

Naxalism: Changing Tactics Naxalism: Changing Tactics

Saumitra Mohan*

*[*Saumitra Mohan is an IAS Officer presently working as an Additional District Magistrate, Hooghly in West Bengal. The views expressed here are authors personal views and do not reflect those of the Government.]*

The way Naxal activism and related violence has been recurring with increasing frequency lately has really become a cause of serious concern for not only the integrity and security, but also the general well-being of this country. While neighbouring Nepal is witnessing a reconciliation with the Naxals (Maoists), as reflected in latter's participation in the new government, India continues to be a victim of their gory ways. The mainstreaming of the Naxal movement in Nepal hopefully marks the end of the Naxal movement in that country, India is still groping in the darkness to size up the real problem and come out with a suitable response in the form of a well-coordinated strategy to break this wild and intractable stallion called Naxalism.

Sphere of Influence

As of now, Naxal violence, today, has spread its tentacles from 156 districts in 13 states in September 2004 to 170 districts in 15 states in February 2005, affecting about 40 per cent of the geographical area of the country and 35 per cent of its population, if we are to believe recent intelligence reports. With the objective of establishing a 'Compact Revolutionary Zone' as typified by the Red Corridor, extending from the boondocks of North Bihar to the underdeveloped hinterland of Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, in the heart of India, the Naxals aim to use the same, reportedly, for eventual seizure of the State Power leading to subsequent establishment of the Maoist State.

Be it the activism of Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh, the attack on Jehanabad jail (resulting in freeing of about 340 prisoners and their leader Ajay Kanu) in Bihar, the heinous killing of Sunil Mahato, the JMM Member of Parliament or the recent attack on a police camp in Bastar killing about 56 policemen, Naxals have been evincing greater precision, penetration, organization and audacity in striking their chosen targets at will. They have also attacked many such symbols of state authority, mostly police, as witnessed in their incursions 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.

The Tactics

Transforming themselves into a modern guerilla force, Naxals, today, are equipped with sophisticated weapons and communication system. With the formation of a united outfit namely CPI (Maoist) along with the raising of an armed wing i.e. People's Liberation Guerrilla Army through the merger of Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and People's War Group (PWG), the Naxal Movement has not only succeeded in getting over the problem of sanguinary

infighting amongst them, but the Movement has also witnessed a shift in focus and strategy. Today, they are not only logistically better organized and better trained, they are also better motivated and better led.

With the programme of a New Democratic Revolution, the Naxals wish to attain their goals through the spread of disaffection amongst the rural poor, by creating an impression that the new economic policy, hegemonic and imperialistic as it is, is prejudicial to their interests. The newly acquired prosperity of the landlords, bourgeois traders and bureaucrats further annoys and frustrates them. They believe that the benefits of the Panchayati Raj have been cornered by a handful of well-to-do peasants. Hence, they have declared all landlords, big or small, and all bourgeois, powerful or petty, as class enemies and have been working for their elimination by violent means.

The New Strategy

The new strategy is one of protracted armed struggle whose objective is not seizure of land, crops or other immediate goals, but the seizure of the state power. Within this perspective, participation in elections and engagement with the prevailing bourgeois democracy are rejected, and all efforts and attention are firmly focussed on revolutionary activities to undermine the state and seize power, by hook or by crook. They plan to mount further attacks against the symbols of 'feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism' and they also don't mind supporting the struggle of nationalities for the self-determination, including the right to secession. They have also been paying special attention to mobilizing and organizing women as a mighty force of the bloody revolution they are waging.

Lack of Pragmatism

The Naxals, so far, have refused to see and acknowledge as to how the benefits of a federal democracy and a plural welfare state have reached all and sundry, thereby pointing to the achievements of the nation-building efforts all these past years owing to which the Indian State has successfully avoided the pitfalls of a failed state, as seen in many countries in Africa and Latin America. By ignoring the urges of a growing nation to develop without any fetters, the Naxalites are refusing to see the writing on the wall. They would do well to understand that nothing has ever been achieved through violence and violence as a means to any goal has been a treacherous monster and, as such, has always devoured the users like the fictional Frankenstein.

No form of government has proved to be better than democracy which has responded and evolved as per the genius of its locale. Indian democracy has also been evolving slowly and has shown resilience and strength with every passing day. If the Naxalites still feel the other way round, they should come forward to discuss the same across the table. After all, there is nothing in the world that can not be discussed and resolved across the table.

Already, the government has been responding to their basic allegations of inequitable and in-egalitarian development and has come forward with a slew of development proposals to address the said inequity. Their support to secessionist and separatist movement is also grossly misplaced and points to their garbled conception of politics. By doing so, they are only helping the cause of those who love to see this country grovel in the dust.

