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Countering New Tactics of the Maoists: Good Intelligence is the Key

17 Jan, 2013 [Dr. N Manoharan, Senior Fellow, VIF](#) [View581](#) [Comments 0](#)

As the whole nation was looking with concern at the brutal mutilation of Indian Army jawans at the Line of Control by Pakistani soldiers similar wanton act by Maoists in Latehar district of Jharkhand. After killing few CRPF jawans in an encounter in Katiya forest of the district in 2013, the Maoists booby trapped two of the bodies with IEDs. Tying explosives to dead bodies was not new to the Maoists. They have used various methods of causing mayhem and destruction before. But, the present tactics seem cruellest of all. Bombs weighing about 1.5 kilogram were planted inside the stomach of the two dead CRPF jawans. They were pressure bomb prototypes, which were to explode either at the time during autopsy. The bombs were made of a mixture of nitrate explosive and gelatine sticks, nine volt batteries and a detonator. Bomb disposal squads were quickly called in and the bomb was diffused. But, one bomb went off during evacuation killing three villagers during the removal of bodies.

From time-to-time, the Naxals have been trying new tactics to catch the security forces off-guard. Last year, they indulged in a series of abductions to force the authorities to accede to their demands. Some of the abductees included two foreign tourists, a member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), and a district magistrate of Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. In 2010, the attacks were characterised by ambushes in which power and casualties. Ambush in Dantewada district in April 2010 killing 76 jawans of 62nd Battalion of the CRPF is still fresh in memory. To prepare themselves to counter the new tactics, the Maoists move on to another innovative method, just to keep alive the 'element of surprise'. From the surprise element, the Maoists also tried new tactics as and when they were cornered and wanted to inflict maximum damage to the security forces. Without doubt measures would be taken to tackle booby-trapped bodies henceforth, but it is expected that Naxals will use new tactics in an attempt to meet new challenges. But the wisdom lies in pre-empting such efforts with honing of our jawans' skills in matter of counter-ambush training and good leadership at all levels especially at the junior levels.

Something that has come out clearly in the present incident is that it was not done impromptu, but was planned well in advance. Before planting on dead bodies of jawans, the Naxals were said to have carried out such experiments on animals like donkeys, dogs and goats. The fact that the bombs were neatly packed in a plastic container to ensure that it did not get moist due to blood also shows careful consideration of various technical aspects. Such planting of booby traps in the dead bodies is not a novel phenomenon especially, when one looks back at the annals of Indian insurgency. This incident, however, may have been first of its kind for the CRPF jawans.

After the Latehar incident, the CRPF Director-General Pranay Sahay observed, "I agree we were operating on general intelligence but we're trying to give our men the best." Therefore, real time and actionable intelligence is essential for any insurgency operation. It is all the more crucial if the enemy is invisible as in the case of Indian Maoists. Without reliable strategic and tactical inputs, any counter-insurgency force, however trained and sophisticated it may be, is severely handicapped.

The Indian Maoists may be having an edge over the government forces both on the quantity and quality of intelligence available to them. This advantage is due to their elaborate spy network, apart from having formal and informal informers. The former include sympathisers in rural areas, nearby towns and even far away cities. Informal informers are those who find the Maoist cause "genuine" and voluntarily provide information available to them. They could be activists, intellectuals, journalists or laymen. The Maoists also rely on open source information from statements, interviews, press releases and news reports, through which they gauge patterns of thinking and behaviour of the government and their movement to an extent.

On the other hand, the intelligence network of the government needs to become more effective. The issue is not dearth of, but several intelligence agencies both at the Central and State levels. Yet, the Central Reserve Police Force, identified by the Group of Ministers as a counter-insurgency force does not have a full-fledged intelligence arm of its own. It has to depend by-and-large on the intelligence in police and intelligence agencies where its units are deployed. It is vital to build up CRPF's own intelligence network that is sound in human aspects.

Technical intelligence capability of the counter-Maoist forces are presently not up to the mark, both in terms of equipment and human resources. The Air Force and the nodal TECHINT agency, National Technical Research Organisation, can be approached for the requisite assistance. The Indian Air Force can be of immense help in aerial reconnaissance, communication interception and terrain mapping.

More emphasis should be laid on human intelligence on Maoists who are invisible and evasive like a “fish in the water”. In this regard develop a proper network of informers consisting of locals who could be relied on for delivering credible and contact intelligence. Winn population would enable automatic flow of first hand information. Efforts should be made to penetrate the rank and file of the Maoist inside information. Such ‘soldiers in residence’ and informers should be provided with suitable communication mechanisms to pass on time.

Delayed information is as good as no information. What is also required on an urgent basis is a suitable informer protection mechanism are protected, it is difficult not only to sustain the present crop of informers, but also to develop their network further. At the same time intelligence should be carried out just to make sure that Maoist informers working within the government and in other areas do not should also be paid to enhancing investigative and analytical capabilities of the local police to tap maximum information from the Intelligence also has to target external linkages of Maoists that are forged for the purpose of procuring arms, training, funds, and proper accurate intelligence remains the most significant factor in successful counter-insurgency operations.

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