



Left Wing Extremism – The Threat and Response

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Six years back, when on November 4, 2004, the Prime Minister proclaimed Left Wing Extremism as the biggest threat confronting the nation that had to be met with a ring of resolve of a freshly elected government to take the bull by its horns. However, when he repeats the same now, it carries an air of helplessness at war footing notwithstanding, during the last six years, the area under Naxal influence has nearly doubled extending to nearly 203 districts in fourteen states. The number of armed guerrillas has swelled from less than 7,000 then to somewhere around 13,500 now. Left extremists, today, have many more and much sophisticated (the number has increased to be nearly 14000 as against 5500 in 2004) and have upgraded their tactics, field craft and skills in handling weapons and explosives manifold. They raise an expenditure of Rs. 1,200 Crore a year, which in an impoverished area of their dominance is a huge amount to create instability and enables them to pay regular salaries to their armed cadres. Economic conditions of the people have by and large remained unchanged despite sizeable developmental outlays - most of the funds either are misappropriated or siphoned off by the corrupt.

It would be erroneous to infer that the government took no initiatives both at security and developmental fronts to deal with the situation. However, in terms of the efforts made have failed to achieve the expected results. It makes it a case less of error of intention, and more of lack of capability, which in a national cause of much greater concern. The matter that needs to be pondered over is why a country of India's Comprehensive National Power is unable to cope with a threat from an ideology that has been defeated and discredited world over, is unable to counter an offensive by under-resourced and ill trained tribals and biggest democracy is unable to mobilize its civil society in its fight against the extremists, whose agenda is patently anti-national.

The first requirement for designing an effective response is to accept the realities as they are and to make a hard assessment of the enemy – his mindset, and goals. One can not win unless one fights and one can not fight till one is able to define the enemy – boldly and bluntly. One major reason why we have gone wrong in our responses and not derived full value out of our efforts and sacrifices is our fear to face the hard realities as they exist, notwithstanding the

What needs to be accepted by all those in power and those who aspire for it is that Left Wing extremism is pure and simple terrorism that fully meets the criteria of the term i.e. 'Use of violence to terrorise people for achieving political objectives'. Their armed struggle is for acquiring and then retaining political power through force and both in theory and practice they have not deviated from this goal. While often advanced causative factors –developmental, social, political etc.- may have acted on their own merit, for Maoists they are only instrumentalities to seize political control. In pursuance of this end, they are prepared to make a common cause with anyone who is inclined to give expression to their dissent through violence. They support everything that negates Indian nationhood - may it be the secessionists in Jammu & Kashmir, East, radical Islamic groups or armed ethnic groups. In an interview in 2007 Ganapathy, the Secretary General of CPI-Maoists asserted "We see the progressive anti-imperialist force in the contemporary world. It is wrong to describe the struggle that is going on in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir as fundamentalism. Our Party supports the Islamic upsurge". Commenting on 26/11 massacre of Mumbai, Bimal, Polit Bureau Member was quoted in Hindustan Times as "We do not support the way they attacked the Victoria station, where most of the victims were Muslims. At the same time, we feel the Islamic upsurge should not be basically anti-US and anti-imperialist in nature. We therefore want it to grow." Varavara Rao referring to North East insurgencies stated on May 13, 2007 that "The revolutionary, democratic and nationality movements, like the ones in Kashmir and the Northeast to unite, and something will come out of this unity". They will have to be fought and defeated at all planes – ideological, political, and political, and accepting this basic character of the threat will only compound the problem and prolong the national agony.

Having settled the goal, the next stage is working out the strategy to achieve it. It is obvious that the policy of 'blow hot blow cold' does not work and only indecisiveness of those in power. It also demoralizes the security personnel. Indecisiveness is a consequence of fear and needs to be shunned. The security forces, given the right resources, empowerments and leadership is quite strong and resilient to take on the Left Extremists. They need to be provided best communication equipment, armoured personnel carriers, night vision devices, portable gen-sets, direction finders etc. There is also an urgent need to improve the conditions, making safe their work places and keeping their morale high. Most importantly, tactical plans should be well deliberated upon by senior and experienced officers wherever possible duly rehearsed. It is particularly necessary where central forces have to work along side the local police forces.

