in remote areas allows them to gain a deep understanding of local conditions, insurgent routes, and cross-border connections. This ongoing presence boosts the trustworthiness and reliability of their intelligence. The Indian Army, including Territorial Army units, brings valuable analytical and technical intelligence skills. Military Intelligence (MI) agencies keep detailed records on insurgent groups, their leaders, tactics, and past operations. These records are supported by signal intelligence (SIGINT), technical surveillance, and aerial observation, which help verify ground-based HUMINT^{xv}. While Territorial Army units aren't required to run independent intelligence operations, they play an important supportive role by contributing local knowledge, language abilities, and continuity in securing static and rear areas. Their involvement improves cooperation between regular Army forces and civil authorities during extended operations. Intelligence is integrated through established coordination methods. At the district and sector levels, joint intelligence committees and coordination meetings gather representatives from the Army, Assam Rifles, State Police, Intelligence Bureau (IB), and civil administration. These meetings enable verified intelligence sharing, assessment of source reliability, and prioritization of actionable information^{xvi}. In the Northeast, the Unified Command structure enhances this coordination by placing all security forces under a shared strategic framework, ensuring unified action and preventing overlap in operations. Before executing search or cordon operations, intelligence goes through a set operational process. Initial insights from police or AR patrols are confirmed via technical means and corroborated by central intelligence bodies, particularly the Intelligence Bureau. Sensitive information is edited to protect sources. Joint planning conferences decide which force will lead, how tasks will be allocated, the deployment of inner and outer cordons, and contingency plans. Generally, Army or Assam Rifles units serve as the inner combat cordon, while Territorial Army units and State Police manage the outer cordon, control civilian movement, and help conduct searches, ensuring operational success and legal compliance. During operations, real-time

intelligence sharing relies on secure communication systems and joint operation rooms. New information gathered in the field, such as recovered items, sightings, or civilian tips, is immediately shared with all involved units. After an operation, materials like weapons, documents, and electronic devices are analyzed together. Interrogation outcomes and forensic results are integrated back into the intelligence process to improve threat assessments and plan follow-up operations. Despite challenges like information overload, lack of trust between agencies, and the need to protect sources, standard operating procedures and a strict need-to-know policy help manage these risks. When implemented correctly, this integrated intelligence-sharing framework enhances operational accuracy, minimizes collateral damage, bolsters civil-military relationships, and significantly undermines insurgent networks. In summary, intelligence sharing among the Territorial Army, Indian Army, Assam Rifles, and State Police forms a cohesive security model where local insight, operational experience, and strategic intelligence come together to ensure ongoing success in counter-insurgency efforts.

Conclusion

The Assam Rifles plays a crucial role in managing borders and ensuring internal security along the Manipur-Myanmar border. This role is shaped by the specific geopolitical, ethnic, and security factors in the Northeast region. As India's oldest paramilitary force and the main agency responsible for border security along the India-Myanmar frontier, the Assam Rifles holds a strategic position at the crossroads of national security, regional stability, and local cultures. Its responsibilities go beyond the border control and include counter-insurgency operations, gathering intelligence, and coordinating with various national and regional partners. Along the Manipur-Myanmar border, marked by tough terrain, thick forests, poor infrastructure, and an unfenced boundary, the Assam Rifles acts as the first line of defense against various cross-border threats. These threats range from insurgent infiltration and arms smuggling to human trafficking and illegal migration. By maintaining border outposts, conducting long-range patrols, setting ambushes, and using surveillance, the force has been key in upholding border integrity, even with significant logistical and environmental challenges. Its presence allows for ongoing monitoring of traditional routes, waterways, and jungle paths that insurgent groups and criminal networks have historically used. In terms of internal security, the Assam Rifles has been vital in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism efforts in the Northeast. As part of the "Sentinels of the North East," the force has played a consistent role in reducing insurgent violence. Its deep understanding of local languages, cultures, and geography—enhanced by significant recruitment from the area—has helped it build trust with local communities and gather valuable intelligence. This community-focused approach has been crucial for identifying insurgent hideouts, disrupting their supply chains, and enabling successful joint operations with the Indian Army, state police, and central intelligence agencies. The strategic importance of the Assam Rifles has grown due to changing regional security challenges. Political instability in Myanmar, especially following the coup, has increased the risks associated with armed groups, illegal weapons, and refugee movements crossing the border. In summary, the Assam Rifles is a vital component of India's border management and internal security approach along the India-Myanmar border. Its varied roles include border security, counter-insurgency, intelligence coordination, and community engagement. This reflects a well-rounded security strategy suited to the complex realities of the Northeast region. As regional and international security threats continue to change, the effectiveness of India's response will rely on strengthening and modernizing the Assam Rifles while maintaining its connection to local communities. The force's ongoing importance lies in its ability to combine strong security measures with initiatives that build community trust, ensuring the protection of India's borders and the stability of this sensitive and strategically important region.

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