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***MAOIST INSURGENCY: INDIA'S WAR
WITHIN***

“Make trouble, fail, make trouble again, fail again . . . till their doom- that is the logic of the imperialists and all reactionaries the world over in dealing with the people’s cause, and they will never go against this logic. This is a Marxist law. When we say “imperialism is ferocious”, we mean that its nature will never change, that the imperialists will never lay down their butcher knives, that they will never become Buddhas, till their doom.

Fight, fail, fight again, fail again, fight again . . . till their victory; that is the logic of the people, and they too will never go against this logic. This is another Marxist law. The Russian people’s revolution followed this law, and so has the Chinese people’s revolution.”

*Cast Away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle (August 14, 1949),
Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. IV, p. 428.*

The above quote in a gist explains the resilience of the Maoist insurgency in India – also known as the Naxalite movement, left-wing extremism, and people’s war – that has now entered its fifth decade. Characterized as a democratic, agrarian revolution against the forces of imperialism, the main agenda of the movement has been to mobilize the peasants, tribal groups and working class against the landed class, organize an armed struggle under the auspices of a revolutionary party and herald a New Democratic Revolution based on communist social order¹. It first broke out in March 1967 in Naxalbari village in West Bengal². Although peasant uprisings had been ongoing since 1946, Naxalbari revolt symbolized the heralding of a revolutionary armed struggle against the Indian state and marked the “turning point for communist movement in the country.”

Since its outbreak, the Maoist insurgency has embodied a number of armed struggles striving for an equitable socio-economic development

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within its fold, resulting in a much-fragmented insurgency until 2004. The formation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) in September 2004 transformed the movement into a better organized and coordinated insurgency. Six years hence, the Maoists have emerged as the most powerful radical force in the country with an all-India character, a Peoples Liberation Army operating in several states and an emerging New Democratic People's power in the Dandakaranya (DK) region³. In this period, they have intensified their guerilla warfare. The government of India has taken cognizance of this threat as the prime minister of India, Manmohan Singh, declared it to be the 'single biggest threat to the internal security of India' in 2006, and subsequently launched a security offensive in November 2009: a deployment of almost 100,000 paramilitary troops and police to contain the estimated 20,000 armed cadres⁴. The Maoists have responded with equal vigour resulting in a brutal spiral of violence.

This situation has been brought about partly because of the expansionist aspirations of the unified Maoist party⁵. But the political and social context for their resurgence has been provided by the disproportionate nature of India's economic growth. Since 1991, India has experienced a boom in economic growth with 100 percent rise in per capita income, fuelled further by enormous amount of Foreign Direct Investment. Yet this economic growth has failed to trickle down with over 200 million people continuing to live below poverty line. Without necessary modernization of its institutions, the benefits of the economic growth and liberalization have failed to reach the poorest sections of society. On the contrary, displacement, environmental damage and health hazards have only exacerbated alienation and resentment against the state in large sections of society. The Maoists have sought to leverage this both for their own rise and to challenge the legitimacy of the parliamentary system of delivering justice. In doing so, however, their success has been limited. Often the objectives of the revolution have clashed with the needs of the people. Their political and social expansion remains limited. This article will provide an assessment of the characteristics and guiding principles of the rebel Maoist movement in India.

Objectives, Guiding principles and Characteristics of the CPI (Maoist)

In its earlier phases the movement was confined to one or two states. Today, the Maoist presence has spread across 14 states with heavy concentration in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal⁶. Large tracts of forest land coupled with heavy tribal population neglected by the state, these states proved to be a fertile ground for the Maoists. Notably, the rebels are concentrated mostly in the forested belts of these states with the plains remaining largely peaceful. The

Naxal violence is most severe in 34 districts across 8 states as identified by the government of India⁷. Although there are several left-extremist groups in India, the CPI (Maoist) is the most powerful one⁸.

