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Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Maoists: An Analysis

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Naxals of the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Maoist), better known as Maoists, characterised more than once by the Indian prime minister as the gravest threat to our internal security, have been continuously fine-tuning their strategies and tactics in order to maintain their relevance. On the other hand, the state too has been making concerted efforts by taking ‘security and development’ measures to diminish, if not altogether defeat, the challenge posed by the rebels to the Indian state.

Lately, in March and April 2012, they have, in a repetition of their earlier tactics, abducted two Italians and a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in two separate incidents in Orissa, and the district collector (the highest civil bureaucrat of a district) of Sukma, in the neighbouring central Indian state of Chhattisgarh.1 These abductions have attracted national and global media attention. All hostages have since returned home safely, but only after the two state governments struck deals with the respective rebel leadership. Also, even as their spatial spread has been steadily on the rise since 2001, fatalities from Maoist violence and the destruction of infrastructure have also reached fairly high levels, peaking in 2009 and 2010.

In view of this, it might be useful to analyse one of their most important documents, Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution (STIR),2 which was released on 21 September 2004, when the two most powerful groups of the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) were merged. This article is divided into three parts. The first part gives a brief background of Maoism and suggests that the document should be studied and analysed by the Indian government while developing a ‘national strategy’ to combat Maoism. The second part throws light on the strategy and tactics used by the Maoists and discusses how the Maoists seek to exploit the socio-economic disparity in Indian society to bring about a revolution in India. The third part examines the Maoist document and assesses it from a holistic perspective. Furthermore, it critiques the Maoist strategy and concludes that while it remains the primary responsibility of the state to combat Maoism through the least violent means possible, non-governmental actors should focus on promoting a debate and creating awareness to remove information asymmetry in this field and assist in the development of a national strategy for resolution of the conflict.

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Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) released a document which consisted of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the Maoists and their activities, and highlighted some important issues such as the classification of states on the basis of violence, organisational hierarchy, motives of the Maoists, civilian casualties, destruction of government property economic infrastructure and the women cadres.

The document stated, among others things, that the Maoists killed 5,467 civilians and destroyed 281 schools between 2001 and 2011. Another set of comparative statistics relating to 2006—2010, in a different document, reveals that the number of civilians killed by Maoist violence (2,237) is far more than in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) (661). It is also an indication of the geographical spread and intensity of the violence, as well as the level of expertise gained by the Maoists. Generally, it is seen that the Maoist-related violence has always resulted in high numbers of innocent civilian casualties, many of whom were branded as police informers or class enemies. Killing of innocent civilians must be condemned at all levels. The numbers are too large to be ignored, as the state is also responsible for the safety and security of its citizens.

Brief background

Historically, although there have been classic uprisings of the Adivasis and poor farmers in Bengal, Bihar, Bastar, Chota Nagpur and Andhra Pradesh against the British authorities and the regional/local landlords, both pre- and post-independence, the current Maoist movement has been active in our country in some form or other since 1967. Drawing inspiration from Maoist ideology, the Naxal movement gained momentum between 1967 and 1971. The armed uprising was led by Charu Mazumdar in Naxalbari in 1967. Consequent to actions by the state government and the success of Operation Steeplechase, jointly conducted by the army, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and state police from 1 July 1971 to 15 August 1971 (45 days), the Maoist movement was crushed. The period between 1972 and 1980 saw a visible decline in the movement, as it splintered into several groups/sub-groups. The period from 1980 to 2004 saw a revival of the movement by a series of dialogues and negotiations between various splintered groups. This period also saw the formation of the People’s War Group (PWG) by K. Seetharamiah on 22 April 1980 and the merger of the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) and CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Peoples War (or popularly known as PWG) on 21 September 2004. From 2005 onwards, the Maoists carried out a large number of attacks on police posts. Some of the significant incidents of Maoists violence are the Jehanabad jail break (2005), the Dantewada jail break (2007), the killing of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MP Shri Sunil Mahato at Jamshedpur (2007), the Rani Bodli Post attack in Dantewada district (2007), the Nayagarh attack (2008), the attack on an East Frontier Rifles (EFR) post at Silda (2010), the ambush at Tadmetla (2010), the Dantewada–Sukma bus massacre (2010), the kidnapping of District Collector Malkangiri (2011). In 2012, we have witnessed the kidnapping of the Italians, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MLA in Odisha and the district collector of Sukma in Chhattisgarh. Spate in Maoists’ violence and abductions are believed to be part of their tactical counter offensive campaign (TCOC), with a view, among other aims, to divert the attention of the SF from the planned periodic meeting of their top leaders.
It is important to analyse this movement in detail to understand the ground realities, so that a comprehensive counter-Maoist campaign can be planned and conducted to match the unique and distinct requirements of the conflict. The central and the affected state governments have been making efforts to study the historical, ideological, cultural and socio-economic basis of the Maoist conflict, so as to evolve a coordinated approach to manage the conflict. The final and long-term solution would, of course, lie in crafting a national strategy for conflict resolution.

