

# Naxalism: A Threat to India's Security

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## Introduction

The Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh, on 20 December 2007, while addressing the Chief Ministers' conference on internal security minced no words in describing Naxalism as the "single biggest challenge"<sup>1</sup> and Maoists as "virus". He said the "Left Wing Extremism" (LWE) was of a 'unique nature' and it was time to have a dedicated force "just to tackle Naxalism". He urged the states to raise forces on the model of Andhra Pradesh "Greyhounds" anti-Naxal force which was set up by N Chandrababu Naidu when he was the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. He added that such a trained, dedicated force would go a long way in assisting states tackle Naxalite groups. He resolved to implement a two pronged approach to tackle Naxalism, by ensuring development of regions breeding LWE, while maintaining law and order.

## The Tribal Nature of LWE

The roots of Naxalism, later termed as Maoism, or LWE as now officially labelled, pre-date India's Independence. The Tebhaga and Telengana movements in Bengal and the Nizam's Hyderabad took place in the mid-1940s. The issues were land reforms and rural exploitation. On 3 March 1967, a group of peasants armed with bows, arrows and spears swooped on a piece of land at Naxalbari a small village in North Bengal, planted red flags and declared that it belonged to the Kissan Sabha<sup>2</sup> (Farmers Community). Naxalism is home grown and we cannot point fingers at others for allowing it to flourish. Presently, it is said to extend across "15 states, with 170 districts under their influence, out of which 51 are seriously affected."

Despite the critical leadership, and ideological guidance, being provided by committed urban youth, LWE is largely a tribal phenomenon. An analysis of its spatial and geographical spread clearly highlights its correlation with India's forest cover and tribal district boundaries. It is the tribal nature of this movement that compounds the internal security threat potential of this insurgency. India has 533 tribes,<sup>3</sup> comprising a population of over 88 million which primarily inhabits India's forest tracts. 85 per cent of our Scheduled Tribes (ST) population resides in the forested tracts of central and peninsular India.

## Preview

The following aspects are proposed to be covered:-

- (a) Causes of Naxalism.
- (b) Ideology.
- (c) Strategy, organisation and tactics.
- (d) Steps to meet the challenges.

## CAUSES OF NAXALISM

### Support Base of Naxalites

Naxalite movement has its support among the landless, share-croppers, agricultural labour, Harijans and tribals. As long as these people are exploited and social justice continues to be thwarted, this support base of the Naxalites will continue. LWE succeeds where people are poor, they face oppression by certain segments of society, the government is indifferent to their plight, and there are little prospects that things will get better in the future. On the other hand, LWE fails when the reverse is true. Thus the root causes<sup>4</sup> are as under:-

- (a) Exploitation and oppression of Dalits, Adivasis, and landless people in interior areas.
- (b) Absence of developmental activities and virtual absence of health care, drinking water, roads, electricity and educational facilities in areas where Naxalism has taken roots.
- (c) Disillusionment of people living in interior areas with the Parliamentary democratic system of governance in India.
- (d) For tribals, forest, land, and water mean their livelihood. They have been deprived of these under various acts and orders.

### Forest Management and Livelihood of Tribals

**Reserved Forests.** Protected and reserved forests were created for the purpose of conservation as well as scientific extraction of timber for the state. This led to reducing the status of tribal inhabitants to encroachers. Tribals lived in the forests which provided them means of livelihood for generations. Suddenly they found themselves excluded. Their forest rights were reduced to privileges granted by the state. Tribals found forest officials and contractors waiting to exploit them and take their cut. They got squeezed in the process.

**Land Reforms in Remote Areas.** Remote areas by definition were less developed and in most areas, roads were not constructed. The 'Abhujmadh' area in Chhattisgarh is very large but has not been surveyed. It does not have roads, hospitals and schools. After Independence, land reforms in remote areas have not been particularly successful. The compensation paid to Zamindars (land lords) was mostly through bonds<sup>5</sup>, but proper records of

rights repatriated to the state were not kept. There was no clear knowledge on the part of officials regarding cultivation rights. Land settlements were held up over prolonged period which led to delays, evasion, litigation and poor implementation.

