

FIGHTING THROUGH THE RED CORRIDOR

(BUT WHERE IS THE WILL AND THE WAY?)

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World listens when Dr Manmohan Singh speaks; says the President of USA. But his assertions were not heard and heeded in his own regime. Our Prime Minister has been reiterating over the past many years that the Naxalism is the single biggest threat to our internal security. But sadly enough his statements were never taken seriously. Red terror was considered to be a simple law and order problem and his warnings were often contradicted by his own establishment. Erstwhile Home Minister remained insensitive to this alarming danger to our internal security. Thanks to 26/11 that Mr. Chidambaram took charge and displayed guts to dare the devils. All of us know that the danger of Red Terror in the country is a death trap for the nation. Mr Home Minister wasted no time in challenging the military might of Naxals. He got partial backing from his govt, but the opposition and the media fully supported his plan of tackling this menace militarily. He made a strong case for the use of armed forces against Naxals but Cabinet Committee on Security did not approve of it. It is now amply clear that the armed forces of the country will not be employed against Maoists. This has been made clear by the PM also leaving no scope for any ambiguity. After the mist is clear, the central and state govts must realize that the priority task in front of them that brooks absolutely no delay is to face the challenge more aggressively than before. After 26/11 Home Minister reiterated in very strong words that India will exercise all available options to prevent repeat of Mumbai. Such reaction was warranted after April 6 slaughter of 75 policemen of a CRPF Coy. These martyrs were sent on a hurriedly botched up anti Maoist operation without proper training and equipment in counter insurgency and jungle warfare. Unfortunately 26 CRPF jawans are again brutally massacred at Narayanpur on 29 June. This is an alarming provocation. This is 3rd major attack in less than 4 months in the same area. Such devastating set backs put the security forces in bad light and shake the faith of nation. On the contrary Maoists gain initiative as well as tremendous tactical and psychological advantage. Many security analysts feel that these shocks are tip of the iceberg and the iceberg is yet to roll.

When 20 states are confronted with unconventional red terror and the Naxals easily get away with impunity after every attack; we should better realize and be convinced that this kind of unorthodox warfare is a grave threat to our internal security. Such terrorism compels nations to opt for militaristic solutions. Prolonged use of armed forces not only raises doubts on human rights violations but also raise questions about undemocratic practices in democracy. Human rights do get violated in the process of fighting terrorism. The compulsion of internal security puts the govt in a dilemma – should you violate human rights to preserve nation's integrity or sacrifice integrity to protect human rights? Similar is the dilemma in the valley. Such internal security scenario is bound to be ridden with perils of contradictions and confusions such as whose baby it is; of the states or of the centre. Will the army be employed against the menace, if so, when ? Such confusions

weaken the nerve of the govt. With a firm, strong and forceful leader like Chidambaram there is no need for army in this unconventional warfare. An army of sheep led by a lion will always be more successful than an army of lions led by a sheep. But in the light of recent utterances of NC, Hurriyat and PDP leaders in relations to the current stand off in the valley stating that the CRPF has gone out of control or the govt has lost its nerves (govt blames CRPF & opposition blames govt) puts the central govt and commanders of security forces on the defensive. Such unsavoury rhetorics curve initiative of troops encountering such critical situations in the aid to civil authorities. Despite Home Secretary's statement that those who defy curfew and attack police post cannot be considered innocent, the security forces continue to be blamed for excesses. Many political big bigs are pressing for repeal/dilution of AFSPA. Blame games by human rights activists and politicians are rampant. Under such conditions where the will is and what is the way to fight through the dark red corridor. Desperate operations will result into more desperate Dantewadas and Narayanpurs.

Naxal movement which started in Bengal in 1967 as a peasant's movement. Has spread to 223 districts in 20 states out of which 33 districts in 9 states are fully controlled by Maoists. They have established their own regimes which dispense justice, levy taxes, and provide security. They don't respect democracy and the rule of law. They resort to unprovoked attacks on security forces and innocent civilians. They are on war with the nation as is evident in Chhattisgarh. They rule over Bastar Division of Chhattisgarh. Maoist's presence in this area is estimated to be 15000. They are well trained, ably led, highly motivated and armed with sophisticated weaponry as seen in Dantewada and Narayanpur incidents. Thousands of militia acts as their eyes and ears. Massive extraction of iron ore and displacement of tribals is the cause of alienation of people and complete dominance of Maoists. It is surprising to see how they have succeeded in winning locals for overthrowing a democratically elected govt. No nation can tolerate a state within the state and a govt within the govt. Unfortunately human right activists and liberal intelligentsia still consider it as a socio economic problem. They think that jobs to the unemployed youths and development activities can neutralize Maoists. It is not so on the ground because their objective is to overthrow the govt by the use of gun to get justice. Tackling red terror is a daunting challenge because of terrain, topography, local support, alarmingly sophistication of weaponry at their disposal and confusion in internal security policy.

Maoists have created formidable guerrilla wings like the LTTE and Vietcong. After deadly set backs such as in the recent past, security forces tend to become scared, defensive and barricaded thereby losing the initiative by which they allow the insurgents all the freedom of action. Administrative structure collapses leading to an uncontrolled agitations and lawlessness. At the moment Maoists have an upper hand for the above reasons. Such situations compel the govt and security forces to impose curfews and resort to killing, arresting and harassing those who defy it.

Strong and determined military action under the directions of a firm leader is the only way through the red corridor. Maoists are fighting like elite Infantry and Para Commando units against our ill trained, ill equipped, highly politicised and poorly led security forces.

Para military forces cannot finish Naxalism till they adopt army's professional ethos, tactical doctrines, leadership culture of leading from the front, tough training and high level of motivation. Above all they be allowed to operate independently. To fight through the red corridor successfully, CRPF must reorientate its operational role. Leadership screening up to CO's level must be carried out and wherever required be replaced with army officers. Concept of employment of a Coy or combination must be given up. (in the latest tragedy 63 unlucky jawans were from two different Coys). Bn should operate together for operational duties so that CO is there to monitor and react. *A separate, secret and special elite force must be created, if it is not there already, to hunt down the Maoist leaders in the red corridor. (Veerappan was neutralised by such force). Secrecy and deception should be main ingredients of operations of this force.* Home Ministers assurance of finishing Naxalism in 3 years is easily workable provided the vote bank politics is fully set aside for 3 years in the affected red corridor and he is given free hand to monitor use of security forces.

No army against Maoists is a sign of vibrant democracy of which nation should be proud of. Let us not use army but be quick in adopting the tactics, the expertise and the methods of the army. Expertise of Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School of the army must be made use of. Similar training institutions must be opened by the army in the Naxal affected areas. Army must not shy away from helping another sister belt force in every aspect of fight against red terror. To start with, army should provide junior leaders to lead and show the way to breach the red corridor.