By indulging in the brazen and unprincipled acts of violence, they are not only hurting the developmental cause of their own Nation, but they are also playing into the hands of our enemies. For the government, it would be advisable to continue its efforts to bring them aboard, while continuing its developmental efforts simultaneously, without compromising with the security and integrity of the country.

The Recent Surge

The recent surge in naxal violence has established beyond doubt that naxalism is more than a mere law and order problem. And now that increasing evidence is being found of their extra-national linkages with the forces hostile to the interests of this country, there is definitely a need for a renewed thrust for tackling this hot potato. Army intelligence is reported to have proved a close connection between the Maoists and the terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The arrest and subsequent interrogation of the Nepalese Maoist, Pasang Lama, on Indian Territory has only substantiated this link.

Hence, an emergent need has been felt to develop a more synergized strategy to tackle this menace. In fact, both central and state governments have been at the drawing table for quite some time to develop such an action plan. The recent Bhubaneswar meeting of National Naxalite Co-ordination Committee was one such step in this direction.

Naxalites are believed to be working at a counter strategy including exploring newer ways to intensify the people's war by increasing their mass base across the country and strengthening its armed cadres. According to a report, naxalism is believed to have affected about 40 per cent of the country's geographical areas and 35 per cent of its population. The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) is the principal force on the naxal scene, accounting for almost 98 per cent of ultra left-wing extremism in India.

If we try to see through the pattern, breadth and precision of naxal violence in the country, then we would find that the naxalites have not only been successful in strengthening the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the military wing of the CPI-Maoist, but have also succeeded in recruiting more cadres through militant, but populist mass movements against the neo-liberal policies of globalization, liberalization, and privatization. Their strategies seem to expand the armed struggle from 'guerrilla war' to 'urban and mobile warfare', focusing on industrial areas.

Ideological Underpinnings

With Singur and Nandigram coming into focus, naxalites seem to be placing more reliance on agrarian revolution and protracted people's war as the path for their so-called 'new democratic revolution', as seen during the heydays of the Naxalbari upsurge in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The motivation for reversion to the nearly four-decades-old agenda is the temptation to capitalize on the controversy revolving around the conversion of farmlands into industrial zones.

The naxalites have, indeed, successfully cashed in on the popular resistance to the proposed land acquisitions in Singur and Nandigram, if reports of their expanding mass base in such areas are to be believed. They further plan to use resistance to the SEZ phenomenon as a means to extend their presence to new areas. Today, as many as 250 proposals to establish SEZs in 21 states are awaiting approval and naxalites are reportedly busy chalking out plans for more such flare-ups. The mainstream parties here need to be more wary to preempt the naxalites from taking negative advantage of any such popular movement.

Taking a cue from their Nepalese counterparts, the 'desi' (local) naxalites are learnt to have got into collusion with the sundry revisionist and secessionist forces in a bid to expand their support base. Maoists in Nepal had declared their support to eight minority autonomous regions during their armed struggle phase and thereby got immense support, in turn, from these areas.

New Alliances

Naxalites, here, similarly have been supporting demands for separate states like Telengana and Vidarbha with an eye to the eventual setting up of a communist state in this country. Not only this, they also support the secessionist movements in north-east and Kashmir and as such they pose bigger threats to national security than we have cared to believe so far.

Maoists' new strategy seem to be setting up bases in new regions by means of taking up such emotive issues as forcible displacement caused by Special Economic Zones, industrialization, infrastructure development projects, caste oppression and religious fascism. Naxalites intend to turn the guerrilla war into mobile war and guerrilla zones into base areas. They have also been exploring newer tactics against the background of changes taking place in the agrarian situation including increasing resort to jail breaks and attacking the express centres of state power like police/military stations.

The Maoists do not abruptly launch 'armed struggle' or violence, but are known to proceed very methodically including conducting a preliminary study of local social, economic and political milieu and the vulnerabilities of particular groups of population before coming out with customized action plans. They prefer to maintain a low profile in adverse conditions. They deliberately keep violence low in border regions so as to keep away the police attention, thereby facilitating intra-state movement.

Naxalites are known to follow flexible tactics. If the situation warrants, they restrict the movement at the level of political mobilization, highlight local issues through front organizations and organize meetings in strongholds to garner popular sympathy.

Conclusion

Therefore, instead of focusing only on tackling the naxal violence, the government should monitor the activities of the front organizations as well. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen the capabilities of the local police in action and in intelligence collection. The same can be done through specialized training and provisioning of better infra-structure to increase their overall efficiency and effectiveness. It is high time we stopped thinking of naxalites as 'some misguided citizens' and start dealing with them as outright enemies of the State. The Nepalese Naxalites have shown the way by laying down arms and joining the mainstream political process. Our home-grown Naxals ought to take a cue from them.