

THE RED ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: THE NAXALITES, INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON AUSTRALIA¹



Radicalised communism has been a part of Indian domestic politics since its appearance following an incident in the village of Naxalbari during 1967. The town is reflected in of the name of the insurgents, the Naxalites. In the modern era Australia has been required to strengthen its strategic partnership with India. The development of a stronger and more resilient strategic partnership should involve being aware of the threats that each partner faces, especially one as entrenched and as active and relevant as the Naxalites. This provides the imperative to undertake research regarding the most recent form of the Naxalite insurgency, the Communist Party of India Maoist, and the policies which the government of India pursues in relation to the counter insurgency campaign. This paper considers the characteristic features of the Maoists, the policies of the previous government as well as the indications regarding the policies of the current government and the implications for the region and Australia.

Introduction

Radicalised communism has been a part of India's domestic politics since its appearance in 1967. The most recent manifestation is the Communist Part of India- Maoist (CPI-M). This paper seeks to identify the key features of the CPI-M as well as the policies which were implemented by the previous central government to counter the threat. The paper's intent is to provide possible recommendations regarding policies which could be implemented by the new government as well as highlighting the importance of this issue to Australia and its burgeoning relationship with India. The CPI-M, also referred to as Maoists and Naxalites, has been described by the previous Indian Prime Minister as the greatest threat to India's internal security.² The claim that a threat is of such a magnitude creates an imperative to study and discuss the threat, its attributes and the official responses to the threat. By evaluating the attributes of the CPI-M it is possible to determine what overall level of threat is actually posed by the insurgency thereby identifying whether the sentiment of the previous Prime Minister represents the situation in the state or if it is an exaggeration for a political purpose. An evaluation of the current and previous governments' responses will be able to determine whether or not the tactics are effective. This paper has three primary sections, an analysis of the insurgency, an analysis of the government's response to them and an evaluation of the both as well; as the implications for the region generally and Australia specifically. The attributes of the group which are to be evaluated are: the motivation and objectives, recruitment, leaders, popular support, sanctuary and external support as well as weapons and tactics of the CPI-M. The second section of this paper will focus on the government's response to the group. These responses will be classified as being related to the security forces, economics, politics and society. The analysis will be underpinned by a brief history of communism in India. The responses by the governments are to be considered in relation to counter insurgency theory. Once the policies have been discussed this paper will evaluate the insurgency, the government and the implications of the conflict on India's region and Australia. This paper seeks to highlight the threat posed by the CPI-M while also

¹ This paper was initially written for a research project as part of the MRICT at Macquarie University

² Press Information Bureau, *Focus on Good Governance, Reducing Deprivation and Alienation: Prime Minister, Concluding Remarks at the 2nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers on Naxalism*, 2006, date of access 13 November 2013 http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page.asp?relid=17128.

acknowledging the positive actions which have been taken by the Indian government and associated agencies, such as the police, in countering the Maoist threat.

Historical Development

The attempt to introduce communist governance into India is not a recent phenomenon and is linked to the process of decolonisation in India. When India gained its independence from the British Empire not all groups within Indian society were integrated into mainstream politics. The earliest form of the Communist Party of India appeared in the 1920s with the first constitution of the party being adopted in 1925, before independence.³ The party then became radicalised in 1967 and has continued in various guises to the current day. At first the Communist Party of India was a united group which was predominately Marxist in nature. The Party then splintered resulting in the formation of multiple factions including the Communist Party of India-Marxist, the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre of India among others. These organisations functioned separately from each other with differing goals and tactics based on their specific motivations. In 2004 the Maoist Communist Centre of India and the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist People's War Group merged into one party becoming the Communist Party of India-Maoist. In 2009 the party was officially banned through the application of the *Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act* of 1967.⁴ While the Communist Party of India-Maoist is officially banned, Maoists have remained active which has resulted in casualties among civilians and security personnel. There is still a Marxist presence in India. This paper however focuses on the Maoist faction as it is more active.

The term Naxalite comes from the town of Naxalbari where a landless labourer was killed by his landlord in 1967.⁵ This event was responsible for the radicalisation of the Communist Party of India. The Naxalites sought to support the landless or poor against those they claimed were against the local populations including the landlords and the government as is relatively typical of communist revolutions. This class struggle became important for the overall communist movement. It should be noted that while there are generic epistemological similarities between the Communist Party of India-Maoist and the Communist Party of India-Marxist the differences potentially lead to conflict. An example of the conflict between the two organisations occurred in 2010; several Marxists were killed by Maoists while the Marxists were celebrating a return to their traditional stronghold. The Maoists considered the areas to be under their control.⁶

A long term feature of Indian society has been the caste system. Each individual in India belongs to a caste which is determined by their family. The highest caste is the Brahmin, or priests, and the lowest is the Dalit who have been derogatorily referred to as God's Children and Untouchables. The caste system is highly ingrained within Indian society. Upward mobility between castes is virtually impossible as a person is unable to control the status of the family into which they were born. In 2007 the Indian Supreme Court ruled that there was no way in which an individual could change their caste.⁷ The caste which one belongs to determines who they are allowed to marry, what jobs they can be employed in and what university the individual is allowed to attend. The caste system has been considered negatively by the international community, especially in the West. Pakistan also has a caste

³ M.P Singh, R Saxena, *Indian Politics: Constitutional Foundations and Institutional Functioning*, 2011, PHI Learning Private, 2nd edition, p. 293.

⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs, *Naxal Management Division*, 2013, date of access 04 November 2013, http://www.mha.nic.in/naxal_new.

⁵ S Adige, 'CPM 'Reclaims' Lalgarh', *Political Events*, vol. 28 no.42 2010, p.43.

⁷ Times of India, *Can't Change Caste, SC to College Student*, 2007, date of access 20 July 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Cant-change-caste-SC-to-college-student/articleshow/2586617.cms>

system due to the country's origin as part of India. The Communist Party of India and its factions through the years have claimed that they seek to counter the effects of the caste system on individual's ability to achieve their aspirations and remove it completely. While this is nominally the case, CPI-M cadres have indicated the caste system has been reinforced within the insurgency and are threatening to create splinter groups to counter the perceived caste based challenges.⁸

Motivation and purpose

The motivation of an insurgency can provide information about the nature of its struggle. Motivation and objectives are required for any group as it provides the basis for membership and tactics. The Maoists, like many communist based insurgencies, are nominally motivated by the wealth gap within India and its polarising effect on society. The economic developments in India have not positively affected all areas of the country due to geopolitical and social issues. A differentiation in wealth exists between poorer groups, such as the Adivasi tribal people, and the wealthier groups in society allowing for the exploitation of the poorer classes by the wealthier due to the caste system, social status and national traditions. A causal link between the uneven distribution of wealth and social status is a general motivation of communism. The Maoist aspect of the group's motivation can be seen most clearly in their tactics which will be discussed below. The stated objective of the Communist Party of India-Maoist is to "complete the democratic revolution in India".⁹ Another, more operational, objective of the group is the overthrow of existing governmental structures and their replacement with communist administrations.¹⁰ This is to be achieved through armed struggle.

Weapons

The weapons used by the Maoists are a combination of those which have been acquired by the group and those which have been constructed by members of the movement itself. It has been claimed the group has developed the ability to manufacture AK-series rifles.¹¹ Another class of weapon which is created by the insurgents is improvised explosive devices.¹² These are used by multiple insurgencies across the world and are effective as they are designed to be hidden from the targets. Landmines have also been used effectively by the Maoists with some which had been planted by the Maoists having been recovered by police.¹³ As noted above the movement is also able to acquire weapons, the collection of which is achieved through various methods; some weapons are provided to the movement by other entities which offer support, such as China and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).¹⁴ China's involvement in the conflict will be discussed below in greater detail. Other weapons have been looted from police and other security forces by the Maoists.¹⁵ Efficient use of weapons requires sound tactics for an insurgency to achieve their desired goals.

Tactics

⁸ C Das, *Divided Maoists Turn on Each Other*, April 2013, date of access 17 July 2014, http://khabarsouthasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2013/04/24/feature-01.

⁹ IHS Janes, *Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-M)*, 30 June 2013, date of access 10 August 2013, <http://janes-ihs-com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/CustomPages/Janes/DisplayPage.aspx?DocType=Reference&ItemID=+++1320772>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² R Tripathi, '40 IEDs Seized in Chhattisgarh in 1 Week', *The Indian Express*, 2013, date of access 13 November 2013, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/40-ieds-seized-in-chhattisgarh-in-1-week/1194213/>.

¹³ Times of India, *Landmine Seized in Kandhamal*, 2013, date of access 13 November 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-02-16/bhubaneswar/37132983_1_landmine-j-n-pankaj-security-forces.

¹⁴ A Bhat, 'Are India and Burma Likely to resolve Border Issues Soon?', *The Asian Age*, 2013, date of access 2013, <http://www.asianage.com/ideas/are-india-and-burma-likely-resolve-border-issues-soon-057>.

¹⁵ Indian Express, *Five Naxals Armed with Weapons Arrested in Chhattisgarh*, 2013, date of access 13 November 2013, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/five-naxals-armed-with-weapons-arrested-in-chhattisgarh/1157583/>.