Maoists are great political analysts who carefully work-out their long term strategy and tactical plans. Maoists in their political estimates assess, and justify, that the political class in the country, irrespective of the brand names that they carry, are fast losing their legitimacy and credibility. They elect to their positions more by virtue of legality of the process that catapults them to power than the moral authority, trust and respect of the people that they command. The credibility of the governmental apparatus to provide a sense of security and justice to the people, redress their basic grievances, assure development and assuage their anger has ebbed. Most of the extremist actions analysed in strategic terms are aimed at exploiting this in firmity and indulging in acts will further erode the legitimacy of the system. Their attacks on police and para-military forces are aimed at demonstrating that the coercive power of the government is a myth as it is even unable to hold its own. Their holding Jan Adalats, imposing fines and dictating terms for talks are calculated to undermine the government's ability to enforce its writ and authority. Their propaganda that government is only a 'paper tiger'. On the contrary, the state has been able to do little to demolish the contrived self image of the Left. The discordant voices within the government and display of confusion and indecisiveness immensely boost their moral. While the far flung news because of incidents of violence what is lesser known is their fast spreading influence in urban suburbs, among the trade unions, unemployed youth and tribal areas.

To meet this grave challenge the political class first needs to do a serious introspection and subordinate their party interests if not for the larger national interest to their own self interest. All political parties need to realize that they face an existentialist threat as the political power, the booty of the war, has to be seized through a classical model of Fourth Generation Warfare-(4GW) – a warfare where the enemy is invisible and the battle is for the control of civil society – through controlling the hearts and minds of the people or delivering results by redressing grievances of the people.

The modern day guru of Fourth Generation Warfare, William Lind aptly observes that, "If nation states are going to survive, people in power must earn and governed." Addressing the American Council of Foreign Relations he said "The heart of Fourth Generation Warfare is a crisis of legitimacy of the state". F model when he added that, "The establishment is no longer made up of 'policy types'- most of its important functionaries are placemen. Their expertise is remaining members of the establishment. Their reality is covert politics and not the competence or expertise". When the 4GW will visit them their response shutters on the windows of Versailles".

Majority of the people in Maoist affected areas and even their supporters and cadres have little to do with Maoism at ideological level. They are only alienate with real of perceived sense of injustice, oppression and indignity. Maoists are cleverly exploiting this sentiment to their advantage – caste conflicts in Bihar landlords in Andhra, discontent against forest laws in tribal areas, unemployment amongst youth and radicalism among Muslims are all given prescriptive through gun as the ultimate solution of all their problems. While the local grievances need to be effectively addressed through improved governance and there is also a need for creating mass awareness of the ultimate designs and consequences of what the extremists stand for.

Maoist propaganda must also be effectively countered, particularly at the political level. Democratic political parties have plenty of political arguments and to demolish the subversive propaganda of the Left extremists. They also have reach and access upto village levels with intimate social networking that needs task cannot be undertaken by the government agencies or the police. Additionally, through a concerted, credible and sustained psy-war offensive contradictions and practices, tales of their brutalities, collaborations with the rich to collect funds, incidents of moral turpitude etc. should be highlighted. The local and tanks and NGOs operating in the region could be leveraged for the purpose. Some of their front organizations, masquerading as think tanks and NGOs etc propaganda also need to be tackled effectively.

At tactical level the most important advantage of 4GW warriors is the advantage of invisibility. Only quality operational intelligence can make them visit operations aimed at pre-empting, preventing and punishing the depredators. It is also the only instrumentality through which they can be tactically surprised of speed and surprise neutralized. The tendency to raise additional battalions without corresponding accretion in operational intelligence capability creates extremists and only provides them more targets to hit at. State Police forces, with their intimate knowledge of the terrain, language and local people are best ground intelligence. They need to be resourced and trained for intelligence work. Diversion of at least 30% of central modernization grants to state police gradation should be made mandatory.

Money is one of the most important factors helping extremists to acquire weapons and explosives, raise their cadre strength by recruiting youth on regular out mass mobilization programmes. They are reportedly collecting Rs.1,600 crore a year, which is a big money for carrying out armed insurrection in an impromptu determined effort and much lower risk, the governments can take stern actions against business houses paying protection money, transporters paying levies taxes and corrupt government officials sharing the loot from the developmental funds. Most would be willing to cooperate if provided sense of security and p achieved at a much lesser cost.

There is no doubt that this menace ultimately will be contained and countered. A finely chiseled strategic response is required only to minimize its cost to valuable lives lost, growth and development stalled and innocent people falling prey to malicious propaganda of the extremists. The civil society and opinion role to play in this. They should create right pressures on the politicians and create broad spectrum awareness among the people to help bring about a quick response.

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