

India and her Maoists A tiger crouching, a dragon curling...¹ Ajai Sahni*

A decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and more than three decades after the Chinese began to gradually unshackle themselves of Maoist dogma, to progressively embrace the *mantras* of capitalism, India is experiencing a vast and escalating surge of a violent Maoist rebellion. To the Western mind, the developments in both Russia and China irrevocably demonstrated the failure of the communist ideology, and it is bewildering to see a resurgence of this discredited doctrine in an India that has widely come to be regarded as an engine of growth, a dynamic economy, a rising global power and a stable centre of democratic governance, in an otherwise volatile and crisis-ridden South Asian region. The seduction of Maoism in India, however, remains very real.

India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has, since November 2004, repeatedly declared that the Maoists - in local parlance, also called 'Naxalites' - constitute the country's "greatest internal security challenge". The assessment has been sharply underlined by Home Minister P. Chidambaram's disclosures, in September 2009, that the Maoists were 'active' in as many as 223 Districts across 20 States, out of a total of 626 Districts and 28 States in the country. Of course, only a fraction of these Districts have actually witnessed Maoist violence, and most are in the early stages of 'revolutionary mobilisation' - the creation of basic networks, the establishment of underground and 'overground' organisations, and the opportunistic harnessing of local grievances for radical political activity. The Home Minister has thus revealed that violence "has been consistently witnessed in about 400 Police station areas of around 90 Districts in 13 States".

It is sobering, however, to note that, at a meeting of the Central Coordination Committee of Naxalite-affected States at Bhubaneswar on November 21, 2003, the then Union Home Secretary had disclosed that a total of 55 districts in nine States were affected by varying degrees of Naxalite activity. Just ten months later, on September 21, 2004, an official note circulated at the meeting of Chief Ministers of Naxalite-affected States indicated that this number had gone up to as many as 156 Districts in 13 States by September 2004.² The sphere of Maoist activity was estimated to have expanded further to 170 districts in 15 States by February 2005³, to push relentlessly on to the present figure of 223 Districts in 20 States.

The dramatic expansion of Naxalite activities is the more spectacular when seen against the slow, painstaking and uncertain struggle that went into the seizure of the 55 districts that had fallen under their shadow by the end of 2003. The current movement traces its genealogy back to the insurrection of 1967 in the Naxalbari area of North Bengal (hence the appellation "Naxalites"), but that insurgency - after a wildfire spread in its early years - had been comprehensively defeated by 1973, with the entire top leadership of the spearhead Communist Party of India - Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) either jailed or dead. What little remained of its splintered survivor organizations was destroyed during Indira Gandhi's Emergency of 1975.

It was in 1980, with the formation of the People's War Group (PWG) under the leadership of Kondapalli Seetharamaiah (an erstwhile Central Organising Committee Member of the CPI-ML) in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, and the reorganization of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar in the mid-1980s, that the movement resurfaced in some strength. Initial successes were, again, rapid, and by the mid-1980s, 31 districts in seven States were afflicted by Naxalite violence. By the early 1990s, however, the problem had been eliminated from at least 16 of these districts, bringing the total number of affected districts to just 15 in four States.⁴ It is from this uncertain revival that the Maoists have swelled to their present power.

Despite the Prime Minister's unwavering focus on the dangers of the Maoist rebellion, this threat was carelessly dismissed by much of India's political leadership, including his own Cabinet colleagues, till fairly recently. On April 15, 2005, the Prime Minister articulated the most crystalline perspective on terrorism and political violence:

There can be no political compromise with terror. No inch conceded. No compassion shown... There are no good terrorists and bad terrorists. There is no cause, root or branch, that can ever justify the killing of innocent people. No democratic Government can tolerate the use of violence against innocent people and against the functionaries of a duly established democratic Government...

Less than ten days later, his then Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, publicly declared, "The Government is not interested in using weapons. They (the Naxalites) are our brothers and sisters and we know that this is a socio-economic problem rather than one of law and order..."⁵ While the dissonance was not as strident, there was certainly also a grave measure of denial in the then-Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee's comment that, "Naxalite activity in Andhra Pradesh and other parts has caused some concerns but it is manageable and there is no need for anyone to panic. The problem is being dealt with."⁶ Such conflicts of perspective remained endemic till Chidambaram took over as Home Minister on November 30, 2008.

