



RESEARCH ARTICLE

NAXALISM IN INDIA: ROLE AND RESPONSES OF ARMED FORCES

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ABSTRACT

Naxalism, also known as Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is perhaps the most serious threat faced by the country at present. The Naxalites or Left-wing extremists or Maoists initially launched their violent campaign of armed agrarian revolution on the lines of the Chinese revolution led by Mao Tse Tung, in Naxalbari village in 1967, in the Siliguri sub-division of West Bengal and hence the movement, Naxalism, got its name from this place. This ideology based movement was initiated by extreme left wing elements of the Communist Party of India- Marxist (CPI-M). The movement was brought under control in the mid 1970s owing to a number of factors, including an intense crackdown by the state, ideological and personal differences leading to recurring splintering and to some extent because of the land reforms implemented by the West Bengal government. However, in the 1980s the various splinter groups under different leaders regrouped themselves. Today, the Maoists have a strong presence in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra and West Bengal etc. The emergence of the so called 'Red Corridor', which stretches all the way from the border with Nepal through Central India to Southern India, has become a grave security concern. In the districts where the Maoists have a sizeable presence, the writ of the state does not run. In these areas, the Maoists collect taxes, impose fines and levies, control the roads and even dispense crude form of justice. The movement has picked up rapidly, and poses a grave internal security threat to the country leading to an intense debate in the academia and the intelligentsia regarding the possible role of the Indian Army in controlling the menace.

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INTRODUCTION

Naxalism, also known as Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is perhaps the most serious threat faced by the country at present. The Naxalites or Left-wing extremists or Maoists initially launched their violent campaign of armed agrarian revolution on the lines of the Chinese revolution led by Mao Tse Tung, in Naxalbari village in 1967, in the Siliguri sub-division of West Bengal and hence the movement, Naxalism, got its name from this place. This ideology based movement was initiated by extreme left wing elements of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). The movement was brought under control in the mid 1970s owing to a number of factors, including an intense crackdown by the state, ideological and personal differences leading to recurring splintering and to some extent because of the land reforms implemented by the West Bengal government. However, in the 1980s the various splinter groups under different leaders regrouped themselves. Today, the Maoists have a strong presence in Andhra Pradesh,

Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra and West Bengal etc. The emergence of the so called 'Red Corridor', which stretches all the way from the border with Nepal through Central India to Southern India, has become a grave security concern. In the districts where the Maoists have a sizeable presence, the writ of the state does not run. In these areas, the Maoists collect taxes, impose fines and levies, control the roads and even dispense crude form of justice. The movement has picked up rapidly, and poses a grave internal security threat to the country leading to an intense debate in the academia and the intelligentsia regarding the possible role of the Indian Army in controlling the menace.

Genesis of the Naxal Movement

'... out of all the major contradictions in our country ... the one between the landlords and the peasantry i.e. the contradiction between feudalism and the broad masses of the

Indian people is the principal contradiction in the present phase.'

Programme of the communist party of india (marxist – leninist), clause 16: The LWE, despite its extreme leftist ideological stance, is primarily a tribal insurgency. The bulk of its armed cadres are of tribal extraction. The tribals are natural hunters. The subset of skills required for hunting & insurgency are very similar; hence, tribals make ideal guerillas. The North Eastern tribal insurgencies that broke out in 1956 have effectively tied down a large portion of the Indian Army for over six decades along with a huge number of PMF and Central Police Organisations (CPOs). The implications of a tribal revolt in the Indian heartland of Central & Peninsular India can, therefore, be easily imagined.

The old adage that 'There can be no smoke without fire' is apt to describe the Naxalite problem facing the country today. The tyranny of the landlords and the caste system combined together have wreaked havoc on the Indian poor tribals, peasants and labour class which form the bulk of the population of the country. The 'have-nots' have risen in revolt against the system a number of times – though we tend to overlook the same by not studying it and hence not learning the desired lessons.

