

RECENT TRENDS OF NAXAL VIOLENCE IN INDIA: NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Mohammad Saqib*

Introduction

The paper seeks to analyse the recent trends in the naxal violence in different states of our country and the Government policies and implementation towards solving the problem. The problem of Naxalism in India is not a new phenomenon. The problem started from a remote village name Naxalbari located in the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal. Since then, it spread into less developed areas of India, such as Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and so on. The movement had evidently socio-economic roots such as uneven distribution of land as well as exploitation of the rural poor and socially deprived by revenue collectors and landlords. The movement seeks to organize revolution on the pattern of Maoist revolution of China through armed and violent struggle and bring about an end to highhandedness of the upper classes.¹

India has over the last many decades been facing a tough challenge of naxalism that are prevalent in several parts of our country.² The issue related to Naxalism is a cause of serious concerns with naxal violence being reported on regular intervals in several parts of our country. To deal with the growing menace of naxalism which according to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is the single largest threat to peace, security and stability of our country.³ This can be reflected from the fact that today naxals influence extended well over 2000 police stations in 223 districts across 20 states. Adding to the bigger picture he admitted greater violence in areas under 400 police stations in 90 districts of 13 states. In terms of the demographic influence, naxals has its impact on over 40 per cent of the country's area and 35 per cent of its population.⁴

* **Assistant Professor in Department of Defence Studies, Hindu College Moradabad**

India has since the advent of globalisation witnessed tremendous changes and improvements, but still many inequalities persist between rich and poor, town and country and also between upper and lower castes. Conditions for large sections of rural India still compare with the worst of sub-Saharan Africa, and in many remote areas the state has long been absent. However, economic grievances alone do not correlate with Maoism, and in net terms, the Indian state has tremendous internal legitimacy – only 26 of India’s 100 poorest districts, and 20 of its 100 most illiterate are Maoist afflicted.⁵ The success of the Maoist movement is deeply rooted in the weakness of some parts of the Indian state to fulfill its ideally functions and responsibilities. Naxalites take advantage of the vacuum created by the state agencies. In other words we can say that, the state agencies failure is a success for the maoist. Maoists try to fill the void created by the state government by not taking any such effective measure to address the problems faced by the local people such as tribal’s and the adivasis. According to Sahni, the population in respective areas expects that the state provides basic needs for them but generally fails. Under these conditions the population reacts with a lot of gratitude towards the efforts of the Naxalites to establish a kind of social order by way of which they set up courts as well as distribute land. At the cost of the state government, naxalites have managed to establish a support base among India’s landless peasants. It is estimated that, at present they enjoy the support of 50% of India’s tribal population.⁶

The paper argues for stringent government policies and implementation to tackle the fast growing problems related to naxalism. In order to comprehensively dissolve the Naxalite threat, the government will need to adopt a three-pronged approach - political measures, social and economic development and military measures.

Naxal Ideology and Tactics

The Naxalites were a group of far-left radical communists who promoted Maoist political sentiment and ideology to fight exploitation by landlords in India’s feudal postcolonial socio-economic system. It is based upon an extremist belief that the Indian government is a semi-colonial, feudalistic, and imperial entity that needs to be overthrown. It takes up the cause of the marginalized sections of society, thereby opposing the implementation of various developmental projects such as construction of roads, rails, schools, and hospitals in affected areas in order to

demonstrate to the people the ineffectiveness of the state. When successful, the Naxalite movement has operated in a vacuum created by the absence or collapse of the administrative structure at the local, provincial, or state level.⁷

At the politico-ideological level, Naxalism is also a reflection of an increasingly insensitive society, where ideals of equality and justice are being subverted for personal greed and power. Naxals have not only exploited this alienation by espousing local demands but also seek to offer an alternative system of governance based on the ideals of Maoism. As one author argues, “The failure of the state to reach out to the poor and also its mal-governance leading to retreat of governance has resulted in a power vacuum as well as the space for the Maoist to strike roots and gain legitimacy among the impoverished. Naxalism has been fueled by socio-economic and political issues.” By showing sympathy to adivasis, the naxal groups are able to gain support from the local people, which hold the key to their security and survival.⁸

