



Maoist Insurgency: Tactical Quiescent?

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Relative Slowdown

The monsoon period has traditionally been a time of relative quietude in rebellious activities of the Maoists. But this year, even before nature's rain lashing, there has been a noticeable dip in the number of major anti-state incidents perpetrated by them. Indeed, in the regions, there are visible signs of the Government's efforts to control the insurgency fructifying to encouraging results, tentatively at least.

There is relative quietude in the intensely Maoist affected areas in the states of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar, and so it is in the severely affected areas of West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. However, from the hazy inputs coming from various sources, it is easy to infer that the Maoists continue to remain in their ominous business from their 'liberated' bases in remote jungles.

Be that as it may, a traverse through the troubled areas indicates there have been some attitudinal realignments among the contentions of Maoist rebellion. This development therefore provokes deeper enquiry and analysis.

Reckonable Developments

If during the past three years, life and movement along the main arteries running across the Maoist affected areas had been relative interruptions, presently even among the people in interior areas a sense of release from the perpetual state of apprehension is palpable. It is the case that the insurgents have been run down; what seems to have actually happened is that a slew of events have converged to make the parties to the confrontation – Maoists, police and people – to pause, take stock and re-strategise.

Let us see as to what these events are and as to how are these likely to play out in the coming days. However, conditioned by the trend, it would be natural to expect subtle differences in the situation from one affected state to another.

Strengthening of Police Forces

Repeated warnings from intelligence agencies, security analysts and even the Army notwithstanding, it was only after the mass killing (Dantewara, Chattisgarh) in May 2010 that the public pressure to act with due urgency got infused among the policy-makers in the Police Departments. No doubt, much before that the Central Government had initiated many steps to equip the Central and state police to effectively fight the insurgency. But in the face of obdurate self-denial among the ruling political parties in all states barring Chattisgarh, such measures had made any worthwhile progress. The effort was diluted further by the absence of common cause among the police hierarchy and the states, who – as some in the know have attributed to their transient and mutually rotational incumbency – failed to rise above tribal competition and red tape. Even in the matter of good governance, various state public service departments had their own agendas dictated by the scope for influence and crony aggrandisement. Thus, proposals and plans proposed by one group among the state police departments, the departments of public works, health, education, rural development etc. got subverted by another group. That was an agreeable situation for political power brokers who found such cross-cuttings to be much to their advantages.

Once, however, the Maoist mayhem started hurting political interests, the same state hierarchy rose to the occasion. In a remarkably short time, within just a period of three years or so, the forces were substantially expanded in terms of manpower and infrastructure, motivated with modern weaponry and accoutrements, serviced with effective engineering works and communications, better trained, and above all, Maoist operations with due deliberation, overwhelming strength and responsive logistic support. Indeed, it has been a commendable purpose within the fraternity of civil services – the IPS being a part of that fraternity – in harnessing its grip over the system to obtain what was needed.

The results on ground has been reckonable, the Sukma debacle in December 2014 being but an one-off incident in nearly ten months. Recruitment, new raisings, build up of road and communication networks, fortification of police posts, mobility, administrative support, evacuation by air, and all such policing related initiatives which moved at a snail's pace earlier, saw a quantum acceleration during the period. Meanwhile, the state could sort out many of the inter-cadre officers' related heart-burns while also streamlining the inter-state difference in border police action. It could also prod other departments, particularly the Public Works and Health Departments, to be readily responsive to requirements raised by the police forces. It is not the case that every matter is hanky-dory, but there has definitely been much improvement in the situation from what the police forces had earlier been operating under.

Subjected to regular assault from the Maoists and public trivialising of their worth, the afore-stated developments have energised the police post or armoury has been allowed to be attacked, patrolling in fringe areas have been better organised and many of the Maoists which had been given a wide berth earlier, have been repeatedly traversed by strong patrols, thus dismantling a mental barrier.

There is today a palpable sense of confidence, even aggression, among the higher level police officers. Experience, however, should caution against overconfidence - even if words of caution do not seem to make much impression on a mood bordering on boisterousness. This is a consideration among the top police and state leadership.

Police Action

Better organised police action undertaken in deliberately defined areas is showing encouraging results. Much of the inhabited hinterland protected police operating bases from where area domination patrols operate at regular intervals. Movement in rural areas is safe developments out of special Left Wing Extremism (LWE) related allocations have commenced, the ever-absent government officials are at their post and many of the public services - health centres, schools, tele-communications, Public Distribution System (PDS) - are functioning alongside the innate pull of misappropriation, work-shirking and callous attitude as are ingrained into the society.