**Credibility Gap.** Due to poor records, details of compensation paid for land acquired, and settlement plans worked out, and implemented, did not lead to satisfactory results. This created a credibility gap. If a state representative or corporate body functionary promises compensation for a project or a dam, factory or an exclusive zone, people laugh and refuse to believe him. There have been cases of the same set of people being uprooted over and over again, as new projects got sanctioned. There has been illegality and manipulation in the process leading to harassment, deprivation and marginalisation.

**Vested Interests.** There has been a lack of political ‘will’ because the feudal class with vested interests<sup>6</sup> is occupying influential assignments in the political set up; bureaucracy in the government; judiciary; media and so on. They ensure that incentives for capacity building, generation of employment, development of roads and so on, are thwarted in order to safeguard their vested interests.

## IDEOLOGY

### Maginalised Sections of Society

Naxalites do not belong to any particular religion, or community, but largely are Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalised sections of society. They are led by people totally indoctrinated by the teachings of Mao. The basic issues are land reforms and economic development. The ideological dimension is provided by Maoism.

### Party Programme

In 2004, a document titled ‘Party Programme’ was issued. It contains ideological basis of Naxalism. Important aspects are given in succeeding paragraphs.

*The domination and control of the imperialist finance capital in every sphere of our life - economic, political, military and cultural- continues to increase further and further. Actually, the imperialists control the key sectors of the Indian economy and even the administration. Recently, the stranglehold of imperialist finance capital over agricultural sector also continued to tighten along with other sectors because of WTO and imperialist globalisation. - - - Hence, India continues to be a semi colonial and semi feudal country under the neo-colonial form of imperialist rule, exploitation and control.*

Maoists envision that their revolution will result in changing the imperialist, feudal ideology and culture, and will establish socialist ideology. *For this it will be necessary to smash the State machinery and all other centres of power of the ruling classes thoroughly and build up the democratic power of the people based on worker-peasant alliance. In this way, our revolution will follow the path of the Chinese Revolution.*

### The Threat

The LWE in India poses a serious long term ideological threat through its potential to generate a serious rural-urban fault line. This fault line will become acute, once India’s demographic bulge acquires a critical mass because of rising unemployment. It is the introduction of Maoist ideology that poses a long term systemic threat to India’s democratic and liberal state developing at a fast pace, based on free market economy.

## STRATEGY, ORGANISATION AND TACTICS

### LWE Strategy

The focus of the LWE is on the tribals and lower caste people for support. The extremists generally identify the causes of the people’s grievances against the state. Then, they convey to the people the government’s acts of omission and commission that are responsible for their deprivation. After developing a support base, extremists proceed to pull down the structures of governance through threats and murders. An administrative vacuum is created wherein the writ of the state government does not run, and then they entrench themselves. Stress is on militarisation with hierarchy and building up of ‘People’s Guerrilla Army’, capable of destroying the state machinery.

### Organisation

**Organisational Structure.** Naxalites have a 13 member Politburo and a 35 member Central Military Commission (CMC). There are five Regional Bureaus (RB) - North, Southwest, Orissa/ Chhattisgarh, Eastern and Central; which provide them the ideological support and guidance. As far as their armed wing is concerned, they have zonal military commissions, each with a few divisions (company equivalent) and Dalams (platoon equivalent). At village level they have what is known as ‘Sangam’ - these are overground active supporters who are ideologically committed to their cause. In addition, they have a large number of frontal organisations like ‘All India People’s Revolutionary Front’ and a very effective propaganda outfit. Naxalites have some 10,000 armed cadres. The overground workers are estimated to be 45,000 to 50,000. Overall holding is 15,000 assorted weapons inclusive of 900 AK-56 rifles, 200 light machine guns, and 100 two inch mortars, besides local weapons and small arms looted from police armouries. Notwithstanding its ideological moorings, there is a view that in many areas, the Naxalite Movement has degenerated into an extortion racket through intimidation and terrorism.