Major uprisings: To understand the Naxal movement, it is pertinent to see the earlier uprisings in the Central Indian tribal areas and note the similarities. The root causes of all such dissidence remain the same, i.e. exploitation of the downtrodden. Some of the major uprisings are listed below:-

- 1946 – The Tebhaga Movement in Undivided Bengal
- 1946 – 51 - The Telengana Insurrection
- 1967 – Naxalbari
- 1968 – Srikakulam
- 1967-71 – West Bengal, Midnapur and Birbhum
- 1968-70 – Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

Root Causes of the Naxalite Movement

- Land Reforms / Rights
- Lack of Infrastructure and Development
- Tribal and Forest Policies
- Social and Economic Inequalities
- Economic Deprivation
- Unemployment
- Inadequate Governance
- Excessive Strain on Requirement of Land Due to Economic Liberalisation and Development
- Flaws in the British Bureaucratic, Legal and Policing System
- Insensitivity of the Higher Bureaucracy and Political Elites
- Feeling of Neglect and Ostracization

Present State of the Naxal Movement and its Effects

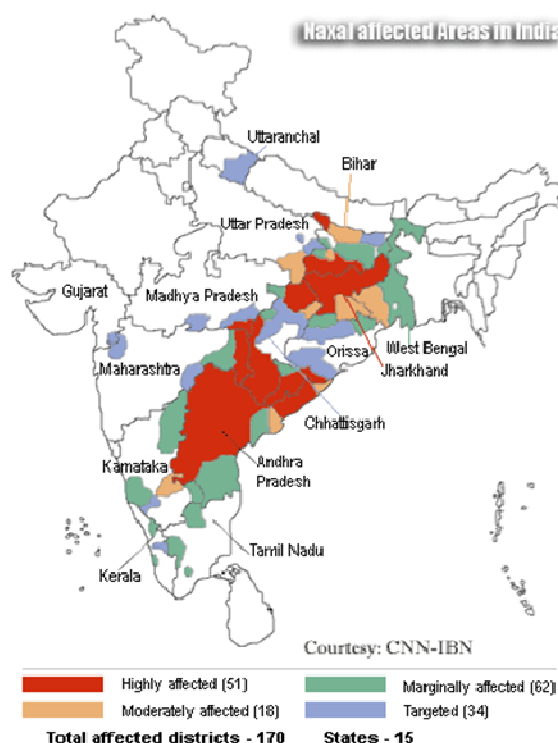
Characteristics of the Naxalite Cadre and its Leadership: Northern Andhra Pradesh, Eastern fringes of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, Western Orissa, the whole of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and South Western as well as the entire North Eastern Bihar are the most Naxalite infested areas in the country.

These are also the areas which are most remote, underdeveloped and poor, but with vast reserves of natural resources. Especially in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the cadres are mostly tribal – poor, undernourished and unemployed. Most of the junior and middle level commanders are from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Bengal; come from small townships, have a young age profile and have acquired basic schooling as well as some higher education.

Terrain, organisation and tactics: Naxalism thrives in the hilly and plateau areas of the thinly populated Central India which has little in terms of roads and telecommunication or socio-economic infrastructure. Jungles and perennial streams provide safe sanctuaries for the armed groups to operate from, who draw sustenance from sympathetic villages and the voids of state machinery in development, basic education, health care, law enforcement, transportation or employment. This void has helped the Naxals to practically run a parallel govt. in the area. Their 'camps' or 'hide-outs' are located not too far inside the jungles, close to water sources and village trails, secured by a network of informers for early warning, and shifted at frequent intervals. The key command and control organ of the CPI-Maoist is the Central Military Commission (CMC) which is headed by general secretary Ganapathy. However, it is now believed that Nambala Kesava Rao alias Basavanna is the 'lynchpin' of the CMC.

Geographical spread: This movement has spread its tentacles across the length and breadth of Central India. It has sprung across more than 20 states of which six, viz. Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra are the most affected ones. Even if and when the Army gets involved, it may not be possible to impose a Constitutional safeguard like the 'Armed Forces Special Powers Act' (AFSPA), as the areas under the influence of the LWE in each of the affected states vary.

