



Naxal terror on wane, Red Corridor crumbles

*Published April 23, 2024
Publication No. R348-230424G*

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Bringing on board forest dwellers and tribal youth that are outside famed growth story through specially designed projects should form part of a comprehensive strategy

Introduction

Bharat's security forces undertook a massive counter-terrorism operation in the state of Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on April 16, 2024 to capture naxalite terrorists. In the over-night operation, 29 Naxalite terrorists were eliminated in the fierce gun battle. Shankar Rao, a notorious naxalite terrorist with reward of Rs 25 lakhs for his capture was neutralised in the campaign.

In the aftermath, an extensive haul of weapons including AK-47s and Indian Small Arms System (INSAS) rifles was reported emphasising extreme danger posed by these Left-extreme terrorist groups.

Over the years, scheduled tribe community living in interior villages of Chhattisgarh has had suffered big time due to ferocity and disruption caused by Naxalite terrorists operating in the region. Terrorists have not only hampered economic and social development but presented huge challenges for the people in this most backward region apart from difficulties for both the state and central governments. The conflict between security forces and communities on one side and naxalite groups on the other has made meaningful enhancements very difficult thereby trapping the region in a perpetual state of adversity.

This briefing seeks to offer a thorough analysis of the origin of Naxalite terrorism in the region, government's attempt to address this deeply entrenched problem, significant consequences for local residents and alternative approaches to resolve and move forward from these enduring challenges.

Terrorist Naxalite Movement

In March 1967, Naxalbari, a village in West Bengal was the origin of a violent movement spearheaded by Indian communist Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. Mao Zedong's purportedly revolutionary concepts influenced this violent movement

named naxalism. Naxalites, known for their brutal tactics, misled impoverished farmers and tribals in several parts including those in far flung hamlets of Chattisgarh.

It is a terrorist movement that seeks to overthrow Indian state and establish communist regime. They intentionally mobilise marginalized and isolated people pushing them to oppose the current status quo through violent struggle often with terrible consequences.

This guerilla movement gradually expanded reaching important geographical corridors such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, founder of left-wing extremist People's War Group (PWG) purposefully chose these locations christened as Dandakaranya region. Advantageous topographical region and distressing socioeconomic conditions served as perfect backdrop for mobilizing the illiterate or semi-literate tribal populations.

Chhattisgarh, a state rich in mineral and forest resources become a major centre for Naxal - Maoist operations. Scheduled Tribes primarily populating the districts of Dantewada, Bastar, Jashpur, Surguja, and Kanker became crucial for the insurgency. In 1979, a disruptive effort specifically targeted Bastar, the largest and most environmentally diverse among them, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive Maoist strategy. By 1995, Dandakaranya had become a bastion of Naxal activity under the leadership of Muppala Laxman Rao, commonly known as Ganapathy who became general secretary of PWG in 1992.

By 2000, the impact of this terrorist movement had spread to ten out of the 16 districts in Chhattisgarh indicating a substantial increase in operations. This period marked the beginning of more rigorous administrative actions designed to control the spread and consequences of Naxalite terrorism, marking a new phase in the government's strategy.

State & Central Governments' action

State government's response to Naxalite terrorism was through Salwa Judum, a "peace campaign", launched as a strategic counter-terrorism

effort by mobilizing communities opposed to violence by design. This campaign brought to forefront the plight of tribal communities which the Naxalite Maoists had instigated by misleading them and forcing them into a cycle of violence. They had to bear the brunt of this oppressive cycle through unwanted conflict.

There are two distinct phases to the government's approach to combating Naxalite terrorism. First, during 2005 -14 that began with the peace campaign or Salwa Judum where security forces trained local volunteers to protect villages and offer a constructive alternative to youth that were under pressure to join the CPI-Maoist ranks.

Another important effort in the same phase was marked by launch of Operation Green Hunt. This was a major anti-Naxal operation involving paramilitary and state forces in what was marked as "Red Corridor." This Red Corridor drawn by Naxalite terrorists included areas of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal.

Second phase of this counter-terrorism effort began in 2014 when Narendra Modi took office as Prime Minister. This campaign had several elements to sustained and extended operations such as Operation Hill Vijay, Operation Prahar, Operation Thunder, and Operation SAMADHAN-Prahar.

These operations were characterized by a multidimensional approach encapsulated in the acronym SAMADHAN: Smart leadership, aggressive strategy, motivation and training, actionable intelligence, dashboard-based key result areas and performance indicators, harnessing technology, an action plan for each theatre and cutting access to naxalites sources of finances.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah reported that these multifaceted efforts significantly reduced left-wing extremist violence. In 2009, there were 2,258 incidents of Naxalite attacks. But, by 2020 these violent incidents were reduced to 665 indicating 70 per cent slide. Also, related deaths decreased from 1005 in 2010 to 183 in 2020. This decline reflects effectiveness of the strategies that was a turning point in fight against Naxalite terrorism.

Major Attacks carried out by Naxalite Terrorists

Since their inception, the terrorists have targeted Indian security personnel and people unrelated to naxalite violent movement's activities and objectives. These terrorist acts have claimed lives of numerous leaders, innocent civilians, security forces and government officials. The catastrophic maoist strikes have exposed the region's security challenges.