**Dandakaryana and Abhujmadh.** It is located in Chhattisgarh and contiguous area of Maharashtra. The heart of

Dandakaryana is the thickly forested area of Abhujmadh, which covers approximately 10,000 sq kms. Of this 7,000 sq kms fall in Chhattisgarh and the remainder is in Maharashtra. The area of Abhujmadh has not been surveyed. Nearly 20,000 tribal families live in this area, in 237 villages, in a primitive manner with virtually no basic amenities. There are no roads and tracks. The Naxalites treat it as a totally liberated area. More than a dozen training and logistics camps are located in the area. The Politbureau and the CMC of the Naxalites meet here periodically. It is the nerve centre of Naxalite activities.

**Compact Revolutionary Zone.** The Naxalites say that the corrupt ministers and government officials have not been able to provide good governance to remote areas of the country. They seem determined to carve out what they call “Compact Revolutionary Zone”<sup>9</sup> stretching from Pashupati Temple in Nepal to Tirupati Temple in South India. This will encompass the tribal areas of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala and give them access to the “Bay of Bengal” and the Indian Ocean. This corridor has dangerous potential and must not be allowed to be established.

## **Tactics: Naxalite Violence**

**First Phase: Naxalbari.** Naxal violence started as an agrarian revolt in 1967 by Santhal peasants of Naxalbari in West Bengal. They formed the Communist Party of India- Marxist-Leninist [CPI (ML)]. It turned towards violent annihilation of class enemies through rural rebellions in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal. In 1970-71, there were 4,000 incidents of Naxalite violence. Concerted police operations were launched. These culminated in Operation Steeple Chase I (01 July-15 August 1971), in which the Army provided outer cordon in joint operations. This broke the back of the movement. During the period 1972-77, it weakened further. The Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) emerged in Bihar. This led to formation of caste armies like the Ranvir Sena and the struggle degenerated into caste violence.

**Second Phase: People’s War Group (PWG).** In April 1980, various Naxalite groups got merged to form the PWG. It was realised that insurgency in the plains was easily combated by the security forces because of mobilisation, fire power and movement differential. The PWG shifted the struggle towards forested tribal areas in Andhra Pradesh. The terrain was better suited for guerilla warfare. Forest Committees and dalams were formed. The struggle also spread to Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa by 1991.

**Third Phase: Left Wing Violence.** From 1990 onwards, India began to globalise its economy. Liberalisation was opposed strongly by the LWE. On 21 September 2004, the PWG and MCC merged to form CPI (Maoists). The spread of LWE thereafter has been dramatic. Estimates put the number of districts affected at 170 out of India’s total of 614. However, 51 districts are seriously affected. Naxalites have been targeting the government’s buildings and infrastructure like jails, police stations, railway stations and so on. For economic development, 300 Special Economic Zones (SEZS) have been planned in India. CPI (Maoists) views it as an attempt to grab lakhs of acres of prime agricultural land by foreign and local sharks. Naxalites have called on the people to resist seizure of their lands. Focus on economic warfare enables Naxalites access to large sums of money through extortion and ransom. As per a newspaper report, Naxalites in Jharkhand alone, make about Rs 3.2 billion annually. In mineral rich states, Naxals impose levy on business houses, transporters, and contractors. Rs 70,000/- or so per annum are charged from coal firms and Rs 25,000/- or so per annum from transporters. Political parties are also known to pay protection money.

**Casualty Ratio.** A cause for concern is the adverse casualty ratio between the police, Central Police Organisations (CPOs) and the Naxals. During the period 1999 to 2006, it had ranged from 1:1.4 to 1:2. However, during the years 2007 and 2008, the ratio has become more adverse - 1:0.6 and 1:0.8, and tilted in favour of the Left Wing insurgents. High casualties are caused by extensive use of IEDs and landmines by the LWE.

## **SIMILAR INSURGENCIES IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES**

### **Maoist Revolution in People’s Republic of China (PRC)**

Mao Tse Tung had based his revolution in China upon the landless peasants in the country side. It was an agrarian revolution that overthrew the landlords and developed a three-phase model of People’s Revolutionary War that defeated the Chiang Kai Shek Government and ushered in Communist rule in the PRC. The revolution started in the country side and later overwhelmed the cities. Mao enunciated the concept of three stage guerilla warfare. Its salient features are summarised in succeeding paragraphs.

**Stage 1: Strategic Defence.** A guerrilla organisation was set up. It gradually increased its influence by selective terrorist actions against the state functionaries and other supporters. Initially aim was survival and consolidation.

