

## Insurgency, Counter-insurgency, and Democracy in Central India

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The Naxalite movement began in India in the late 1960s as a peasant struggle (in Naxalbari, West Bengal, hence the name Naxalite). It represented the revolutionary stream of Indian Marxism which did not believe that parliamentary democracy would lead to the requisite systemic change and argued for armed struggle instead. While the Indian state managed to crush the movement in the 1970s, causing an already ideologically fractured movement to splinter further (currently 34 parties by official estimates),<sup>1</sup> in 2004 two of the major parties, the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Marxist-Leninist) People's War (formed out of the merger of the People's War Group with Party Unity) and the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) of India, united to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist).<sup>2</sup> The CPI (Maoist) is currently a significant political force across several states, especially in rural areas where state services have been inadequate or absent.<sup>3</sup>

Since about 2005-6, the Maoists have become the main target of the Indian state, with thousands of paramilitary forces being poured into the areas where they are strong, and the prime minister repeatedly referring to them as India's biggest security threat. As a consequence, armed conflict is occurring across large parts of central India and is taking several hundred lives on an annual basis. In the state of Chhattisgarh, which is the epicentre of the war, sovereignty is contested over large parts of terrain.

### COMPETING PERSPECTIVES ON THE MAOIST ISSUE

There are three main perspectives on the Maoist issue. The first, which is the security perspective, equates the Maoists with terrorists.

India's home ministry has put out half-page advertisements in all the national newspapers, proclaiming alongside photos of corpses that 'Naxals are nothing but cold-blooded murderers'. This perspective, which is held by the police-dominated home ministry as well as by many 'security experts', argues that the Maoists no longer have a revolutionary ideology and are a self-seeking group of extortionists out to destabilize the country and impede 'development', by which they mean industrialization. This perspective is blind to the history, ideology, and actual practices of the Maoists.

The second, which is the dominant liberal perspective, epitomized by an expert group constituted by the Indian government's Planning Commission, might be labelled the 'root causes' perspective.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, poverty and lack of 'development' (here meaning employment), and the want of primary services like education, are to blame for pushing people to support the Maoists. This view ignores the absence of a Maoist movement in other poor areas as well as questions of Maoist theory, organizational presence, and local agency. It also ignores the fact that while the bulk of the Maoist cadre are from *adivasi* or Dalit communities, middle peasants and upper castes play a significant role, especially in leadership positions.

The third, which is the revolutionary perspective held by the Maoists themselves and their sympathizers, portrays the movement as a product of structural violence. While they describe people as forced into resistance and armed struggle, there is equally an emphasis on active agency and sacrifice, contrary to the root causes perspective that sees people as mainly passive victims. While long-term state capture is an important goal that certainly influences party strategy, in practice, the Maoists also emphasize more concrete economic and social objectives like land distribution, drought relief, farmers debts or caste atrocities. In particular, since 2003-4, they have posited themselves as the only bulwark against mining and land acquisition. This perspective blurs over the history of non-violent but militant struggles elsewhere in India, including against mining, as well as over the contradictions between the long-term demands of a guerrilla struggle aimed at state capture and immediate economic benefits for the people in whose name this struggle is being waged.

A nuanced analysis that seeks to explain the strength of the Naxalite movement in any particular area needs to take into account several factors. These include the specific socio-economic context; the nature

of stratification; the specific political history of the area (both in terms of parliamentary parties and social movements); the issues of agency that explain why certain individuals join the Naxalites; Maoist and state ideology; as well as the logics of Maoist and state militarization which create their own momentum. Geographical factors—e.g. the suitability of territory for guerrilla struggle—also matter. But above all, it is questions of injustice and impunity which best explain the overall trajectory of the Maoist movement in India.

#### OVERALL CONTEXT FOR THE CURRENT CIVIL WAR

The driving forces for the current civil war are sharpening inequality, the creation of the new states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand in 2001 which strengthened rent seeking among the local bourgeoisie and political actors, a liberalized national mining policy in 2003, and a growing emphasis on industrialization, as well as Maoist unification in 2004. Faced with growing resistance to land acquisition, militarism has become the preferred state option to ensure rapid industrialization.

#### POVERTY

Since India started liberalizing in the early 1990s, inequality has grown. Depending on the formula, anywhere between 28-80 per cent of Indians were below the 'poverty line' in 2010,<sup>5</sup> and the latest UNDP figures reveal acute poverty in eight states, all of which (except for Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) have a strong Naxalite presence.<sup>6</sup> While the size of the Indian middle class is debated, it is commonly estimated to account for merely some 300 million people. Meanwhile, national newspapers report on the globally acquisitive abilities of Indian companies,<sup>7</sup> and the fact that India has the highest number of billionaires in Asia.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is fallacious to argue that it is inequality, poverty, or lack of development *per se* that leads to people joining the ranks of the Naxalites (the root causes argument), or conversely, that it is Naxalites who are impeding development (the security perspective). While there is no doubt a strong correlation between areas of high poverty and Naxalism, a causal link or direction has not been established. For instance, Jhabua, in western Madhya Pradesh, has roughly similar socio-economic and demographic indicators as

