

Dealing with Conflicts

What is the issue?

Increasing conflicts around the world call for a different approach in dealing with them beyond the intervention of the armed forces.

What are the different forms of conflict?

- Conflict could be external or internal to the country.
- Internal conflicts can be further classified into two categories - conflict against the state and people-to-people conflict.
- Conflict against the state may include separatist movements, and suicide bombings.
- Suicide bombings are an extreme manifestation of conflict, carried out by a relatively organised group of non-state actors.
- Their ultimate goal is the destabilisation of the state and these incidents are generally referred to as terrorism.
- The people-to-people conflict could be between different ethnic, religious and social groups.
- This could include religious riots, homicides, domestic violence, common violence, and other crimes.

How has the trend changed?

- Over the period, internal conflict has replaced external conflict.
- Within this, people-to-people internal conflict has declined, and internal conflict against the state has increased.
- The adverse economic and social impact of internal conflict against the state is much greater compared to people-to-people conflict.

Why do conflicts need attention?

- The world has made rapid progress in reducing poverty but regions affected by conflict have been left behind.
- In the last decade, various global conflicts have affected nearly 2 billion people and resulted in a loss of more than 10% of the global economic activity.
- Perceivably, international ideological movements merge with local grievances, and different forms of violence get linked to each other.

- When economic changes become a concern for local community, local grievances can escalate into acute demands for change.
- In this context, unemployment, corruption and social exclusion increase the risks of violence.
- Clearly, conflict is not just one-off events, but cycles of repeated violence.
- Hence it needs due attention given the multifaceted implications.

What are the driving factors for conflicts?

- **Economy** - Internal conflicts are largely related to the economic dynamics.
- Global evidence supports a strong inverse relationship between conflict and per-capita income level.
- Conflict increases due to adverse economic shocks, such as famines and rural distress.
- Youth unemployment has been and is a key motive for many joining both rebel movements and urban gangs.
- **Exclusion** - Political exclusion and inequality affecting different ethnic groups result in higher risks of civil war.
- It is easier for terrorists and rebels to recruit people to their cause in such areas because their opportunity cost is low.
- In ethnically-based or separatist conflict, recruitment can be easily made on ethnicity or religion basis.
- **Poverty** - Conflict is concentrated in areas that have higher poverty rates, weak institutions and that are poorly integrated.
- These have experienced more than three times the number of terrorist incidents per capita, compared with the well-off regions.
- Poorer regions also have poorer state capacity, and hence the government is not able to deal with the rebels effectively.
- The poverty-conflict interlink can thus slow down the pace of poverty reduction and achievement of multilateral development goals.
- **Geographic conditions**, such as the presence of forest cover, can also be associated with the incidence of conflict.
- States in India that have a higher forest cover have experienced higher conflict intensity.
- This is consistent with numerous accounts of Naxalites using forest cover to hide effectively from law enforcement forces.

Have measures at tackling this been effective?

- Development efforts from the ancient times have focussed on reducing conflict through collaboration, with the formation of village communities.
- In modern times, the most common approach is to use police forces to

establish law and order in the affected areas.

- In areas where police forces are insufficient, the armed forces are called in to deal with the insurgency.
- But in most cases, this has not been a successful strategy.
- Even when successful in defeating the insurgents, the human costs associated with military operations are very high.

What are the other better options?

- **Peace agreements** - A different approach to dealing with conflict is to conduct negotiations and sign peace agreements with the insurgents.
- To be effective, this approach needs two requirements -
 - i. the government must conduct coordinated negotiations
 - ii. the insurgent group must be genuinely interested in joining the political mainstream
- E.g. Indian government has signed peace deals with several separatist groups in the north-eastern states
- Similarly, negotiations with some Tamil groups in Sri Lanka have resulted in their integration into mainstream politics.
- **Economic solution** - Complementary to the security-based solution is an economic solution.
- In this, the government takes measures to expand social and welfare programmes.
- It thereby reduces poverty in the conflict-affected areas to undercut the support for insurgency.
- **Regional cooperation** - Many internal conflicts in South Asia have cross-border dimensions.
- E.g. the Taliban in Afghanistan has support in Pakistan's border areas, Maoists in Nepal have links with Maoist movements in India
- Likewise, many separatist groups in India's north-eastern states had training camps and cells in neighbouring countries.
- The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and other Tamil separatist groups in Sri Lanka have traditionally enjoyed support from the Tamil diaspora.
- In such a context, cross-border regional cooperation is an essential part of any counterinsurgency strategy and a more effective one.
- Regional Partnership Forums should be formed with support of donors and national policymakers.
- Besides, it must have the flexibility to work with the local communities.

What should the approach be?

- Policy choices are critical for reducing repeated conflicts.
- In this context, economic policies should be geared not just to maximise growth, which could take time.
- It should also focus on proactively engaging the local communities, and addressing the distributional or political factors that led to the conflict.
- Policy choices must be structured to reduce both real and perceived inequities.
- It should focus on short-term economic and social goals first, and then on medium and longer-term efficiency considerations.
- This approach calls for humanitarian and community-based treatment for conflict-affected people.
- This includes closure of refugee camps, and reintegration of refugees within the society.
- Policies should have plans for post-conflict development and reducing poverty too, to have sustainable results.

Source: Financial Express