Naxals employ classic guerilla tactics, disperse in the face of organized force and prioritize their links with the population - often through violent intimidation. Maoist guerillas have the tactical advantage over Indian security forces, and have demonstrated the ability to conduct sophisticated large-scale operations. They are not only capable of assaulting training centers and police stations to capture weaponry, but also carried out attack in jails to freed their captured comrades and target judges and state functionaries to weaken state presence. Their lethality has grown with the use of Improvised Explosives Devices (IEDs), which now result in the majority of counterinsurgency casualties. They have displayed their capabilities in some of the recent operations carried out by them.⁹

Naxal Violence in Recent Years

From time to time and in tune to the changing security, Naxals have developed newer tactics to meet the much stronger opponent. They have been evincing greater precision, penetration, organization and audacity in striking their chosen targets at will. They are equipped with sophisticated weapons and communication system resulting in displaying their capability to carry out attack on many such symbols of state authority, mostly police. For instance as witnessed in their assault in Koraput in Orissa, Madhubani in Bihar, Giridih and Bokaro in Jharkhand and in

Karnataka, killing hundreds of policemen and looting fire arms and money. According to the report by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 3,607 persons including civilians and security forces were killed in the Naxal violence between 2008 and 2012. The key reason for the increased Maoist Violence during 2009 – 2010 was their ability to penetrate in to people’s resistance movements.¹⁰ However, the last few years have witnessed a sharp decline in the total number of naxals related violence. In comparison to 2012, the year 2016 saw a decline from 1415 to 1048 in terms of the incidents of violence, while the number of deaths reduced from 415 to 278 during the same periods.

The recent downfall in the naxals violence in the year can be attributed to the combined efforts of the Central and State Governments and is a really encouraging development. Besides, the greater presence and the increased capacity of the security forces across the Left Wing Extremism affected states, better operational strategy and the better monitoring of development schemes in the affected states have further contributed to it.¹¹

Table 1: State-Wise Extent of LWE Violence during 2012-2016

State	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016	
	Incident	Deaths	Incident	Deaths	Incident	Deaths	Incident	Deaths	Incident	Deaths
Andhra Pradesh	67	13	28	7	18	4	35	8	17	6
Bihar	166	44	177	69	163	32	110	17	129	28
Chhattisgarh	370	109	355	111	328	112	466	101	395	107
Jharkhand	480	163	387	152	384	103	310	56	323	85
Madhya Pradesh	11	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	12	2
Maharashtra	134	41	71	19	70	28	55	18	73	23
Odisha	171	45	101	35	103	26	92	28	86	27
Telangana	NA	NA	8	4	14	5	11	2	7	0

Uttar Pradesh	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Bengal	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	8	0	7	0	8	0	10	0	6	0
Total	1415	415	1136	397	1091	310	1089	230	1048	278

Source: *Annual Report 2016-17*, Ministry of Home Affairs, p. 5.

According to the data produced by Ministry of Home Affairs, the number of civilian fatalities recorded in 2017 was 188 which is the second lowest in this category since 1999. A previous low of 171 was recorded in 2015. The number of Districts from where fatalities were reported declined from 42 in 2016 to 40 in 2017. On March 24, 2018, speaking on the occasion of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)'s 79th Raising Day, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh stated, 'Maoism has become a serious challenge... but because of the gallant and determined action of the CRPF and other Forces, these incidents have come down drastically. I Can say that the LWE problem in the country has entered its last leg...' ¹²

Chronology of Major Naxal Assaults Over the Past 10 Years

25 March 2018 Three woman cadres of the Communist Party of India-Maoist were killed during an exchange of fire between Security Force personnel and the Maoists near Dokari Ghati under the Narayanpatna Police limits in the Koraput District of Odisha. SF personnel seized a cache of arms and ammunition from the location of the encounter.

1 March 2018, 10 CPI-Maoist cadres, including six women, and one *Greyhounds* constable were killed in an encounter near Pujarikanker, along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border, in the Bijapur District of Chhattisgarh.

11 March 2017 12 personnel of the 219th battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed and another four injured when Communist Party of India-Maoist cadres ambushed a road opening party in the dense forests near Kottacheru village under Bhejji Police Station in the Sukma District of Chhattisgarh.

8 March 2017 four Maoists were killed in an encounter with personnel of the 205th battalion of the Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) of the CRPF in the forest area of Baskatwa under Gurpa Police Station in the Gaya District of Bihar.