Such discordance of perspectives in the highest echelons of the national Government appears, now, to be substantially a thing of the past. Unfortunately, the state appears to have taken a hasty swing from under-reaction to unplanned and ill-conceived belligerence over the past months. Certainly since the re-election of the Manmohan Singh Government in May 2009, steady leaks from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and other Central departments and agencies have fed a media frenzy about 'surgical strikes' by combined teams of 'Special Forces' from the States and the Central Paramilitary Forces, in a 'coordinated' and 'massive' offensive across the Maoist 'heartland' areas. These imaginings have been backed with sci-fi visions of high resolution aerial, satellite and thermal imagery and air support for ground troops.

As the Centre loudly and continuously tom-tommed its projected 'massive operations', it became abundantly clear these would come as no surprise whatsoever to the Maoists. Indeed, there was ample evidence that the Maoists had been systematically preparing for the 'imminent' onslaught for months, and had already initiated operations to thwart and circumvent the state's

strategy. A Maoist Politburo document of June 12, 2009, had warned that 'revolutionary cadres' had to prepare themselves for "far more brutal, deadly and savage" state repression "than under any other regime hitherto witnessed" and would have to deal with "the state's khaki (Police) and olive-clad (Army) terrorist forces". The Politburo, however, also declared,

"Though the enemy is itching to suppress our Party and movement by deploying a huge force in all our areas, *he has severe difficulties in implementing this at present*; he has plans to increase the number of central forces in the next few years... *but in the immediate context it is quite difficult for the Centre to send the forces required by each state to control our movement*. Keeping this in mind, we have to further aggravate the situation and create more difficulties to the enemy forces by expanding our guerrilla war to new areas on the one hand and intensifying the mass resistance in the existing areas so as to *disperse the enemy forces over a sufficiently wider area*... tactical counter-offensives should be stepped up and also taken up in new areas so as to *divert a section of the enemy forces* from attacking our guerrilla bases and organs of political power." (Emphases added).

As talk of an imminent 'war' against the Naxalites escalated, consequently, diversionary violence by the rebels intensified. As against 721 confirmed fatalities in 2008 (MHA data), the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* had already documented a provisional total of 873 fatalities in Maoist-related violence in 2009 (till November 16). 2009 has already witnessed as many as 77 major incidents (defined as incidents involving three or more fatalities) as against 59 in 2008.

This wave of pre-emptive Maoist violence has evidently had a sobering impact on the strategicians of the Centre's 'massive operation', and there has been a dramatic dilution of the earlier 'war rhetoric'. On November 12, the Home Minister dismissed talk of the Central operation as "pure invention of the media" (though he omitted mention of the significant and continuous leaks from the Home Ministry that had fed distorted public perceptions). He declared, further, that what was to be expected "in the months ahead is merely a more coordinated effort by the state police to reassert control over territory or tracts of land where regrettably the civil administration has lost control. And for that purpose we (the Centre) will assist them in every manner possible, particularly by providing paramilitary forces and sharing of intelligence."

How did this happen? How could a group variously estimated to have no more than 15 to 20,000 armed cadre spread thinly across vast territories so quickly force the combined might of the Federal and State Governments into an apparent turnaround? The reality is that the Maoists have consolidated their disruptive dominance in areas where the state has little presence and, worse, the cumulative capacity deficits in the security apparatus are so great that there is little possibility of altering the balance of Force in any radical measure to secure a demonstrable victory against the rebels.

It is crucial to review the relevant state capacities in this context. First, police-population ratios for the whole country stood at a bare 125 per 100,000 in early 2008. According to the Prime Minister's statement at the Conference of Directors General of Police on September 15, 2009, this has now risen to about 145 per 100,000 - still abysmally low, compared to required ratios for *peacetime* policing at well over 200, and ranging, in some western countries, at over 500 per 100,000. This is, moreover, a primitive, ill-trained and ill-equipped Force, and, in most States, has little capacity or orientation to deal with a full-blown insurgency. Worse, these numbers reflect sanctioned strengths, and not the actual strength available on the ground. Thus, there was more than a 14 percent deficit against total sanctioned strength in 2008. The situation in the States most affected by Naxalism is infinitely worse. Bihar has a Police-population ratio of just 60, and a deficit of over 33 percent against sanctioned strength. Orissa has a sanctioned ratio of 97, and a deficit of nearly 19 percent. In Jharkhand, the ratio is 136/100,000, and the deficit is 21 percent; Chhattisgarh has 128/100,000 and a deficit of 26 per cent; Andhra Pradesh, 96/100,000 and a deficit of 11 percent; West Bengal, 92 per 100,000, and a deficit of 25 percent.