Dantewada in Chhattisgarh. According to the 2001 census, the population in Jhabua is 85 per cent tribal, with 47 per cent of the population living below the poverty line and only 36.87 per cent literate (2001 census). But unlike Dantewada, which is the heartland of the Maoist movement, Jhabua has been the site of a remarkable non-violent movement for many decades now (the Narmada Bachao Andolan), apart from other local struggles over land and forests. Similarly, the region of Bundelkhand in central India is one of the poorest areas of the country, and while there is a high degree of stratification, there are no Naxalites. Furthermore, in order for people to support the Naxalites (or any other social formation), they have to be present, and historically, the Naxalites have not made much headway in western India, despite the presence of a sizeable *adivasi* or Scheduled Tribe population in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western Madhya Pradesh.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to remember that in each of the states where the Naxalites are present, the local configuration of power as well as Naxalite demands vary. In states like Andhra Pradesh or Bihar, a feudal set-up and sharp social stratification (in terms of both caste and class) have meant that the Naxalites have been pitted against local landlords in their defense of the poor. Meanwhile, in the *adivasi*-dominated tracts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa, the main concerns of the people have been exploitation by the government's police and forest departments, pitting the Maoists directly against the state.

Security experts claim that 'development' is possible only once an area is within government control, and hence 'area domination' through military measures is necessary before people's rights can be recognized. However, high-poverty areas like Jhabua and Bundelkhand have always been within government control and nobody has prevented the government from implanting whatever welfare schemes it wishes. On the contrary, one often sees more welfare services being implemented in areas under Maoist influence, if only because of their purported usefulness in low-intensity counterinsurgency. The large financial packages sanctioned to insurgency-affected areas by the Planning Commission (which allocates funds between government departments and states) may as well be seen as the success rather than the failure of a model of armed struggle in terms of getting benefits for people. The passage and implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights)

Act of 2006, which aims to provide secure land tenure to *adivasis*, is officially conceded as arising out of the need to undercut the core constituency of the Maoists.

#### INDUSTRIALIZATION

If poverty is the context rather than the direct cause for the growing strength of the Naxalite movement, then the same must be said about India's industrialization regime, which is threatening to displace large numbers of people without providing commensurate employment. Industrialization provides the background not so much for understanding why the Naxalites are active—after all, the major struggles against land acquisition are led by non-Maoist local campaigns, and the Maoist's own roots lie in land reform—but instead as a reason for why the government is interested in finishing off the Naxalites.

The formation of the CPI (Maoist) in 2004 coincided with the liberalization of India's mining policy in 2003, and with the SEZ Act in 2005, which set-up SEZs. In 2001, the formation of the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand also provided an incentive for the ruling parties in these states to intervene more actively in areas which had hitherto been relatively neglected in the larger parent states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Both Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, states with large mineral and forest areas predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes, explicitly set out to promote industrialization, signing a number of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with industrial houses. Several of these MOUs are suspect, with local politicians and industrialists colluding to make quick money.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally, the loot becomes so glaring that face-saving legal action is required for state legitimacy—leading, for example, to a former chief minister of Jharkhand, Madhu Koda, being charged by the Central Bureau of Investigation for corruption. The emphasis on mining has made it important to vacate the areas of Maoists, whose *de facto* control over the region constitutes an obstacle to rapid industrialization and land acquisition.<sup>11</sup> Industry associations have explicitly supported the government's offensive against the Naxalites, and have called for the involvement of the private sector in this effort.<sup>12</sup> Predictably, these associations have also opposed a government proposal to give tribals a 25 per cent share in mining profits, on the grounds that a lower profit margin would adversely

affect investment.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, however, while industry is opposed to any government regulation, it is happy to have the government acquire land on its behalf.

#### GOVERNMENT REPRESSION

Forcible land acquisition has been an ongoing irritant in the Indian government's relations with village communities, leading to often-violent clashes in which villagers are killed by the police, who act almost as private agents for companies.<sup>14</sup> While these struggles are not led by the Maoists, and are usually local campaigns with activists taking care to keep their distance from any armed action, the repression against the Maoists provides an occasion to arrest and harass the activists in all these campaigns. The charge of being a Maoist sympathizer is easily levelled, and once arrested, even without the application of extraordinary law, legal redress takes time, effort, and money. The protests against land acquisition have also encouraged the Maoists to believe the situation is sufficiently ripe for them to expand, and to exploit in order to gain support. This belief is only strengthened when the government uses force against peaceful protestors—even at a time when it is exhorting the Maoists to come to dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

