
Is China Waging a Proxy War Through the Maoists?

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While we Indians are sensitised about the ongoing proxy war by Pakistan, there is very little or no consciousness that Maoism or Naxalism is actually a proxy war being waged by China against India for the last five decades. The Maoist movement in India, as it is made out to be, is not a recent phenomenon, but has been impacting the Indian state in varying intensity, depending on the international environment and the type of dispensation of the Union of India.

Maoism is indeed a fallout of the Communist movement in India. The Communist movement during the initial years after India's independence had violent overtones. Realising its futility, the Communist leadership then decided to opt for the electoral route. It did pay dividends, as for the first time, anywhere in the world, a democratically elected Communist government came to power in Kerala in 1957. It is touted as a great victory for the Indian historical trait of assimilation, but it has not been without a price in the form of left wing extremism, which has constantly spurned the assimilative process at the behest of external powers.

The expansion of the international Communist movement suffered a great setback after the Sino-Soviet split in early 1960s, as also due to the Vietnam War. This spawned ultra-leftist groups and movements in many parts of the world. They were aided and abetted by China in such a manner that the deniability factor could be maintained. It was during this period that the Naxalite phenomenon in India began to take shape and had become a great threat to the integrity of India by 1969. The Naxalite leader, Charu Mazumdar, had exhorted his cadres "to expand anywhere and everywhere". When the Naxals launched "Spring Thunder" in Naxalbari, the Chinese Community Party mouthpiece wrote in its editorial comment in 1967, "A peal of a Spring Thunder has crashed over the land of India." The editorial offered moral support from the highest level of China.

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The Sino-India War had reverberations on the Indian Communist movement, wherein a very strong section of the movement took a pro-Chinese position on the plea that the conflict was between a socialist and a capitalist state. There emerged three groups in the Communist Party i.e. the nationalists, the centrists, and the internationalists. A sizeable segment of the movement rejected Deng's "capitalism in China". This explains the reason for the current animosity between the two. Nevertheless, there is one thing common between them, i.e. total subservience to China. It is for this reason that there has never been the slightest condemnation of any acts of omission or commission by China. To them, China is infallible. But be it India's nuclear tests or the Indo-US nuclear deal or Indo-US military exercises or India's assistance to Nepal, they never miss an opportunity to spit venom against India.

Over the period, the ultra-leftist movement has engendered many splinter groups, some more extremist than the other. In the past, some of these groups were involved in a vicious internecine conflict. It was only in 2004 that the Communist Party of India [(CPI) Maoists], was formed after the merger of the CPI (ML), People's War Group, and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). With the merger, it was announced that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism would be the new ideological basis of the CPI (Maoists) and its avowed aim was to seize power from the state through "protracted armed struggle". Given the propensities of the ultra-leftist parties to split on the flimsiest grounds, whom does the government talk to, because some or the other group will never accept any peace process and, therefore, violence will continue?

Moreover, any ism does engender violent ultra streams like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) from the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) or National Socialist Council of Nagaland [NSCN (IM)] and NSCN (K) from the Naga National Council (NNC). The rise of the Maoists should be seen in that overall perspective. The common thread running through these organisations is China. A senior ex-official of the Intelligence Bureau, Maloy Krishna Dhar, wrote in the *Nepal Monitor* in November 2009, "I have highlighted the facts of existence of Maoists groups in the Northeast and Bangladesh as well as Nepal to emphasize the fact that sophisticated weapons are inducted by Indian Maoists from the Chinese arms peddling mafia through Maoists in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. The Bangladesh-based Maoist parties, mostly active in the western part of the country are in cahoots with Indian Maoists." He further added that the arms of Chinese origin are inducted by the sea route from Haldia, Kasaba Naraingarh (Midnapur) area to areas like Khantpara, Baripada, etc.

The present home secretary maintains, "Chinese are large suppliers of small arms and I am sure the Maoists get it from them." In 2004, 10 truck loads of light and medium machine-guns as also a huge quantity of ammunition was seized at

Chittagong port in Bangladesh. One of the senior officers of the National Security Intelligence of Bangladesh has revealed that the entire consignments of arms were procured from China. He also said that ULFA and NSCN (IM) leaders visit Kunming in China to procure arms, which are also supplied to the Maoists in Nepal and India.

The anti-India and pro-China leanings of the Indian Maoists are evidenced by the Press release (May 5, 2009) of the CPI (Maoist) Central Committee on developments in Nepal: "US imperialism and Indian expansionism are particularly perturbed over the growing influence of China over the region, consolidation of China's grip over Sri Lanka, and fear that the government in Nepal is moving closer to China. And it is this fear which is common to both India and the US that has pushed these powers to oust the government led by Maoists in a bid to install a regime loyal to them. ...it (Indian Maoists) pledges all support to the Maoists in Nepal in their fight against Indian expansionism."

The internationalist character of the Maoists is evidenced by their membership of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), which was created in July 2001 after a meeting of nine South Asian Maoist parties in West Bengal. The organisation resolved to follow the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao, and not the least, to build on the examples and experience of Protracted People's Wars in Peru, Nepal, Philippines, India, Turkey and elsewhere. The Maoist leader Kishanji has said: "The Islamic upsurge should not be opposed as it is basically anti-US and anti-imperialistic in nature. We, therefore, want it to grow."

