



DIMINISHING RED SHADOWS: ASSESSING THE DESCENT OF LEFT WING EXTREMISM IN INDIA

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The trend of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India demonstrates a downward trajectory. Despite this, sporadic incidents of violence result in casualties, and the evolving tactics employed by insurgents are being met with adept responses from the security apparatus. Against this backdrop, the current paper aims to integrate the strategies used in counterinsurgency operations against Indian Maoists into a broader framework. This includes examining their implications within the wider spectrum of global non-state and conventional military engagements.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2004, every year, the Indian Maoists observe their foundation week commencing on September 21.¹ However, in September 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) informed that Left Wing Extremism (LWE) was limited to merely 41 districts (out of a total of over 760 districts) in India – a significant achievement compared to the situation in 2010 – when 96 districts (out of a total of about 640 districts then) were affected by the insurgency.² Statistics indicate that in 2023, the Maoist insurgency is further under the control of India's security forces.³ Nevertheless, incidents of violence continue to occur.⁴ The security forces, too, have kept up their vigil by carrying out pre-emptive raids.⁵ In addition, Targeted Incarcerations (TI) are implemented to nab the leadership of the extremists.^{6,7}

To understand the insurgency at the ground level, a field visit to the district of Aurangabad was undertaken in October 2022, which was personally coordinated by the Superintendent of Police, Kantesh Mishra.⁸ As ascertained from Mishra, TI is a potent weapon to squeeze the blood out of the insurgency.⁹ Nonetheless, under a controlled state of affairs, the insurgency has had its share of fluctuations and a battered origin.

This paper utilizes a qualitative analytical framework to examine Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India, situating it within the broader context of irregular and non-state warfare. Structured in five sections, it commences with an introduction to the subject, traces the genesis of India's Maoist insurgency back to 1965, and proceeds to map the evolution of guerrilla warfare

¹ “Red terror: All about the Maoist foundation week”, *Organiser*, September 22, 2023, <https://organiser.org/2023/09/22/197325/bharat/red-terror-all-about-the-maoist-foundation-week/>

² Vijaita Singh, “Maoist influence down to just 41 districts: Centre”, *The Hindu*, September 26, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-plans-to-intensify-operations-against-naxals-choke-flow-of-funds-act-against-frontal-groups/article36679839.ece>

³ “Maoist Insurgency: Assessment – 2023”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <https://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/india-maoistinsurgency>

⁴ “4 Vehicles Burnt, Private Firm's Staff Assaulted By Maoists In Jharkhand”, *PTI/NDTV*, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/4-vehicles-burnt-private-firms-staff-assaulted-by-maoists-in-jharkhand-4423436>

⁵ “UP: NIA cracks down on CPI (Maoist) revival with multiple raids across the state”, *ANI*, September 06, 2023, <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/up-nia-cracks-down-on-cpi-maoist-revival-with-multiple-raids-across-the-state20230906131635/>

⁶ “Maoist leader from Chhattisgarh arrested in A.P.'s Alluri Sitharama Raju district”, *The Hindu*, September 23, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/maoist-leader-from-chhattisgarh-arrested-in-aps-alluri-sitharama-raju-district/article67338334.ece>

⁷ Naveen Kumar, “Wanted Maoist Sanjoy Deepak Rao apprehended by Cyberabad police”, *The Hindu*, September 15, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/wanted-maoist-sanjoy-deepak-rao-apprehended-by-cyberabad-police/article67311535.ece>

⁸ Kantesh Mishra, an Indian Police Service officer of 2015 batch, was the Superintendent of Police of Aurangabad district in India's eastern state of Bihar, from July 2021 to January 2023.

⁹ Kantesh Mishra had more or less cleared his district of LWE to the extent that it could be materialized. One aspect of his counterinsurgency principles was targeted incarceration [TI] of the local level Maoist leadership. According to Mishra, the tactic had worked well in Aurangabad district.

globally, emphasizing Mao Zedong's tactics. The discourse then extends to a comprehensive analysis of non-state warfare, contrasting it with conventional warfare and exploring the significance of language in counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. The paper culminates by offering conclusions on the potential trajectory of the Maoist insurgency.