The crisis of leadership is more acute. At the cutting edge ranks of Deputy Superintendent of Police to Senior Superintendent of Police, deficits in Andhra stand at 19 percent; in Bihar at 35 percent; in Chhattisgarh at 28 percent; in Jharkhand at 51 percent; in Orissa at 34 percent; and in West Bengal at 25 percent. In the 'fighting leadership' at the ranks of Assistant Sub-Inspector to Inspector, deficits in Andhra are at 15 percent; Bihar: 39 percent; Chhattisgarh: 41 percent; Jharkhand: 18 percent; Orissa, 34 percent; and West Bengal 30 percent. Crucially, sanctioned strengths in most leadership ranks are severely inadequate, and will become progressively so as recruitment to the lower ranks accelerates. The overall system does not appear to be geared to respond to these predicaments. In the worst case, for instance, Orissa has a current sanctioned strength of as many as 207 officers in the IPS ranks, but has just 84 officers currently available. The State had requested the Centre to allocate a trifling eight IPS officers from the graduating batch of 2009; the Centre allocated just four - a number that will be significantly exceeded by those retiring this year, and against the current deficit of as many as 123 officers.

Manpower deficits are, of course, infinitely compounded by extreme shortfalls in technical, technological and training variables; by irrational and wasteful deployment of Forces, and by persistently imprudent political interventions. The outcome is that current capacities of Police Forces in the afflicted States are simply insufficient to design an effective response to the Maoist challenge.

The Centre pretends to come 'to the rescue' with its 'battalion approach', and there has been much talk of 'massive deployment' of CPMFs. The reality is sobering. Prior to the much advertised 'massive operations' the total allocation of CPMFs in the Maoist affected areas was a mere 37 battalions, yielding a total of just 14,800 men in the field. There is now talk of 70 battalions being sent to these areas - though it is not clear whether this will be an additional 70 or an augmentation of current Force to this number. We would, in other words, have either 70 or 107 battalions allocated under the Centre's projected operational plans, that is, 28,000 or 42,800 CPMF personnel, as the case may be, for six worst affected States with a total area of 1.86 million square kilometers and a total population of over 446 million. This is like trying to irrigate the desert with dewdrops.

Of course, the Centre's operational strategy would seek to concentrate this Force in areas of specific Maoist dominance, to 'recover' these areas, and then 'bring them under civil administration'. But the Maoists would simply refuse to confront the state in its areas of strength, and the state cannot, given existing capacities, maintain permanent saturation in the 'recovered' areas. Where the state's deployments are heavy, the Maoists will simply walk away. Where State Forces are dispersed or their presence is eventually diluted, they will be selectively targeted in a campaign of attrition.

The reality is, the Maoist ideology and strategy finds fertile ground in the security, administrative and political vacuum that extends over vast areas of the country, where the state is systematically and chronically failing to provide the public goods and services that it is obliged to - including the security of life and property, criminal justice and opportunities for social and economic growth. In such circumstances, it is inevitable that other individuals and agencies will step in to fill the vacuum. It is inevitable, also, that in most such cases, these individuals and agencies will not be constrained by the limits of law or any established procedure, in their interactions with local populations, and, consequently, that these interactions will tend to be unacceptably violent, exploitative and even tyrannical.

The fact is that the entire structure of rural administration in the Naxalite-affected areas has been wholly emasculated, or has simply not evolved beyond the primitive structures of colonial governance, or has, through a combination of factors, including primarily the incompetence, corruption and criminalisation of the political leadership, deteriorated to the point of paralysis.

This give rise to strong advocacy in the India establishment and among armies of international 'activists' and 'experts' for another bogus 'solution' to the Maoist rampage: bringing 'development' and 'civil administration' to areas currently under Maoist disruptive dominance. But this 'strategy' - if kite-flying deserves such a title - has no possible future. It is based on a simple logic of inversion: if the lack of administration is the problem, providing administration is the obvious solution. But this is not as easy as it may first seem.