The Red Corridor*



Emergence of a compact revolutionary Zone (CRZ): Spread of the 'Red Corridor' from the Nepal border to Tamil Nadu is a very disturbing sign. This area of CRZ is characterized by thick jungles, contiguous tribal belts and vast underdeveloped regions spread across the Country, including the Ambhujmadh area in the Dandkaranya forests in South Central India. The Ambhujmadh area has vast tracts of uncharted jungles spread over more than 10,000 sq km and nearly 20,000 tribal families living in 237 villages in a most primitive manner with virtually no basic amenities. Even the British left this area unsurveyed. Till date, after some recent efforts, this area remains only partially surveyed. Rule of law or the Govt machinery has no presence here, the only organised presence is that of the Anand Van of Baba Amte in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli areas in Maharashtra and the Rama Krishna Mission in Chhattisgarh. Thus the Maoists, taking advantage of the void in state control and non-governance, have established large scale presence in the regions of Southern Chhattisgarh, Western Orissa and South West Jharkhand, and consider it as a 'Liberated Zone'.

Challenge to the established state authority: The government institutions are being openly subverted by the Naxalites and their sympathizers in the following manner:-

- Tax collection and levies from contractors, traders, industries, transporters and even government officials.
- Redistribution of all available land.
- Extortion from the contractors and businessmen.
- Dispensing crude justice in their openly held 'Jan Adalats'.
- Killings and kidnapping of police informers, defiant persons and government officials.
- Well planned attacks on para-military forces and subverting government institutions to demonstrate their authority to the people and stall the state machinery.
- Destruction of public and private property and enforcing 'bundhs' at will.

Indoctrination of masses: Masses get swayed by the glitter of Naxals' instant effectiveness and method of arbitration, thus severely damaging the credibility of the state as well as the democratic institutions. Open observance of the 'Naxal Day' in full public view at various towns/cities while the state authorities just looked on, was a serious indictment of a weak state institution.

Recommended Response by the State

Re-establishment of the state authority: Creation of infrastructure development and directly addressing problems of the local population is the only method of regaining the trust of the masses. Re-establishing the education and health facilities will go a long way towards this achieving this aim. NGOs can be incorporated and can contribute a great deal towards meeting this goal.

Psychological conditioning: Apart from socio-economic measures, and probably as a sequel to it, practical and workable psychological measures should be undertaken by the authorities to assuage the feelings of the people. The government has probably already commenced this psychological campaign as the story in the 'Times of India' proves it, 'Exposing the anti – development face of the Naxals, the government is now putting out advertisements in newspapers stating the record of the ultras.

The MHA has cornered them with the catch line – 'Who is against development?' A senior home ministry official said, "...The idea is to expose the Maoists who are trying to mislead local people.

Surrender policy: There should be a clear surrender policy to facilitate and execute surrender of the Naxals and ensure rehabilitation of those who surrender. The operation should be under taken as a multi-pronged strategy on Naxals with the policy of carrot and stick.

Police action: The aim of police action should be to freeze or stagnate the movement so as to prolong the stage of Strategic Defence and thus demoralise the cadres and motivate them to de-link from the movement. The basic considerations in this regard are:-

- Tactical deployment of forces and establishment of well defended police posts in areas so far abandoned by state administration.
- Positioning of reserve and reaction forces, with due mobility.
- Clamp down on illegal arms factories and smuggling of explosives from mines.
- Re-activation of grass-root 'human intelligence'.
- Build up of police logistics so as to enable it to deploy across the underdeveloped hinterland.

Unified police command: In the last few decades since Insurgency has started, the affected states have adopted different approaches to deal with this problem. It has been experienced that coordination and synergy has been lacking between various state governments in spite of them facing a common problem and sharing common inter-state boundaries. Naxals have been moving freely to the neighbouring states to escape the para military operations in one state. Therefore, there is an urgent case for having a 'Unified Command and Control Structure' where the hierarchy and responsibilities are clearly and unambiguously laid out.