Origin of the Maoist Insurgency

Although we do not require Bernard D'Mello to tell us the historical cliché that the Deccan-based Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (People's War) [CPI(ML)(PW)] transformed into the CPI (Maoist) in September 2004 after its fusion with the Bihar-Jharkhand based Maoist Communist Centre, we are a bit gobsmacked by D'Mello's assertion that post-merger, the Maoist party ceased attacks on the "instruments and partisans of the establishment (read government)".¹⁰ D'Mello nonetheless speaks an obvious pro-Maoist voice and terms any attempted 'objective' narration as necessarily failing to capture the accurate picture! D'Mello accuses the security forces (in 2004) of having unleashed a set of 'organized private gangs, viz—Narsa Cobras, Kakatiya Cobras, Nallamala Cobras', to eradicate the pro-Maoist mass organizations.¹¹

However, even as D'Mello refers to the inspiration that the Maoists drew from the legacy of Adivasi hero Gunda Dhur – who fought against British colonialism, he does state that then Maoist General Secretary admitted to having been militarily cornered by the Indian security forces:

*"July 2007, the Party General Secretary, Muppalla Laxman Rao, more popularly known as Ganapathy, admitted that in Andhra Pradesh, the enemy has the upper hand from the tactical point of view."*¹²

There was always a background to the growth of Maoism in India. As India was unlocking itself from British colonial trappings, communists were waging an insurgency in Telangana, which continued even against the independent post-colonial Indian government. The ideological enclosure to the movement had been provided by the Soviet delegate, Andrey Aleksandrovich Zhdanov, 'who, during the Cominform Conference in 1947, called upon the Communist parties in Asia to overthrow the governments of the newly independent as well as not-yet-free countries through armed uprising'.¹³

Early in 1951, writes Sohail Jawaid, four prominent Communist leaders, S.A. Dange, R. Rajeswar Kao, A.K. Ghosh and Basavapunniah, visited Moscow. After returning to India, A.K. Ghosh succeeded Rao as Secretary-General of the then Communist Party of India (CPI). The most interesting aspect of the new CPI policy was ending the Telangana insurgency. Instead,

¹⁰ Bernard D'Mello, *India after Naxalbari*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2018, p. 230.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., pp. 231-33

¹³ Sohail Jawaid, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, . Associated Publishing House, Delhi, 1979. p 26.

the CPI decided to make inroads into the Indian parliament and oppose the 'Government's reactionary policies'. The idea was to form a 'four-class alliance of the workers, peasants, middle class and the national bourgeoisie' and, after that, form a People's Democratic Government, writes Jawaid. The results of the following elections in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) show that the CPI won 26 out of 512 seats. After all, the parliamentary *avatar* of Communism was beginning to be accepted by Indian society.

By April 1958, CPI accepted the prospect of a possible peaceful transition to Communism in India because, by then, they had won a majority in the south Indian state of Kerala. As per Jawaid, CPI declared that 'there was no need for civil wars or insurgent movements to advance Communism in this world of the atomic weapons'. In this connection, Jawaid refers to Fansod, who in turn quotes Lenin:

*"...as long as the masses have faith in parliament, communists must engage in parliamentary activity, [however] not to strengthen, but destroy the parliamentary system".*¹⁴

Furthermore, Jawaid tells us that the Chinese Communist upheaval in 1949 led by Mao Zedong created confusion among the Indian communists. When the first serious clash between India and China took place on 20-21 October 1959, the Indian Communists were divided into two schools of thought. The first group, led by Ajoy Ghosh, justified the Indian government's posture. In contrast, the second group, led by R. Ramamurti, A.K. Gopalan and E.M.S. Namboodiripad, declared that CPI would oppose any "aggression" by India. However, later, in November 1962, when the CPI national council condemned the Chinese invasion of India, three leading leftists, Jyoti Basu, H K S Surjeet and P Sundarayya, resigned in protest.¹⁵

Quite interestingly, Jyoti Basu was later the Chief Minister of a communist-led government in India's eastern state of West Bengal. Basu, in July 1964, was one of the chief architects in the formation of the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M), thereby separating from the S A Dange-led CPI – as a mark of outright protest against having Dange as the Chairman of the party – who was alleged to have submitted mercy petitions to the British colonial government during his period of incarceration in the 1920s. The West Bengal Communists, on the other end, declared that the unit would not follow the instructions of their central leadership and would re-establish the link with the people to fight against the Indian government (which had Jawaharlal Nehru as the Prime Minister then). They circulated a pamphlet in which it was written: "Turn your guns and bayonets on the Congress (read Indian National Congress) Fascists, arrest the hated officers, and set fire to the whole of Calcutta and the whole of Bengal."¹⁶

And if we believe that this was the first time Communists in Bengal had been pro-violence, then we ought to be reminded of Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's work in which he analyses the declassified record of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to conclude that in 1948-50, the Indian

¹⁴ Ibid., p.16

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 20

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 22

province of West Bengal witnessed a violent communist upsurge. Bandyopadhyay comments that 'in many ways, the events of this period foreshadowed what happened in West Bengal during the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s'.¹⁷

