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## Combating Left Wing Extremism

10 Feb, 2010 [Ajit Doval, KC - Former Director, VIF](#) [View920](#) [Comments 0](#)

Does Left Extremism really pose a threat to India's security or is it something that media has hyped for want of better stories? After all, they don't stand question India's territorial integrity and apparently are not working as proxies of powers hostile to India. They, at best, want a regime-change, albeit that many others would also vote for. Or is it merely the problem of hunger and poverty that needs a soft approach. These and many other nuances notwithstanding the answer to the question is – Left Extremism poses a very serious threat which is real and has to be fought with total resolve. Any obfuscation, in the calibrated response would lead to delayed and hesitant response, increased costs and prolonged agony. Naxalites use violence to achieve their political goals, innocent lives and thus fully meet the definition of terrorism. Let India's principled position that 'Core issue' argument does not justify terror be diluted for serious implications. But let us examine why it is really a high potential threat.

Firstly, they seek to bring about the change through violence and annihilation of arbitrarily decided class enemies. In-built in the package is destruction of the state which stands for – democracy, rule of law and the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. More importantly, if hypothetically, the 'revolution' is successful and dispensation becomes tyrannical, oppressive and corrupt, which exercising absolute power it is bound to, how one get rid of it. Backed by might of a totalitarian apparatus - army, police, judiciary all included it will become unchangeable except through a bloody civil war or foreign intervention. Fortunately this is a remote possibility.

There is a second factor of which there is relatively lesser public awareness. The Naxalites feel no ideological compunction in aligning with and supporting India's security interests. In the name of supporting nationalist minorities, they support secessionists in Kashmir, insurgents in Northeast, LTTE in Sri Lanka and Maoists in Nepal. Charu Majumdar, their role model, opposed India during Bangladesh war and supported Pak military repression in the then East Pakistan. Of course, Chinese aggression in 1962 is an old story. So much for their ideology of supporting peoples movements against oppressive regimes. Similarly, in the name of Jharkhand, they indulge in worst form of caste violence. They have a self serving definition of 'have nots' and exercise ruthless violence against the poor who do not support them. The massacre of tribals belonging to Salwa Judum is illustrative. Over 90% of civilian victims of their violence are poor whose rights are subordinated to the Naxalites right to kill. Under the thin veneer of their revolutionary ideology lies a ruthless ambition for absolute power in pursuit of which they sacrifice all that is good for the country and the civil society.

But it is the third factor which makes the phenomenon most worrisome. It is a scenario that the 'revolution' does not succeed – which it never will - but the Naxalites, by their strength, engulf new areas, militarize itself and make large areas of the country non-governable. They stun to submission the poor and the deprived and provide protection or even undertake schemes for their socio-economic upliftment due to vitiated security environment. They are able to collect taxes, dispense justice, distribute government lands and siphon crores of Rupees from developmental funds to finance their misadventure and the government remains impotent. Naxalites have a vested interest in perpetuating poverty to conserve and expand their constituency. One only has to see to believe the magnitude of their deep entrenchment. And it is not a small area but running into thousands of square kilometers; one Punjab getting added to it every two years. The erosion of India's state power, weaken it internally, retard its economic growth, prevent social and economic upliftment of the poor and downtrodden and make politics of violence. This is the real danger.

Taking the trends of last 5 years, if we build a model of security scenario for the year 2010 it would present a bizarre picture. Over 260 districts in India, nearly half of India, would be naxal affected where the government's writ does not run. If we add to this the insurgencies in North East, militancy in J & K, Islamic terrorism, India's overall internal security landscape will present a frightening specter. The strength of left wing armed cadres would soar from the current 16,000 with backup support of thousands of 'revolutionary' militia, well trained and motivated. The arsenal of sophisticated weapons may be in the range of 10,000. Jan Adalat, where spot justice is dispensed, extending up to beheading of people, may increase from the present 3 per week to one every day. Collections levies estimated to be in the range of Rs.70 crores per month, with more money pouring in, may soar to over Rs.150 crores per month. This money in the backward and inaccessible tribal areas can cause havoc. With as little as 25% of this money, they may have the liquidity to sustain a guerilla army of 75,000/- a month. There will be no dearth of able bodied unemployed youth falling prey to this a temptation. In this backdrop, visualize the specter of Indian army deployed in the countryside in platoon and section strength facing murderous crowds in thousands, many in the crowd equipped with automatic weapons. They will either over-react leading to an unacceptable level of civilian casualties or will be disarmed and possibly lynched. It is noteworthy that despite sizeable army and two-third deployment of paramilitary forces domination of countryside in the tiny Kashmir valley and six worst affected districts of Punjab proved difficult. They will be required to dominate even the existing Compact Revolutionary Zone will be mind boggling.

For the response, first of all we should doctrinally accept it as a problem of terrorism and decide to deal with it as such. The Prime Minister should call an all-party meeting to build a consensus against providing any space to the naxalites for electoral gains or political appeasement. Proactively invoking Article 355 of the Constitution to be enacted empowering the centre to suo moto deploy central forces in badly affected areas. The state governments may be informed that provisions of Article 355 be invoked in the eventuality of breakdown of constitutional machinery if they fail to control the problem.

The number of policemen available for per one lakh population in all the naxal affected states is amongst the lowest and much below the national average. Chhatisgarh (92), Jharkhand (74), Orissa (92), Uttar Pradesh (88), West Bengal (97), Karnataka (97). This situation should be corrected immediately by increasing the number of policemen per 1 lakh population must be made available to the affected states. More important than the numbers is qualitative upgradation of manpower through selection, improved training and quality leadership. Except in Andhra Pradesh, police forces in most of the naxal affected states have poor mobility, are ill-equipped with inadequate weapons and lack the expertise to fight terrorism. These need to be urgently addressed. Special equipment for jungle warfare including air reconnaissance sensors, night vision devices, etc. should be made available. Intelligence is the critical component of all covert conflicts. Operational capabilities of state intelligence agencies at the police station levels must be built for undertaking tactical operations. Concerted efforts to choke their sources of finance and channels of procuring weapons and ammunition. If required, more stringent laws on the subject should be legislated.

A concerted effort should be made to access the affected population to disabuse their minds of false and misleading propaganda carried out by the naxal national media, think tanks and NGOs operating in the region could be leveraged for the purpose. These are only some illustrative policy ideas which need finely worked out action plans with well defined responsibilities; time bound deliverance and accountability for failure.

*The writer is former Director of the Intelligence Bureau*

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