The Maoists remain committed to the orthodox communist objectives like withering of the state and international proletarian revolution. To achieve this, the Maoist first aim to “to complete the New Democratic Revolution in India as a part of the world proletarian revolution by overthrowing the semi-colonial, semi-feudal system under neo-colonial form of indirect rule, exploitation and control and the three targets of our revolution—imperialism, feudalism and comprador big bourgeoisie⁹.” Their immediate aim is, therefore, to accomplish the New Democratic Revolution. Apart from their objectives, the guiding principles of the Maoists, like democratic centralism, salience of armed resistance, rejection of parliamentary democracy, and anti-industrialization propaganda, also reflect their ideological commitment to communism. In reality though, the application of the communist ideology is much more complex:

Democratic Centralism

Located in the southern belt of Chhattisgarh state, the party functions through a Central Committee, Regional Bureaus, Zonal or State Committees, District or Division Committees and Squad Area Committees. Commitment to central party line is followed through strict disciplinary measures, but, at the same time, every unit is given the freedom to develop new tactics to carry forward the party general line based on ground situation¹⁰. Because the party was formed following years of negotiation, organizational unity is repeatedly stressed in all Maoist documents. In practice though, some of the tactics used by local state units have contravened the general party line such that the impact has been a loss of credibility of the Maoists. Although the Maoists have made self-criticisms on the killing of innocents and the use of torture, such killings are justified as a necessary response to state's oppression.

Democratic United Front (UF)

Building a Democratic United Front under the leadership of the proletariat constitutes an integral component of the Maoist political strategy. The UF is to consist of four classes: the workers, peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie¹¹. The main support for the Maoists comes from the Scheduled Caste (Dalits) and the Scheduled Tribes (adivasis) who constitute 16 per cent and 8 per cent of the Indian population and live mostly in rural areas¹². Notably, there are areas in India with high proportions of Dalits or Adivasis but little Naxalite activity such as in Punjab, Harayana, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Poverty alone does not

explain support for the Maoists; a confluence of factors such “as denial of justice, human dignity, increasing awareness and consciousness of one’s abject condition against general growth together cause alienation resulting in the conviction that relief can be had outside the system by breaking the current order asunder¹³.” Their presence in the urban areas remains limited. Significantly, this is not because the conditions in urban settings are less conducive to alienation and unrest: rate of employment increased steadily in the first decade after liberalization for men in urban areas¹⁴. Other problems such as low wages, employment of family labour, child labour, contractual nature of work, prevalence of health hazards are rife in urban areas. Yet, the Maoists have been unable to mobilize support in urban areas, a weakness that demonstrates the limited transformative potential of the movement.

Saliency of armed resistance

Armed struggle and violence remains at the heart of the Maoist political programme. The use of violence is considered important not only to bring about revolution or structural changes but to achieve ‘true humanity through the moral reconstruction of the subject¹⁵.’ The Maoist revolutionary strategy is said to broadly consist of three stages: the organization stage which focuses on mobilizing public support through front organizations and propaganda work around exploitative structures of society; the guerilla warfare stage, in which the rebels engage the state in a struggle over control for a particular area; and the mobile warfare stage, where the revolutionaries having defeated the state establish their complete control¹⁶. Armed action is to remain central at all times.

Since 2004, the Maoists have steadily consolidated the guerrilla warfare stage engaging the state in a struggle particularly in the 34 violence-affected districts. Total number of deaths resulting from Naxal violence has risen sharply over the past five years.

Table: Maoist-related violence, 2004-2008.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No of incidents	1533	1608	1509	1565	1591
Civilian Casualty	466	524	521	460	490
Security Forces Casualty	100	153	157	236	231
Naxalite Casualty	87	225	274	141	199

Source: Naxal Management Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

Daring attacks upon the security forces including the police and paramilitary forces, suspected police informers, local politicians, economic and public infrastructure, and development projects are among the tactics used by the Maoists across the central belt. Security forces, in particular, have suffered severely. Although a target since 2005, the massive deployment of paramilitary forces in the Naxal-affected areas in 2009 has considerably increased their vulnerability to attack. Among the deadliest attacks occurred on 6 April 2010 in Chhattisgarh state, when the rebels ambushed a CRPF battalion killing 74 members of the CRPF and two Chhattisgarh policemen. The Maoists typically rely on 'swarming' attacks whereby a group of 300-500 cadres launch a particular attack accompanied by another group that blocks any reinforcement from reaching the place of attack. This technique together with the forest terrain is largely responsible for the massive casualties suffered by the security forces and demonstrates the firepower the Maoists. Another tactic recently being used is hostage taking. In the states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the rebels abducted few policemen. The state governments refused their demands, as a result of which few of the abducted officers were brutally murdered while others released. The rebels also target civilians, particularly those alleged to be 'police informers.'