Jawaid, on the other hand, further informs that though the Naxalite (Maoist) armed agrarian uprising was launched in the first week of March 1967 in the Naxalbari region of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, it was developing in 1965 itself. Interestingly, in early 1965, Indian officials seized Indian currency of more than Rs. 31,00,000 at the Raxaul check post from a Tibetan, which was intended to assist the extremists in West Bengal.¹⁸ India's IB informed the Indian government that the extremists in West Bengal were being guided by the Chinese from the territory of Nepal and had been provided with arms manufacturing facilities there. Furthermore, in March 1966, IB provided evidence that large quantities of arms and ammunition had been smuggled into West Bengal through the territory of East Pakistan. To add fuel to the fire, Radio Pakistan broadcasted on July 02, 1967, which declared that 'the time has come when the Indian people would make their rulers stand in the criminal box and liberate themselves from slavery'. Meanwhile, the Indian government got hold of an intelligence input that the Naxalities had established contacts with the Maoists in Nepal. Later on, when the West Bengal police were chasing the Naxalite Kanu Sanyal, he was given refuge in Jhapa (Nepal) by his Nepali counterparts.¹⁹

Guerillas in the Modern World

As the French occupiers historicized it, the 'Spanish ulcer' was perhaps the most impressive people's war of the 19th century, at least that is what Charles Townshend opines.²⁰ The local Spanish resistance fighters were called *partidos*, or partisans, and the French label for their style of operations was *la petite guerre*, which in Spanish is called 'guerilla'. However, in the early spring of 1793, the peasants of Vendée (France) took up arms against the republican French government. Quite interesting indeed – pro-royalist and pro-clergy peasant combatants had a showdown with a republican government born out of the French Revolution – essentially anti-royalist and anti-clergy! Though the initial provocation was 'forced' conscription, the real motivation for the peasants of Vendee was to resist the Republican government's attempt to make the clergy subordinate to the state. After several early rebel victories, writes Townshend, the peasant rising turned out to be an intense war of violence. Several republican generals were sent to the guillotine for failing to subdue the peasant rebels. When the rebellion was finally put down, about 20 per cent of the population of the affected region had perished. It is well known that France had constantly been beset with jacqueries, but this was a somewhat reactionary peasant uprising. Later on, when Napoleon would turn out to be more accommodating towards religion, it was perhaps not without reason.

¹⁷ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *The Story of an Aborted Revolution: Communist Insurgency in Post- independence West Bengal, 1948–50*, *Journal of South Asian Development*, Vol. 3(1), 2008, pp. 1–32. DOI: 10.1177/097317410700300101

¹⁸ Sohail Jawaid, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, 1979, p 31

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁰ Charles Townshend, *The Oxford History of Modern War*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 177

The spectre of people's war occurred in France once again, and this time to haunt the victorious German armies after the surrender of Napoleon II in September 1870. In a few weeks of the conventional war with Prussia, almost all the French regular forces had been captured at Sedan or besieged in Metz and Paris. Yet, the new republican government of France refused to admit defeat, writes Townshend. Leon Gambetta gave the clarion call:

*"Harass the enemy's detachments without pause or relaxation, prevent him from deploying, restrict the area of his requisitions, and disturb him day and night, always and everywhere."*²¹

In the process, they kept the Germans in check for four months. The hero of Italian unification, Garibaldi, brought volunteers to help the French Republic.

Nonetheless, the potential impact of the People's War was finally shaped by a confluence of two national movements – the Arab revolt of 1916-18 and the Irish War of Independence in 1919-21. The British advance from Egypt into Palestine and Syria was assisted by Arab guerrilla forces led by Emir Faisal, son of Mecca's Sharif – who was advised by a British officer, T. E. Lawrence, popularly known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'. Of the four critical factors identified by Lawrence, mobility and security were essential aspects of guerrilla operations. Townshend tells us that Lawrence avoided discussing the issue of space, which was, on the other hand, considered vital by Prussian war expert Clausewitz. Instead, Lawrence focused on time and ideology. Lawrence rightly held skilful propaganda as one of the critical factors in counterinsurgency (COIN). He was perhaps the first counterinsurgent of the modern era who upheld the long insurgency war on the canvas of 'hearts and minds of the people'.