Need for analysis
The document ‘Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution’, which is said to be a blueprint of the Maoists’ strategy for the ensuing years and is a road map for the Maoist revolution, should be examined in detail for two major reasons: firstly, to understand the psyche and thought process of the Maoists; and secondly, to make an assessment of the document and compare with the existing ground realities and, more importantly, to broadly recommend actions to be taken at various levels to resolve the conflict. Against the backdrop of the recent Maoist attacks and kidnappings, this article seeks to deconstruct the Maoist high command’s approach in recent times.

Strategy and tactics: Maoist view
Kautilya, the famous statesman cum politico-military strategist of 375 BC, said, ‘A strong enemy can be overcome by the union of large numbers, just as grass through its collectiveness wards off erosion caused by heavy rainfall’.7 Having observed the activities of the Maoists over the last few decades, it is clear that the ideology of Mao Tse-Tung inspired the Maoists considerably to formulate the said document. However, it appears that the above-mentioned words of Kautilya also had some influence on its formulation.

The document, with 13 chapters, covers strategy and tactics in two different parts, was conceived by the joint central committee of the PWG and the MCCI prior to their merger in September 2004. Five draft documents were prepared after a series of intense discussions over a prolonged period of time. The document is the synthesis of all the important policies, perceptions and experiences of the two parties. It has political and intellectual overtones and indicates a protracted armed struggle, suitably modified for Indian conditions.

The political and military strategy is based on three broad factors, which include a detailed and objective analysis of (a) the class character of Indian society, (b) the character of the Indian state and (c) an in-depth analysis of the uneven economic, political, social and cultural developments in the country. Based on their analysis, the Maoists have worked out the strategy and tactics to carry their movement forward. It categorically states that while the strategy of the Indian Revolution would remain the same throughout the country, there was a need for different tactics to be followed in different regions at any given time, due to the uneven economic, political, social and cultural developments in the country and a host of other related factors. This is an extremely important aspect which needs to be taken note of by the government, so that its counter-strategy is also formulated at the national level, with different sub-strategies/tactics to meet the developmental and security requirements specific to a particular area or region.
On the conceptual front, the Maoists envisage that the revolution will take place in two stages, i.e., the new democratic stage, where the semi-feudal and semi-colonial character of Indian society will be transformed into an independent and self-reliant democratic society, and the socialist stage, where society will be based on socialism with the ultimate aim of moving towards communism. It clearly states that the first stage should be under the leadership of the proletariat, and also suggests that the urban/semi-urban working class must maintain close links with the agrarian rural masses, so as to lead them.

The document aims to usher in the ‘New Democratic Revolution (NDR)’, through a mix of political and military strategies that have been formulated by the creative application of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought, more importantly Mao Tse-Tung’s. It has been formulated after a careful and objective class analysis of Indian society and the character of the Indian state. An in-depth analysis of the uneven economic, political, social and cultural developments in the country has been undertaken, to formulate appropriate strategy and tactics and, thus, successfully exploit the existing fault lines.

The aim of its political strategy is to unite all the motive forces against imperialism, feudalism and comprador bureaucratic capitalism, while the military strategy aims at establishing revolutionary ‘Base Areas’, first in the countryside, where the state is relatively weak and the terrain is favourable, and then gradually moving towards the cities. In other words, it seeks to implement some of its political thought through its military strategy.

Discussing the four major contradictions of Indian society and the state, the document finally suggests that the most serious contradiction is the one between feudalism and the masses, and this is the main obstacle to the economic and social development of Indian society. It therefore aims to exploit these major prevailing weaknesses in the remote and backward areas of the country, as well as spearhead the NDR. However, it recognises that the NDR would have to pass through numerous stages and that the inter se priority of these contradictions may change as the revolution progresses.