The Maoists have multiple tactics which have been used in their campaign. Overall the insurgency follows a strict adherence to the application of Mao Tse Tung's prescription for a People's War. The Indian Maoists are involved in organising a more traditional insurgency campaign than has been seen globally in recent years in comparison to the Al-Qaeda movement which primarily relies on individuals globally to continue their campaign rather than a centralised body. The advantage of the Maoists' use of a traditional form of insurgency is that the traditional counter insurgency tactics should continue to be effective in providing an approach to counter the threat. The movement's tactics have changed as the area of the operations has expanded into the urban environment. Mao Tse Tung's approach to an insurgency was one that began with guerrilla tactics which comprised of members of the rural population and culminated in a conventional battle against the government which ideally would bring victory to the insurgents.¹⁶ It is an interesting tactical consideration that while the Marxist element of communism in India did not initially support attacks on security personnel the Maoists have always made use of that tactic in line with their doctrine.¹⁷ The Maoists were originally focused on agrarian-based support and causes but a year after radicalisation the leadership noted that the peasants were a more effective fighting force if they were focusing on state power rather than a lack of food.¹⁸ Since the 1960s time the movement has become increasingly urban in nature due to changes which the Indian society and economy is facing in the modern era. The Naxal Management Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs' figures indicate that there has been an increasing trend in the number of violent incidents between 2010 and 2012 in the states which have a larger urban population within the states of interest.¹⁹ In those which are more rural the number of incidents have been decreasing over the same period.²⁰ It should be noted that each of the states has less than fifty percent of the population living in an urban environment.²¹ The overall trend in urbanisation provides further support to the claim regarding the number of incidents. The changing environment from rural to urban has resulted in changes in the way the Maoists choose their targets. In an urban environment, attacks on security personnel are easier as the security personnel are in greater proximity to the Maoists. However the shift to a semi-urban environment has led to increases in arrests of Maoists in terms of absolute numbers.²² The difference in strategy between rural and urban areas was not planned for by the early leadership, was at the time it was not a consideration based on India's population, which meant that there was to be no difference in how the attacks occurred.²³ Changes in Indian society has meant that the urbanisation of the state has resulted in the forced adaptation of the tactics used by the CPI-M. The security forces represent the state as they maintain and enforce its laws and the policies of the government. By attacking the security forces, a symbolic target, the Maoists seek to spread terror. A group can use terror without being labelled a terrorist organisation as it is a tactic often used by insurgencies.²⁴ The CPI-M has used ambushes as a tactic as evidenced by an incident in 2013 in Chhattisgarh state when Maoists ambushed the vehicles occupied by a group travelling with Mahendra Karma and Uday Mudaliar, senior figures in the previous Indian government.²⁵ In this attack the Maoists

¹⁶ IHS Janes, op. cit.

¹⁷ S Ghosh, *The Maoists: A Maoist Experiment*, Firma K.L Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1974, p.117.

¹⁸ C Mazumdar, 'One Year of Naxalbari Struggle', *Liberation*, June 1968, cited in S Ghosh, *The Maoists: A Maoist Experiment*, Firma K.L Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1974, p.38.

¹⁹ Naxal Management Division, *Naxalite Statistics*, 2013, date of access 04 November 2013, http://www.mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/NaxalStats-270813.pdf.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Maps of India, *Indian States and Union Territories*, 2013, date of access 03 November 2013, <http://www.mapsofindia.com/states/>.

²² Naxal Management Division, op. cit.

²³ S Ghosh, *The Maoists: A Maoist Experiment*, Firma K.L Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1974, p.118.

²⁴ V Williams, *Security II Insurgency and Non-State Challenges*, lecture given at Macquarie University, July 29 2013, accessed 04 November 2013 <http://content.echo.mq.edu.au:8080/ess/echo/presentation/9667bcf4-cf41-477d-897b-67d483c66864>.

²⁵ S Bagchi, 'Mahendra Karma Killed, V.C. Shukla Injured in Maoist Attack', *The Hindu*, 2013 date of access 13 November 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/mahendra-karma-killed-vc-shukla-injured-in-maoist-attack/article4750467.ece>.

fatally shot Karma and Mudaliar along with eighteen other people.²⁶ The area which has been affected by the Maoists is referred to as the 'Red Corridor'. It runs from the Indian-Nepalese border to southern India.²⁷

Command and Leadership

Military style operations require a clear command structure to enhance stability and effective functioning. The Maoists are no exception. There are multiple committees that form the central command of the group which are organised in a hierarchical pyramid with less members involved in the highest levels of decision making within the insurgency. The most senior is the Politbureau, led by the General Secretary followed by the Central Committee.²⁸ As the CPI-M was formed by a merger between two separate insurgencies as such the leadership of both groups would need to be represented in both the Politbureau and the Central Committee. Until his death in 2011 the Communist Party of India Maoist was led by Mallojula Koteswara Rao, alias Kisenji. Since this event the leadership of the CPI-M has continued with Muppala Lakshmana Rao, who uses the nom de guerre Ganapathy, as the general secretary.²⁹ Structurally below the Central Committee are the regional bureaus, state, zonal and district committees.³⁰ These committees are responsible for the tactics and activities of the smaller groups and focus on the operational and tactical level. The Central Committee in contrast deals with strategic level planning. The Maoists also have dedicated propaganda and intelligence bodies; the Central Propaganda Bureau and the People's Security Service respectively.³¹ The concern in 2005 was that the CPI-M would attempt to unite insurgencies with diverse aims across the country such as ULFA and the Indian Mujahedeen^{32,33,34} If all the insurgencies had unified this would have meant that the government would not have been able to effectively counter them due to the numbers of insurgents and it would have placed a drain on government resources. This has not eventuated as attested to by the conflict between the Maoists and the Marxists. In addition to its leadership an insurgency is only able to function as long as they have recruits.

Recruiting and Popular Support

The Maoists recruit from four main demographics. These are the Adivasi people, the poor peasantry, landless labourers and academia.³⁵ These classes are all likely to resist the government through communist ideals. The popular support aspect of the insurgency will be discussed later. Indirect support groups are a potential source of recruits. Members who have been arrested include chemistry honours students, among others.³⁶ Membership is also not solely limited to males. There have been females who have decided to fight as part of the membership.³⁷ As the insurgency has moved into an urban environment the people who are likely to join the insurgency have changed. A poor farmer placed in an urban environment

²⁶ Ibid.