1 February 2017 Maoists triggered a landmine explosion near Mungarbhumi in the Koraput District of Odisha, killing eight Police personnel and injuring another five. The explosion targeted a Police van carrying 13 Police personnel, on its way to the Police Training College in Angul District.

19 July 2016 CRPF commandos were suddenly attacked by Naxals in the jungles of Aurangabad district, Bihar with an IED blast. The ambush was followed by an encounter that claimed the lives of 10 CRPF jawans.

20 July 2015 2 SUVs, 1 tractor and 1 motorcycle set ablaze. Naxals attacked a construction site in Banka district injuring several construction workers.

14 June 2014 3 passengers were killed while 6 were wounded. 500 Naxals attacked and hijacked the Dhanbad-Patna express train in Jamui district, fired gunshots and also detonated bombs.

10 April 2014 2 died and 6 were injured. A CRPF jeep was blown up during the Lok Sabha elections.

11 March 2014 15 security officials were killed in Sukhma district.

28 Feb 2014 6 policemen, including an SHO, were killed. The incident took place in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh.

2 July 2013 The Superintendent of Police and 5 other personnel of Pakur were killed in a maoist attack in Dumka, Jharkhand.

25 May 2013 27 dead. Former Chhattisgarh Congress chief Nand Kumar Patel and former state minister Mahendra Karma were killed along with several other Congress leaders, security personnel and villagers, in a Naxal attack in Darbha valley.

18 Oct. 2012 6 died, 8 were injured. Gun battle and landmine blasts incapacitated a deputy commandant while injuring 7 other security personnel. The incident occurred in Gaya.

29 June 2010 26 killed. CRPF Jawans died in an ambush near Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh.

8 May 2010 Naxals blew up a bullet-proof car in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, killing 8 CRPF jawans.

6 April 2010 A Chhattisgarh police official and 75 CRPF jawans were brutally killed in an ambush in Dantewada.

4 April 2010 The Koraput district of Odisha witnessed the death of 11 officials from the elite anti-Naxal force Special Operations Group.

15 Feb 2010 24 died. Security personnel belonging to the Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR) were killed by Maoists inside their camp in Silda, West Midnapore.

8 Oct 2009 17 died. Police personnel killed in an attack at Laheri police station in Maharashtra. The incident occurred in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.

26 Sep 2009 BJP MP's sons were killed. Baliram Kashyap's sons were killed in a maoist attack at Pairaguda village in Jagdalpur.

4 Sep 2009 4 villagers were killed in a forest in Aaded village, Chhattisgarh.

27 July 2009 6 were killed. A landmine blast in Datewada, triggered by Naxals, had claimed 6 lives.

18 July 2009 1 villager killed and 1 construction vehicle torched. A villager from Bastar district was killed by Naxalites while in another episode in Bijapur, a road construction vehicle was burnt down.

23 June 2009 Naxals opened fire on Lakhisarai district court premises in Bihar to free four of their comrades. The freed comrades included the self-style Zonal Commander of Ranchi.

16 June 2009 11 police officers killed in a landmine and physical attack. In a different incident 4 police personnel were killed, while two were wounded in an ambush triggered by Maoists at Bundelkhand in Palamau district.

13 June 2009 10 killed, several others injured. In a small town close to Bokaro Naxals instigated two consecutive landmine and bomb attacks.

10 June 2009 9 police personnel along with CRPF troops were trapped and injured by Maoists during a scheduled patrol. The incident occurred in Saranda jungles of Jharkhand.

22 May 2009 16 policemen dead. Maoists instigated the killings of security troops and officers in the jungles of Gadchiroli in Maharashtra.

22 April 2009 Train hijacked with 300 passengers on board. Maoists had forced its route from Jharkhand to Latehar where they finally escaped.

13 April 2009 An attack on the bauxite mines of Koraput district in eastern Odisha led to the killings of 10 paramilitary troops.

16 July 2008 21 dead. Policemen die as a police van was blown up in a landmine blast. The incident was reported to have occurred in the Malkangiri district of Odisha.

29 June 2008 38 troops killed in ambush. Maoists launched an attack on a boat on Balimela reservoir in Odisha that was carrying 4 policemen and 60 Greyhound commandos.

