
Naxalism in India: Prognosis and Cure

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Introduction

Classic insurgencies have a number of features that include conflicts of identity, underdevelopment, aspiration and development divides and resource exploitation, resulting in the greed-grievance phenomenon. All of these lead to an anti-establishment sentiment. Historical and terrain factors also sustain militancy and dictate its form, such as rural or urban. Identification of causative factors is, therefore, necessary to determine conditions which have led to the necessity for a larger than usual security footprint. This is important in the context of left wing extremism (LWE) affecting large swathes of the country.

About 200 districts and over 1,000 police stations are currently impacted by some form of Maoist influence. These districts are mostly located on the eastern half of the Indian landmass stretching from West Bengal to Andhra Pradesh. The extent of Maoists influence in these areas varies greatly and ranges from 'low presence' to 'very seriously affected' districts. The states more seriously affected by Maoist violence are Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. The states having a lesser Maoist footprint are Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. In other areas, Maoist influence as of now is marginal.

The Naxalite

The term 'Maoist' has now become part of the Indian lexicon. It refers to people in an organisation which has as its goal the overthrow of India's constitutional structure through force and the establishment of a dictatorship on the lines enunciated by Mao Zedong in China. The term Naxalite is also used for the

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Maoist as the movement originated in the Naxalbari block of Siliguri sub-division in Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The social base of the movement varies in different states. At some places, it comprises peasants with small or nil landholdings and to lesser extent, middle peasants. At others, it consists of tribals. At still others, it is an amalgamation of the above, along with other marginalised sections of society. In caste terms, the base

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of the movement consists of lower and intermediate castes. This applies to the Hindu as well as Muslim communities. The leadership of the movement is largely from the upper castes and classes and to a large extent is Andhra Pradesh centric.

To most of the common people who form part of the movement, the term Naxalite has come to represent a movement or struggle for basic rights. The testimonies convey an anti-system sentiment and suggest that the Naxalites have a fair idea of the important components of their struggle for basic rights as well as knowledge of their opponents—the government machinery, landlords, upper classes, big business houses and the like. In their self-identity, therefore, the Naxalites clearly see themselves as individuals who have chosen a path which clashes with the existing order. In their view, their struggle for basic rights has met with fierce opposition and condemnation which has turned their ‘right’ into a ‘wrong’ in the eyes of a large part of the world. They generally disassociate themselves from the wrongs that are commonly attributed to the movement to the extent that they may distance themselves from the term itself. They define who they are by who they are not and in so doing, affirm the positive values of the Naxalite movement.¹

At the lower levels, the ideological factor of Maoism is clearly missing. In the Adivasi homeland where the movement is centred, one cannot but notice a disconnect between what the tribals seek and what the Maoists provide. Few Adivasis have heard of Mao Zedong or care for what he stood for and did. The leadership, however, is still centred on the teachings of Mao and is using the tribal people to further their own agenda. A motivated leadership having the vast support base of the poor and dispossessed poses a *sophisticated challenge to the state which is yet to be comprehended in its entirety by the people of India*. According to a *Times of India* report of August 02, 2011, the Maoists have attacked as many as 1241 economic targets, damaging railway properties, telephone exchanges, towers, electricity lines and power plants across nine states. The daily loss of innocent lives and the destruction of welfare utilities such as schools and economic targets are indeed staggering. India has never been so bloodied by its ‘own’. If we wish to

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preserve our freedom and way of life, it is vital that the Maoist threat be addressed with the single-minded focus it deserves. The thrust has to be on multiple levels and would encompass ideology, constitutional mechanisms, governance, economic development and use of force by the central and state police.

The Question of Ideology

In the ultimate analysis, the war being waged in India's heartland is a war of ideology. It is a battle between democracy and all that it stands for versus a dictatorship involving the suppression of the very freedom democracy believes in. For democracy to win this battle, it must be perceived to be a functional and worthwhile entity. This

would require a visible and effective justice delivery mechanism to the poorest in India's heartland, transparency in governance, empathy on the part of government officials and targeted socio-economic development. However, if the instruments of state, as represented by the lower level functionaries who interact with the locals, are themselves perceived to be agents of suppression and exploitation, there will be little to differentiate them from the Maoists. Good governance and an effective justice delivery mechanism are, hence, key issues which need to be addressed. Also, an effective perception management campaign can sensitise the target population to the exploitative nature of the Maoists who are simply using the tribal people to further their own agenda. But for a perception management campaign to succeed, it must be based on truth. And for that, issues of governance and justice would still have to be addressed.