Townshend narrates the post-Bolshevik Revolution (1917) guerrilla campaign led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno in southern Ukraine to push the story forward. Makhno's peasant insurgents first fought against the anti-Bolshevik 'White' army and, eventually, the Red (Communist) army. His operations were relatively flexible, primarily due to the use of light farm carts – which enabled his infantry to move at the pace of the cavalry. On one occasion, Makhno inflicted a major defeat on the White army of General Denikin, cutting his supply line during his advance towards Moscow in September 1919. However, Makhno's anarchist movement was condemned to failure in a campaign of positional warfare.²²

Nonetheless, the man who crafted the most constructive configuration of people's war in the 20th century was Mao Tse-tung. As Mao's communists were driven out from the southeast of China by Chiang Kai Shek's army in October 1934, they moved to the northwest, forming a fresh guerilla base, after embarking on their historic 'long march'. It was not merely a march, though. At the end of the journey, barely 10 per cent of the initial number of guerillas and peasants who set out could reach the destination. However, Mao turned a hero – and became the father of protracted guerilla warfare, clearly delineating the fact that revolution is not a 'dinner party' as it requires a range of sacrifices and hard work – but ushers in success if one

²¹ Ibid., p. 181

²² Ibid., p. 186

follows the path of guerilla warfare in a sustained manner. However, Mao always stressed that guerrilla warfare must pave the way for conventional war when the 'strategic stalemate' phase would give rise to the 'strategic offence' phase in which the People's Liberation Guerilla Army [PLGA] would transform into the People's Liberation Army [PLA].

Nonetheless, Townshend theorizes that the 'Long March' had put the Chinese communists in a position where they were distant from the coastal areas which Japan had occupied in the 1930s so that Chiang Kai-Shek's army had to face the main Japanese onslaught on the one hand and simultaneously had to take on Mao's peasant guerillas in the hinterland.²³ Corruption and inefficiency of Chiang's regime were other causes of their eventual downfall. To add to the woes of Chiang, Mao's writings acted as a propaganda catalyst – a parameter so much emphasized by Lawrence.

And if this Chinese guerilla victory was not enough, shortly before the Japanese withdrew from Southeast Asia, the communist Vietminh guerillas under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh proclaimed a republic in Hanoi. When the French army challenged them in the hills, they began a protracted guerrilla campaign using their substantial regular army units. Insofar as propaganda of 'winning the hearts and minds' was concerned, Vietminh military leaders put forth the treatises of Truong Chinh's 'The Resistance War Will Win' and Vo Nguyen Giap's 'People's War, People's Army'. A potent combination of guerilla warfare, conventional armed approach and propaganda led to the defeat of the French forces in the historic battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1953. The Vietminh forces miraculously supplied 155 mm artillery on the battlefield on bicycles. And the besieged French garrison was overwhelmed by 'human-wave attacks'.²⁴ The battle of Dien Bien Phu was a perfect crescendo of guerrilla force transforming into a successful conventional force.

Though 'winning hearts and minds' [WHAM] of the people by the British forces turned out to be effective in the COIN doctrine in erstwhile Malaya (present Malaysia), the French could not taste success in the Battle of Algiers in 1956-7. After a series of setbacks in the desert, the *Front de la Libération Nationale* [FLN] of Algeria concentrated on intensifying operations in the capital city of Algiers. Though the French could successfully contain the urban insurgency of the FLN, French public opinion turned against the protracted operations, which acted as an obstacle to their complete sweep in the rural areas.²⁵

Non-State Warfare

Stephen Biddle mentions a queer case of the Shiite group Hezbollah surviving a 34-day onslaught of Israeli infantry and artillery in 2006. Hezbollah was armed with precision-guided anti-tank weapons and positioned among fortified villages.²⁶ Biddle further states that a new

²³ Ibid., p. 188

²⁴ Ibid., p. 189

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 191-192

²⁶ Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2021, pp. 1-4.

school of fourth-generation or hybrid warfare theorists believe that state and non-state actors may converge towards a fusion of high-end technology and irregular methods.²⁷ Nonetheless, Biddle informs that after 2005, when the insurgency in Iraq intensified further, the US military appeared as too capital-intensive and too firepower-dependent to manage 'dispersed, population-intermingled insurgents' using guerrilla warfare techniques.²⁸

In this context, it is worthwhile to mention what Max Boot writes about American counterinsurgent expert General David Petraeus:²⁹

Petraeus, ... was acutely aware that a powerful insurgency was growing and that it could not be stopped by firepower alone. In his headquarters in Mosul, he displayed a sign that showed his appreciation of the basic tenets of population-centric counterinsurgency as elucidated by David Galula (French officer and Algeria operations veteran) and Robert Thompson (of the Malayan insurgency).