Above all, Maoists owe their growing support to the form and brutality of the government counter-insurgency campaign. This has effectively elevated a movement with local roots into one with a national presence. In West Bengal, the People's Committee against Police Atrocity (PCPA), which is widely seen as close to the Maoists, originated as a reaction to police repression after a Maoist attempt in November 2008 on the life of the state's chief minister. In Chhattisgarh, government responses have taken the form of state-sponsored vigilantism and between 2005-7, strategic hamletting. In this phenomenon known as Salwa Judum (purification hunt) which has carried on till 2011, the security forces and special police officers, who are locally recruited youth, together go and burn houses, loot property and kill people, initially in an effort to drive them into camps, and later, simply to keep up pressure on the Maoists through their base. Officially over 600 villages are affected. When this boomeranged by increasing civilian support for the Maoists, New Delhi started Operation Green Hunt in 2009. The controversial nature of this operation—a very visible one, spread across several

states—has turned some sections of Indian civil society against the government.

Security experts often concede that state response is a critical factor in explaining Maoist activity; indeed they place all their faith in a military response wiping out the Maoists. But their narrative usually centres around the so-called success story of Andhra Pradesh, which has used a mixture of local development and a no-holds-barred police response in which several Maoists have been killed in extra-judicial ‘encounters’ by a specially trained force called the Greyhounds. In Bihar, on the other hand, before the crisis of September 2010 in which the Maoists held four policemen hostage in exchange for eight of their comrades, the trajectory has been quite different. Bihar used to have a high incidence of Maoist-state-vigilante conflict, but during the Rashtriya Janata Dal regime, relative quiet was bought through a tacit understanding between the Maoists and the RJD.<sup>16</sup> In either state, however, agrarian crises continue to be a problem showing, once again, both that ‘objective conditions’ do not necessarily find expression in Maoist politics; and conversely, that it is not Maoist presence which is impeding welfare, but the state’s own indifference.

It is also important to note that the Maoists are not internally homogeneous. Differences between the MCC and People’s War Group (PWG) persist even though they have merged and cadre are transferred between states. For example, the MCC is widely considered more militarist and doctrinaire than the former PWG. In Jharkhand, police have been successful in encouraging breakaway Maoist groups like the Jharkhand Liberation Tigers, as compared to Chhattisgarh, where not only is there a larger and more homogeneous tribal base in the party, but the party has established much stronger roots through its mass struggles for land and remunerative prices for forest produce. The balance between militarization and mass politics has a variety of spin-off effects in terms of which demands get taken up and how.

#### THE BATTLE OVER PUBLIC PERCEPTION

For both the government and the Maoists, proving local support is critical. For the government, this is because its claim to being a democracy rests on a version of social contract theory, which in turn presumes legitimacy among the public at large. For the Maoists, local support is necessary for a movement that claims to be fighting for the people.

But it is precisely in such situations of civil war and conflict that support can never be gauged accurately. Indeed, apart from the perils of voicing an opinion in times of conflict and the safety-driven impulse to under-report support for the Maoists, people themselves often do not know what they want, because the present is so bad, and the alternative so dim. But even taken at face value, what emerges from media polls is a strong preference for developmental solutions over military ones, for unconditional dialogue, and for reform of the existing political process.<sup>17</sup>

This is especially remarkable given how hard the government has tried to securitize the problem. Until recently, official pronouncements on the Naxalites located the movement largely in a 'socio-economic' context, as not 'merely' a law-and-order problem, but one born out of a development deficit.<sup>18</sup> In the last three or four years, however, in what Huysmans calls the performative function of security labelling, noting that 'the signifier "security" does not describe social relations but changes them into security relations',<sup>19</sup> the Indian government has converted the Naxalite 'problem' almost exclusively into a security issue, with an 'effective police response' overriding all other solutions.<sup>20</sup> Even normal development and administrative processes are 'securitized'— as seen in the use of the Border Roads Organization traditionally deployed in frontier areas to build roads in the heart of India, and in the proliferation of smaller administrative and police units.<sup>21</sup>

Much of the discourse around Naxalism in India today is akin to what Stuart Hall identified as the creation of a 'moral panic' around mugging in 1970s' Britain:

When the official reaction to a person, group of persons or series of events is out of all proportion to the actual threat offered, when 'experts' in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors perceive the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk 'with one voice' of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases (in numbers involved or events) and 'novelty' above and beyond that which a realistic approach would sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*.<sup>22</sup>

This moral panic, created by the government's response and its amplification by the media, is primarily responsible for giving the Maoists a visibility they did not possess earlier.