Constitutional Mechanisms

The Constitution of India is perhaps one of the finest documents ever penned which, if implemented, would have rendered void much of the angst prevailing amongst the tribal people against the state. The Fifth Schedule under Article 244² of the Indian Constitution is an enabling provision which unfortunately remains unfulfilled. The Fifth Schedule mandates the establishment of a tribal Advisory Council. No legislation concerning tribals can be made without consulting the council. The governor is also required to give an annual report to the president

regarding the administration of the tribal areas, but these provisions are followed more in their breach. Ensuring the implementation of Article 244 will do much to remove tribal grievances and reduce the support base of the Maoists.

The Panchayats [Extension to Scheduled Areas] Act (PESA) is another enabling provision which puts the powers of managing the forests in the hands of the Panchayats run by the tribes who reside there. Amongst the districts affected by LWE, 32 are PESA districts. Here too, the states continually overrule PESA and apply the central Land Acquisition Act of 1894 vintage to acquire tribal land. There is speculation that mining lobbies, that are experiencing a boom, do not want its stringent clauses implemented. A former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh told the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA): "Its (PESA)

implementation would put an end to mining projects."³An independent assessment of the Panchayati Raj Ministry carried out by IRMA on the orders of the prime minister submitted its report with a chapter added on the status of PESA implementation. This chapter criticised the Centre, the state and the police forces for "a damaging mix of misgovernance, alienation and violent insurgency" against the tribal people. In its final form, however, this chapter was dropped. Ensuring that the constitutional provisions are adhered to must, therefore, be a primary intervention.

A positive step taken has been the passing of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, on December 18, 2006. It has also been called the "*Forest Rights Act*", the "*Tribal Rights Act*", the "*Tribal Bill*", and the "*Tribal Land Act*." The Indian Forest Act, 1927, India's main forest law, was created to serve the British need for timber. The law destroyed all the community management and regulation systems that had existed before, forcing people to choose between either abandoning the forest entirely or living as 'criminals' within or near it. The new Forest Act basically grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws. Such interventions are necessary and must be carried through to their logical conclusion.

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A vexed problem remains the issue of ownership of the anti-Maoist operations. The Centre maintains that law and order is constitutionally a state responsibility and all it can do is to assist the states if requested to do so. As such, the state governments actually own these operations. However, they lack the resources and means to confront the Maoist threat on their own and constantly seek central assistance. This leads to a situation where accountability gets diluted as both the Centre and the state governments affected by LWE conveniently blame each other for lapses in putting down the Maoist terror.⁴ Being a state subject, there is also lack of coordination when it comes to dealing with Maoists who are located in areas where it is easy to move between inter-state boundaries. There are also differences in perception and attitude between states governed by parties that are in opposition to the ruling party at the Centre. As Maoists affect the electoral outcome in these states, the elected state governments are keen to emphasise their primacy in the domain of law and order to avoid any substantive security operations against the Maoists.⁵ While the Maoist cadres have time and again displayed tremendous mobility in the Red Corridor, the affected states are severely hamstrung by boundaries and territorial jurisdiction issues. The 'law and order' approach being propagated both by the Centre and affected state governments requires to be revisited and the threat dealt with holistically across the length and breadth of the country. While institutional mechanisms exist to coordinate action between the Centre and state governments, it is difficult to achieve consensus due to political considerations and exigencies. The affected state governments too have not displayed a pan-Indian sensitivity in addressing the problem. Their claims that there is indeed cooperation between them in coordinating anti-Maoist operations do not seem to be supported by robust and tangible evidence. An amendment to the Constitution to put law and order on the Concurrent List would be an important step in dealing holistically with the problem. This, however, is easier said than done.

Long-Term Strategic Perspective

At the ground level, adequate evident exists of the district commissioners and superintendents of police being well focussed and motivated. However, there appears to be a lack of clarity on the long-term strategy being adopted to tackle LWE. Both at the Centre and state levels, a vision statement must spell out the goals to be achieved. This must then be translated into a long-term perspective plan. The requirements must initially flow from the districts encompassing a period of 5 to 10 years. The plan should then be coordinated at the state level and issued

as a directive to the districts. This directive must be unique to each district and must state the benefit that will accrue to the local population. The directive should encompass what is proposed to be achieved, the cost to be incurred, the resources that would be made available and the time lines for completion. At the state level, all development effort must flow from this plan and progress monitored.