Biddle, on the other hand, unmistakably defines a non-state actor. First, he describes a sovereign state (as per the 1933 Montevideo Convention) as an institution with a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and a capacity to enter into relations with other states. Accordingly, non-state actors include insurgents, ethnic separatists, warlord militias, private military firms, ideological extremists, or any other user of armed force who are not states as per the Montevideo Convention. Furthermore, based on the scale of violence, Biddle defines warfare as organized violence exceeding 1,000 total battle deaths with at least 100 deaths on each of the two belligerent sides.³⁰

He tells us that tribal societies are expected to field small, decentralized fighting units with an urge to safeguard others of the clan/group possessing common descent. However, tribal units supposedly have difficulty cooperating in more giant formations that cross lines of family lineage. In this regard, Biddle invokes the opinion of Richard Shultz and Andrea Dew:³¹

'traditional societies do not have standing professional armies in the Western sense....[they] invariably take protracted, irregular, and unconventional forms of combat.'

Biddle considers 'stealth' as 'the single trait most commonly associated with guerrilla or irregular warfare.' He writes that 'outnumbered, outgunned guerrillas' use concealment as a tactic against the superior armed force of the state. He talks about 'ambush as a standard technique in orthodox defence. And, of course, Biddle is spot on when he says that 'guerillas typically avoid concentration and tend to spread over large areas in small, independent

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

²⁸ Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*, p. 9

²⁹ Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 2013, p. 538

³⁰ Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*, p. 11

³¹ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

formations'— so akin to tendencies reflected in tribal mode of warfare.³² To corroborate this assertion, it is germane to note what Leroy Thompson (Thompson, 2010) writes:³³

The setting of ambushes and boobytraps has been a basic guerrilla tactic in virtually every insurgency. They allow the guerrillas to inflict casualties on government security forces, using hit-and-run tactics in the former case and simple devices in the latter.

Moreover, Biddle is correct when he says, 'guerillas are too weak to prevail by outright brute force destruction of the enemy'.³⁴ This statement would have been fully agreed to even by the protagonist of modern guerrilla warfare, Mao Zedong – who too knew the inevitability of guerrilla warfare reaching a stalemate at one stage and thus advised the showdown by the PLA against the weakened state forces. Che Guevara tendered a similar opinion in his pithy manual on guerrilla warfare – however, stressing the swift action of the 'foco' (a focal point of rebels) to achieve the result and not always wait for the full development of a liberation army or for that matter the subjective and objective conditions to fully mature to launch the final assault on the 'reactionary' state.

Biddle quite correctly affirms that almost all warfare is asymmetric, in the sense that no two combatants will ever use the same methods of warfare. Though in popular strategic parlance, guerrilla warfare is housed within the vocabulary of asymmetric warfare. Although international law defines 'irregular' combatants, writes Biddle, as those who do not wear any 'identifying insignia' and carry their arms covertly. In a sense, this definition itself is under the cloud. For instance, some Maoist combatants within India's heartland do put on uniform, but they are purely non-state as well as irregular.

Moreover, they never engaged the Indian state in any modern conventional war – with exposed formations relying on mass firepower. In this regard, Biddle refers to the 1940 French defence of the Maginot Line – a positional warfare with heavily fortified underground bunkers buttressed by artillery and machine guns.³⁵ The garrisons had uniformed soldiers. Interestingly, even then, Biddle does not assert that the Maginot Line was an 'archetypical example of conventional warfare' because commanders and strategists of that war clung to 'stealth' to safeguard their positions. However, to break the stealth component in modern COIN warfare, it might not be imprudent if a barrage of mortar shells is dropped on the insurgents – that is, artillery firepower can aid the intrusion of ordinary company-level infantry into the insurgent territory. The upshot is that flexibility in warfare is the norm, and both state and non-state actors indulge in it.

³² Ibid., pp. 26-39.

³³ Leroy Thompson, *The Counterinsurgency Manual: Tactics of the Anti-Guerrilla Professionals*, KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2010, p. 131.

³⁴ Stephen Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*, p. 31.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 39-45.

Irregular, Vis-À-Vis Conventional Wars

The world was taken aback when the Taliban, with a force of around 75,000 guerrilla fighters, could so easily take over the entire Afghanistan – a country which was being manned by close to 3,00,000 'trained' soldiers. Inputs from experts and war veterans indicate fudging of numbers by the Afghan commanders. Moreover, corruption, mismanagement, directionless political objectives and lack of legitimacy of the incumbent Afghan government have been cited as 'other' reasons for the 'pack of cards' like the fall of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Nonetheless, criticism has also been heaped on the faux pas committed by the American military. Historian and analyst Max Boot, in particular, was vocal about the latter aspect.

Lawrence D. Freedman's review essay commemorating 100 years of the beginning of the 20th century's first Total War is an analytical, if not an engrossing, read. While reviewing the works of seven historians, Freedman ultimately opines that it is always fraught with risks to specifically explain the underlying causes of wars and posit solutions, especially that of great wars such as the First World War. It is pertinent to quote what Freedman concludes with:³⁶

"War has no reliable solutions because contexts change. What resolves conflicts in one setting will provide cover for aggression in another; actions that deter aggression under some circumstances will at other times provoke it."