**Stage 2: Strategic Stalemate.** Platoon and Company size guerrilla bands were employed using hit and run tactics of raids and ambushes. At this stage, the aim was to break the will of the state to fight. It lasted for more than a decade.

**Strategic Counter Offensive.** Regular People’s Liberation Army was formed. Conventional military operations were launched to defeat the armed forces of the state.

**Analysis.** In essence, the Chinese civil war was a struggle between the agricultural rural poor and the landlords as well as emerging industrial urban population. The revolution was led by the landless peasants of China. India is a democratic and liberal state that is based on free market economy. It is this parallelism that is casting a shadow over the march of LWE across tribal India.

## **Pakistan**

The tribes of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) of Pakistan are in virtual revolt. Pakistan militarised and armed its tribal society to wage a jihad against the erstwhile Soviet forces in Afghanistan. The extremist jihad ideology nurtured by Pakistan is posing a serious threat to its very existence, as Talibanisation radiates outwards from the tribal regions and makes inroads into the Punjab and other provinces.

## **Maoist's Rebellion in Nepal**

The Maoist rebellion in Nepal has a number of similarities with the LWE movement in India. Its base was largely tribal (Magar, Gurung and Pun tribes of Nepal). The leadership was from the educated elite of Khatmandu valley. The Maoist insurgency in Nepal lasted for a decade from 1996 to 2006. The Maoists fought the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) to a standstill. However, Maoists prematurely, switched to regular military operations. Launching of frontal attacks on well fortified RNA positions caused heavy casualties that compelled the Maoists to seek an alliance with democratic parties. Maoists joined the main stream, participated in democratic elections, and formed Maoist-led government in Nepal for some time. It remains to be seen whether the LWE in India will follow a similar model and join the mainstream democratic process.

## **Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh, Chakma tribes revolted in 1970s. The insurgency was contained by repressive measures. Even the demographic composition of the tribal areas was changed. Maoist style insurgencies are erupting among the other tribes as well.

## **Analysis**

The onset of tribal insurgencies is not just an Indian phenomenon. It is also endemic to neighbouring countries, and stems from a clash of industrialisation and modernisation taking roots in these countries, with the tribal legacy left over, as historical baggage. LWE is the outgrowth of the failure of the state to penetrate, control and administer its forested areas.

## **STEPS TO MEET THE CHALLENGES**

### **Credibility of Instruments of Governance**

Social, economic, religion and question of identity are important factors. These must be tackled in a sensitive and just manner. Any compromise, either by the political leadership or by bureaucracy including police, will lead to discrediting the instruments of governance. Due to multiple causes, there has been a failure of the administrative system at the grassroots level. Good governance would be the key to improve the situation. The Prime Minister of India while addressing the Chief Ministers' Conference on 20 December 2007, enunciated the "two legs" response, wherein the military pressure and development projects are pursued concurrently. A 14 point policy to combat Naxalism was also enunciated in this meeting. It included the need to distribute land to the landless poor as part of speedy implementation of land reforms and the development of physical infrastructure. The Planning Commission, under its Backward District Initiative (BDI) and Backward Regions Grant Fund has identified 250 districts for pumping in extra funds for accelerated development.

### **Redressal of Grievances**

Effective steps to reduce ethnic and social inequalities, disparities in educational and employment opportunities, and for creating effective machinery to redress grievances, are essential to improve the environment. Steps to reduce economic deprivation and improve the delivery of essential services can erode the base of public support on which the extremist movements survive. More than any thing else, it would be the economic policies that would determine the future of these movements. A thriving economy which gives hope and opportunity is more likely to defeat all types of extremist movements than any other strategy.

### **Rural Infrastructure**

Most strongholds of LWE happen to be poorly connected and difficult to access. Unfortunately, the tribal insurgency has reached a stage where the insurgents now have a vested interest and stake in the continued underdevelopment of this area. They are specifically keen to prevent infrastructural penetration of these jungle areas and, to that extent, have been doing their best to hamper road construction and developmental activities. There is a need to accord priority for construction of black topped road networks. Bharat Nirman Programme<sup>12</sup> launched by the Prime Minister in December 2005, has some of the following objectives and should be pursued vigorously particularly in LWE affected areas:-

- (a) Electrifying all villages and habitations.
- (b) All weather roads to all villages in the next five years.
- (c) Safe drinking water to all villages.
- (d) Providing houses as per Indira Awas Yojana guide lines.
- (e) Telecommunication voice coverage to all villages.