What is then at stake is the government's image of being firm and taking action; action which may have no direct relevance or efficiency

in tackling the problem at hand. The ‘Naxalite problem’ is not so much about violence in absolute terms, as it is a reflection of the threat posed by Naxalites to the *status quo*. It is also a function of the security establishment’s need to project a ‘threat’ that justifies more—often unaccountable—funding and forces. In fact, states are compensated by the federal government for any anti-Naxalite expenses, including those expended on ‘local resistance groups’. This gives many cash-strapped states an incentive to project a greater threat from Naxalites than they actually pose.<sup>23</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the Maoists do not see armed challenge as the only serious alternative to the state.<sup>24</sup> The Maoist fetishization of militarism is connected to their goal of capturing state power through armed struggle, and establishing, in a slogan commonly attributed to them, *Lal Qile par Lal Jhanda* (Red flag on the Red Fort).<sup>25</sup> The combination of Maoist self-projection as a significant military force and government projections of them as a military threat makes it difficult for independent observers to insist that both sides go beyond the logic of war. While the government brands any critic of its counterinsurgency policies as pro-Maoist, the Maoists have declared that those who criticize their acts of violence are ultimately ‘apologists for the oppressors, in spite of their good intentions and sincere attitude’.<sup>26</sup>

#### MAOIST ORGANIZATION, MILITARIZATION AND FINANCING

The Communist Party of India (Maoist) is organized like every other communist party, with a politburo and central committee, which oversees various state committees or special zonal committees. These state/zonal committees straddle existing state boundaries. For instance, the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee has seven divisions under it, which include Bastar in Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra. Below this are regional, divisional, or district committees, area committees, and so on down to local cells in villages or factories.

There are also various mass organizations that have units in villages. In the Dandakaranya region, these are known as *sanghams* or collectives—like the women’s organization, the seed-sowing cooperatives, and the village defense committee. These collectives are supervised by a visiting squad or *dalam* comprising some 10 to

15 people, which carries arms but is not primarily involved in military action. There is a separate military wing, the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, which is assisted by people's militias (made up of village defense committees) for specific actions.

The Maoists are estimated to have 7,300 weapons for 10,500 armed cadres nationwide, a 25,000-strong people's militia, and 50,000 members in village-level units.<sup>27</sup> According to police sources, they also have 'AK-series assault rifles, carbines, 7.62 [millimeter] self-loading rifles, grenade launchers, mines, improvised explosive devices and mortars', and are manufacturing their own weapons.<sup>28</sup> Despite occasional police claims that Maoists get their weapons from China or Sri Lanka, in its saner moments the security establishment recognizes that most of this weaponry is looted from the police themselves or from raids on government armories. The Maoists have engaged in some major military actions—breaking open jails, as in Dantewada and Jehanabad; looting ammunition depots and explosives from the National Mineral Development Corporation warehouses in Dantewada; blasting transformers; and attempting assassinations of prominent politicians. In 2008, they ambushed and killed 38 members of the elite Greyhound forces on the Balimela reservoir in Orissa, while in April 2010 they killed 74 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. These deaths were memorialized by the state in ways similar to those who died in the Kargil war between India and Pakistan, with at least one television commentator calling for a war between 'India' and the Maoists.

The actual violence by the Naxalites belies the threat they supposedly pose in military terms. Even in Chhattisgarh, the state affected the most by government-Naxalite conflict figures prior to the current counter-insurgency offensive suggest no need for the 16 companies of special armed police that were sent there in 1998, or for the 10 battalions of paramilitary forces that are currently posted there. While Naxalite killings have certainly gone up since 2005, and especially in Chhattisgarh, this spike is seen by both sides as an expression of retaliation against the Salwa Judum militia, and hence cannot be used as a causal justification for counter-insurgency. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, there were 908 Naxalite-related deaths in the country as a whole in 2009.<sup>29</sup> However, much of this data, as well as data published by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), which are drawn from open-access sources like news

reports and are widely cited, are inaccurate and misleading. For instance, the SATP lists 518 civilians, 608 security forces, and 491 'terrorists' killed in Chhattisgarh between 2005 and 2010, coming to a total of 1,617.<sup>30</sup> However, during the initial two years of Salwa Judum, there were also a number of people killed by security forces and vigilantes whose deaths were simply not recorded, or they were recorded as killed by Naxalites since state compensation is available only to those killed by Naxalites.<sup>31</sup> In later years, due to public pressure, these extrajudicial killings have been recorded as 'encounters'.

The overwhelming establishment focus on Naxalite violence also casts into stark relief the double standards espoused by India's ruling parties. The Congress and the BJP have each been responsible for the deaths of thousands of citizens.<sup>32</sup> The BJP, especially, but not uniquely, has several fronts which are openly engaged in vigilante violence against the vulnerable, including artists, filmmakers, and authors whose views are deemed unpalatable, as well as Christians, Muslims, and others.<sup>33</sup> The BJP's mother organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, openly disavows India's secular constitution. Violence or killings alone, therefore, cannot account for the government's anxiety about Naxalism. What frightens New Delhi is the fact that the violence is primarily directed against security forces and those in power, rather than against the poor, who are already daily objects of violence in India.