Known for their reliance on traditional weapons, the Maoists have started using more sophisticated weapons. Their stock of advanced weaponry includes special caliber firearms (rifle, machine gun, pistol), country made firearms (guns, and revolvers), claymore mines, IEDs, and grenade launchers along with modern communications means including wireless sets and interceptors¹⁷. Landmine blasts and use of IEDs have become a common mode of attack mainly targeting the SF. They have been successful in hampering the combing operations of the SF particularly by mining roads leading to the forests, thereby hampering both quick action by security forces and access by civil administration.

The Maoist rebels and their sympathizers claim that such brutal killings are "unfortunate fallout of the government's wilful policy of Operation Green Hunt," and more immediately, the suspected extrajudicial execution by Indian security forces of the Maoist spokesperson Cherukuri Rajkumar (known as Azad) and a freelance journalist Hemchandra Pandey when they were travelling to initiate peace talks with the government (July 2010). Such claims contain a degree of truth, for, the pattern of attacks reveal that the security forces are most often than not targeted while returning from area-domination or combing exercises. The situation today is such that today violence has taken centre stage both from the side of the rebels and the government.

Anti-Industrialization

Another hallmark of communist movements worldwide has been a focus on the internal stresses and contradictions in society. As pointed out above, the liberalization of economy in 1991, and the disproportionate pattern of economic growth since, has exacerbated the inequalities between classes, and between town and country. India's hinterland remains acutely underdeveloped, particularly the mining region across Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand that is driving India's fuel-and-mineral-hungry economy. Billions of money has been invested in these states in the past two decades with India gradually opening its mining sector to 100 per cent foreign direct investment and privatizing many public sector mining companies. With these processes of opening up, rules for setting up mine-based smelting plants, power plants, dams, infrastructural utilities were liberalized further. Investments have particularly risen since 2003 with the hikes in international prices of minerals following a rising demand. Simultaneously the region has also witnessed several protest movements against industrialization and land acquisition¹⁸. At the core of these resistances lie issues such as displacement, failure of proper rehabilitation, destruction of forest-dependent livelihood, use of forest land for non-forest purposes, environment damage, water pollution and lack of proper implementation of Forest Rights Act. Although most of these struggles are led by local villagers, many are supported by the Maoists.

This issue has added an intractable angle to the Maoist insurgency – on the one hand, the protests have provided Maoists the chance to rally these struggles and guide them eventually towards the cause of the revolution. As such, while the Maoists claim to be combating the exploitation of the tribals, they are actually more interested in utilizing tribal support as a means to further a planned takeover of the Indian state itself. They make little attempt to be accountable to their tribal constituents and prohibit development of any kind taking place in their areas, while instead directing their energies towards creating permanent instability in the areas that they control. The Maoists themselves bear little concern over the lives of the non-combatants beyond that which serves their cause.

People's democracy against parliamentary democracy

According to the Maoists, the Indian democracy is a sham since it was imposed from above by the British¹⁹. They endorse the Marxist theory that "democracy is part of the superstructure and belongs to the realm of politics, that is to say, that it serves the economic base. Democracy and freedom are important under specific historical conditions but are not an end to themselves but only a means." Participation in parliamentary elections and running the state affairs results in bureaucratization and

alienation of the party from the masses. It is on these grounds that the Maoist party has rejected the path of 'peaceful coexistence among political parties against the forces of feudalism and imperialism' as adopted by the Nepali Maoists and have firmly reiterated their commitment to the New Democratic Revolution. The only way to achieve their goals is through protracted people's war i.e. area-wise seizure of power starting from the countryside and gradually encircling the cities; collaboration with the mainstream parties can never be a stage of the revolution. Interestingly, the Maoists view their Nepalese counterparts as having deviated too far from communist ideology and for having become "bureaucratic" rather than revolutionary.