Among the Maoist cadres, the lure of 'percentage cuts' accruing from various social development schemes have led to dog-fights among and at the same time, caused the state and Panchayat functionaries wetting their lips in anticipation of the manna. Rural employment recruitment of local lads into the newly raised Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and India Reserve Battalions (IRB) are pulling the youths through hardships of rebellious ways. Energetic police actions having made life in the yonder difficult, and incentives becoming more attractive, troops have also started.

No doubt, the police forces have achieved quantum improvements in their counter-insurgency capability, particularly in preventive measures. The stage when they would be in position to take the fight to the insurgent strongholds is, however, yet far away.

Maoists' Setbacks

A new-found urgency in the state governments and the energised police actions have challenged the Maoist's unbridled domination over the state. The police no more remains as the insurgents' 'quartermaster' for supply of weaponry, and combined with concerted action by the state in gun manufacturing and ammunition filling industries in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Maoists are faced with a crunch over supply of arms and ammunition, the latter mostly. Similarly, arrest of several middlemen who arranged explosives for the insurgents has, to some extent, led to depletion of explosive devices.

The second factor that has impinged on the rebellion is the combined effects of preceding years of economic slowdown on one hand, funding of socio-economic developmental schemes in the Maoist affected areas on the other. The first has caused retardation in mining, allied business and a resultant drop in 'levy' extortion, while the second has lured away the Maoist cadres - never serious about radical socialism - to greener pastures of regular and quasi-legal earnings. More, the development schemes in progress and in planning, and control of local panchayats by councils' over these, has enticed away many key Maoists to the engaging games of group-aggrandisement, graft and brokerage in local politics. Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha is so affected by competition to make money that Maoist splinter groups have taken to fratricide when access to the loot is not forthcoming.

Killing, surrender and arrest of many ideologues, and more importantly, the key players who are generally referred to as 'area command' and 'third rung cadres into a quandary. Not graduated to the role of leadership and yet trying to establish their position, these wannabe leaders cannot consolidate themselves. Meanwhile, failure in expanding their 'urban party cells' and so garner more finances to buy weapons, pay the expenses of the insurgency, has added to the Maoist woes. The People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) cadres, who unlike the village and town cadres and collaborators are totally dependent on Maoist logistic chain, are the most affected.

In view of the setbacks discussed above, it appears that the Maoist leaders have decided to lie low while looking for means to build up their capacity. The policy is to let the hard core cadres lie dormant while remaining embedded in the rural and semi-urban society, and use their collaborators to spread their influence. PLGA would, in the meanwhile, operate from their deep jungle camps, train and bide time for the cadres to recover. Their giving way to police patrols traversing through the core of their 'liberated' areas is one indicator of that policy of do as you would be done by. Certain acts of violence would be triggered to keep the 'flame glowing', as they are wont to parrot at the slightest encouragement. It is probably to that purpose that a couple of blasts on rail tracks were affected in the jungles of Latehar (Jharkhand) in September-October 2014. Innocuous targets, superficial damages and wild location also being indicative of that policy.

Of course, any threat of police intrusion into their 'liberated' areas, from where the rebellion finds sustenance, would invite extreme retribution. This was done in November-December 2014 in the Chintagufa area of Sukma, Chattisgarh, a remote and forested hill area astride the Indra River, the Maoist's strongest fortress. Some among the police hierarchy understand that attempting to displace the Maoists from such of their strongholds amount to premature overreach of their forces. But there are many who give an impression of being overconfident, something that is not in their experienced mind.

The insurgency seems subdued - for the present. But it is gearing up at all times to reappear at the centre-stage.

Situation in Affected States

Needless to say, the insurgency situation varies in each of the Maoist affected states, the difference being in the hues of political problems, which in turn are influenced by the politics of power. Thus in **Chattisgarh**, sustained initiatives of a focused state administrative

police action and dedication of certain Non-Government Organisations (NGO) manifests in even the most violence prone areas find restoration of near-normal life. There is much enthusiasm among the people regarding various social-service, education, employment development schemes, so much so that the Maoists seem to be chary of interfering in development works and thus upsetting the p however, remain sanguine, as they aver, of the Government's eventual 'failure' given its 'corrupt foundations', and the resultant re-em 'disillusionment' for them to flock back to the 'Red Salute'. Similar scene is playing out in **Maharashtra** with commendable success acc efforts.

The situation in **Jharkhand** is ambivalent. Here, while the trader-miner-mafia-political-outlaw-Maoist nexus remains operative, the police the receiving end for long, have, on their own initiative, hardened their counter-insurgency posture. A tentative political leadership h police to undertake, without interference, what counter-Maoist operations may deliberately be organised within their resources. C domination operations are better organised and more frequent, leading to killing and arrest of many first and second rung leaders. De and the advantages these offer have weaned away many cadres and collaborators to the mainstream while fissures within the extren particularly on the question of sharing of extorted 'levy'. Notably, the run up to the state assembly elections has been peaceful more or l a popular fervour for development rather than the destructive revolutionary rhetoric. But the future course of insurgency would depen and effectiveness of the new government that has taken charge of the state in January 2015.

