

# TACKLING THE RED TERROR MILITARILY

## ***BUT WHERE IS THE MILITARY?***

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Dantewada and West Midnapore have become latest Panipat and Kurkshetra for India due to unprecedented unconventional terror warfare unleashed by Maoists, mainly in the past three months. They are only the tips of the iceberg. When 20 states are confronted with unconventional Naxalism (Red Terror) and many other states continue facing insurgencies, we should better realize and be convinced that this kind of unorthodox warfare is bound to spread and prolong jeopardizing the writ and very existence of the state. Our Prime Minister has been reiterating over the past 4 – 5 years that the Maoist terrorism is the single biggest threat to our internal security. But sadly enough his assertions were never taken seriously before by his own party and the govt and were rather contracted frequently by his own incompetent Home Minister. Thanks to tragic 9/11 that Shiv Raj Patil had to go and vacate the hot seat for a definitely more astute, competent and visionary Mr. Chidhambaram. Luckily today no body contradicts, nor even the opposition parties that the Maoists pose a grave threat to our internal security; no lesser than Punjab militancy and insurgency of J&K. We all know beyond any reasonable doubt that the danger of Red Terror in the country is grave concern of the govt and the security forces. Patil's replacement after a shameful Mumbai attack did sent a strong signal that now onwards the swords are drawn to their full length and the rising heads would roll. Mr competent Home Minister wasted no time in getting his own house in order first before challenging the military might of Naxals. He got full support of the govt, appreciation of opposition and supporting projection by media. He hurriedly formulated a 2 pronged strategy after his offer of dialogue was out rightly rejected by the Maoists. The main ingredients of his strategy were:-

- (i) Isolation of Maoists by extensive development of the Tribal Areas affected by Naxalism to wean away their local sympathy/support
- (i) Counter military offensive to destroy their military strength.

India's counter insurgency strategy in North East in 1950s also consisted of two main components i.e., combat operations and augmentation of developmental and welfare activities. However in retrospect few additional components were considered necessary and added. First and foremost of it was ***intelligence*** which was considered key to the success of counter insurgency (CI) operations. Experience proved that only those army units succeeded which were able to collect their own information meticulously (without depending upon plethora of dubious civil agencies). Second was ***psychological warfare*** through govt institutions/agencies which proved effective in isolating insurgents. Third aspect was close ***coordination*** between army, police and govt agencies. These increments to the main strategy paid rich dividends in North East and later in Punjab and J&K. Similar additions and experiences to the 2 pronged anti Naxal strategy will prove useful.

Maoists have outrageously challenged the authority of state since 1967 and resorted to unprovoked attacks on security forces and innocent civilians thereby forcing an unconventional war on the nation. It is surprising to see that what started as a Peasants Movement, *similar to the peasant's insurrection of 1525 in Germany*, has spread to 223 districts in 20 states out of which 33 districts in 9 states are fully controlled by Maoists. The single largest domain over which Maoists hold sway is the iron ore rich Bastar Division of Chhatisgarh, It is spread over 40,000 sq kms. Estimated strength of Maoists in this area is 10,000 to 15,000. They are well trained, ably led, highly motivated and fully armed. Few thousands of their militia cadre acts as their eyes and ears. Massive extraction of iron ore and displacement of tribal's is the cause of alienation of people and complete dominance of Maoists. It is surprising to see how they have planned and succeeded in winning popular support on the verdict of overthrowing a legitimate, democratically elected popular govt which is pro common man and fully committed to inclusive growth. They have established their own regimes which dispense justice, levy taxes, and provide security. No nation can tolerate and accept a state within the state and a govt within the govt. Hence in all its fairness such illegitimate threats must be neutralized and rooted out altogether. Unfortunately human right activists and liberal intelligential oppose military action and still consider it as a socio economic problem and suggest that only if we can talk to the tribal's, provide jobs to the unemployed youths and start development activities, we can neutralize Maoism. It is not so on the ground because they are well organized militarily with the objective of overthrowing the govt by the use of gun. Tackling red terror is a daunting challenge because of terrain, topography, local support, alarmingly sophistication of weaponry at their disposal and the weaknesses of our security forces. Reports of their alliances with LTTE and insurgents of North East add altogether a new dimension to the challenge. To fight Maoists who have created formidable guerrilla wings like the LTTE and Vietcong, strong and determined military action is the only answer. Russia did it in Chechnia under similar circumstances to suppress uprisings against the state. Therefore a strong military action against Maoists in our case is inescapable. While this is the unavoidable option, the root cause of the menace will have to be addressed politically and socially. Dialogue and development are equally unavoidable and hence important increments of the strategy.

Maoists are training and fighting like elite Infantry and Para Commando units against our untrained and ill equipped security forces. Para military forces are considered inadequate to finish Naxalism. Therefore *employment of the Army in anti Naxal operations in the Red Corridor has been under considerations of the govt since long. No clear cut decision has yet been taken to pitch the Army directly or indirectly against the Maoists. Many reasons and explanations have been put forth, many a times vaguely. While the debate may continue but where is the Army to tackle the Red Terror? 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our army is committed in the valley, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> in the North East and the remaining 1/3<sup>rd</sup> is employed in aid to civil authorities such as taking out kids from blind wells, relief and rehabilitation, UN peace missions, disposing of human rights violations, facing charges in the civil courts, scandals and ceremonial duties.* Where would you get the military from to tackle Maoism. Even if govt pinches some from here and there it would be making a mistake of entangling elite security force in prolonged low intensity war thus compromising its fighting abilities/jeopardizing national security. Army better be left to