As opposed to the parliamentary system, the Maoists advocate formation of a people's democratic state whose basic organ of power is the Revolutionary People's Committee or the Janathan Sarkar. So far, they have been able to set up JS in parts of southern Chhattisgarh surrounding the Abhujmad hills (part of Dandakaranya region) that has been declared by the Maoists as a liberated zone²⁰. Each JS is elected by a cluster of villages whose combined population can range from 500-5000; a group of JS form an Area Committee (AC) and three AC's make up a division²¹. According to one estimate, Dandakaranya region currently consists of 10 divisions²². The JS follows several practices similar to the parliamentary democracy including adult franchise, accountability to representative assemblies and periodic elections. Emphasis however is laid on organization along class lines with collective dictatorship of the proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeois and national bourgeois classes²³. Additional fundamental rights include right of voters to recall an elected person, to bring anyone in position of authority who is working against interest of the people to court, and the right to unionize among others. People are to have total control on the democratic government where their opinion will have much importance in the decisions and in solving problems. Various departments of the government – judicial, defense, agriculture, finance, health, education and culture – are to be oriented along the class and mass line and work towards promoting local methods and practices.

Recent fact finding reports highlight several achievements of the JS or the RPC²⁴. The Maoists have virtually established a parallel administration in the Dandakaranya region through the JS that are responsible for taking up welfare activities, running mobile schools and health camps, distributing food grains and clothes, building irrigation canals, holding cultural activities, administering justice through people's courts and practicing cooperative farming. The travelogues indicate an increase in agricultural production and living standards of the people. Another significant achievement is the massive participation of women that amounts to

between 40-45 percent of the party. Notwithstanding the verity of these facts that cannot be testified in the absence of government records, it is clear that the Maoists continue to ignite hope in the region for an alternate democratic model.

Be that as it may, the RPCs represent an embryonic form of a system that promotes direct participation of people and seem to function best in particular circumstances²⁵. The Dandakaranya region, for instance, has been neglected by the state for centuries and governed mostly by age-old customs based on hierarchy and exploitation. But conditions in other parts of the country are starkly different where people enjoy various freedoms, and state institutions, no matter how weak, are accessible to most people. For the Maoists to extend their politics into the plains remains a formidable challenge. Moreover, the use of coercive methods and wanton killings have also perpetrated fear in the region against the Maoists that poses a doubt over the higher ethical standards that a revolution claims to follow.

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Over the past five years, the Maoist movement has transformed into a powerful insurgency. In terms of their reach, they have penetrated into far more areas than expected. They also have established themselves as a force to reckon with through sophisticated and massive attacks against security forces. They continue to hone their capability in using more sophisticated weapons such as IED. This along with the group's local support and knowledge of the terrain makes them a powerful adversary. The government of India has declared a holistic strategy to deal with the Maoist problem, combining the use of force to reclaim areas controlled by the Maoists while simultaneously promoting development. It has led to some successes with the arrest of a number of important Maoist leaders, some penetration into the Abhujmad area in Chhattisgarh, and successful conduct of the general elections. However, the government forces have also suffered great losses due to the Naxals, after coming under repeated attacks. Despite this, the government is hesitant (and rightly so) to deploy its army in the region, partly because the army is already over-used in country's northern state of Jammu and Kashmir and Northeast states rife with ethno-separatist conflicts, and partly because India carries with it the unpleasant experience of use of the military in the state of Punjab during Mrs Indira Gandhi's tenure. The government has offered to hold talks with the rebels, an offer that the Maoists are yet to respond to.