This would undoubtedly enthuse some historians with joie de vivre – historians who hold the 'chance' factor more precious to any discourse of meta-narrative or structural constructs to explain events. On the other hand, 'What War is Still Good For', by associate professor of political science at the University of California Bridget L. Coggins³⁷, and another one by Lawrence Freedman, entitled 'Why War Fails: Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and the Limits of Military Power', harps on the topic of 'war'. Though the former is a book review and a critical discussion on the limits of conventional war in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, both have worthy content.

Coggins defines war and affirms unequivocally that gang wars are not 'wars', as claimed to the contrary by Christopher Blattman in his manuscript 'Why We Fight: The Roads of War and the Paths to Peace'. Coggins brings in the quantitative aspect of defining war - at least 1,000 human deaths in one year, something similar to Biddle. However, Coggins' conjecture that wars may evaporate in future as duels have does not hold the test of reason. Duels were mere one-on-one conflicts which were de-legitimized later as law and order held its grip on society. To envision the same fate for war implies a similar grip of law and order on international politics (which

³⁶ Lawrence Freedman, "The War That Didn't End All Wars", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/war-didnt-end-all-wars>

³⁷ Bridget L. Coggins, "What War Is Still Good For: Why States Fight", *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2022-04-19/what-war-still-good>

includes sovereign states), which is far-fetched, more so when the history of the jurisdiction of world bodies over sovereign states has not been that glorious over the years. Moreover, Coggins opines that the 'culture of violence' among states needs to change wishful thinking – at least in the foreseeable future since that culture is strongly coupled with the mindset, aspirations and greed of the political leadership in sovereign states. In a sense, violence or war – both conventional and irregular/guerilla, remains and apparently would stay as an effective instrument of political manoeuvring.

Lawrence Freedman, on the other hand, squarely holds the conservative command hierarchy of the Russians responsible for their deadlock situation in the 2022-23 Ukraine conflict. Meanwhile, the Ukrainians, according to Freedman, are banking on local intelligence and the operational decisions of junior-level commanders at ground zero. Of course, Freedman puts the final blame on the Russian President (supreme political leadership) for invoking a purposeless war that the subaltern soldiers do not find conducive to continue fighting. Though these aspects are worthy of consideration, they cannot be the sole reason for the deadlock in a conflict where Kyiv is combating against a relatively stronger adversary. A steady supply chain of weaponry, ammunition, food and medicines, along with the diplomatic and humanitarian support of several Western states, cannot be ignored as fundamental reasons for the strong fightback posed by Kyiv.

In an articulated piece by American political scientist Tanisha M. Fazal, the author raises alarm bells on the violation of 'norm' in international relations: a term defined by political scientists Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink which signifies a 'standard of appropriate behaviour for state actors' – an etiquette that is to be maintained in world politics of not transgressing the boundaries of sovereign states. Fazal writes that the 'norm' took shape post-WWII.³⁸ She also explains the Russia-Ukraine conflict in this context. She opines that this is an anachronism – an event that attempts to reverse the path of history that has already seen the end of gobbling up states and their territories in totality, ultimately altering maps.

The point here is, can we talk about anachronism in history? More so, insofar as conventional, post-WWII wars are concerned? Technology has undoubtedly changed, and economic considerations have more pressing implications, but does that prevent geopolitical issues from assuming significance? Till greed remains a factor, the propensity to gobble up resources and territories will continue. The fact is that the states ought to possess the requisite military and economic wherewithal. Ethical issues, too, would take a backseat within the borders of the aggressor state till its population remains unharmed of the implications of the aggression. On the contrary, the political-military leadership may rather receive encouragement from the populace if they could explain the benefits of territorial conquest, if any, or the application of proper military-centric COIN measures, for that matter, to the populace. In this regard,

³⁸ Tanisha M. Fazal, “*The Return of Conquest? Why the Future of Global Order hinges on Ukraine*”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-06/ukraine-russia-war-return-conquest>

'information' in the public domain to 'influence the discourse' is a fundamental ingredient in the war/COIN.

Role of Language in COIN Doctrine

The primary doctrine of counterinsurgency (COIN) is to focus on the strategy of Clear, Hold and Build (CHB) – that is, 'Clear' the area of the insurgents, then 'Hold' those areas for a considerable time while in parallel 'Build' infrastructure and institutions in those areas so that the incumbent government can permanently entrench itself, to obliterate the influence of the insurgents from the hearts and minds of the people. This standard operational protocol is followed as enumerated in the American and Indian COIN manuals. This COIN strategy was supposed to provide the Americans with an agreeable exit option from Afghanistan. It is, however, a different matter altogether that the endgame saw a return of the Taliban in 2021 once the American forces withdrew.