Change in Administration and Policing Models

The Naxal problem is not new. Its manifestations have been with us for over four decades. That the situation has been allowed to deteriorate to the extent that it has now become the most serious national security challenge for the country indicates deficits both in the quality of administration and in the police forces of the country. Both the administrative model as well as the policing model inherited from our colonial rulers need to be revisited in tune with the requirements of a free and democratic country.

Today, we need to provide good government in the worst of law and order environments. To that purpose, a better civil administration structure must come up in place of the model we presently have. This means the best officers drawn from across the country should be part of the new administrative set-up. Perhaps it is time to constitute a new All India Service, similar to the former Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS). The IFAS was an eclectic group of officers drawn from various arms of the government. Unfortunately, it was merged into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS).⁶ In the LWE affected areas, we need to revisit the IFAS model for a more responsive, dedicated and functional administrative set-up.

All tribal majority areas must be consolidated into administrative divisions whose authority must be vested with a democratically chosen leadership. This body must function as a largely autonomous institution with all laws passed by the state legislature being ratified to its satisfaction. Instead of the state capital controlled government, the instruments of public administration dealing with education, health, irrigation, roads and land records must be handed over to local government structures. The police must also be made answerable to local elected officials and not be a law unto themselves.

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Police reforms have been the subject of many a discussion. Many committees of eminent police officers and jurists have given wide ranging recommendations for police reforms but the reform process has yet to take place. But more than reform, the role and structure of the police forces need to be looked into *de novo*, especially the aspect of leadership. We need to look into structural changes in the Indian Police Service to make it more responsive to present day challenges.

Governance

Crisis of Capacities:⁷ Notwithstanding the urgent need, the *crisis of capacities* remains substantially unaddressed within the intelligence, enforcement and administrative apparatus. As per Ajai Sahni:

There are several state governments and political constituencies whose heart is not in the CI effort the Centre is trying to catalyse to meet the Maoist challenge. The crisis of capacities transcends all fields of government endeavour. The disturbing reality is that basic capacities, not just for policing or counter-terrorism, but, indeed, for governance, enterprise and social action, have been allowed to decline to such an extent that the most rudimentary tasks of nation-building, indeed, even of administrative maintenance, cannot be executed with a modicum of efficiency.⁸

As an example, US democracy works on the assumption that 'the best government is the least government'. Consequently, the US focusses as exclusively as possible on what are considered 'core functions' and minimises engagement in welfare and in activities that can be taken over by the private sector. In India, however, the administrative philosophy is the exact opposite, with the government's fingers planted firmly in every possible pie. The conclusion drawn is depressing. Even as all shades of opinion, including the government, rue the fact that it is bloated and overstaffed, in core areas, it is embarrassingly understaffed, leading to a crisis in capacity where it actually matters. This needs to be rectified.

Fixed Tenures: To overcome the overall deficit of governance, it is important to have compulsory tenures for officers at all levels of administration in the Naxal affected areas. The period of tenure should be fixed to ensure continuity and accountability.

Restoration of Tribal Rights: Tribal and forest rights need to be restored in full measure. Land issues are increasingly becoming more acerbic and need to be dealt with holistically and in keeping with the long-term interests of the local population. The expansion of big industry into the region to exploit the mineral wealth is essential but should be accompanied by transparent and effective

implementation of compensation based on a life cycle concept which includes creation of a permanent asset bank for land owners, employment guarantee schemes and the like to reduce grievances.

Accountability in Administration: Accountability and prevention of corruption are well established keys to good governance as well as development. Misappropriation of funds adds to the Naxal kitty, thereby feeding militancy. Specific measures for accountability will have to be devised as against the *laissez faire* attitude and approach at present, which may be one of the causes of increase in Naxal influence whenever fund allotment increases. Specific measures for accountability and prevention of corruption need to be devised. Expenditure of funds is audited but no audit is carried out of the actual work done. A ground check is essential to see that government schemes have been implemented and are not merely paper exercises.

Justice Delivery System: There is a need to reform the justice delivery system to ensure a better rate of conviction in the courts of law. The technology available today has to be incorporated as admissible evidence in our judicial system as an enabler to law enforcement. There is also a need to establish fast track courts/mobile courts in inaccessible areas to address the grievances of the local people on priority and to prevent them from seeking redress from courts run by the Naxals.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): A strong check on the activities of various NGOs and social organisations must be established. While interference is inappropriate, there is certainly a requirement to ensure transparency in their functioning, especially with respect to the flow of funds and types of activities undertaken.

Petty Officials: Forest officials in conjunction with other arms of the state are generally seen as being oppressive and show the government in a bad light. Petty officials who interact with the locals on a regular basis need to be sensitised to this aspect.