There has been a long-standing myth that India suffers from 'too much governance'; that its 'bloated bureaucracy' needs to be 'rationalised' through drastic reduction. This is another bit of the most extraordinarily contrafactual nonsense that has taken firm root in the Indian imagination. The reality is, India's administrative capacities are collapsing, not just qualitatively - because of the rising incompetence and corruption of the system - but even in terms of minimal quantitative variables. Thus USA, with its belief that "the best government governs least" has as many as 889 Federal Government employees per 100,000 population. India's Central Government employs just 295 per 100,000, and a large proportion of these are flogged out to a number of public sector enterprises and units entirely unconnected with core governance. The Railways, for instance, is the largest single Central Government employer, accounting for over 42 percent of the total pool. If Railway employees were to be excluded from the strength of Central Government Employees, this would leave us with a ratio of just 171 Central Government employees per 100,000. Moving on to State and Local Government employees, we find that, in the US, these account for another 6,314 per 100,000; in sharp contrast, Uttar Pradesh has 352; Bihar, 472; Orissa, 1,007; Chhattisgarh, 1,067; Maharashtra, 1,223; Punjab, 1,383; Gujarat, 1,694. Worse, in India, the overwhelming proportion of Government employees is in the lower cadres, as against the 'thinking' element of the state in higher echelons. Even in the latter category, qualitative profiles, including modern and administrative skills, training and technological competence are severely limited. Crucially, there is no plan or programme, given current resource configurations, that can address the cumulative developmental deficits in India in any timeframe that is relevant to counter-insurgency goals. Given current state capacities, it must be clear, no proposed strategy can offer the possibility of a decisive victory, or even enduring gains, against the Maoists.

It is the infirmity of the state, and the effective absence of its agencies and services across India's vast rural hinterland, and not some inherent and irresistible appeal of the Maoist ideology, that explains the seeming 'popularity' of this anachronistic doctrine in a modernizing world and an apparently modernizing India. The Maoist strategy simply harnesses a complex of inducements and terror to enthral populations that have fallen into the blackholes of India's administrative and security system as a result of decades of political neglect, vacillation, collusion, corruption and ineptitude.

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India's Maoists and the Dreamscape of 'Solutions' Ajai Sahni

In November 2003, according to the then-Union Home Secretary, 55 Districts in nine Indian States were listed as "Maoist affected";¹ by 2009, the country's Minister for Home Affairs, P. Chidambaram informs us, that number had risen to 223 Districts in 20 States. Further, the new 'solutions' currently being proposed, the Maoist leadership confidently assures us, will only help the Naxalites "expand to wider areas, mobilise wider masses... gather new momentum and get new dynamism."²

Some may contest the Maoist assessment of the future, but, clearly, the many 'solutions' being applied to the problem (those who have been sworn to protect India over the past decades have surely been trying to solve this 'gravest internal security threat' to the country) are not working.

No doubt, the situation is not quite as alarming as the 223 District figure (India has a total of about 636 Districts) may initially suggest. A third of the country has by no means been 'captured' by the Maoists, nor are these vast areas seething with disruptive violence. The Home Minister thus clarified that violence "has been consistently witnessed in about 400 Police Station areas of around 90 Districts in 13 States" (there are over 14,000 Police Stations in the country). But 90 Districts experiencing 'consistent violence' is by far greater than the total of 55 variously affected Districts in 2003. The steady expansion of Maoist networks and the calibrated extension of their violence, suggest a significant strategic failure on the part of the state.

The most profound reason for this strategic failure is, bluntly put, sheer and enduring stupidity. No 'solution' has any relevance whatsoever without a clear detailing of the resource configuration and the objective context within which it is to be applied. Yet, virtually the entire counter-insurgency (CI) discourse in India has remained doctrinaire, with almost no reference to the nuts and bolts of what is available, a coherent strategy into which these capacities are woven, and how this is to be implemented.

The chief manifestations of this discourse have been the dogmas of the 'military / law and order (L&O) approach'³ vs. the 'developmental / political solution' - as if by saying 'military approach' or 'developmental solution' all issues of policy, resources, strategy and tactics are resolved at a stroke.