for its primary role of safe guarding its borders by repelling aggressions of neighboring enemy countries. There is an out of the box answer. While we don't have a spare active army to be employed in CI operations against Maoists, there is a huge pool of retired young soldiers and officers besides highly experienced Super Cops like KPS Gill and the veterans of North East and J&K. Their services can be utilized for well trained and experienced manpower and experienced command structure. Perhaps that is why the VI CPC recommended lateral induction of armed forces personnel in the Para Military forces. This move was stalled by bureaucracy at the behest of IPS officers who enter police and para military by compulsion and default after failing to enter IAS/IFS. What would be the motivational level of such conscripted cadre as compared to the voluntary leadership of army which comes out of cream of the nation? That is why the politicization of security forces which can be attributed to inefficiency and disloyalty of leaders to the forces they command. Men are the same but the leadership is different. Pakistani POWs of 1971 war had lot of praise for our officers and often told us that if they are led by officers of the Indian Army, they can defeat any army of the world. Credentials of Indian Military leadership are proved in every conflict from Kashmir invasion to Kargil. While such strong pool of manpower lies waste in our country, we continue pushing our ill trained and poorly led Jawans in the jaws of doom and later follow the tragedies with delicate obituaries.

First prong of the strategy could not take off because Maoists outrightly rejected the dialogue offer and enhanced their terror attacks on the security forces as well as on the innocent civilians as a result of which state administration could not undertake development activities effectively in Naxal dominated areas. However no time was lost in mobilising Para Military forces. 70 to 80 thousand troops were deployed in the strategic locations in the areas which is referred to as Red Corridor. Under the new strategy centre expects to neutralise Naxalism in next 3 years.

Insurgency whenever & wherever surged is supposed to be born out of a genuine cause. Where good governance, justice, economic growth and development eludes common masses, Naxalism thrives to fill the vacuum. As the govt authority erodes, Maoists move to establish parallel structures of governance. When people feel neglected, deprived and discriminated, they pick up guns. *Fight for the rights* become a mass movement and leads to challenging the authority of nation state by resorting to violent means. Since the origin of insurgency and Naxalism in our case is undeniably linked to apprehension of displacement, deprivations and insecurity by tribals and Adivasis; its root causes have to be identified and addressed. The govt is fully alive to the issues and is considering ways and means to restore the confidence of tribal's and Adivasis. Enacting a law to give legal ownership of the forest land to tribals is a significant step to redress their grievances.

The months of April & May turned out to be the worst for the govt in which Maoists ambushed CRPF column in Dantewada , killing 76 constables on the spot followed by attack on a civil bus and recent attack on Gyaneshwari Express in West Midnapore killing 146 innocent passengers and injuring more than 150 besides many similar attacks on security forces and civilians in many other states. Unless the Indian state can credibly

demonstrate its resolve to stand up to the threat posed by Maoists, it is by no means certain that the Maoists will relent and come to the negotiating table. Home Minister has a difficult task to convince the cabinet to employ at least Air Force in logistic support.

Bold, secret and innovative offensive operations such as at Dantewada which inflict large number of casualties have cascading effect on the initiative and morale of the security forces. After such experiences security forces tend to become scared, defensive and barricaded thereby losing the initiative by which they provide upper hand to the insurgents. Administrative structure collapses leading to an uncontrolled lawlessness. Consequently civil public tends to align with anti national elements. At the moment Maoists have an upper hand. Such situations compel the govt and security forces to impose curfews and resort to arresting and harassing innocent people. It is therefore essential that such challenges be studied thread ware at all level and taught in our security establishments, military academies, IAS Academy and political establishments. Special regional/area Counter Insurgency, Jungle and Guerrilla Warfare Schools must be opened where besides the security forces, civil rights activists, bureaucrats and politicians should also be trained to be made aware of the objectives and dangers of Naxal insurgency.

Engagement of Indian Army in CI role began as early as in 1950s in thickly forested remote mountains of North East. Similar is the topography of Red Corridor. Ironically this political decision to induct army to fight rising tide of separatism set a precedence which in recent years has become more of a rule rather than an exception. J&K and North East still have large presence of Army. Srilanka used armed forces to get rid of formidable LTTE. Luckily there is no such compulsion as yet for our govt to resort to the use of armed forces despite provocation by Maoists and suggestions from various quarters. Armed forces are supposed to be highly professional and trained to fight against the enemy. They are not meant to be used against disgruntled elements of the society despite having been successfully used in the past in such situations. Reluctance to use army for internal challenges is a sign of vibrant democracy of which we are proud of. Let us not use army against the Maoists but be quick in adopting the tactics, the expertise and the methods used by the army in the past in dealing with internal disturbances. Expertise of Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJW) of the army at Warangte must be made use of. Similar training institutions must be opened for security forces in the Naxal effected areas. Services of the army must be utilized for planning CI operations where deception and secrecy should be the main consideration.

The main task in front of the govt is to defeat the Maoists militarily. New Delhi must reestablish its authority in the Naxal effected areas and create conditions for pursuing an inclusive politico socio economic agenda of the govt as early as possible. Therefore it is an opportune moment for the Prime Minister and Ministers of Home and Defense to put their heads together to devise ways and means to utilize the services of ex servicemen and ex veterans in some form or the other to destroy red terror from our soil in much less than 3 years.