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### **UNITED NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT OF SOUTH WEST ASIA (UNLFW) :**

#### **SECURITY CONCERN**

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Nine insurgent groups of North East India have come together to form a new unified militant outfit known as United National Liberation Front of South West Asia (UNLFW). The initial idea was sown in 2011, by leaders of four North east insurgent groups namely, Paresh Baruah of ULFA, Khaplang of NSCN (K) and heads of Meitei outfits United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and People's Liberation Army (PLA) who met and decided to form a confederation to, what they call, 'liberate the ancestral homes by total struggle unitedly.'<sup>i</sup> It has taken four years to finally form this outfit on 17 April 2015, as there were some differences amongst the groups on appointment of Chairman. All the differences and last minute hitches seem to have been resolved with the announcement of Khaplang as the Chairman and Paresh Baruah either as Commander-in-chief or Vice Chairman respectively.<sup>ii</sup>

#### **Member Groups and Common Objectives**

The outfits who comprise this UNLFW are NSCN- Khaplang, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Songbijit faction), Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) and six Meitei outfits Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), PREPAK (Progressive), Revolutionary People's Front, and United National Liberation Front (UNLF). Khaplang a Naga from Myanmar has been instrumental in forming this federation and it comes immediately after it broke ceasefire agreement with the Indian government in March 2015. The common objectives of these groups are, as they put it, 'to gain complete independence, to secure sovereign political future from occupation and march ahead together in peace, progress and prosperity of the whole region.'<sup>iii</sup>



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### China Hand

There are intelligence reports of Chinese agencies having played an active role in encouraging the various groups to come on a common platform. There are reports of China declining repeated requests of support by Paresh Baruah, on the ground that militant outfits separately would not stand a chance against the Indian security forces.<sup>iv</sup> Earlier, Chinese intelligence has been instrumental in bringing together several insurgent groups of Manipur in an umbrella organisation called CorCom, which has joined the UNLFW. The Chinese have promised to provide weapons and logistics to the new grouping as they want to keep things boiling in the northeast in view of their claim on the state of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>v</sup> It may be possible that China could use this outfit to further its objectives both in Myanmar and North East India.

China seems to have played a part in NSCN (K) abrogating the ceasefire with Indian government in March 2015, which it had signed in 2001. The outfit had accused of Indian government of not being serious about discussing the issue of sovereignty of Nagas.<sup>vi</sup> But NSCN (K) has a ceasefire agreement with Myanmar government which allow its cadres to move freely in Sagaing division's Naga self administered zones. By virtue of China encouraging Paresh Baruah and other outfits to form a combined outfit, now all member groups of this new outfit UNLFW can be based in Sagaing division alongwith the NSCN(K). Myanmar, bogged down by recent fighting against its own ethnic rebel groups, may not want another hostile front opened up in this border area with India. The Myanmar government has been on a denial mode as far as presence of militants from the northeast on its soil. Therefore, this united front in the safe sanctuary in Sagaing division can plan series of attacks in this border region. It may be a Chinese plan through the militant group to derail India's act east policy – trying to develop connectivity, development and building infrastructure in North East India.

### Spate of Attacks

There has been a spate of attacks by this newly formed group UNLFW on Indian security forces since its formation in April 2015. On 3 May 2015, seven soldiers from the 23 Assam Rifles battalion and



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one jawan from the 164 Territorial Army Battalion were killed in the Mon district of Nagaland.<sup>vii</sup> It also carried out one of the deadliest ambush on Indian army in the last two decades in Chandel district of Manipur, which left 18 army men killed and 11 injured on 4th June 2015. Initially, there were suspicions that these attacks were carried out by other Manipur valley based militant groups but UNLFW has claimed responsibility of these attacks. These attacks have sent out several disturbing signals – use of lethal weapons like rocket propelled grenades, mortar bombs and IEDs. There could also be optimum utilisation of their human resources and expertise of various cadres as they will be operating under one command.

### Potential of UNLFW

The newly formed outfit has been successful in creating a ripple in the Indian security establishment after the spate of attacks on Indian army so soon after its formation. The renewed Chinese interest in the insurgency in North East India, can make UNLFW a potent force, through continuous supply of weapons, training and, most importantly, unification of myriad insurgent groups. However it remains to be seen whether they can remain united long enough to achieve their goal and create a dent amongst Indian security forces. Also, it will take sometime to increase cadre base of some groups as KLO is almost non-existent and ULFA had lost its cadre strength after suffering reverses.

### Security Concern

The Indian government was planning to accelerate the development of North East India as part of its look East policy; the raising of the UNLFW will be a cause of worry. Myanmar army is busy battling ethnic rebel groups in the north east region bordering China, thus, has little control in the areas bordering with India. Myanmar army is thin on ground specially in these areas bordering with India. Therefore, Myanmar government may not be in position to conduct operations on its own or carry out joint operations with India, due to paucity of troops.



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There is a lurking danger of reviving of interest amongst the youth, if the new outfit, UNLFW is successful in inflicting further damage to Indian security forces. If UNLFW is able to create curiosity and interest, there is possibility of increasing its cadre base which had almost dried up in the entire region. Then despite India's best efforts, it may take that much longer to resolve the insurgency in the region.

### Conclusion

The emergence of a new unified militant outfit supported by China is an ominous development, which India should take it very seriously. While, India should step up anti insurgency operations, yet at the same time it should keep the negotiation channel open to bring the UNLFW leaders on negotiating table. Meanwhile, India should engage Myanmar to prevent creation of sanctuaries in its territory, conduct of joint operations or allow surgical strikes by Indian security forces so that the problem is addressed swiftly.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

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<sup>i</sup> Here is a guide to newly formed insurgent group UNLFW that killed 20 jawans in Manipur accessed at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/heres-a-guide-to-newly-formed-insurgent-group-unlhw-that-killed-20-jawans-in-manipur> 05 June 2015

<sup>ii</sup> Why the formation of a common platform by Insurgent groups from the North East should give the government a cause of worry by Rajeev Bhattacharyya accessed at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/common-platform-insurgent-groups-northeast-UNLFW-worry-government>

<sup>iii</sup> Here is a guide to newly formed insurgent group UNLFW that killed 20 jawans in Manipur accessed at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/heres-a-guide-to-newly-formed-insurgent-group-unlhw-that-killed-20-jawans-in-manipur> 05 June 2015

<sup>iv</sup> China hand suspected in NSCN (K) attacks on Indian forces by Subir Bhaumik accessed at <http://www.thequint.com/India/china-hand-suspected-in-nscn-k-attacks-on-indian-forces>



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v Nine militant groups of NE form united front with Chinese blessings by Rezaul A Laskar , Hindustan Times accessed at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nine-miltant-groups-of-north-east-form-united-front-with-chinese-blessings>

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