Modernisation of the police force: The existing ratio of 1:1000 police to population needs to be enhanced to a minimum of 3:1000 in LWE areas. Recruitment drive – to enroll candidates based on merit and aptitude rather than caste or political patronage – to fill up vacancies in police ranks followed by meaningful training would bear fruit. Police officers with a proven track record should head vulnerable police stations and police out-posts in remote areas and these should be well secured with protective works. Mine Protected Vehicles (MPVs) should be made available to police and para-military forces to ensure safe and unhindered move of forces for various tasks. Latest state of the art communications should be provided to all agencies within as well as outside the affected states. Provision of helicopters to move Quick Reaction Teams and reinforcements and introduction of Night Vision Devices and protective gear would empower the police to effectively respond to Naxal challenges.

Improving the standards of training: Police personnel who are being employed in fighting Naxals should be trained in specially designed schools with emphasis on field craft and battle craft, i.e. good tactical use of ground, improving their skills at firing, increasing mental and physical stamina and endurance, capability to operate continuously for 72 to 96 hours without falling back on locals for administrative support.

Enrolling Ex-Servicemen (ESM) into state police: Bihar has enrolled over 8000 ESM, who have the requisite experience as Special Auxiliary Police (SAP), for combating Naxalism. This force has been found to be extremely successful. The states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Orissa are also in the process of enrolling Ex-servicemen. Similar action should be taken by other Naxal affected states.

Action at central government level: Counter Naxal activities should be made a subject of the 'Concurrent List' through formal legislation. A central agency consisting of Director Generals of Police (DGP) of the Naxalism hit states and heads of various intelligence agencies is the need of the hour. A proposed charter of this agency would be as follows:-

- Planning and coordination of inter-state operations.
- 'Clearing' of Dandakaranya and such other 'Red Areas'.
- Sharing of intelligence with various stake holders.
- Specialised training of the Special Police Task Forces.

Army's Response and Action

'The weapon of last resort should not be used at the beginning of the Battle' -Anon

Army is the force of the last resort in any democracy. However, in India, we tend to employ the Army at the very first instance that anything unusual happens - from cable cars getting stuck to children falling in bore wells, from flood relief to earthquake relief, from building overhead bridges for the Railways to fighting insurgencies. All such tasks and many more are thrown at the Army without questioning the civil administration to explain their inaction or worse still their botched up operations. The Naxal problem, as it faces us today, should never have been allowed to come up – not by crushing it with brute force, but by removing the reasons for its existence.

Preparatory steps: LWE is a festering problem confronting the state. A similar situation existed in the North East before 1956, in Punjab during the early 1980s and in J&K prior to 1990. The Army was deployed in each of these insurgencies with no time for preparation at a time when the state machinery had already folded up. This left the Army to learn the intricacies of the problems from the scratch– at a heavy cost of life and time. As a stake holder of national security, therefore, the Army needs to be pro-active and imaginative in preparing to deal with the problem, if and when called upon by the government to do so.

Intelligence management at the army level: At present, there have been some half-hearted efforts on the 'intelligence' front by the state agencies because of an obvious lack of expertise on the issue. Sharing intelligence with the Army is not on their agenda. There is, however, a requirement of collecting and collating the information regarding the LWE by the Army. Presently, collation of information at the functional level is through the 'Intelligence Cells' who carry out informal 'intelligence preparation' by means of ad-hoc efforts between various agencies in the affected states. The Army should develop extensive database, about everything related to Naxalism including the extent of its spread, trends, the strengths and weaknesses of its cadre, their tactics, leadership profile, weapons and equipment and their funding.

There is an urgent requirement of formal integration of the existing military and civilian intelligence set up by establishing a 'Regional Intelligence HQ', where designated representatives from all the concerned agencies, including the Army, are obliged to confabulate and share information. Command of such a HQ could be unified under a common head.