The central task of the revolution, as envisaged, is the ‘seizure of political power through protracted armed struggle’. This would commence by fermenting an agrarian revolution in the rural hinterland. Having carried out the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the character of the Indian state and its armed forces/security forces, it deduces that it would not be possible to stage a simultaneous revolution (an armed insurrection) throughout the country. The document clearly highlights the weakness of the security forces in the rural or remote areas as compared to the cities. Hence, the vast countryside would be most suitable for the revolutionary people’s army to strike at the enemy (security forces). Thus vast tracts of the remote areas can be converted into red resistance areas and liberated by taking advantage of the favourable terrain. Considering the state’s weaknesses in the vast, under-developed, hilly, forested and backward areas of the country, the Maoists would establish guerrilla zones in these areas, develop them into strategic base areas that are suitably strong and self-sufficient to sustain revolutionary operations, before targeting the urban areas to capture power country wide.

It is interesting to note that the document STIR has discussed the following aspects in some detail:

- Categorisation of rural areas, on the basis of their distinct characteristics, as different tactics are required for different areas. Formulation of tactical principles and priorities for all Maoist-related areas, e.g. first priority should be given to
establishing base areas. Building the people’s army and establishing base areas would be the basic, principal and most immediate task. It also highlights the method of transformation of the guerrilla zone into a base area.

- To give accurate direction and momentum to the Indian revolution, there is a need to understand the relations between the party, the people’s army and United Front (the three ‘magic bands’), and further build these institutions.
- The documents describe the three forces of the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) as the main force, secondary force and base force (people’s militia).
- The basic principles of the strategy and tactics of the PLGA for various contingencies have been amply highlighted. Some of these are: ‘The guiding principle of the PLGA strategy must be to prolong the war, as time is required for preparing the masses for the war, and the spirit of prolonged self-endurance should be upheld as the people’s war is torturous and arduous’; and ‘We must mobilise the people to support our armed forces enthusiastically and to fight the enemy together with them. The people are the eyes and ears of the army; they feed and keep our soldiers. It is they who help the army in sabotage and in battle. The people are the water and our army the fish’.
- It fully appreciates that the people’s revolutionary forces, i.e. the people’s army and the people’s militia, are extremely adept in guerrilla tactics, which are suitable for the local difficult terrain conditions. It also highlights the planned and gradual transformation of the PLGA into the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which would graduate from guerrilla warfare to a force capable of conducting mobile and positional warfare. The force would be fully supported by the People’s Militia, which has a large number of fighters.

Assessment

Clearly, the document combines the ideologies of the MCCI and PWG, and has been formulated after a series of intellectual deliberations. The strategy and tactics discussed have evolved from the basic tenets of the Maoism of Mao Tse-Tung, Marxism and Leninism. The document also draws its inspiration from the Maoist struggle in other parts of the world over the years. Apparently, a few changes have been made to adapt it to Indian conditions. Though Maoist theory has undergone a sea change from ‘Land to the Tillers’ of the early years to the present anti-globalisation and anti-economic liberalisation, it has failed to understand that the theory adopted by Mao in the 1930s cannot be replicated in the current scenario due to vast differences in the global world order between the 1930s and the present day. This aspect is reflected in its document, the ‘Party Programme’, where it opposes the liberalisation of the economy and globalisation, referring to them as methods for imperialist forces to control the capital wealth of the world.

Conditions in pre-revolutionary China

Between 1927 and 1949, there was an intense struggle for control of China. There was a civil war in 1927, primarily between the nationalists and communists. The country remained at war with itself from 1927 to 1937, until the Japanese invaded China in 1937. During this period, China was beleaguered with a large number of problems pertaining to social and economic growth, poverty and backwardness of its predominantly
rural population, and deteriorating internal security conditions. The Great Depression of the 1930s, too, had some impact on the economic conditions in China. By 1930, Chiang Kaishek recognised the growing threat of Mao’s Red Army, which had to be stopped. During the internal phase of the conflict, the Kuomintang (KMT) launched a number of campaigns against the upcoming rural communist forces between 1930 and 1934. Although the Red Army was outnumbered by the KMT’s National Army, the former enjoyed the support of the local population, who provided them with timely and accurate information about the KMT’s army. In addition, the KMT had grossly underestimated the discipline, motivation and resourcefulness of Mao’s Red Army. As a result, the Red Army was able to escape from the encirclements and cordonsof the KMT. As the Red Army had the overwhelming support of the masses, it formed the basis for the formulation of the Maoist ideology and revolutionary strategy. The vast support of the masses gave Mao Tse-Tung huge confidence in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and also in the success of the Maoist revolutionary strategy.