On a similar pattern, this CHB has had its palpable effects on the Maoist insurgency in India, with, of course, the implementation of additional aspects by the Indian government, viz. an effective surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy for the insurgents, as well as a pointed Targeted Incarceration (TI) approach against the Maoist leadership. Innovative methods, too, have been applied. For instance, there is no gainsaying the fact that language plays a significant role in human lives. Language can eliminate any misunderstanding/miscommunication by being an instrument to transfer ideas/knowledge/information to people. Further, language is a visible and powerful indicator of the identity of a particular group. In 'The History and Origin of Language' by A.S. Diamond, Malinowski suggests that language is "the necessary means of communion; it is the one indispensable instrument for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible."

Insofar as COIN in the Indian context is concerned, the primary component is 'winning hearts and minds' [WHAM] of the local populace. WHAM could be best delineated as a people-oriented doctrine for establishing political, economic, social, and cultural linkages. The WHAM-based COIN approach has been implemented in the Maoist heartland of India. As a natural consequence, language training has been kept as an integral part of the 'Doctrine of sub-conventional operations' of the Indian Army, released by the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence in 2006. Working knowledge of the local language/dialect is imperative to gather ground intelligence and communicate with the local civilian populace – which in turn strengthens the WHAM-centred strategy in COIN operations.

When the counterinsurgent speaks in the native language with the local population or attempts to address their issues through their language, the locals feel at ease. They are likely to confide more to the counterinsurgent. In that scenario, the police/armed forces would not appear to be foreigners/outsiders in the tribal domain and naturally would have better leverage against the insurgents. To re-iterate what Mao Zedong wrote – the population is the water, and the insurgent is fish in that water. In that context, if the counterinsurgent successfully pumps the water out, the insurgent is isolated and could be captured relatively easily. An obvious way of

achieving this is for the counterinsurgent to mix with the local population. Naturally, knowledge of the local language is a prominent tool.

In tune with the WHAM approach of COIN operations, the police/security forces of the district of Dantewada in the central Indian state of Chattisgarh conducted a three-month course in the local Gondi dialect in the middle of June 2019. After completing the training for the state police, the target was to focus on the CAPFs deployed in the area. Dantewada-Bastar region in Chattisgarh is the guerilla base for the Indian Maoists. In this specific case, the 'water' is tribal folk, and the Gond tribe predominates the forests of Dantewada. So, the counterinsurgent police approach hits the bullseye. To manage the left-wing extremists, especially to combat the ambushes, the police need to gather viable ground intelligence, which could be achieved through a working knowledge of the local language. Within this context of people-oriented COIN operations, analysts have conceptualized the making of a 'Language Enabled Soldier'. Armed with the weapon of language, a soldier/police/counterinsurgent can even eavesdrop during routine patrols or while guarding the prisoners. They can also get friendly with local children who are very susceptible to being entrapped or used as messengers by the insurgents.

As fallout, the counterinsurgent could check radicalization if (s)he is aware of the local language. Moreover, friendly interaction with the children can bridge the trust deficit between the counterinsurgent and the local people. Knowledge of the language can make it easier for the Indian police to access inflammatory literature in the local dialect/language. Further, the local vernacular press could also be monitored. It is pragmatic that the structure of the security forces for COIN operations should be at par with the terrain of the affected area and its inhabitants. And it is the latter that could be targeted better if the local language skills are taught to the counterinsurgent.

Even if the FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency Manual (Army Field Manual 3-24, 2006) released by the US Army is perused, a separate Appendix C could be seen, dealing with 'Linguist Support'.³⁹ The manual lists different categories of linguists, in which the first category is usually prescribed to be hired locally. In addition, the US Army manual stresses that the 'speech, background, and mannerisms of the linguists/interpreters should be completely acceptable to the target audience'. As if to pinpoint the significance of the role of language in COIN operations, the manual writes that 'interpreters are a vital link among soldiers, Marines, and the target audience, and without supportive, cooperative interpreters, the mission is jeopardized'.

COIN is fundamentally an intelligence-driven exercise. Intelligence in COIN operations aims to facilitate understanding of the environment, emphasizing the local population and insurgents. A large fraction of the local populace in Dantewada-Bastar (including women and children) are 'Sangham Sadasya', i.e. members of the local council of the Maoist party. The fulcrum of the Maoist movement in India is the local people/tribals (Adivasis). The security forces ought to gain the confidence of the local tribals/advasis so that the insurgents do not

³⁹ United States Department of the Army, "Army Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency", December 2006, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=468442>

wean them away. In this direction, the Indian security forces are in the right direction. It will surely not be out of place to quote Leroy Thompson's COIN Manual in this backdrop:⁴⁰

"No matter how effective military counterinsurgency forces may be in combat against guerilla forces, no campaign can be won without the support of a substantial portion of the population."