The Maoists finance their operations through what they call levies on industries and forest contractors, enabling the rise of dynamics of corruption, patronage, and protection. Indeed, industrialists often work out private bargains with the Maoists. For instance, this author was told by a surrendered Maoist from Orissa that a senior official of the Essar Group appealed to him to allow a pipeline to pass through his territory. This pipeline is meant to pump iron ore from mines at Bailadilla in Chhattisgarh to Vishakapatnam port. The Essar official said: 'Since you are the local government here we will pay you the same rate of royalty we pay the government.' Given that this rate is abysmally low (considerably less than US \$1, or Rs. 27 per ton), and given that the market rate for iron ore is US \$120 (about Rs. 5,600) per ton,<sup>34</sup> this did not constitute much hardship for the Essar Group. The Maoists decided to divide the Rs. 2.8 crore they got annually between party funds and local development, but in the first year they spent it all on roofing tiles for 60 villages. The following year, however,

the Chhattisgarh state unit of the Maoists objected to the mining by Essar on the grounds that it devastated the local environment and provided no benefit to the people of Chhattisgarh. Consequently, the Maoist Central Committee called off the deal with Essar, and ordered the Orissa committee to break the pipeline. The Maoists repeatedly claim that their deals with companies and contractors do not come at the expense of their own constituency, e.g. even when they have a deal with a contractor, they insist on minimum wages. However, this scarcely enables transparent alternatives to the system of industrial capitalism.

Maoist levies (the government calls these ‘extortion’ schemes) must, however, be placed alongside other parallel systems of informal taxation that routinely operate without government censure. Regular levies extracted by forest and police staff to facilitate illegal tree-felling or tin mining are routine in mineral-rich and forested states like Chhattisgarh. State facilitation of private accumulation is extensive, ranging from ‘sweetheart deals’ between politicians and corporates over disinvested public sector enterprises, or the licensing of scarce natural resources and government contracts to government doctors and teachers who, because of their failure to work, push people toward private health care or tuition.<sup>35</sup>

#### DEMOCRACY AT WAR: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE MAOIST CHALLENGE

Almost as remarkable as the coming to centre stage of the Maoists between 2005 and 2010 has been the timidity of India’s democratic institutions when faced with what is termed a ‘national security’ issue. This is of course hardly unique to India, as demonstrated by the failure of statutory checks on excesses committed during the US-led ‘war on terror’ worldwide. While the main ruling parties, the Congress and the BJP, colluded in sponsoring the Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which ruled West Bengal, conducted a war there through its own armed gangs, locally called the Harnad Vahini. Parliament has thus offered little protection for the people. While *adivasi* legislators have been generally opposed to a militaristic solution, they are dependent on their parties for tickets and funding and have been unable to provide an alternative voice.

Independent statutory commissions have also failed the victims of vigilante and state violence. The National Human Rights Commission

did not respond to repeated pleas from victims in Chhattisgarh, and when directed by the Supreme Court in 2008 to undertake an inquiry, sent a team of 16 police personnel who went to villages in armoured tanks, accompanied by some of the very SPOs who had been responsible for the violence. The National Commission for Women has not taken up the cases of rape victims, while the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has been silent. The only commission which has displayed any enthusiasm or integrity is the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, but it is relatively new and powerless.

Within the government, the Home Ministry calls the shots on this issue, with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs completely irrelevant. The Home Ministry Naxal Management Cell is dominated by policemen or 'security experts', and the home minister himself, P. Chidambaram, has made the war against the Maoists his own. While elements in the Congress party have been uncomfortable with this approach, with party colleagues calling the home minister 'intellectually arrogant' and his ministry 'paranoid', the Congress party leader, Sonia Gandhi, has acquiesced in the war on *adivasis*.

The Supreme Court has been the only institution to uphold its mandate of protecting the rule of law, but court processes are tortuous and the writ petitions against vigilante violence and abuses of human rights have already lasted three years. In any case, repeated judicial directions to the state of Chhattisgarh to carry out elementary tasks, like registering First Information Reports (FIRs) or rehabilitating those whose houses were burned, have been met with outright refusals to act.

In the initial years of Salwa Judum (2005-8), the media were largely quiet, especially in Chhattisgarh. This was enabled through a combination of government censorship and threats against the media; the enactment of the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act 2005, which penalized anything that could be construed as support for the Maoists; and a language and reality disconnect between journalists and *adivasis*. The strategy of arresting the secretary of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, Dr. Binayak Sen, had a mixed effect. On the one hand, his release became a cause célèbre, bringing some media attention to the issue. On the other hand, it focused all civil society attention on his person, at the expense of the wider issues involved. In West Bengal, a much stronger democratic tradition; an active opposition party, the Trinamool Congress, intent on winning

elections (which it did); and the national media's virulent anti-communism ensured that the ruling CPI (Marxist)'s handling of the Maoist issue got sufficient coverage. Since Operation Green Hunt started, Maoist attacks escalated, and with prize-winning authors like Arundhati Roy having adopted the Maoist cause, the issue has finally become front-page news.