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²⁸ IHS Janes, Op cit.

²⁹ A Menon, 'Rise of Muppala Lakshman Rao and His Ways', *India Today*, 2013, date of access 23 September 2014, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/rise-of-muppala-lakshman-rao-and-his-ways/1/273739.html>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² S Jha, 'Left-Wing Extremism in 2004: An Assessment, 2005, date of access 04 November 2013, http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/LeftWingExtremismin2004_SKJha_030205.

³³ W Hussain, *Peace Audit Northeast: The Naxal Spread and its Local Linkages*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Special Report 157, 2014, p.8.

³⁴ C Das, *Maoist Split Shakes Rebel Movement*, July 2014, date of access 17 July 2014, http://khabarsouthasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2014/07/01/feature-03.

³⁵ S Jawaid, *The Maoists in India: Origin and Failure of the Maoist Revolution Strategy in West Bengal 1967-1971*, Associated Publishing House, 1979, pp.39-46.

³⁶ S Adige, 'Maoists Recruiting Students in Their Cadre', *Political Events*, Vol 28. No.44, 2010 p.41.

³⁷ Times of India, *Women cadres Take Bigger Roles in Maoist Groups*, 2013, date of access 13 November 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-07-01/raipur/40306364_1_cadres-recruiting-women-ib-official.

would be in unfamiliar surroundings as would a city person in a rural environment which would reduce the individual's effectiveness. It has been noted that those who are recruited from the city have not always been able to integrate with their rural comrades as there is not the same understanding of life in a rural environment.³⁸ This is also due to the fact that the motivations within an urban environment are different to the motivation of the rural cadres even though the enemy is the same.

As noted in the Jane's brief on the CPI-M there is no accurate estimate of the popular support for the group quantitatively though it can be definitely said to exist as demonstrated through the continuation of the conflict.³⁹ Almost all counter insurgency practitioners and theorists agree that popular support is required for an insurgency group to continue its campaigns.⁴⁰ As mentioned above, in India much of the support for the Maoists comes from the Adivasi tribal people, poor peasant, landless labourers and academia.⁴¹ The number of incidents may not only illustrate the tactics employed by the group but also demonstrate support for the movement. The Left Wing Extremism Division (previously the Naxal Management Division) of the Ministry of Home Affairs notes that there are sections of the Indian population which have an idealised view of the Maoists and attempts to highlight that violence and armed struggle are the central tenants of the Maoists approach to the insurgency campaign.⁴² Many states in India have been affected by the insurgency with the Naxal Management Division listing nine individual states which have been affected by Naxal violence. These states were chosen by the Maoists as there is a large agrarian population as well as urban development. This form of state would highlight the difference in wealth among the population and theoretically provide supporters for the Maoists. The number of incidents in three of the four most urban of these has shown an increasing trend.⁴³ This would suggest that support exists for the Maoist cause in these states and it is reflecting the societal changes within India. There has also been evidence that some support has been garnered from the corporate sector. A conference of businessmen for example was accused of hearing a paper making recommendations about the development of business in India which had been written by an imprisoned Naxalite.⁴⁴ This suggests that it is not the traditional groups alone who support the movement but other non-traditional groups as well. The supporters of a radical movement not only provide sanctuary for the insurgents but also provide a source of intelligence on government forces and activities.⁴⁵

External Support

One benefit of popular support and sanctuary is the ease with which an insurgent can make use of the sanctuary. Sanctuary in a foreign state provides insurgents with protection against prosecution by state officials. Most of the support for the Maoists comes from other insurgencies including the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, the Parti Karkerani Kurdistan in Turkey and, in the past, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.⁴⁶ These groups have been or are involved in struggles in their own states and are more nationalist in nature

³⁸ S Jawaid, Op cit. p.45

³⁹ IHS Janes, Op cit.

⁴⁰ British Army, British Army Field Manual: Counter Insurgency, vol. 1 part 10, 2009, date of access 04 October 2013 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/16_11_09_army_manual.pdf.

⁴¹ S Jawaid, pp.39-46.

⁴² Ministry of Home Affairs, *Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Division*, June 2014, date of access 12 July 2014, http://www.mha.nic.in/naxal_new.

⁴³ Naxal Management Division, *Naxalite Statistics*, 2013, date of access 04 November 2013, http://www.mha.nic.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/NaxalStats-270813.pdf.

⁴⁴ S Adige, 'Corporates, Naxal Link Worries Centre', *Political Events*, vol.28, no.10, 2010, p. 14-15.

⁴⁵ V Williams, Op cit.