### **Providing Employment**

Land is shrinking because of growth of population and more extensive land use. There is a need to take people off

the land and provide jobs elsewhere. This requires education and training. Dalits and tribals will not oppose industrialisation, urbanisation, construction of dams and other projects, if they are equal beneficiaries and stakeholders<sup>13</sup>. Special packages with corporate houses should have inbuilt system of training tribals and dalits and enable them to avail of the new opportunities. The state and society must cater for adequate opportunities and facilities for enabling the tribals and dalits to live with dignity and improve their living conditions and quality of life.

### **Cooperation Between the State and Central Government**

In the states where the situation has gone beyond their control, the Centre, as laid down in the Constitution, is duty bound to intervene, notwithstanding the fact that law and order is, under the State List. The Union Government is charged with the responsibility of protecting the states from internal disturbances under Article 353 of the Constitution, even though law and order comes under List-II, the State List. Even if the Centre decides to intervene, the state's role cannot be minimised. The primary responsibility to deal with the security challenges must rest with the state governments. A situation should not be allowed to develop where the state government washes its hands off, or its forces instead of cooperating with the central forces, actually work against them. The internal security challenges can be met effectively with full cooperation between the central and state governments. The police, the paramilitary forces, the Army (in advisory capacity) and intelligence agencies must act in close coordination. The hostile foreign forces can, and will take advantage of the internal situation to destabilise the country in pursuit of their own agenda. All internal security problems, if not checked effectively, can develop an external dimension.

### **Security Apparatus**

**Need for a Composite Force.** There is a need for a well coordinated security apparatus comprising the police, the paramilitary forces, the Army (in advisory capacity), and intelligence agencies, even in those states where the internal security situation is not so serious. It is easier to deal with problems at the initial stages, rather than delay till the state police find it difficult to cope up.

**Security Responses.** The government has sanctioned Rs 800 crore for anti-LWE operations and to improve security and mobility. Raising of Combat Resolute Action Battalions (COBRA) under the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is in progress. With their raising, strength of the CRPF will increase by 10,000. The armouries at police posts, and in jails, are being strengthened, fortified and tactically sited to inflict deterrent casualties if attacked by the Naxalites. The Army is being closely associated with planning of operations, to be able to intervene, if the situation so demands.

**Recommended Strategy.** The authority of the state should be established in the 'Guerrilla Zones'. For this, the police force has to be reoriented for combat, specifically in counter-insurgency and jungle warfare. Security forces should be made more professional and provided suitable small arms, equipment, communications, and integral logistics support. The personnel must undergo robust physical and psychological training to meet the Naxal challenge and ensure success in operations. The police will be required to carry out a creeping reoccupation of the 'Guerilla zones'. After the area is secured, socio-economic activity should follow. The political leadership should step in, and psychological campaign should be launched, to wean away population from the LWE influence. It will be only with pressure from the security forces, politicians, and the population that Naxal leadership will come to the negotiating table.

### **Comprehensive Security Policy**

The Naxalism should not be treated as merely law and order problem. They have to be dealt with comprehensively in all dimensions and at all levels – political, economic, and social. They are all interlinked. At times, the required measures would be in conflict with each other. Going too far in one direction could be counter productive. Striking the right balance is the key in meeting these challenges effectively. We need a comprehensive security policy that will be implemented effectively at all levels.

### **Conclusion**

In a country of more than one billion people, there are bound to be successes and failures. It might be seen that as a nation, we have not done so badly. After all, at least it has been held together and is making progress, despite the prophets of gloom and grave problems. Considering that the USA faced a bitter civil war and the mighty Soviet Union has fragmented, the Indian Union has its basic unity.

Re-establishing control over Naxalite affected areas, their development, and enabling the marginalised people living there to lead a secure, dignified and better quality of life is vital. As a nation we should ensure that this objective is achieved. National 'will', commitment and focus are required.

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