The Maoist movement in India, therefore, is not homegrown. It is an ideological movement to capture Indian territory and overthrow the present parliamentary system of democracy. It is for this reason the Maoists label their movement as 'war', their hostages as 'prisoners of war', and the areas where they hold complete sway as 'liberated zones'. A Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT) operative Mohammad Omar Madni, now in custody, has revealed that the LeT was acting in coordination with the CPI (M) in Jharkhand. This was reported by *The Times of India* on June 9, 2009.

On October 2, 2009, a senior Maoist leader, Srinivasan, clearly spoke of the linkage of the Maoists in India with China. In the same month, the Foreign Minister of Nepal Ms Sujata Koirala stated that the Maoists in India were receiving arms and aid from China through the Maoists in Nepal. Another Maoist leader has spoken about the Indian Maoists receiving training in the Yunnan Province of China through the aegis of ULFA. There are 10 China Study Centres in Nepal, five of which are in Terai along the India-Nepal border. These centres serve as conduits, facilitation nodes and indoctrination centres for the Indian Maoists.

This is not the first time that the Maoist movement has threatened the integrity of the country. The Naxalbari movement grew rapidly between 1969 and 1971. In 1971, the war clouds were hovering over India and India's eastern theatre had become strategically sensitive. Given the China-Pakistan strategic partnership and China-Naxalite links, Mrs Gandhi realised the need to tackle the Naxals immediately and with a firm hand. She announced in Parliament that the Naxalites would be fought to the finish. Accordingly, Operation Steeplechase was launched from July to August 1971 by the army and police in West Bengal and the bordering districts of Bihar and Orissa. There were 1,400 arrests in Andhra, 2,000 in Bihar, 4,000 in West Bengal and 1,000 in Kerala. Several leaders were killed. This clearly indicates that even then the Maoist movement was pan-Indian in nature and had little to do with demands of development and local grievances.

Between 1980 and 1990, most of the Maoist violence occurred in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. The Maoists had made no inroads into the tribal areas. It is only when certain areas of Andhra Pradesh became virtually Maoist territories and served as the epicentre that the movement began to make inroads in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The newly formed "People's War Group" was more violent and vicious than its previous version. Therefore, to paint the Maoist menace as a upsurge by the tribal population is a travesty of the truth. Of the 40 districts in Bihar, 32 are impacted by the Maoist insurgency. Of these, there are hardly any districts with any significant tribal population.

The focus of the Maoist leadership on the tribal regions, as has emerged from the interrogation of arrested Maoist leaders, is because they constitute the mineral heartland of India. By targeting mineral activity in that area, they intend to target India's economic growth. Moreover, illegal mining activity by the Maoists, in collusion with some politicians and bureaucrats, is a huge industry. A large chunk of the illegally mined iron ore is given legitimacy through intimidated and sympathetic officials, and is being shipped to China.

The extortion industry of the Maoists is estimated to be worth Rs 15,000 crore. Even the armed forces personnel are not spared, the latest victim being one Gp Capt RK Prasad, who had to cough up Rs 10 lakh for the release of his brother, kidnapped by the Maoists in Jharkhand. Incidentally, the group captain was one of the officers coordinating the air effort at Air Headquarters during 26/11. Two decades ago, the retired Air Chief Denis Anthony La Fontaine, who had chosen to settle in a rural area of Andhra Pradesh, was robbed of his pistol and belongings by the Maoists. Apart from abductions, extortions and lootings, the funding of the Maoists is also through poppy cultivation from Ghagra area in Gumla in Jharkhand,

parts of Kishanganj and Purnia in Bihar, and also parts of Chhattisgarh.

The spread of the Maoist writ in the mineral heartland of India has also given them unlimited access to huge quantities of explosives, used for mining purposes. Some of these explosives are being supplied to the Maoists in Nepal. At least three such consignments have been impounded in Bihar. In terms of availability of explosives and expertise in improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the *jihadi* organisations pale into insignificance. Much of the training in IEDs has been provided by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the past.

The Maoist leaders in India are known to be inspired by the guerrilla movement (Shining Path) in Peru. They have divided their insurgency into three phases: strategic defence—which is the period of preparation and establishment of strongholds in the rural areas; strategic stalemate—when the insurgents and security forces are at par and the phase is characterised by negotiations between the government and the insurgent leaders; and strategic offensive—when the insurgents make the final assault on the citadel of government. In the reckoning of the Maoists, they are in the second phase, but very close to the third one. The second phase of strategic stalemate is also characterised by leveraging of planted media and so-called intellectuals, who are on their payroll or are sympathisers.

China operates at various levels and exploits those organisations which are best suited for a particular environment. Some parties, which are the overt faces of the Maoists and are in electoral politics, like the CPI (ML), become active during this period. During the time of the monarchy, when the Maoist insurgency in Nepal was at its peak, China kept denouncing the Maoists, and maintained that they were misusing the name of Mao, but once the Maoists formed the government, the links were exposed. Against the established practice, when Prachanda became prime minister, the first country he visited was China. He flew to Beijing in response to an invitation by Premier Wen Jiabao ostensibly to attend the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games. This five-day visit had all the trappings of an official visit. Had the Maoist government in Nepal continued, a Nepal-China Friendship Treaty on the lines of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty of 1950 would have been a reality.

It is, therefore, clear that the Maoist movement has been a continuous reality in India for last at least five decades. For an enduring solution, the imperative is to root out the problem in such a manner that it does not raise its head again, and China does not succeed in fragmenting India into 20 or 24 parts, as one Chinese scholar recently threatened. It is time that the fact that the Maoists are the proxy soldiers of China is realised—in the event of an India-China military standoff, they would act as fifth columnists.