S.No	Date	Place	Detail
1	May 2010	Bijapur	Maoists in Bijapur killed eight Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel by blowing up a bullet-proof vehicle.
2	June 2010		Naxalites killed twenty-six CRPF jawans in an ambush at a secret site, proving the terrorists' devastating capabilities.
3	May 2013	Darbha Valley	In one of the most serious political attacks in recent memory, naxalites assassinated 25 Congress leaders.
4	February 2014	Dantewada	A naxalite attack led to death of six police officers.
5	March 2014	Sukma	Naxalites continued their offensive in Sukma, a well-planned attack killed 15 security personnel.
6	April 2015	Sukma	Another clash in Sukma resulted in the deaths of seven police officers.
7	March 2017	Sukma	Naxalites killed 12 CRPF jawans before launching another horrific attack in April that claimed 25 more lives in the same district.
8	April 2017		A horrific Naxalite attack claimed lives of 25 CRPF soldiers.
9	May 2019	Gadchiroli	Following a Maoist attack that burned down 25 trucks at a construction site in Gadchiroli and landmine killed 15 Indian police officers and their driver.

10	April 2021	Sukma- Bijapur border	Naxalite - maoist terrorists ambushed and killed 22 security personnel near Jonaguda village.
11	April 2021	Dantewada	An IED detonation tragically killed 10 District Reserve Guard (DRG) men and their driver in Dantewada

These attacks not only highlight the gravity of naxalite threat but hint at prolonged influence on regional peace and stability.

Impact on Development

Naxalites terror operations cannot be seen as just a security issue or challenge to larger sovereignty. Constant terrorist insurgency by assorted naxalite outfits that operate more as private armies in Chhattisgarh posed substantial challenge to state's governance and advancement initiatives.

Continuous acts of ferocity and disruption have not only hindered government efforts in public interest but have had disproportionate effect on everyday life of local population and monetary prospects.

Continued naxalite operations have had its impact on development and expansion of critical infrastructure as well as blocked investment opportunities critical to the region's economic growth. As outcome, major infrastructure sectors such as healthcare, education, and transportation continue to lag leaving people without basic facilities that translate to better quality of life.

Cost of naxalite operations go beyond bloodshed; meaningless violence erodes the foundations of regional economy and stability. Naxalite operations frequently target and disrupt industries with considerable employment potential, leading to reduced number of jobs and economic instability.

Constant vandalism and violence have created an unpredictable climate in which progress has not only stalled but slowed. To end the cycle of violence and underdevelopment, Chhattisgarh needs a multifaceted approach that combines strict security measures with extensive socioeconomic policies.

The goal should not be merely to eliminate immediate risks but address the underlying structure that fosters naxalite terrorism. Chhattisgarh has the aptitude to foster all-encompassing development by ensuring safety and security of its resources, paving way for long-term success. Collective efforts made by the state and its inhabitants can only ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for all Chhattisgarh residents.

Concluding Observation

On June 13, 1967, then-Home Minister Y B Chavan addressed the Lok Sabha, describing armed conflicts in Naxalbari as acts of "lawlessness" that need to be crushed and controlled.

Unfortunately, the government did not take concrete measures at the time resulting in current situation in which these lawless groups comprise the most serious threat to Bharat's national security.

Naxalites' ongoing acts of terrorism have not only destabilized local governance but significantly hampered developmental projects, leaving the region rife with violence and hardship. This subtle effect undermines any efforts to improve socioeconomic conditions of indigenous populations, aggravating the very disparities and injustices that the insurgency claims to be fighting against.

Ideological indoctrination that manifested from theories of annihilation initially evolved naxalite groups more into lethally armed private gangs under different leaders. The movement that hitherto boasted of ideologies at one point of time is today bereft of any such principles today. Massive corruption, territory wars among different groups, linkages with overseas insurgency groups ranging from Pakistani jihadist gangs to Sri Lankan liberation armies, has rendered naxal terror an anti-peoples force.

Recruitment into these private armies that operate as naxalite groups of different denominations ranging from SUCI, Peoples War Group have largely dried up. Paid foot soldiers recruitment to refurbish their ranks and file is another dimension to the naxal story. Also, frequent internecine gang wars for spoils of looted money, arms, ammunition and seeking authority to lord over large tracks of forest produce is

something that has turned naxal terror all the more terror force 'without a purpose'. Rejection of out-dated Leftist terror ideas globally has had its impact on Bharat's naxalites as well. Their anti-Bharat stance has made them all the more singularly repulsive and distanced from the people.

But, to wipe out even the existing terror gangs, a comprehensive multi-dimensional approach needs to be put in place that goes beyond conventional measures from security and insurgency perspective.

It entails combining strong security measures with vigorous development projects specifically designed to bring the people into the famed Bharat growth story net.

Creating a safe and prosperous environment, one can reduce the appeal of insurgent doctrines. The fight against naxalite terrorism is much more than just restoring law and order; it is critical for defending Bharat's internal security and ensuring that youth and tribals living in hinterlands are freed from the shadows of violence and fear.

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