⁴⁶ IHS Janes, Op cit.

than the Maoist conflict in India, with the exception of Nepal. In the case of the Nepalese Maoists the insurgency was able to enter legitimate politics and has become part of the official governance of that state.⁴⁷ It has been claimed that Indian Maoist were trained in Nepal.⁴⁸ Nepal has denied the claim.⁴⁹ There is also evidence of support for the Maoists from China. This has been demonstrated through the development of joint training camps between the Maoists and the People's Liberation Army, such as those in Yunnan province.^{50,51} The benefit of having support from a state entity is the resources which become available to the group both financially and in the provision of training. The Maoists have become more powerful through the relationship. The Naxalites also have affiliations with the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia which, as the name suggests, is an umbrella organisation for Maoist groups.⁵² These groups form support for the Maoists in India which can aid in their attempt to realise their objectives. The support is not always one way. In many cases the Maoists also provide support to the other groups.⁵³

China has been implicated in the conflict between the CPI-M by multiple academic sources. Their involvement includes the provision of training camps mentioned above. Evidence has also been provided by some Indian scholars and policy officials that China has been involved in the sale of weapons which are received by the CPI-M. This is not always a direct transaction with organisations such as the ULFA providing a conduit between the Chinese arms dealers and the Naxalites.⁵⁴ A.J Anoop claims that in 2009 the Indian Home Secretary was confident that the Chinese were providing weapons to the Maoists in India.⁵⁵ As noted by BP Routray some of the arms which are purchased in China are transported through Myanmar.⁵⁶ This has ramifications for the region as the United States of America and other states lift the sanctions which have been placed on Myanmar for many years. The transportation of arms may also suggest to the international community that the state is unable to control the flow of goods through its borders. Anoop also notes that the Chinese have never condemned the actions of the Naxalites and the government has actively protected those who seek to support the Indian Maoists.⁵⁷ Singh notes that the Naxals themselves do not criticise the actions of China; for example they call for the self determination of Assam and Kashmir but do not make any claims regarding Tibet's independence.⁵⁸

Counterinsurgency Theory

There are many sources of counter insurgency theory from academics and practitioners. These sources consider different aspects to be vital for success in any counter insurgency operation though some are common to all. As mentioned previously all theories suggest that the key to success in a counter insurgency campaign is to gain the support of the local population.⁵⁹ In any population there is a minority which will always support the government,

⁴⁷ Times of India, *Nepal's Maoist Party Not to Join Government*, 2013, date of access 20 July 2014,

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/Nepals-Maoist-party-not-to-join-government/articleshow/27712972.cms>.

⁴⁸ S Adige, 'India's Maoists Trained in Nepal', *Political Events*, vol.28, no.10, 2010, p. 15.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ IHS Janes, *Op cit.*

⁵¹ RSN Singh, *Maoists: China's Proxy Soldiers*, India Defence Review, vol. 25, no. 3, 2010, date of access 20 July 2014

<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/maoists-chinas-proxy-soldiers/>.

⁵² IHS Janes,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Singh, *Maoists: China's Proxy Soldiers*

⁵⁵ AJ Anoop, *China-Naxalite Linkages: Gauging its Dimensions*, Vivekananda International Foundation, date of access 20 July 2014,

<http://www.vifindia.org/article/2011/march/25/China-Naxalite-linkages-Gauging-its-dimensions>.

⁵⁶ BP Routray, *Naxal Violence: Expanding into India's Northeast?*, 2013, date of access 20 July 2014,

<http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/naxal-violence-expanding-into-indias-northeast-3795.html>.

⁵⁷ Anoop, *China-Naxalite Linkages: Gauging its Dimensions*

⁵⁸ Singh, *Maoists: China's Proxy Soldiers*

⁵⁹ N Goswami, *Counter-Insurgency Best Practices: Applicability to Northeast India*, Small Wars Journal, vol.8 no.12, 2012.

a minority which will always support the insurgent and an apathetic majority.⁶⁰ The majority are the people whose support both sides focus on gaining as the minorities on either side are unlikely to accept anything the other says. The local population can provide a source of intelligence which is a major factor in determining the success of the operation and can be used by the counter insurgent. The counter insurgent is required to gather intelligence regarding the terrain, enemy capabilities as well as the needs and expectations of the local population to effectively and successfully complete the operation.⁶¹ The insurgent may be able to gather intelligence with greater ease for two main reasons. Firstly the insurgent is more likely to be part of the community giving them an advantage. Secondly the insurgent does not have to operate within the rule of law. This is not an option for the counter insurgency practitioner. By ensuring their actions are always within the rule of law the counter insurgent is able to maintain personal integrity and operational credibility. This aspect will also aid the population's belief and confidence in the strength of the rule of law. In addition to the belief in the ideal the positive behaviour of personnel involved in the counterinsurgency campaign may also improve relations between the counter insurgent and the local population. Perceptions regarding the tactics of counter insurgency operations differ. For example David Galula believes that the greatest strength of the counter insurgent is that they are not the insurgent and have greater levels of manpower and funding available to them than the insurgent.⁶² Others, such as Mao, believe that to successfully counter an insurgent movement one must utilise their methods.⁶³ Insurgency is one of the oldest forms of warfare when one party has a distinct military advantage over another and has hardly changed since ancient times.⁶⁴ This means that, while there have been some variation to allow for the developments in weaponry, technology and global urbanisation, the basic theories from generations of scholars and practitioners can be easily adapted to the modern counter insurgency environment such as in relation to the Maoist insurgency in India.