In **West Bengal**, the situation is unique. Domination of various party cadres, turncoats, lumpen elements and religious fanatics is so have lost their distinct identity. The state police suffers strong influence from party cadres, a situation that the central police forces de find rather dismaying. Maoist insurgency per se remains in the background, but afflicted with equally damaging ills, it is not a stable and

In **Odisha**, the unstated policy of the state government was to contain the spread of insurgency to new areas while lying low in the territory. In the past six months or so that has changed, and besides deployment of operating bases, area domination by police patrols The results have been satisfactory, particularly in arresting some top leaders, allegedly in mutual convenience.

The policy of mutually profitable 'accommodation' among petty politicians, outlaws and Maoists in **Bihar** is apparently still in force, confrontation while going about their business. That gives the impression of relative quietude in Maoist infested North-Western and Sou the state. As for Eastern **Uttar Pradesh** and **Madhya Pradesh**, Maoists have generally avoided overt insurgency in these areas and using these instead as their sanctuaries.

Progressive Measures

Recently, the Central Government has picked up threads from the initiatives of the previous regime and added some impetus to the cour Issues listed in the current 'Two-pronged Strategy' have distinctly been flagged into a 'Four-Pronged Doctrine', viz, 'security measur 'socio-legal empowerment' and 'perception management'. The ongoing Integrated Action Plan (IAP) of 'clear, hold, develop' in 88 affecte subsumed into a new 'Additional Central Assistance to LWE Affected Districts Programme' (ACALADP). To facilitate reach into remote a affected districts, the under construction road length has been increased to 5,500 kilometres, and with over 12 lakh title deeds disti provisions of the tribal-friendly Forest Rights Act, 2006 are finally bearing fruition. Much of these measures remain yet at the preparate little changes have actually occurred on ground, these have made a difference - the people are hopeful.

Supervised by the 'Inter-Ministerial Group', 'Coordination Committees' at the district, state and Centre level have begun streamlining dev well as the overall approach to the counter-Maoist strategy; these are functioning reasonably well within the ambit of usual local 'Oversight Committee' at Central level, comprising of ministers of Home, Finance, Tribal Affairs, Environment, Rural Development, Panchn Transport has been constituted recently with the aim of giving further impetus to implementation of the counter-Maoist strategy committees are to be constituted at the state level too. Enhancement of financial powers of police chiefs and proposed constitution c Welfare Council' are the other notable measures in this regard. However, these changes would deliver only if the state level political, police functionaries remain focused on containment of the rebellion.

In the overall context, with the insurgency in a state of relative dormancy, the situation seems to be turning in favour of the state. T matters to be wary of.

Analysis

Viewing from the ground, it is hard to deny that there has not been a better situation to disarm the insurgency and contain the Maoist there are certain possibilities and pitfalls which it would be wise to guard against.

Hopeful proclamations of the state administration and exuberance among the police forces notwithstanding, the situation remains critic where state-functionaries or even police forces fear to tread. The PLGA remains ensconced in their jungle camps, extortion goes on unab thrives. Police officials have learnt to converse in military terminologies without having the benefit of practising these nuances under rea the standard of training in the 21 Counter-Insurgency and Anti-Terrorist (CIAT) Schools have yet to mature. Obviously, rather t bureaucratic control, the CRPF leadership, since it has been committed to counter-insurgency role, needs to be tuned to practical experience on long-term basis. In brief, the level of counter-insurgency training and operational execution would have to be raised cons insurgency should the Maoists manage to escalate its level. That is a possibility which is not to be taken lightly.

In the final analysis, no insurgency can be defeated without sustained offensive action to run over the insurgents' bases - 'liberated referred to. Such offensive action can only be delivered by militarised, rather than police, forces, who are organised, trained, led, adminis in the manner military. The Government may take note of that fact.

There is little doubt that the Maoists are lying low and biding their time while waiting for finances to improve, organisational losses to rec the 'area' level particularly - and alternate sources of supply of weapons and ammunition to be found. Even if there has been softenin growing distractions of easy life and more agreeable opportunities as compared to life in insect-infested jungles, it would be naive to imag rebellion is about to be contained. Lastly, the real fear is that the rebels, when cornered, may enter into issue based alliances with elements and external adversaries in order to uphold their cause. That indeed would be catastrophic for the nation.

The present situation offers good prospects of controlling the Maoist menace. To do so, however, the course set is to be trod carefu distractions of short-term expediencies and partisan compromises.

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