Let us, quickly, see how this is utter nonsense. In Manipur, the Police-Population ratio stands at a startling 554 per 100,000 (at a time when the average for India was 125). In addition, some 42 battalions of Central Paramilitary Forces and the Army are deployed in a counter-insurgency grid in the State. Manipur does, of course, have an elected Government and an immensely overstaffed paraphernalia of administration, but no one pretends that there is a functional civil government in the State. Despite much 'hearts and minds' rhetoric, the 'military solution' - the use of force - is the only visible CI strategy in operation. And yet, this tiny State, with a population of under 2.4 million (ranking 22nd out of 28 States, by population size) now accounts for the largest number of insurgency-related killings for any single State in the country. Total fatalities in Manipur were 416 in 2009; Assam (population 26.7 million) accounted for 392; Jammu & Kashmir (population 10.1 million), 377; and Chhattisgarh (population 20.8 million), 345.⁴

On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh (population 76.2 million) has an extremely poor Police-population ratio, currently at 96 per 100,000. At the peak of the successful CI phase, between 2005-09, no more than six battalions of CPMFs were ever deployed in the State for anti-Naxalite operations, and the core responsibility of the campaign was vested squarely in the State Police. Of course, the quality of administration in the State is infinitely better than Manipur, but, once again, no one could, on the merits of the record, argue, that 'development' has ever been systematically and effectively applied as a CI strategy. In 2005, the Maoists were rampaging across every one of the State's 23 Districts, and total Naxalite-related fatalities in that year stood at 320. By 2009, total fatalities were down to 28, with the Maoists operating principally from across the borders of neighbouring States, into just four peripheral Andhra Districts.

Clearly, 'military' strategies or L&O approaches vary widely across theatres, and the efficacy of use of force is far from uniform across these. There is no simple choice of a 'military' or 'L&O' response, with automatic and inevitable consequences to follow. The question of utility and impact cannot simply be resolved without reference to detailed realities of the ground, including the character and stage of the insurgency, force structure, leadership, capacities, deployment, motivation, terrain, population, strategy and tactics. All use of force is not equal, and this is the case even where the quantum of force used may be comparable. The 'military' or 'law and order' solution, indeed, comprehends an infinitely wide spectrum of Force dispositions, strategies, tactics, policies and practices, many of them effective, and others entirely counter-productive. Nothing but a detailed study of specific campaigns - both successful and unsuccessful - can yield an understanding of what works and what fails, in what circumstances. Such a study has been conspicuous in its absence within the Indian CI-CT and security establishment, as well as among 'civil society' voices that are particularly voluble on the subject.

On the other hand, advocates of the 'developmental solution' would have us accept, as a general proposition, that the problem of terrorism-insurgency cannot be addressed through 'security responses' or use of force, but must be resolved through the implementation of a range of programmes for poverty alleviation, the 'empowerment' of disadvantaged groups, the redressal of grievances, and delivery on wider developmental goals, to undercut the 'recruitment pool' of terrorist and violent political groups.

This is another unexamined shibboleth, essentially based on a *a priori* reasoning, a hollow tautology that rests, simply, on the unverified claim that the lack of development (poverty) is the 'root cause' of terrorism and, therefore, the 'elimination' of this 'cause' is the 'solution'. There is, here, no reference either to available resource configurations and administrative capacities, or to any rational assessment of the deficits that would need to be met in order to realize this 'solution'. One may, just as well, argue that the 'solution' to poverty is wealth; or the 'solution' to disease is good health - both claims are impeccably true, but imagine the reaction of a cancer patient being advised by his doctor to 'go home and be healthy'!

It is not surprising that the Maoists are laughing at these inanities. When the Centre declares its 'new strategy' would 'clear, hold and develop' areas under present Maoist dominance, Azad, the spokesman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of

India - Maoist (CPI-Maoist) responds:

The exploiting classes have absolute control over more than 90 percent of the country's geographical area. If at all they wish to reach out to the masses with their so-called reforms, who is preventing them from doing so? Instead of addressing problems of the poor in these vast regions under their absolute control, they are talking of recapturing territory from Maoists.⁵

Advocacy of the 'developmental solution' is, in fact, based on a number of politically correct but altogether contra-factual assumptions.⁶ Among the emotively powerful articulations of this advocacy is the idiom of 'winning hearts and minds', and Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templar's counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya is held up by the uninformed as a shining example of this model. But, as Paul Dixon notes, relatively mildly, "the phrase 'hearts and minds' does not accurately describe Britain's highly coercive campaign in Malaya. The British approach in Malaya did involve high levels of force, was not fought within the law and led to abuses of human rights."⁷ David Benest is more outspoken: "Bluntly put, coercion was the reality - 'hearts and minds' the myth."⁸ And in the most significant assessment, Sir Templar himself had, by 1968, come to refer to 'hearts and minds' as "that nauseating phrase I think I invented."⁹

In essence, the 'development solution' fails - and inevitably founders - on the following considerations:

- You cannot develop what you do not control.
- 'Development' is not something that can be ordered off a menu card. The state's absolute capacities to deliver an acceptable level of development to populations in the principal 'problem areas' are themselves limited by demographics, the available natural, financial and human resource base, and structural infirmities.
- No society in the world has ever 'out-developed' an ongoing insurgency or terrorist movement.
- The 'developmental solution' has progressively become an alibi for persistent failures to address immediate tasks of response.
- The time frames of counter-terrorism and developmental policy cannot be reconciled. Counter-terrorism demands immediate responses; development is, by definition a long-drawn-out process.
- While the rhetoric of 'development' dominates the discourse in areas of major conflict, there is little evidence of a sustained effort at development or good governance in areas - particularly in the rural hinterland - where there is no significant manifestation of insurgent or terrorist violence.
- Crucially, an overwhelming proportion of developmental resources actually flow into the vast underground economy of terrorism, strengthening the very edifice that they are intended to dismantle.

Over the past year, nevertheless, the Centre has been tom-tomming 'massive', 'comprehensive' and 'coordinated' operations against the Maoists in the major affected States. These statements, with small variants, have found occasional echoes in some of the worst-affected States, while other States continue to support a 'negotiated solution' with the Maoists. Despite all claims to novelty, however, the essence of these pronouncements is exhausted by the tired 'multi-pronged approach' that has been the staple of the MHA's declarations for decades now.

There was, of course, some initial enthusiasm under the new dispensation at North Block for Army deployment and some kite flying about hi-tech UAV guided 'precision strikes' against the Naxalites, but better sense quickly (and fortunately) prevailed. The Centre's eventual grand vision crystallized in Home Minister Chidambaram's words: "Our response... will be police action to wrest control of territory that is now dominated by the Naxalites, restoration of civil administration and undertaking developmental activities - in that order."¹⁰ Home Secretary G.K. Pillai elaborates, with Panglossian optimism, "We hope that literally within 30 days of security forces moving in and dominating the area, we should be able to restore civil administration there."¹¹ From Chhattisgarh, the Director General of Police, Vishwaranjan, elaborates on this scenario in classical *tache d'huile* (oil spot) counter-insurgency terms: "Our newest strategy is to win complete control over small areas under Maoist influence, hold them, and not withdraw forces until development in the area is well under way... We will repeat this pattern in other areas, a few at a time, until the enemy has nowhere to go."¹²

What is fascinating in these narratives is their exquisite simplicity and their utter divorce from reality. It would, indeed, be quite miraculous if the state could even 'restore civil administration' to vast expanses of rural India where the Maoists have no presence whatsoever, but where virtually the entire apparatus of governance has vanished. At least some of these areas are little more than a stone's throw from Delhi.

The problem with these various 'strategies' is that they aren't 'strategies' at all. These are borrowed ideas with no reference to capacities, capabilities, resources and the conditions of the ground.

A quick review of the relevant capacities is useful here. First, police-population ratios for the whole country stood at a bare 125 per 100,000 in early 2008. According to the Prime Minister's statement on September 15, 2009, this has now risen to about 145 per 100,000 - still abysmally low, compared to required ratios for *peacetime* policing at over 222, and ranging, in some western countries, at well over 500 per 100,000. This is, moreover, a primitive, ill-trained and ill-equipped Force, and, in most States, has little capacity or orientation to deal with a full-blown insurgency. Worse, these numbers reflect sanctioned strengths, and not the actual strength available on the ground. Thus, there was more than a 14 percent deficit against total sanctioned strength in 2008. The situation in the States most affected by Naxalism is infinitely worse. Bihar has a Police-population ratio of just 60,

and a deficit of over 33 percent against sanctioned strength. Orissa has a sanctioned ratio of 97, and a deficit of nearly 19 percent. In Jharkhand, the ratio is 136/100,000, and the deficit is 21 percent; Chhattisgarh has 128/100,000 and a deficit of 26 per cent; Andhra Pradesh, 96/100,000 and a deficit of 11 percent; West Bengal, 92 per 100,000, and a deficit of 25 percent.

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Of course, the Centre's 'operational strategy' seeks to concentrate this Force in areas of specific Maoist dominance, to 'recover' these areas, and 'bring them under civil administration'. But the Maoists would simply refuse to confront the state in its areas of strength, and the state cannot, given existing capacities, maintain permanent saturation in the 'recovered' areas. Where the state's deployments are heavy, the Maoists will simply walk away. Where state Forces are dispersed or their presence is eventually diluted, they will be selectively targeted in a campaign of attrition.