Government Responses

Most campaigns against an armed threat result in responses by security forces, including counterinsurgency. In India the police forces have been used in preference to the Army.⁶⁵ Operations are coordinated by the central government and then applied to each state. While this is the case police operations against the Maoists have become increasingly decentralised. The security forces have also become more proactive in their approach which has led to increased numbers of Naxalite arrests.⁶⁶ The majority of the Maoists who have been neutralised have been arrested but some have been killed in confrontations with police.⁶⁷ Security personnel have been in conflict with the communists since the 1970s. By increasing security personnel in Maoist affected regions more arrests have been made though police have increasingly become targets for the Maoists and as a result the central government has fortified four hundred police stations against the Maoist violence in nine of the affected states.⁶⁸ Unified commands have been established in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Orissa, the states most affected by the violence, where both civilian police forces and the military reserves are able to effectively communicate and plan responses to the Maoist threat.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁰ V Williams, Op cit.

⁶¹ British Army, Op cit.

⁶² D Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, Praeger Security International, 1964, p.51.

⁶³ N Goswami, Op cit.

⁶⁴ V Williams, Op cit.

⁶⁵ India Today, *No Plan to Use Army Against Naxals Chidambaram*, 2010, date of access 20 July 2014, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/No+plan+to+use+Army+against+Naxals:+Chidambaram/1/91619.html>.

⁶⁶ A Tikku, 'States told to Revamp Anti-Naxal Operations', *Hindustan Times*, 2013, date of access 13 November 2013, <http://paper.hindustantimes.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>.

⁶⁷ Naxal Management Division, *Naxalite Statistics*, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Home Affairs, Op cit.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

result of increasing the number of police and improving the command posts has led to increased morale and increased numbers of arrests. The security forces are not the only aspect which needs to be considered by the government in an attempt to implement a successful counter insurgency campaign.

The economic responses to the Maoists have included attempts to address some of the disparity between wealth levels especially in areas which have been affected by a Naxalite presence. Economic assistance has been provided to the affected regions from the central government with the aim of improving governance.⁷⁰ These Integrated Action Plans have strict eligibility conditions including the number of tribal people living in a state, poverty levels of the people as well as levels of Naxal violence which have occurred.⁷¹ The wealth gap is used by the Maoists to garner popular support. If the Indian government addresses the issue, the Naxalites would find less support among the people therefore making the task of the police easier. Other schemes that provide economic relief to areas which have been affected by the Naxalite violence include the Security Related Expenditure Scheme and the Special Infrastructure Scheme.⁷² Economic schemes alone are not enough to maintain popular support against the movement, nor when they are combined with force structures without political and social responses.

Counterinsurgency doctrine suggests that political responses are required to counter a threat, such as the Maoists, as political will determines many of the actions taken in respect to other aspects of human life. Politics has been important in decisions regarding how to counter the Naxalites and other insurgencies. The most obvious political decision relating to strategies which allows the government to counter the Maoists was made in 2009 with the decision to officially ban the Communist Party of India-Maoist.⁷³ This decision was based on the fact that the classification of a group as a banned organisation can affect the way in which the general public perceive it which could limit the membership of the group. Other political decisions include the development of the schemes which have been noted above. The Integrated Action Plans originally included fewer districts than was finally decided with the decision to expand these being an inherently political one.⁷⁴ The messages promulgated through schemes such as the Integrated Action Plans by the government, which provide an alternative position to the Maoists, also have an inherently political aspect. The reason the Maoists gain support is due to aspects of daily life for the poorer classes and castes of society which the politicians have not considered as closely as the Maoist argue the government should.⁷⁵ Political will is often concerned with the social situation of its citizens, including when the government is considering various methods to counter the Maoists.

The social responses are linked to economic responses with initiatives being provided by the government to those who are likely to support the Maoists and those who have been affected by the violence. To provide incentives to people, who are likely to support the movement from small towns and villages, land which has been classified as a 'scheduled area' has been extended.⁷⁶ Rights have been given to the people to produce goods from minor forest areas.⁷⁷ Support has also been given, in financial and other terms, to those who have been affected by

⁷⁰ S Adige, 'Naxal Action Plan Gets PMO, MHA Nod', *Political Events*, vol. 28 no. 43, 2010 p.37.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ministry of Home Affairs, Op cit.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ S Adige, 'Naxal Action Plan Gets PMO, MHA Nod', *Political Events*, vol. 28 no. 43, 2010 p.37.

⁷⁵ M Brown, *Naxalites- Law and Order or Development Issue for India?*, 2014, date of access 20 July 2014
<http://www.futureforeignpolicy.com/naxalites-law-and-order-or-development-issue-for-india/>

⁷⁶ Ministry of Home Affairs, Op cit.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Maoist violence. If the government cares for its people and provides them with the needed goods and services the message of the insurgents would be diluted. The government has used a combination of force, economic and social support in an attempt to counter the violence. By using multiple sources the government is able to reach both the Maoists and the general population.

