



Belling the Naxal Cat

After making a tactical retreat from various prominent fronts in West Bengal and elsewhere following the state offensive, the Maoists were waiting for an opportunity to strike back to make their sinister presence felt. The recent outrages resulting in the killing of hundreds of policemen and security forces including an SP in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and all the other Naxal affected regions of the country is just an example of what the Naxals are capable of. Such Naxal strikes only adds to the casualty toll and further emboldens the sinister forces as assiduously working against the Indian State in the so-called Red Corridor. Indeed, the many simultaneous attacks in recent times have been the deadliest of the extremist violence our country has seen in recent times.

The Maoists seem to have struck with lot of precision and planning. The modality and dynamics of the strike are said to be somewhat reminiscent of the early seventies in West Bengal. The worst strike took place in Rajnandgaon, barely 70 km from the state capital of Raipur. This points to the audacity about the functioning of the Maoists these days. They appear intent on moving closer to the seat of authority from the forests and tribal areas. If some of the intelligence reports are to be believed, the Naxals are working hard to make forays into towns and cities through recruitment of more and more volunteers.

The slain SP, who was on the Naxal hit-list for quite some time, is said to have been targeted for his deemed success in breaking the extremists' urban network in Bhilai city in Madhya Pradesh. Another SP lost his life in Jharkhand's Pakur district few years back. The way Naxals could pull off these strikes with deadly effect points to the proverbial chinks in our internal security armour and to the need for further sprucing up our intelligence and internal security apparatus.

Rightly, the Naxalism has been termed as the biggest threat to the national security by none other than the former Prime Minister himself. The Union Home Minister Mr. Rajnath Singh has also bracketed Maoists with terrorists for the threat they pose to the internal security. Be it noted that CPI (Maoists) has been declared as a banned organisation by the Centre barely a few weeks ago.

While there still seem to be no consensus on banning the Naxals, the time definitely has come to take the Naxal threat more seriously than has been felt so far. The former Union Home Minister Mr. P. Chidambaram rightly believed that the Naxal menace had so far been underestimated which allowed the Left-wing extremists to consolidate and spread their wings. The present Union Home Minister has promised that the battle against Maoists ultras would be joined in full earnest through sustained efforts and drive.

The ban and the branding of Maoists as terrorists should further convince the skeptics about their insidious design on the Indian Nation. We need to find out better ways of dealing with this internal adversary masquerading as Left Radicals. There is not only need for infrastructural upgradation in terms of better logistics, equipment and arms, there is also need for better and more scientific ways of gathering intelligence. Our police force needs to be better trained and better motivated to face the Naxal challenge. The training needs to be customised to make the force understand the various nuances of anti-insurgency operations. Besides, there is undoubtedly a need for better execution and better targeting of developmental schemes in the Naxal-infested areas to extirpate the grounds of frustration and alienation there as per the recommendation of an expert panel recently.

Even though many of the politicians and observers believe that the so-called 'liberated' or 'compact revolutionary' zones are nothing but media hype, we need to take the Maoist challenge in its true perspective. This, *inter alia*, requires a massive overhaul of planning and coordination, along with arming and training of specialised forces. The Naxal threat appears in sharper relief once we look at the latest statistics for this year. The sundry violent incidents involving Naxals often exceed those involving terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir and North-East put together if a recent report is to be believed.

The Government is learnt to have appointed a military advisor to help out in operational matters. Plans are also being drawn up in close consultation with different state governments. Proper coordination among the affected state governments along with a unified command structure seems to be need of the hour. The Naxal expertise in executing ambushes and mine blasts point to the extent and amount of challenge Naxalism poses to our country.

A special task force has been put in place which is supposed to coordinate among disparate police forces of different states. This is likely to help in tackling the Naxal threat better. The same is expected to not only advise the security agencies on specialised training, but is also supposed to help out in operational and logistical coordination. The manner in which our policemen are being repeatedly targeted in ambushes makes it necessary to constantly assess and improve tactics and strategy. The counterforce to Naxals has to be speedier and unorthodox beyond the mundane operating systems.

The truth is that the Naxals are a confused lot, not knowing what they wish to do. They actually do not seem to have any ideological mooring or any vision for the alternative they proffer vis-à-vis the system they seem to be fighting. The Indian democracy gives every ideology ample opportunity to seek popular consent through the first-past-the-post system. But till the time the Naxals do not see reason, an efficient and effective counterforce seems to be the only alternative. It is also generally agreed by all the experts and stake-holders that

apart from the security response to the Naxal threat, the State also needs to slowly ratchet up the pace of development in the Naxal-affected areas to bring the disaffected lot aboard the developmental bandwagon. An effective policy making coupled with an efficient field-level execution is what is need to better tackle the Naxal menace in the country.

Salient Points

- Naxals intent on moving closer to the seat of authority from the forests and tribal areas.
- Naxals seems a confused lot and not having any ideological mooring.
- Naxals pose the biggest threat to the national security.
- The ban of Maoists as terrorists should further convince the skeptics about their insidious design on the Indian Nation.
- Infrastructural upgradation, scientific intelligence gathering, customised police training, etc. is needed.
- Better execution and better targeting of developmental schemes in the Naxal-infested areas is required.

Glossary

Sinister: harm

Assiduously: constant

Chinks: a narrow opening

Masquerading: false outward show

Disparate: essentially different

Ambushes: instance of lying concealed so as to attack by surprise

Proffer: an offer