Socio-Economic Issues

Despite increase in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) levels, a large segment of the population remains marginalised, thus, indicating gaps in the administration of governance. This is the primary reason for resistance to industrialisation, land acquisition and resettlement measures involving displacement of indigenous population. The low socio-economic profile would require considerable investments in terms of fiscal and human resources. Grassroots initiatives are necessary to improve below poverty line (BPL) ratios, growth in the agriculture

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sector and expansion of electricity production. Land issues cannot be viewed through the prism of a one-time lump-sum payment to displaced families, but must be considered holistically in terms of a life cycle package of compensation which should also include opportunities for subsistence by allotment of corresponding resources and reskilling.

Education must remain the principal intervention in all the affected areas. While emphasis on infrastructure development such as roads, electricity, and so on, is important, it must be in conjunction with investment on development of human capital in terms of education and work skills. This will reduce pressure on migration and also provide substantial intangible gains in terms of social cohesion and reduction of conflict and tension within society. Employment generation will have to go hand in hand with improved literacy levels to sustain the local economy and reduce migration. In the short term, there are no answers to the migration problem due to the vast differential of 20 percent in the base human capital levels of the four states most affected by LWE and the more developed states of India. Thus, absorption of the social effects of migration should receive due attention.

Abundance of natural resources coupled with weak regulatory frameworks and inadequate accountability in administration makes the region susceptible to the greed of the large corporates (both public and private), as well as the insurgents. This facet is seen to sustain militancy. Closure of this divide will in the long term lead to a decline in Naxal influence.

A holistic approach to include development, security and rights (DSR) of the people needs to be incorporated instead of merely emphasising the dyad of development and security. Once 'rights' are incorporated into the development paradigm, the economic well-being of the people can be progressed along with the protection of their identity, language, culture and way of life.

Infrastructure development is an engine for overall development but is not an end by itself. Parameters of development should indicate how such infrastructure would contribute to the overall socio-economic progress in the region.

Development Issues

Development is a means for transformation of underdevelopment in the country and not just to counter Naxalism. Inclusive poverty alleviation, wealth creation and development of human resources must remain core concerns. Development has

to be people centred and not Delhi led. It has to be a 'bottom up' approach rather than a 'top-down' one. Centrally administered schemes must be dovetailed with local initiatives so that benefit accrues to the most neglected segment of the population. Not only states, but districts within a state will need a different model of development based on their specific needs. In Bihar, focus on agriculture and services would form an essential component of economic development while in states such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa, interventions to provide the benefit of the large resource base to generate employment and socio-economic goods to the indigenous population are necessary rather than only setting up large industries. At the district level, development efforts would have to take into account the unique composition and identity of the respective populations and their concerns and needs.

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The local people must be central to the development effort and not the industry. The process of development will lead to socio-economic turbulence for predominantly tribal communities who find their traditional way of life impacted very rapidly by change. Development models, hence, must be people friendly even if it means slowing down the extraction of natural resources.

Development efforts must follow the pull rather than the push model. Primarily, the emphasis on expenditure of funds within a given period of time must give way to delivering tangible and visible results on the ground. This is seen to be lacking at present with the level of delivery remaining very low.

For maximum impact, development should focus on road connectivity to the villages, electrification of villages, education facilities, health centres and employment generation schemes. Where road construction is opposed by the Maoists, the construction gangs would have to be protected. Some of the national and state highways do not have bridges. These must be constructed forthwith as their lack is exploited by the Maoists.

In the tribal heartland, industrialisation must not be mistaken for development. Few benefits of the economic exploitation of Central India's mineral wealth have trickled down to the tribals living in those areas. If natural resources must be exploited, then the local communities which bear the brunt

of the suffering and burden due to displacement and pollution must benefit the most. Unfortunately, most corporates have not even fulfilled a small percentage of their laid down contractual obligations. This factor needs to be addressed on priority, with heavy financial penalties being imposed on defaulters. Industry needs to share the benefits of mineral extraction with the local population. It should also be mandated to provide employment in a gradual form by building up local talent and making it a catalyst for growth and development of the region rather than exploitation. A fresh inclusive approach is, therefore, necessary rather than the exploitative one as seen today.