Despite repeated exhortations to the Maoists to agree to peace talks, the central and state governments are clearly unwilling to engage with them in practice, on the grounds that Naxalites' willingness to talk is merely a ploy to buy time. The nadir was the police arrest and killing of the Maoist leader Cherukuri Rajkumar, aka Azad, in June 2010, precisely at a time when he was about to confirm dates for peace talks to begin. In early 2011, the high-profile kidnapping of a collector in Malkangiri district of Orissa led to mediators negotiating a number of demands, including that ordinary villagers accused of Maoist crimes be released, and festering land issues in Koraput be addressed, but after the release of the collector, the government appears to be renegeing on all its agreements.

The latest in the saga is the proposal to flood Maoist areas with funds, largely for the building of roads, but also for 'basic social infrastructure'. Despite reservations by the Planning Commission which allocates money between schemes and states, and which originally drafted an 'Integrated Action Plan' for 'Left wing-extremist-affected' districts, the Home Ministry pushed through a scheme which allocates Rs. 55 crore per district for two years to a committee comprising the collector, the superintendent of police and district forest officer. But it is unlikely that this money will yield much that is useful, given the basic structure of exploitation in which the local administration in collusion with industrialists, traders, and contractors makes all decisions, without consulting the villagers. And compared to the Rs. 800 crore that the Chhattisgarh government has spent on housing and feeding the paramilitaries to repress people in the past few years, the idea that hearts and minds will be won with Rs. 55 crore is laughable.<sup>36</sup>

Above all, there is no appreciation for *adivasi* lifestyles or any attempt to build upon existing strengths, and tired versions of modernization theory continue to be espoused by India's ruling politicians. Such stale rhetoric is clearly apparent in this reportage from the *Hindu*, citing comments made by the Home Minister P. Chidambaram: 'The Minister indicated that while implementation

of laws such as PESA and FRA might give rights to forest dwellers, the long-term solution lay in the basic development which would bring them out of the forests.<sup>37</sup>

What I.F. Stone wrote decades ago about Vietnam rings as true today of India's blinkered political classes:

In reading the military literature on guerrilla warfare now so fashionable at the Pentagon, one feels that these writers are like men watching a dance from outside through heavy plate-glass windows. They see the motions but they can't hear the music. They put the mechanical gestures down on paper with pedantic fidelity. But what rarely comes through to them are the injured racial feelings, the misery, the rankling slights, the hatred, the devotion, the inspiration and the desperation. So they do not really understand what leads men to abandon wife, children, home, career, friends; to take to the bush and live gun in hand like a hunted animal; to challenge overwhelming military odds rather than acquiesce any longer in humiliation, injustice or poverty.<sup>38</sup>

Justice. Political overtures instead of mere economic packages. Development to benefit citizens, not corporates. Apologies for the past rather than homilies for the future. These would all go a long way toward negotiating peace.

#### NOTES

1. Subhashis Mitra, 'Terror Tentacles', *Force*, August 2007, p. 38.
2. For the first phase of the Naxalite movement, see Manorajan Mohanty, *Revolutionary Violence: A Study of the Maoist Movement in India* (New Delhi: Sterling 1977); Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (New Delhi: Select Book Service Syndicate, 1984); for the more recent phase in Andhra Pradesh, see Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC), *Third Report: A Detailed Account of the Committee During the Five Years to Intervene in the Climate of Turmoil and Social Violence in Rural Andhra Pradesh* (Hyderabad: CCC, 2002); CCC, *Negotiating Peace*, (Hyderabad, 2006); Bela Bhatia, 'The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar', *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth *EPW*), 9 April 2005. See also articles in the special section on the 'Maoist Movement in India', *EPW*, 22-8 July 2006, and response by Azad, 'Maoists in India: A Rejoinder', *EPW*, 14 October 2006.
3. In the rest of this article, while I generally use the term Maoist, I occasionally use the term Naxalite, especially if a generic use is called for.
4. See the report of the Expert Group to the Planning Commission, *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas* (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 2008).