Coordination and Cooperation with Police Forces

The following issues merit attention

- Intelligence gathering and sharing to produce a common, comprehensive 'intelligence picture'.
- Offering better training facilities to the police personnel. The practice has already commenced; it needs to be reinforced and the police leadership also – not just the constables – made to participate.
- Ensuring compatible radio equipment and deployment of helicopter support for mobility of CPOs/ PMF, supplies and casualty evacuation.

Recruitment rallies in affected areas: The government must go in for aggressive recruitment in these areas to wean the youth away from the Maoists as well as help create jobs leading to prosperity in general and to generate a sense of loyalty towards the state.

Survey of the area and mapping: The Army has the requisite expertise for survey of difficult areas and mapping, independent of the Survey of India. As a first step, a detailed survey of the most difficult and uncharted areas of Dandakaranya and Ambujmadh needs to be undertaken as these areas are not accurately mapped. Updated maps would facilitate conduct of operations in these areas.

Establishment of jungle warfare school in the CRZ: A jungle training school for Chhattisgarh Police has been established by the state government at Kanker under the guidance of Brig (Retd) B K Ponwar, ex-Commandant of Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare (CIJW) School, Warraingte. However, the Army should establish a branch of CIJW School in a suitable area of the CRZ. This will achieve the dual purpose of training the CPOs and allow the Army personnel to develop an effective intelligence base. It will also make the Army's presence felt and therefore restore the credibility of the government.

Raising of ecological and home and hearth (H&H) territorial army (TA) battalions: Raising of an Ecological Task Force in the CRZ by employing ex-servicemen, with a view to preserving the forest wealth and for collecting valuable environmental knowledge, should be thought of, as such initiatives have many positive fall-outs, including providing employment and spreading stake holding in the government. Similar steps have already been taken successfully in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

Field firing ranges and training areas: Vast stretches of areas in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa which are thinly populated, could be exploited by the Army to for field firing and manoeuvre training. This would provide the much wanted facilities for training for the Army as such training areas are presently not available in the developed areas of the country. Besides the obvious advantage of benevolent interaction between Army and the local people, this would also

enable utilisation of these facilities as bases for conduct of counter LWE operations, when necessary.

Conduct formation and unit level exercises in the CRZ: As part of training, unit and formation level exercises could be conducted in the affected areas to provide for periodic presence of the Army. This is already being done to a certain extent by the Army by undertaking collective training of the Infantry Brigade in one such area.

Conduct of adventure activities in CRZ: The Army carries out many adventure as well as outdoor activities like cycling, trekking, mountaineering, river rafting, etc across the country. The CRZ could be an ideal place to plan some of these. This will not only help the Army in creating goodwill in general but also in knowing the terrain, increased awareness of tribal psychology and the situation prevailing in these areas.

Sadbhavana projects: The Army has a large numbers of soldiers who belong to these areas who have been serving in various Regiments and Corps. In ostensibly helping own soldiers and their families, the Army could carry out Sadbhavana Projects. This would win over people's confidence in the Army and eventually the Government.

Modernisation of forces: In view of the possible employment of the Army against Naxals, modernization on its sub-conventional capability would have to be undertaken on priority, primarily with the following in focus:-

- Usage of helicopters for operations, reconnaissance, troop deployment and communication duties.
- Sophisticated weaponry, Night Vision Devices, Electronic Warfare resources and reliable, secure and robust communication equipment.
- Use of modern surveillance devices including the use of drones and satellites etc.

Conclusion

LWE is a home grown problem which has all the signs and possibilities of exploding into a major security problem for India. The nation and the Army have to be alive to the problem rather than wishing it away or being in a denial mode, so that if and when the time comes, the Army's response is precise and yields quick results. It is largely a problem for the civil administration and the local government to solve with the assistance of the Central government, but the Army must be seized of the issue and be prepared in its own way.

The Indian Army has vast experience in CI operations. Therefore, it is not necessary to dwell on the tactical and logistics nuances of such operations against the Naxal Groups; appropriate actions to counter the challenge will indeed be taken at the appropriate time, if and when required.

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