Keeping aside the security challenge posed by the Maoists, the political and social impact of the Maoists remains fairly contained. Despite their intent, they are yet to demonstrate their ability to strike beyond their stronghold in the rural areas. Politically, their agenda remains fraught with

challenges as they depend heavily on methods such as maintaining secrecy while working with popular mass struggles so as to be able to penetrate more easily and eventually guide the struggles towards the course of the revolution. The wanton killings that are seen as part of 'collateral damage' in a situation of war place them at the level of the very state that enjoys monopoly over violence, and that which the Maoists claim to be fighting against. Above all, the failure of the Maoists in undertaking economic development in the midst of the revolution has created a sense of helplessness among their support base, for as analyst Bernard D'mello points out, "the workers, poor and landless peasants cannot be expected to put up with their abysmal condition over decades. But development can only take place on a relatively stable basis with the establishment of base areas, which is eluding the Maoists, and the longer this adverse situation prevails, the greater the chances of withering away of the movement's support base."

Notes :

¹ Charu Mazumdar Reference Archive, Marxist Internet Archive, available at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mazumdar/index.htm>.

² Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (Rupa & Co; New Delhi, 2006).

³ The Dandakaranya region is the forest region spread across east-central India covering the Abhujmad hills in the west and bordering the eastern ghats. The region extends over an area of 35,600 square miles and spread over the state of Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra.

- ⁴ "Taking on Maoists," *Frontline Magazine*, Vol 26, Issue 22, Oct 24-Nov 6, 2009.
- ⁵ The merger took place following years of negotiation. See Sanjay K Jha, "Political Bases and Dimensions of the Naxalite Movement," in P.V.Ramana eds *The Naxal Challenge: Causes, Linkages, and Policy Options* (Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd, Delhi; 2008), p.66.
- ⁶ "The Naxal problem: Failure of political leadership," *Rediffnews*, 27 April 2010 available at <http://news.rediff.com/column/2010/apr/27/the-naxal-problem-failure-of-political-leadership.htm> as on 2 October 2010.
- ⁷ MIS on Left Wing Extremist Districts, Planning Commission, Government of India, available at <http://pcserver.nic.in/lwe/AllSchemesReportStateWise.aspx> as on 2 October 2010.
- ⁸ Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha, "In conversation with Ganapathy," *Sanhati*, January 2010.
- ⁹ South Asia Terrorism Portal, Maoist Documents, *Party Constitution: Central Committee CPI (Maoist)*, available at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/partyconstitution.htm> as on 4 October 2010.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Jan Myrdal and Gautam Navlakha, "In conversation with Ganapathy," *Sanhati*, January 2010.
- ¹² Planning Commission (2008), *Development Challenges in Extremist-affected Areas*, Government of India, New Delhi.
- ¹³ Ibid. p.3.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. pp.14-15.
- ¹⁵ Apoorvanand, "Violence and Revolution," *Seminar Magazine*, No 607, March 2010.
- ¹⁶ K Srinivas Reddy, Revolutionary and Counter-Revolutionary Strategies of the Naxalites and the State, in P V Ramana (ed.), *The Naxal Challenge: Causes, Linkages and Policy Options*, p.92.
- ¹⁷ Rakesh Kumar Singh, "Analysis of Operational Strength of LWEs," *The Indian Police Journal*, Vol LVI-No.3, p.9-10.
- ¹⁸ Panos South Asia (2007), *Caterpillar and the Mahua Flower: Tremors in the India's Mining Fields*, New Delhi.
- ¹⁹ Open letter to the Unified Communist Party of Nepal from the Communist Party of India (Maoist), p. 5.
- ²⁰ Abhujmad forest region is a vast area of around 40,000 sq km spread across Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. The Maoists have declared this as a liberated zone where they run parallel administration.
- ²¹ Arundhati Roy, "Walking with the Comrades," *Outlook Magazine*, 29 March 2010.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Policy Programme of Janathan Sarkar, Maoist Documents, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/JANATHANA%20SARKARS.htm> as on 5 October 2010.
- ²⁴ Gautam Navlakha, "Days and Night in the Heartland of Rebellion," *Sanhati*, 1 April 2010.
- ²⁵ Ibid.