Comprehensive Approach to Counter the Threats of Naxalism

The Indian government has of late realised that the growing menace of naxalism and its activities need to be tackled in a holistic manner focusing on different aspects such as security, development, rights of local communities, improvement in governance and public perception. In dealing with this decades-old problem, it has been felt appropriate, after various high-level deliberations and interactions with the State Governments concerned that an integrated approach aimed at the relatively more affected areas would deliver results.¹³

At the political level, there is a need for close understanding and coordination between the state and the central government when after the merger of different Maoist groups into CPI (Maoist) in 2004, there has been continuous attempt to woo other splinter groups and have also consolidated their front organizations into 'Revolution Democratic Front' (RDF) to intensify their mass contact programme. At the same time, lack of inter-state coordination has been exploited by the Naxalites to move between states. While it is necessary for the State Governments to conduct proactive and sustained operations against the extremists, and put in place all measures required for this, it is also necessary to simultaneously give focused attention to development and governance issues, particularly at the cutting edge level.¹⁴

At the same time, there is a need for bringing good governance in every states and union territories and not just for naxal affected states. Lack of good governance which does not seriously address the socio-economic problem of the state has given birth to such movement in our country. The movement continue to expand their influence and are also able to gain more and more strength despite government attempts to curb the spread of the naxal violence because the government does not treat it as a politico-ideological and socio-economic problem.¹⁵

India has admittedly prioritized rural development – elevating its ministry to a cabinet level position in 2011 – and significantly increased allocations to Maoist-affected areas through targeted entitlements. However, rural development to date has been superficial and ineffective, with emphasis on increased allocations obscuring problems in implementation and a lack of progress towards desired outcomes. The Maoist Integrated Action Plan for example provided 250 million rupees in 2010, and 300 million in 2011 in discretionary funds for quick-impact

human welfare projects including building facilities for drinking water, sanitation, health clinics, roads etc.¹⁶

From a socio-economic perspective, the states affected by Left Wing Extremism are among the poorest and underdeveloped and are inhabited by the tribal population comprising of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Bihar and Jharkhand. Efforts must be made at the state level to create a climate suitable for development and economic growth in the areas which have been deeply affected by the Naxalite violence. To address the socio-economic alienation and the dissatisfaction with the widening economic inequality which is also one of the root causes of spread of naxalism in our country, the Central Government has come up with a financial assistance of Rs. 2,475 crores for 55 naxal affected districts in the 9 States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh & West Bengal under the Backward Districts Initiative (BDI) component of the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana (RSVY). Under this Scheme, an amount of Rs. 15 crores per year has been given to each of the districts for three years so as to fill in the critical gaps in physical and social development in the naxal affected areas. The Planning Commission has been requested to include other naxal affected areas under their proposed Scheme of Backward Regions Grant Funds (BRGF) for which an outlay of Rs. 5,000 crores has been set apart from this fiscal year (2005-06) onwards. Such a scheme is aimed at tackling poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and underdevelopment as these provide sustenance to the movement. However, besides the allocation of funds what is equally important is the efficient and transparent implementation of the schemes. The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007 are some steps that have been recently taken by the government on the developmental front.¹⁷

From the military point of view, certain steps were taken by the state and the central government to tackle the problem of naxalism and its activities. Every naxal affected state is continuously making its efforts to modernize their police forces in terms of modern weaponry, latest communication equipment, mobility and other infrastructure. The naxal affected States

have also been asked to identify vulnerable police stations and outposts in the naxal areas and take up their fortification. Keeping in view the increased casualties of police personnel due to IED/land mine blasts, the naxal affected States have been provided Mine Protected Vehicles (MPVs) under the Police Modernization Scheme. Moreover, the naxal affected States have been sanctioned India Reserve (IR) battalions mainly to strengthen security apparatus at their level as also to enable the States to provide gainful employment to the youth, particularly in the naxal areas. Recently, additional IR battalions have also been approved for the naxal affected States. The Central Government will now provide Rs. 20.75 crores per IR battalion as against the earlier amount of Rs. 13 crores per battalion. The States have been asked to expedite rising of these battalions.¹⁸