Nonetheless, though Shivaji Mukherjee opines⁴¹ that 'medium capacity states with multiple insurgencies tend to choose a COIN strategy of containment, vis-a-vis peripheral sons of the soil insurgencies, causing them to become stalemated low-scale conflicts', it is undoubtedly not the case for India's Maoist insurgency – which is not precisely the sons of the soil type but at the same time, a long war no doubt. India's multi-pronged approach has had its telling effects on not just containing the Maoist insurgency but successfully shrinking it both on the geographic scale and curbing its armed intensity – and that too without magnifying the scale of violence to an appreciable level.

CONCLUSION

A few apparent questions at the end of this essay pertain to the endgame of India's Maoist insurgency. Will LWE in India end? If yes, when will it end? And how will it end? While posing these questions, however, it should be borne in mind what exactly is implied by the term 'end'? Does 'end' here suggest zero incidents per year or zero deaths per year pertaining to LWE? In either case, zero occurrences (incidents/deaths) should continue for how many years to declare India LWE-free satisfactorily?

Nevertheless, in this context, it would be perfectly fine to refer to the 2010 RAND monograph titled 'How Insurgencies End' by Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki.⁴² The authors in the paper posit, among several other things, that democracies have better chances of defeating insurgencies. Moreover, if an insurgency exists longer, it does not necessarily grant the insurgents a better opportunity to survive and succeed against the government. The monograph brings out the propositions based on a study of 89 insurgencies. India's LWE is also one of those. However, the authors hardly attempt to dissect the intricacies of India's LWE. Instead, they use it as one point in the dataset.

Nonetheless, the two aspects of democratic government and the length of the insurgency are critical parameters for India's LWE. The Maoists are in direct combat against the biggest democracy in the world, and at the same time, the insurgency has lingered for close to six decades (since 1965-67). In addition, two factors further negate the cause of the Maoist insurgents and, in a sense, seal their fate. Notwithstanding ideological connections, there is no

⁴⁰ Leroy Thompson, *The Counterinsurgency Manual: Tactics of the Anti-Guerrilla Professionals*, KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2010.

⁴¹ Shivaji Mukherjee, "Why Are the Longest Insurgencies Low Violence? Politician Motivations, Sons of the Soil, and Civil War Duration", *Civil Wars*, Vol. 16 (2), pp.172-207, DOI: 10.1080/13698249.2014.927702

⁴² Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, RAND Corporation, 2010, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG965.html>,

direct foreign aid/help to the Maoist insurgents in the form of finances or arms and ammunition, apart from the fact that there exists a conduit to the 'outside world' through the insurgents present in northeast India. Moreover, the sheer numerical strength of India's security forces (leaving apart the core armed forces) safely puts across a highly dominant combat ratio in favour of India's armed police forces.

In this backdrop, the 'end' of India's Maoist insurgency is imminent. Already, the latest data put forth by the Indian government indicates that it is in that direction. However, it would perhaps be imprudent to predict the time that would be taken to eradicate the insurgency. If a purely military/armed approach is taken to obliterate the insurgency like that was done in Sri Lanka, then possibly the 'time' factor could be discussed or opined. But with a development-cum-armed approach in the CHB-cum-WHAM paradigm that India has embarked upon, LWE is bound to come to an end, nonetheless, in a gradual manner, decaying slowly. After all, the insurgency is a long, protracted, low-intensity conflict.

Tentacles of the insurgency could always remain, and those can sprout provided they receive the germinating troika of alienation, poverty, and exploitation. Lack of proper ambience of law and order and the growth of radical thought processes would be potent factors for re-igniting the basic elements of the insurgency. Even in this context, a district-level analysis would be warranted to evaluate the potentialities of re-ignition of the insurgency.

The question should be asked is, will LWE remain effective in India to affect the nation's socio-economic and political matrix? Without the Maoists intermingling with the nation's electoral process, their impact on the political equations would be negligible. Militarily, they hardly pose a threat, apart from their presence in the dense forested regions in limited parts of the country. With the democratic processes and institutions going on in an uninhibited manner even in the presence of the insurgency (read decaying insurgency), LWE, which was the 'biggest internal security threat' to the country during 2006-2010, from an overall perspective, is a tiny perturbation in India's politico-military graph in 2023.

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