5. The economist Jean Dreze writes: 'At least four alternative figures are available: 28 per cent from the Planning Commission, 50 per cent from the N.C. Saxena Committee report, 42 per cent from the Tendulkar Committee report, and 80 per cent or so from the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS). Jean Dreze, 'Poverty Estimates vs. Food Entitlements', *The Hindu*, 24 February 2010, <http://www.hindu.com/2010/02/24/stories/2010022456271200.htm>.
6. 'There are more MPI [Multidimensional Poverty Index] poor people in eight Indian states alone (421 million in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal) than in the 26 poorest African countries combined (410 million).' 'Oxford and UNDP Launch a Better Way to Measure Poverty', *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Program*, 14 July 2010, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/mediacentre/announcements/title,20523,en.html>.
7. In 2007, Tata Steel of the Tata group bought British steelmaker Corus for \$12 billion, Hindalco of the Aditya Birla group bought US aluminium sheetmaker Novelis for \$6 billion, and Jindal Steel acquired the development rights for the El Mutun mine in Bolivia for \$2.3 billion. 'The value of takeovers by Indian firms has risen sharply, from less than \$1 billion in 2000 to an estimated \$8 billion in 2006. Acquisitions in the first six weeks of 2007 added up to more than \$18 billion.' See 'Indian Companies Become Major Players in Overseas Acquisitions', HULIQ, 19 February 2010, <http://www.huliq.com/11617/indian-companies-become-major-players-in-overseas-acquisitions>.
8. Narayanan Madhavan, 'India's Band of Billionaires Biggest in Asia', *Hindustan Times*, 10 March 2007, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-s-band-of-billionaires-is-the-biggest-in-Asia/Article1-209306.aspx>.
9. There are several reasons for this. They include the origins of the Maoist movement in Andhra Pradesh and Bengal, from where they spread to neighbouring states, as well as the dominance of Hindu reform movements in *adivasi* areas in western India. In Gujarat, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has recently appropriated these populations for a Hindu chauvinist agenda, although *adivasi* movements fighting for land and forest resources continue to be active.
10. Supriya Sharma, 'Iron Ore Mines Going for Rs 1 Lakh in Chhattisgarh?' TNN, 2 August 2010, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Iron-ore-mines-going-for-Rs-1-lakh-in-Chhattisgarh/articleshow/6245781.cms>.
11. However, contrary to much activist hype, there is no direct co-relation between two proposed steel plants for mining in Dantewada and the forcible evacuation of villages under the state-sponsored vigilante

movement called Salwa Judum. Salwa Judum specifically targeted Maoist strongholds, not villages which are situated in mining areas. This is clear if one maps the progress of Salwa Judum.

12. 'The growing Maoist insurgency over large swathes of the mineral-rich countryside could soon hurt some industrial investment plans. Just when India needs to ramp up its industrial machine to lock in growth and when foreign companies are joining the party—Naxalites are clashing with mining and steel companies essential to India's long-term success.' *FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry) Task Force Report on National Security and Terrorism* (New Delhi: FICCI, 2009), <http://www.ficci.com/SPdocument/20032/terrorism-report.pdf>. This report also calls for private security agencies to be given arms licenses, which is dangerous given that hired goons are already being used against villagers.
13. 'FICCI Opposes Mining Bill, Debunks Tribal Compensation Scheme', *Economic Times*, 25 July 2010, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/FICCI-opposes-mining-bill-debunks-tribal-compensation-scheme/articleshow/6214184.cms>.
14. See, for instance, police firings at Maikanch village in Rayagada district, Orissa, where three people were killed while protesting against land acquisitions for bauxite mining (2001); at Tapkara in Ranchi district, Jharkhand, where nine were killed while protesting against the Koel Karo dam (2001); at the Khuga dam site in Churachandpur district, Manipur, where three were killed (2005); at Kalinganagar in Orissa, where 12 were killed while protesting against a Tata Steel plant (2006); at Nandigram in West Bengal in 2007, where 15 were killed while protesting against land acquisitions for a special economic zone. This is by no means an exhaustive list of recent police firings related to land acquisitions. The police usually claim that they were attacked first and were forced to maintain law and order; this is contested by the human rights groups that have conducted independent investigations into the incidents.
15. On 15 May 2010, the police fired upon and injured protestors peacefully demonstrating against a proposed POSCO steel plant in Orissa. On 12 May 2010 they killed one protestor at the Kalinganagar industrial complex.
16. Arindam Sen, 'Anarchism or Revolutionary Marxism', prepared for 'Resurgence', a symposium on the Naxal/Marxist challenge to the state, March 2010, [http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/607/607\\_arindam\\_sen.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/607/607_arindam_sen.htm).
17. An August 2010 survey by an academic agency and two media houses (*The Week*-CNN-IBN-CSDS) across the 'red belt' claimed that 49 per cent support the government, and 60 per cent have faith in the democratic process, although 76 per cent want the political system to be reformed.

A month later, according to a *Times of India* poll in the five districts of Telengana in Andhra Pradesh from where the Maoists have reportedly been wiped out, 58 per cent said Naxalism was good. (Rupashree Nanda, 'State of the Nation: Government Preferred Over Naxals,' IBN Live, 9 August 2010, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/people-in-Naxalhit-areas-prefer-govt-poll/128447-37-64.html?from=tn>; [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-09-28/india/28244131\\_1\\_toi-poll-Naxalism-maoists](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-09-28/india/28244131_1_toi-poll-Naxalism-maoists)) (accessed 13 April 2011.)