Moreover, the central government has doubled the allocation of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) to the states from 37 to 71, besides raising new battalions for the purpose. At the state level, measures undertaken are: raising of Special Auxiliary Police (SAP) Battalions of ex-servicemen in Bihar (Odisha, Chattisgarh and Jharkhand are also planning to do so), establishment of Counter Insurgency School in Chattisgarh and Odisha (Jharkhand and Bihar too propose to do so), conduct of training courses for police personnel in various Army training centres, and filling of existing vacancies as well as recourse to additional recruitment in police ranks. Efforts are on for acquisition of modern small arms, counter-IED equipment, night vision devises, vehicles and protective gears, to deal with armed naxal groups. In some states even promotion of vigilante groups (eg, Salvan Judum in Chattisgarh and various private 'senas' in Bihar), have been seen. Besides, an idea of establishing a 'National Internal Security Academy' has been mooted; the proposal, however, seems to have been strangled in red tape and departmental rivalry, topped up by strategic myopia. But the question remains as to how long the government would take to completely implement all of these measures and proposal. If the government is really serious about tackling the issue then it would need to introduce fast implementation process.¹⁹

Besides these, the state government has taken the necessary steps to set up/streamline the intelligence structure to effectively deal with the Naxal problem. In support to this, 40 battalions of the Central Paramilitary Forces have been deployed on a long-term basis, as requested by the

affected states.²⁰ The Central Government has also decided to set up a Unified Command in each of the Naxal Affected States for better co-ordination and assistance. The Central government is increasingly focusing on raising special COBRA forces for each of the Naxal Affected States, 20 Counter Insurgency and Anti - Terrorist (CIAT) schools have been planned under the 11th Plan. More details about the CIAT allocations have been given in Table 3. A special commando and military training school under the aegis of the Indian Army has been set up in Chhattisgarh as well.²¹ It has approved a new scheme to assist the State Governments for construction/strengthening of 400 fortified police stations at Rs. 2 crore each in Left Wing Extremism affected districts on 80:20 basis.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the downward trend in the naxal violence in the last few years, naxalism continues to occupy an important in India's security calculus. The naxal movement is very much active in many parts of our country including Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Naxals took the advantage of the lack of development, rampant corruption, absence of effective administration and deteriorating socio-political conditions in the country.²² The factors which gave rise to Naxalism in the country are, unfortunately, very much present even today. The extent of poverty in the country continues to be abysmal. Land reforms remain a neglected area. Unemployment figures are high. Tribals have been getting a raw deal. Governance, particularly in remote areas, is poor.

The previous Government have prepared a comprehensive 14-Point Plan to deal with the problem. There is special emphasis on the socio-economic development of the affected areas, and the state governments have been asked to ensure speedy implementation of land reforms. Infrastructure is being developed and there are plans to provide employment to the youth in the remote, backward areas. The National Tribal Policy seeks to protect the rights of tribals. How far these measures produce the intended results, however, remains to be seen.

Although, there is no short cut route to eradicating the menace of terrorism but certainly the government needs to find the way to solution. And in that the state and central government should come up with determination to deal with the root causes of naxalism rather than trying to

find immediate solution by means of force. The application of force may contain the spread of violence related to naxal but will not bring desired results.

There is a need to address two broad shortcomings in the Governmental functioning: first, there must be proper and effective implementation of the policies adopted to deal with the naxal problems because so far we have witnessed deep contradiction between the policies on paper and the actual practices of the Government. Secondly, more emphasis must be given to upon economic and cultural rights of the naxal affected people.²³ Moreover, the state and the central government together without fail must ensure that the naxal related policies are implemented in a proper and effective manner and that there must also be proper utilization of the funds allocated for tackling the naxal problems. While undertaking several military measures, it is also necessary to undertake comprehensive development of affected regions and effective grievance redressal mechanism. The state and the central government failure to address the development activities in naxal hit tribal areas has been a key factor behind Naxalite growth and sustenance.

Endnotes

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- ¹¹ *Annual Report 2016-17*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, pp. 4-5.
- ¹² See, 'Maoist Insurgency: Assessment - 2018', available at < <http://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/india-maoistinsurgency-2018>>.
- ¹³ *Annual Report 2011-12*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, pp. 30-31.
- ¹⁴ *Annual Report 2011-12*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, p. 31.
- ¹⁵ Ajai Shahni, “Naxalism -The Retreat of Civil Governance”, available at <<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume5/Fault5-7asahni.htm>>.
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