Mao’s thought grew out of the Red Army’s experience of socio-economic and security conditions prevailing in China in the 1930s and 1940s, and formed the basis of the People’s War concept, which became the doctrine of the Red Army and the PLA. Mao also drew from the works of the country’s most famous military strategist, the 5th century BC general, Sun Zi, other theorists and from the experience of the peasants’ uprising. He created a comprehensive doctrine to wage a revolutionary people’s war, incorporating political, economic and psychological measures along with a protracted military struggle against a superior enemy. In the contemporary environment, the Maoist ideology is regressive and outdated. After Mao’s death in 1976, even China has not persisted with Mao’s ideology. Instead, they too have changed with the global dynamic reality.

It can thus be seen that there are serious inadequacies in the ideological and conceptual framework of the Indian Maoist document ‘Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution’, due to the vast differences in the geopolitical-socio-economic-security environment that prevailed in China during the pre-revolutionary phase and the contemporary situation in India. There have been vast changes in the global economic environment, the security environment, the political systems, education levels, technology and communications and other developmental initiatives. The Indian sub-continent as such is no exception. Having said that, it must be understood that there are fault lines in our political-socio-economic-cultural growth story, which require the urgent attention of all stakeholders. As per the latest figures given by the Planning Commission on 20 March 2012, it is good to know that there has been a sharp reduction in the absolute number of poor, by 52.3 million to 354.7 million. These figures have, however, been contested because of differing perceptions of the benchmark for the poverty line. Even so, economic growth has been uneven and has widened the disparity between the rich and the poor.

**Dichotomy: blind replication**

The CPI (Maoist) has carried out the demographic mapping of India to identify and exploit the weaknesses in the political, social, economic and cultural dynamics of the country. The Maoists have generally correctly understood and identified some of the existing inadequacies in the country at large, so as to be aligned with the aspirations of the masses, and have positioned them as the centre of gravity of the protracted armed struggle. Given the existing social and economic inequalities, issues pertaining
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to governance, implementation of land reforms, land acquisition for industrial or mining purposes, basic amenities such as medical care, education, electricity and potable water, resettlement and rehabilitation policies, displaced people, empowerment at the grass roots level, employment opportunities for youth, participative development, the Indian Forest Act and the rights of ‘tribals’ relating to the land and minor forest produce must be addressed to the satisfaction of the affected people, as a priority. The MHA’s Annual Report 2010–11 (Chapter II), stated that left wing extremists operate in a vacuum created by the functional inadequacies of field-level governance structures. The MHA has given details of the holistic plan being formulated to address the areas of security, development, governance administration and public perception. Though the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and Security Related Expenditure (SRE) have been elaborated in the MHA report, it is the implementation of the scheme and reforms at the grass roots level which would be the key to success of the development and security initiatives of the government. Therefore, it would be expedient to diligently enforce and monitor the implementation of the various people-oriented schemes, to address the problems and inadequacies at the grass roots level.

Chapter 5 of the Maoist document states that the path followed by the Chinese revolution is also relevant for semi-colonial, semi-feudal India due to the basic similarities between India and pre-revolutionary China. This is considered to be the most important aspect that determines their political and military strategy and tactics. The Maoists’ branding of India as being semi-colonial does not hold in view of the current political, economic and social status of the country amongst the comity of nations in the new world order. The dynamism, capabilities and commitment of the central and state governments (despite a few differences in their perception of how to tackle Maoism) to ensure development and to improve the security environment have been severely underestimated, if not grossly ignored, in the document. It is likely that the Maoist leadership has deliberately presented a feeble picture of the state, as a part of their propaganda strategy, to woo the masses and to galvanise agrarian support in the rural areas. It probably tries to take advantage of the literate/semi-literate people who would be able to read the document but may not have the analytical skills to see through their ulterior motives and larger agenda. It is this literate and semi-literate class that would constitute their front organisations and leadership in rural areas respectively.