18. 'Naxalites operate in a vacuum created by inadequacy of administrative and political institutions, espouse local demands and take advantage of the prevalent disaffection and injustice among the exploited segments of the population and seek to offer an alternative system of governance which promises emancipation of these segments', Ministry of Home Affairs, Internal Security Division, 'Status Paper on the Naxal Problem', 18 May 2006, 1.
19. J. Huysmans, 'Security! What do You mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier', *European Journal of International Relations*, 1998, 4(2), 226-55, p. 232.
20. For the police, 'effectiveness' means huge expenditure, for instance, on mine-protected vehicles, helicopters, the fortification of police stations, etc., rather than simply greater professionalism and courteous treatment of the public. This, despite the fact that police behaviour and contempt for villagers is a major cause of support for Naxalism.
21. On 13 July 2010, the Government of India proposed a Unified Command to carry out anti-Naxal operations. 'The Centre also offered more helicopters, logistical support and intelligence sharing to the States to fight the Maoist menace. It sanctioned about 16,000 additional Special Police Officers, taking the total number of such posts to about 30,000. It also decided to fund the establishment or strengthening of 400 police stations in the affected districts at the rate of Rs. 2 crore a police station on 80:20 basis over two years. The States were asked to set up an empowered group, chaired by Member-Secretary, Planning Commission, to modify the norms and guidelines to implement development schemes having regard to the local needs and conditions in the affected districts. It was decided to improve road connectivity in 34 worst affected districts. A number of roads and bridges are proposed to be included at a cost of Rs. 950 crore by the Road Transport and Highways Ministry. The Chief Ministers were told that the Planning Commission was considering a Special Development Plan for the affected districts with focus on primary education, health care, drinking water and road connectivity.' Vinay Kumar, 'Centre Proposes Unified Command to Fight Naxals', *The Hindu*, 15 July 2010, <http://www.hindu.com/2010/07/15/stories/2010071557350100.htm>.

22. Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crises: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (New York: HM Publishers, 1978), p. 16.
23. Author's interview with Shivraj Patil, India's home minister, February 2007.
24. In a reply to an open letter written by the Independent Citizens Initiative (a six-member group that visited Dantewada to carry out an investigation into the Salwa Judum, and of which this author was a member), Ganapathi, the Maoist General Secretary, asks: 'Can you show us one instance from the pages of Indian history where the rights of *adivasis* were ensured through non-violent and open means? And not just in India, but anywhere else in the world for that matter?' Ganapathi, 'Open Reply to Independent Citizen's Initiative on Dantewada', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 6 January 2007.
25. The Red Fort in Delhi has been the symbolic seat of India's power from Mughal times onwards.
26. Ganapathi, 'Open Reply'.
27. Gautam Navlakha, 'Maoists in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3 June 2006, p. 2187.
28. Rahul Bedi, 'Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 July 2006, pp. 21-5.
29. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, *Annual Report 2009-10*, <http://www.mha.nic.in/pdfs/AR%28E%290910.pdf>.
30. 'South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) Fatalities in Left wing Extremist Violence, Chhattisgarh 2005-2010', [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data\\_sheets/annualcasualtieschhatisgarh.asp](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/annualcasualtieschhatisgarh.asp).
31. Nandini Sundar, 'Pleading for Justice', prepared for 'Resurgence', a symposium on the Naxal/Marxist challenge to the state, March 2010, [http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/607/607\\_nandini\\_sundar.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/607/607_nandini_sundar.htm).
32. Two thousand seven hundred thirty-three people officially died in Delhi in the anti-Sikh pogroms of 1984 (see [www.carnage84.com/official/ahooja/ahooja.htm](http://www.carnage84.com/official/ahooja/ahooja.htm)), and 1,254 in the anti-Muslim pogroms of Gujarat in 2002 (answer in Parliament, provided by Minister of State for Home Affairs, August 2005).
33. Nandini Sundar, 'Vigilantism, Culpability, and Moral Dilemmas', *Critique of Anthropology*, 30 (March 2010), pp. 1-9.
34. 'Should India Ban Iron Ore Export?' Zeebiz.com, 30 July 2010, <http://biz.zeenews.com/interviews/story.aspx?newsid=109>.
35. In late 2010, four major scandals surfaced showing the collusion between ministers and corporates: the allocation of mobile telephone spectrum to cherry-picked companies for an estimated loss of \$ 40 billion to the treasury, overpriced contracts for the Commonwealth games favouring associates of the chairman of the organizing committee, the illegal diversion of government land to the Karnataka chief minister's sons,

which was then resold for a huge profit, and the Adarsh housing society scam in Mumbai in which flats meant for war widows were given to influential politicians and senior members of the armed forces.

36. Chhattisgarh Seeks Waiver on Anti-Maoist Forces Expenditure', Zee News, 19 January 2011, <http://www.zeenews.com/news681662.html>, (accessed 14 April 2011).
37. Ibid.
38. I.F. Stone, *In a Time of Torment, 1961-1967* (New York: Little Brown & Co, 1967), p. 173.