Evaluation of the CPI-M

The threat posed by the Naxalites has been a long term one with radical communist uprising in India existing since 1967. In that time the threat has morphed but has remained a factor in domestic political decisions within India's borders. When evaluating the characteristics of the group in question, the Maoists, and their ability to sustain the momentum which they have held it may be possible to provide an evaluation of the level of threat which remains at this time. The group possesses a motivation which has endured and objectives for which it can realistically aim. Weapons are available both through acquisition and manufacture. The tactics which are used by the group have been well planned and allowed it to adapt to India's changing demographic environment. The command structure has been firmly established with the leaders able to make decisions with the support of the membership. Recruitment comes from a wide range of demographics and includes both genders; this suggests that the cause is seen as open to all who believe in it. Popular support exists in both rural and urban environments which would allow the group to gather intelligence and have some level of sanctuary and external support for the Maoists exists through many organisations, both of an illicit and legitimate nature, supporting the Maoists. The evaluation of the group is that the Maoists are efficient and adaptive. The continuing threat posed by the organisation however, in relation to the response from the Indian government, is likely to decline over the coming years unless influenced by external factors.

Evaluation of the Government

The previous government has been working with local populations and security personnel to attempt to counter the Maoists. As noted previously this has been achieved through a combination of force and economic benefits to the areas which have been affected. This process has been effective in countering the movement. The number of deaths has decreased in the period from January 1st to September 30th 2013 compared to the equivalent period the previous year.⁷⁸ At the moment there appears to be a lull in Maoist activities. This may be due either to the actions of the government or as part of the monsoon season which has been suggested.⁷⁹ The combination of attacking the Maoists and improving the situation for the people who live in the affected areas has been effective. One reason for this may be due to the fact that the message of the Maoists is being proved incorrect by the government through the creation and dissemination of propaganda.⁸⁰ Without an ideological stand point an insurgency group is unable to continue to gain popular support which may reduce the longevity of the movement. The government has reached both the insurgents and the people affected through their schemes and the operations therefore can be considered highly effective.

The government of India has undergone a change in leadership in recent months. Political changes are often responsible for changes in policy. In the case of India, the policies which have been put in place to counter the Maoists appear to have been successful in reducing the

⁷⁸ Naxal Management Division, Op cit.

⁷⁹ B Jain, 'Left-Wing Extremism has Killed 14 869 people since 1980', *Times of India*, 2013 date of accessed 04 November 2013, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-10-22/india/43286417_1_naxal-violence-naxalites-killings.

⁸⁰ SK Dubey, *Maoist Movement in India: An Overview*, 2013, date of access 24 July 2014, http://www.idsa.in/backgrounder/MaoistMovementinIndia_skdubey_060813.html.

number of fatal incidents across the country. This suggests that there is no need for the new government to reshape the overall form of the policies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already indicated that his government will have a zero tolerance policy in regards to the Naxal violence in India. The Home Ministry announced its decision in early June to return to a “security first approach” for its counter insurgency campaign.⁸¹ This zero tolerance approach is not always the most effective. There have been instances around the world where such an approach has led to the intensification of violence as the underlying issues are not addressed. An example of this can be seen in the insurgent conflict within the Western African state of Mali.⁸² The issues in India include economic disparity between rural and urban populations as well as the disadvantages inherent in the Indian caste system. Another challenge which Prime Minister Modi will have to address is the reported split within the CPI-M.^{83,84} If the group splinters it will become increasingly difficult for negotiation and other non-violent resolution options to be explored as there will be no identifiable leader who can be called upon to speak for a unified organisation.

Regional Implications

The modern era has often witnessed intrastate conflict having an effect on either the region or the international community as a whole, as is evidenced by the actions of the Islamic State. India’s Maoist insurgency is another example of where this may occur. The links with Myanmar and China, in relation to arms, have already been noted. Without the conflict with the Maoists the relationship between Myanmar and India may be improved especially considering Myanmar’s attempts to encourage democracy. The lack of a perceived arms trade from China may also assist the Sino-Indian relationship which has been affected by border disputes between the two states. Pakistan is also implicated in border disputes where the cessation of the Maoist insurgency could reduce one source of pressure in regards to the Kashmir disputes. If there is less of a threat domestically India would be able to increase its focus on international issues, such as strengthening relations with South East Asian states. India has proven stable, against the expectations of some.⁸⁵ Without one of its internal threats India’s stability can be further enhanced. This will allow it to develop strategic partnerships with states such as Australia.

Impact on Australia

Though both Australia and India were Commonwealth nations, traditionally the two states have pursued divergent foreign and defence policies. India’s status as an emerging economy with major developments in its international status has meant that Australia has been attempting to strengthen its relationship with India. The relationship must overcome longstanding negative perceptions on both sides.⁸⁶ The incidents in 2009, where Indian students were attacked and killed by Australians, further complicates the relationship.⁸⁷ While this is the case there have been initiatives taken to enhance the situation. These include

⁸¹ N Gokhale, *Government to Tweak Counter-Maoist Strategy: Sources*, June 2014, date of access 17 July 2014, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/government-to-tweak-counter-maoist-strategy-sources-537364>.

⁸² L Waldek, *Regional Weaknesses and Non-State Drivers: The West African Dilemma*, May 2014, date of access 20 July 2014, <http://content.echo.mq.edu.au:8080/ess/echo/presentation/b49f2c22-877c-40bd-959c-e4791987c602?ec=true>.