The document STIR is somewhat incoherent in content and spirit, since it does not assign due significance to the might of the state, which manifests itself in the form of the largest functional democracy, vibrant economy, dynamic fiscal and monetary policies, along with strong armed forces and police forces. It is, however, correct to a fair extent that a large number of welfare programmes and schemes have not been implemented on the ground, as the benefits could not reach the poor people. The other flaw in the Maoists’ document is that the timelines for various stages of strategy have neither been appreciated nor spelt out, thereby indicating a desire to pursue an open-ended revolution without giving any time lines or objectives to be achieved. To that extent, the desired end state remains ambiguous and directionless. While Mao categorically stated that time is no constraint in a protracted people’s war, the value of time in the contemporary world scenario is starkly different. A prolonged campaign can lose its direction and momentum, thus losing the purity of ideology. In addition, in a long-drawn insurgency, ‘fatigue’, which manifests in different forms and at different stages, is an extremely important factor, having a telling effect on all stakeholders. Insurgency fatigue affects the local population the most, as the civilians are often caught between the insurgents and the counter-insurgents. The local population is the
worst sufferer, as they become tired and fatigued living in an uncertain environment. Generally, long-drawn insurgency campaigns start moving towards organised crime, settling personal scores, subversion, sabotage and terrorism. Some of these tendencies are already visible in the Maoist-related incidents.

A detailed study of the document suggests that there is a lack of flexibility in the thought process. The document appears to be aggressive and ambitious in spirit but lacks pragmatism in its long-term vision and design for execution. It apparently has ignored the vulnerabilities of the movement and the related contingencies. Interestingly, the document does not highlight anything pertaining to organisational structure, hierarchy, command and control, source of funding, procurements, logistics and other administrative issues that support the ideology, strategy and tactics being propagated. These issues have likely been deliberately omitted in this document. This reinforces the fact that the Maoists realise and understand that their organisation, tactics, funding, procurement and logistics are illegal and therefore cannot be revealed, lest they be targeted by the state establishment. There is no ambiguity in their thought process regarding elections; it clearly rejects any participation in elections since its stated strategy is to seize power through a protracted people’s war. However, contrary to their belief, they have continued to sponsor/support select candidates for the elections.

As per Chapter 6, the ultimate aim of the Maoists is to overthrow the Indian state itself and to seize power. The movement was crushed in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the inherent strength of the state. In the present-day context, in order to carry out its task of overthrowing the Indian state, it seeks the support of other secessionist forces, such as those operating in J&K and the North East. In other words, it supports the right to self-determination of such groups, which is not in consonance with its own ideology. Such support for the right to self-determination may result in the emergence of splinter groups within its own organisation, and would not be acceptable to any patriotic Indian. Therefore, their purpose in supporting secessionist forces is probably limited to obtaining help in the future, for using their existing networks for weapons, equipment, training, funds, logistics and international support. The Maoists understood long ago that a considerable part of the Indian armed forces will inevitably be deployed in Kashmir and the north-eastern states of the country, hence it will be difficult for the state to mobilise the armed forces against the revolutionary war. It is true that the armed forces have not been employed for a number of other important reasons, including the one mentioned in the document.

Strategic stages

While discussing the three ‘strategic stages’ (strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive) in Chapter 6, the document states that the protracted people’s war will pass through the three strategic stages. It is based on their experience of revolutions in China, Vietnam and a few other countries. In theory, the concept of three strategic stages may sound logical. However, it has a serious flaw. The Maoists have apparently applied this concept based on their experience of the armed conflict in China, with the Japanese forces (1937–1945), and between the nationalists and the communists in the pre-revolutionary phase in the 1930s and 1940s. Over the last 70–80 years, there has been a marked change in the system of government, the prevailing security environment, economic growth, improvement in the human development indices (HDI), developmental initiatives, strength of the forces involved and so on, though with certain prevalent fault lines in terms of uneven growth in different regions,
inequality in wealth, gross neglect of certain areas, deprivation, non-implementation of land reforms and non-availability of basic amenities. As mentioned earlier, these need to be addressed immediately, by ensuring implementation of welfare schemes and projects on the ground. Also, the Maoists have not fully analysed and appreciated the strength of the armed forces, paramilitary forces and state police forces of the country compared to the conditions prevailing during China’s pre-revolutionary phase. It would be extremely difficult for the Maoists, if not impossible, to achieve the second and third strategic stages.