The reality is, the Maoist ideology and strategy find fertile ground in the security, administrative and political vacuum that extends over vast areas of the country. The entire structure of rural administration in the Naxalite-affected areas has been wholly emasculated, or has simply not evolved beyond the primitive structures of colonial governance, or has, through a combination of factors, including primarily the incompetence, corruption and criminalisation of the political leadership, deteriorated to the point of paralysis.

These are not deficiencies that can easily be addressed, even outside the regions where Maoists have established disruptive dominance. There has been a long-standing myth that India suffers from 'too much governance'; that its 'bloated bureaucracy' needs to be 'rationalised' through drastic 'down-sizing'. This is another bit of the most extraordinarily contra-factual nonsense that has taken firm root in the Indian imagination. The reality is, India's administrative capacities are collapsing, not just qualitatively - because of rising incompetence and corruption - but even in terms of minimal quantitative variables. Thus USA, with its belief that 'the best government governs least', has as many as 889 Federal Government employees per 100,000 population. India's Central Government employs just 295 per 100,000, and a large proportion of these are flogged out to a number of public sector enterprises and agencies entirely unconnected with core governance. The Railways, for instance, account for over 42 percent of the total pool. If Railway employees were to be excluded from the strength of Central Government Employees, this would leave us with a ratio of just 171 Central Government employees per 100,000. Moving on to State and Local Government employees, we find that, in the US, these account for another 6,314 per 100,000; in sharp contrast, Uttar Pradesh has 352; Bihar, 472; Orissa, 1,007; Chhattisgarh, 1,067; Maharashtra, 1,223; Punjab, 1,383; Gujarat, 1,694. Worse, in India, the overwhelming proportion of Government employees is in the lower cadres, as against the 'thinking' element of the state in higher echelons. Even in the latter category, qualitative profiles, including modern and administrative skills, training and technological competence are severely limited.

It is the infirmity of the state and the effective absence of its agencies and services across India's vast rural hinterland, and not some inherent and irresistible appeal of the Maoist ideology, that explains the widening footprint of this anachronistic doctrine and its violent manifestations across an apparently modernizing India. The Maoist strategy simply harnesses a complex of inducements and terror to enthral populations that have fallen into the blackholes of India's security and administrative system as a result of decades of political neglect, vacillation, collusion, corruption and ineptitude. A 'strategy' of response would have to factor in the cumulative deficits that have come to cripple the Indian state today.

On the other hand, as one senior Police official expressed it on conditions of anonymity, "if you don't have a strategy, you start operations." That is the reality of current state responses to the Maoist challenge in India.

1. At intensities varying from marginal, through moderate to high.
2. Mohua Chatterjee, "Thanks to Chidambaram, our war will expand to wider areas: CPI (Maoist)", *The Times of India*, January 19, 2010.
3. I conflate the 'military' and 'law and order' approaches, as both essentially imply reliance on use of force, which is the basic template across which the contrast against the 'developmental / political' approach is constructed. Clearly, however, there is tremendous strategic distinction between reliance on the 'military' and on the 'Police', but that is an issue that requires separate treatment. The 'military' approach is, itself, far from unique or homogeneous.
4. All fatalities data from the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* database, www.satp.org.

5. Mohua Chatterjee, *op. cit.*
6. The various arguments against the 'developmental solution' have been dealt with in greater detail in Ajai Sahni, "Challenging Terrorism", *India & Global Affairs*, April-June, 2009.
7. Paul Dixon, "'Hearts and Minds'? British Counter-insurgency from Malaya to Iraq", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Volume 32, Issue 3, June 2009, p. 353.
8. David Benest, "Aden to Northern Ireland, 1966-76", in H. Strachen (Ed.), *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 118-19.
9. Quoted in Paul Dixon, *op. cit.*, p. 363.
10. Statement of the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram on August 17, 2009 at the Conference of Chief Ministers on Internal Security in New Delhi,
www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/Hm_is_170809.htm.
11. "Centre to launch massive operation against Naxals in November", *rediffnews.com*, October 12, 2009,
<http://news.rediff.com/report/2009/oct/12/massive-anti-naxal-op-to-be-launched-in-nov.htm>.
12. Jessica Bachman, "India steps up its fight against Naxalites", *Time.com*, November 20, 2009,
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1940559,00.html>.

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