Addressing Security Concerns

Nodal Agency: The Naxal challenge primarily remains that of development, governance and rights delivery. However, for the state to carry out its functions, it would have to neutralise the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) which comprises the armed cadres of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) [CPI (Maoist)]. As of now, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has been designated as the nodal agency to deal with internal security issues. It, however, lacks the training and leadership skills to fight the PLGA. This situation is unlikely to change. The government must do a rethink on the above and make the state police forces the primary instruments for addressing security concerns within the state. A large number of CRPF battalions have already been raised. Further raisings of the CRPF must cease and in lieu, each affected state must raise, equip and train its own police force of adequate size to tackle the PLGA in its respective area. Such forces must be trained in the area where they are likely to operate and the army could be asked to assist in the training effort. Local police have better intelligence capability and language skills which make for more effective functioning. These units could be funded by the Centre and used by the state, with the Centre having lien over them when required.

Most states have now established training institutions to train police personnel in fighting the Maoists. This is an important and valuable step but the capacities required are still woefully short. The leadership aspect is also a cause of concern as, unlike the army, the police forces lack the leadership to lead men into battle. The numbers required are also not available. The army could take over the responsibility of running all the training establishments as they have the necessary expertise on the subject.

Naxal Linkages: The Naxal linkages need to be broken. This has to be part and parcel of India's counter-Naxal strategy. India has to commit its full diplomatic

energy in a serious way at both bilateral and multilateral levels to make sure that the external sources of support to the Maoists are disrupted permanently. The government also needs to launch a well orchestrated information campaign to expose intellectuals and other opinion makers supporting the Maoists. It would also be essential to get both the media and intelligentsia to support the fight against the CPI (Maoist). That would remain a challenge for the government.

HUMINT (Human Intelligence): This will remain the key to good intelligence and would have to be developed. Technical intelligence too would form an essential part of the security operations. This must include amongst others, satellite imagery of 0.5 metre resolution, updated maps of the area, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), electronic warfare (EW) and hand-held thermal imagers (HHTI). Training of personnel in exploiting these would be essential. As part of the intelligence effort, the entire area needs to be mapped and made available as gridded computer imagery of 0.5 metre resolution. This is essential for operational planning.

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Conclusion

The Naxal problem has afflicted the country for over four decades. The root causes for lack of progress in problem resolution lie both in the functioning of the government as well as the competence and capability of the police forces. In essence, for the people affected by LWE violence, the democratic model must be made attractive enough for them to voluntarily discard the Maoist route to what they perceive to be their road to emancipation. The government, therefore, has to address local concerns as an answer to LWE. Use of force is but a palliative and can never be the silver bullet for permanent conflict resolution.

Notes

1. Bela Bhatia, "Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar," *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 9, 2005.
2. Article 244 relates to the Administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas. It states that the provisions of the Fifth Schedule shall apply to the administration and control of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any state other

than the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram which are covered under the Sixth Schedule. Part A of the Fifth Schedule states that the governor of the state having Scheduled Areas shall annually, or whenever so required by the president, make a report to the president regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas in the state and the executive powers of the Union shall extend to the giving of directions by the state as to the administration of the said areas. Part B of the Schedule mandates the establishment of the Tribes Advisory Council consisting of not more than twenty members, of whom three-fourth shall be the representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the state. These seats are to be filled in by the other members of the tribe if an adequate number of representatives is not available in the Assembly. The governor has the power to notify that any particular Act of the state shall not apply to the Scheduled Areas. The governor may make regulations for these areas and may repeal or amend any Act of Parliament or of the legislature of the state. No regulation shall be made without consultation with the Advisory Council.

3. Raman Kirpal, "PESA, Left-Wing Extremism and Governance: Concerns and Challenges in India," available at http://www.tehelka.com/story_main45.asp?filename=Ne100710censoredchapter.asp
4. "Dantewada Massacre: The Road Ahead," *Pragmatic Euphony*, available at <http://pragmatic.nationalinterest.in/2010/04/06/dantewara-massacre-the-road-ahead>
5. "To Tackle Maoists, Begin with Police Reforms," available at <http://pragmatic.nationalinterest.in/2010/02/18/to-tackle-maoists-begin-with-police-reforms>
6. A special service known as the Indian Frontier Administrative Service was established in 1957, to administer the northeastern states. This service was doing a commendable job of adequately administering the northeastern states with due regard to the cultural and tribal sensitivities of the people. For reasons best known to the government, the Indian Frontier Administrative Service was abolished in the latter half of the Sixties and merged into the Indian Administration Service (IAS).
7. India Assessment: 2010, available at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/index.html>
8. Ajai Sahni, "The Peacock and the Ostrich," *South Asia Intelligence Review*, Vol. 8, No. 7, August 24, 2009.