Notwithstanding the above, they have correctly appreciated the revolution to be in a phase of self-defence, as stated in the document. Thus, at present it perceives itself to be weaker than the might of the state and therefore would continue to resort to guerrilla tactics in the near and foreseeable future. At the same time, the Maoists will try and carry out all possible actions to increase their power, both political as well as military, in order to gain parity or even ascendancy over the government machinery in selected areas.

**Guerrilla warfare and changed tactics**

The analysis of the military strategy and tactics given in the document shows that the Maoists have studied the guerrilla warfare campaigns of various countries, particularly those in China’s revolutionary war. They have been more innovative and dynamic in order to change their tactics. While adopting hit and run tactics and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, they have tried to avoid direct and prolonged confrontation with the security forces (SF). As per their tactics, they have carried out a swift and surprise attack on the SF only after allowing their columns to move out of their operating bases to a far distance, away from the ‘reinforcement and logistics support’ of the operating bases. In certain cases, due to extremely difficult terrain with dense forest cover, poor weather conditions and greater distances from the communication facilities, including mobile towers, it has not been possible for troops to communicate effectively with their bases. Considering some of these constraints, the Maoists have also been able to target the reinforcing columns of SF, by way of IED attacks and springing multiple ambushes simultaneously, thus causing casualties to the troops and taking away their weapons and ammunition. Such tactics give the Maoists the major advantage of causing large-scale casualties to the SF in a single incident, while maintaining low vulnerability of its own armed cadres. In so doing, the Maoists achieve psychological advantage, moral ascendancy amongst the Maoist cadres, as well as recognition and better credibility among the masses.

In consonance with their policy to exploit the weaknesses of the enemy (meaning SF and government functionaries), the Maoists have been able to achieve some success. While operating in small groups, the Maoists remain highly mobile and exploit their knowledge of terrain to their advantage. They closely monitor the movements of the SF, and are aware of their activities through simple but effective intelligence networks. STIR brings out the need for detailed study of the target with real-time intelligence, before undertaking short, swift and sudden attacks. It also highlights the need for lower-level units to operate independently with a totally decentralised supply system. A case in point is the planned attack on the SF column, along with an ambush of the reinforcing troops near Tadmetla (Chintalnar in Dantewada district) on 6 April 2010. A total of 76 SF personnel were killed in one such incident. Similarly, an Superintendent of Police (SP) and his column were ambushed in Rajnandgaon, in which the SP was killed.
Amongst other lessons, it would be expedient for the SF to understand the importance of fighting a guerrilla like a guerrilla—i.e., do not fight a guerrilla in a conventional manner, bound by standard operating procedures. The SF should be highly mobile, flexible and capable of undertaking sustained operations for five to seven days. As well as ensuring intense operation-oriented training and their ability to operate in small teams, success would lie in obtaining timely and accurate information, failsafe communications and good junior leadership. The junior leaders must remain pro-active, dynamic and innovative to operate in such unconventional situations. The SF must also understand the psychological impact of counter-insurgency (CI) operations on the civilian population. Invariably, as such operations cause considerable inconvenience and hardship to the local population, the junior leaders and the troops must be fully aware of the problem and the remedial measures required to minimise the hardship to the local population. The SF, in coordination with the civil administration, must continue to support and respect the people, by genuinely looking after their interests.

The maxim ‘Kill one, terrorise ten thousand’ has been quite effectively acted upon by the Naxals to kill innocent civilians, terming them police informers, and thus to terrorise the rest of the population. They may have achieved their short-term goal of achieving control over the population, but they will lose the support of the people—the centre of gravity—in the long term. This sentiment of the local population (among other issues) should be part of the perception management campaign.