⁸³ C Das, *Divided Maoists Turn on Each Other*, April 2013, date of access 17 July 2014, http://khabarsouthasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2013/04/24/feature-01.

⁸⁴ C Das, *Maoist Split Shakes Rebel Movement*, op cit.

⁸⁵ J Droogan, *India*, September 2014, date of access 23 September 2014, <http://content.echo.mq.edu.au:8080/ess/echo/presentation/2b98475a-3c6a-458e-9ada-588763c33c4a/media.mp3>.

⁸⁶ S P Wood, “So, Where the Bloody Hell Are We?”: The Search for Substance in Australia-India Relations’, *The Fearless Nadia Occasional Papers*, vol. 1, Winter 2011, p.2

⁸⁷ M Wade, *Attacks on Indians Have Had a Profound Effect on Australia’s Image*, 2009, date of access 20 July 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/attacks-on-indians-have-had-a-profound-effect-on-australias-image-20090924-g4n3.html>.

the Australia-India Roundtable first held in December 2012.⁸⁸ In 2014 Australia took an important step in the relationship by agreeing to sell uranium to India, a state which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which has been an important consideration of the part of India. Hamish McDonald suggested that one way to enhance the relationship between the two states would be to fund research centres so that Australians could learn to understand India in a more nuanced manner; moving beyond cricket, commonwealth and curry.⁸⁹ This more nuanced understanding should include an exploration of the threats which India faces. By understanding a state's threats strategic partnerships can be strengthened as requirements evolve. One such threat for consideration is the Naxalites. The author's discussions with peers has indicated that Australians have not generally been aware of the existence of the issue.⁹⁰ This has ramifications for Australia which may be more significant than initially appears. With the emerging Indian economy and Australian trade, the initial removal of sanctions of Myanmar and the extent of arms trade involvement of the CPI-M in India and the region as major considerations Australia needs to remain informed of the implications of its actions for the region as well as being informed about domestic issues of strategic partners. It has been noted that China is one of the barriers to a deeper strategic partnership between Australia and India with both states seeking to avoid the appearance of balancing against China and both pursuing hedging strategies.⁹¹ While these factors exist, if cooperation is possible on diverse issues such as maritime and energy security, it is plausible that cooperation regarding counter insurgency is a viable option in the strategic partnership between Australia and India.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the Maoists, a communist insurgency group within India, and the response to that group by the Indian government. Many of the aspects of the Maoists suggest that there have been sound decisions made to maintain the efficiency and relevance of the group. Efficiency from the perspective of the insurgent comes from their ability to share a message with the general public, make changes which are in line with their stated goals and operate without providing obvious weaknesses to be exploited by the counter insurgent. The relevance of the group can be seen in their ability to adapt their message and their tactics to an increasingly urban society which is not the operating environment which was prepared for in the early years. This indicates that their message becomes less universal and accessible to specific groups rather than a wide audience which is more likely to create change in the long run though the message has proven adaptable. A counter insurgency has different measures of efficiency and relevance due to the difference in the aims of the campaigns. Efficiency by the government forces is linked to arrests and surrenders of insurgents and presenting an alternative message to the public. The relevance for government forces is delivering results for claims regarding changes. One of the main differences regarding ideology is the fact that, to maintain the support of the public, the government has to be able to deliver on claims which have been made. The insurgents do not have to deliver the changes they call for. The Indian government forces however appear to have been able to reduce both the number of incidents and deaths which have occurred as a result of Maoist violence. This is not to say that the Maoists no longer pose a threat, instead the police have increased their ability to counter the group. As noted above there has been a suggestion that there is a lull in activities on the part of the Maoists during the monsoon season. More time and research will be required to indicate if the declining trend continues and for how long and the influence or

⁸⁸ Lowy Foundation, *Australia-India Roundtable Report: Outcomes Statement and Summary Record of Proceedings*, 2012, Observer Research Foundation, p.1

⁸⁹ H McDonald, 'India, Australia and the Asian Century', *The Fearless Nadia Occasional Papers*, vol. 1, Autumn 2013, pp.4-5.

⁹⁰ Personal communications with the author.

⁹¹ Lowy Foundation, *Australia-India Roundtable Report: Outcomes Statement and Summary Record of Proceedings*, p.16.

involvement of other states or groups. As this has been a long term problem the solution is not likely to be achieved in the three years since the apparent decline in Maoist incidents. Further research which could benefit the understanding of this insurgency includes a focus on the claims regarding the continuation of the caste system within the CPI-M as well as the conditions which have meant that insurgents remain. Furthermore a consideration of the lives of Maoists after they surrender through government schemes needs to be produced to determine the benefits of these policies to those seeking to leave the fighting. The Indian government while acknowledging the advances they have made, should continue to improve the lives of their citizens to further damage the message of the CPI-M. Regionally the conflict with the Maoists needs consideration as the relationships between India and its neighbours can be strengthened if the threat is considerably reduced. Australia also needs to consider the threat otherwise the Naxalites will remain the red elephant in the room in the burgeoning relationship between Australia and India.

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