The Maoists have continued to use abduction as a tool to force the government to meet their demands, as well as to show their presence and visibility at all levels. In reply to a starred question in Lok Sabha on 22 November 2011, the minister of state for home affairs, Mr Jitendra Singh, stated that the Maoists had abducted a total of 1,554 people in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and other states between 1 January 2008 and 14 November 2011. Of them, 489 were abducted from Chhattisgarh, 463 from Jharkhand and 137 from Odisha. In total, 328 persons were killed by the Maoists. In the recent past, there has been a change in the tactics of the Maoists. They have chosen to kidnap selective, high-profile targets, including foreigners, so as to achieve, among other things, greater publicity, propaganda and visibility not only at the national level but also at the international level. Therefore, it would be expedient to analyse the places of kidnapping incidents, killings, the motives of abduction (e.g., being named a police informer, a contractor not paying local levies to the Maoists, or the settling of personal scores), the duration of abduction and any other statistics that may suggest a particular pattern or trend, and then work out a strategy to minimise such abductions, if not eliminate them completely.

One of the recent phenomenon in the tactics of Maoists’ has been to use the children, women and innocent civilians as human shields to protect themselves from the SF. They have adopted this tactics in situations where they are relatively weak in combat and have a larger interest to prevent the SF from making inroads into certain specific areas. Apparently, the Maoists want to retain their control on certain segment of the population and the so called liberated zones. It is also part of their psychological strategy, as any casualties to the civilians and children because of firing will turn the sentiments of the local population against the state. The benefit of doubt must always be given to the safety and well being of the people -the center of gravity- since they, in spite of abject poverty and deprivation, continue to identify and remain committed to
the nation state. Thus, it must be the endeavour of the SF, despite an uncertain environment, to ensure that no innocent lives are lost in security operations and that collateral damage is minimised, if not totally avoided.

Chapter 10 of the Maoists’ document talks in detail about building the PLA. It clearly points to the fact that in order to progress their revolution, building up the PLA as an organised armed force is essential. Therefore, it must be clear to all stakeholders that there is a potential danger building up in our heartland. There is a need to carry out a SWOT analysis of the Maoists’ ideology, strategy and tactics, so as to exploit their weaknesses and to simultaneously take development and governance-related steps to resolve the conflict.

Conclusion

Considering the magnitude of the problem, the resolution of the conflict does not lie in employment of muscle power or in declaring an area as being ‘disturbed’. It requires a comprehensive analysis of the aspirations of the people and taking action to progressively address them. The Maoists have a number of strategic options in the future. In combination with other available options (not discussed in this article), the Maoists could move into semi-urban/urban areas and also seek direct external support to sustain their movement. The fact that there has been an overall decline in Maoist-related incidents and the number of casualties among civilians and security forces in the Maoist affected areas in 2011 should not lull us into a sense of complacency. During the chief ministers (CMs) meeting in Delhi on 16 April 2012, the home minister announced that the Maoists have made inroads into and established links with the ultras in new theatres such as Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. It is evident that the immediate task of the Maoists is to convert the PLGA into the PLA to carry the movement forward. Given their Urban Perspective Plan (not discussed in this article, as it is a separate document by itself), it would be prudent to objectively analyse the strategic challenges and take action to resolve the conflict by employing all elements of national power. We have to address the issues of governance, development, security, empowerment of youth in particular, as well as psychological reassurance and perception management in a systematic and planned manner. As it is the biggest challenge to national security, it is the duty of all elements of central and state governments, industry, non-governmental organisations, the media, cultural/social groups and the people to work collectively, with the aim of synergising and harmonising our efforts towards conflict resolution.

Notes

2. The document titled ‘Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution’ was conceived by the Joint Central Committee of the PWG and MCCI prior to their merger in September 2004. Five draft documents were prepared after a series of intense discussions over a long period. The document is the synthesis of all-important policies and perceptions of the two erstwhile parties. The document can be accessed at the following URL http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/strategy.htm
4. Data accessed at MHA website giving out FAQ about Maoists accessed at http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/NM-FAQ.pdf

7. Chanakya_quotes, Ajaytao’s - E Books - Great Masters\Chanakya.

8. This document is one of the five documents (refer note 2) which was also released alongwith the STIR. Available at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/partyprogram.htm


11. A annual report published by the MHA mainly dealing with the state of internal security affairs along with measures taken to mitigate sub conventional threats.

12. This chapter entitled ‘Basic Tasks of People’s Democracy’ deals with the political, economic and cultural aspects of the state as sought to be ushered in by the Maoists when the revolution is carried out. This is one of the thirteen chapters of the document STIR.