

# Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India

GK Pillai\*

*Specialized training, intelligence based operations, and I must say that the intelligence based operatives are slowly getting us results. We have arrested 2 politburo members in the last six months. We have arrested 4 central committee members, we have arrested another State committee member Deepak Talgu in West Bengal and we are slowly starting to get that intelligence. People are going to come and give information only where they feel that Government is going to stay there. In each of these areas, the central para military forces and the state police forces are going to stay there for at least three years till such time as basic administrative infrastructure like roads, PDE, Schools, hospitals, everything is set up. Then only they will move to the next area and so on and so forth. Therefore, our basic aim in one sense in conclusion is basically to build up capacities in the State police which is absolutely essential and for which I think the 13th Finance Commission has provided funds.*

It has become almost a cliché to say that the LWE situation is the most serious internal threat facing the country. Naxalism has been operating in several parts of the country. It has been there from the late 60s and 70s and different parts of the country have been affected with different levels of naxal violence. It has been tackled in different ways in West Bengal, in Kerala, in Andhra and so on and so forth, Telangana situation was there earlier. A significant change came about with the merger of the Peoples War Group and the MCC to form the CPI (Maoist) in 2004. Thus, there had been a fusion of the ideology with the armed groups, both coming together for the first time.

I particularly want to spend some time on what I call as “what are the objectives of CPI (Maoist)?”. There has been a lot of debate and discussion among intellectuals and NGOs on this. Everybody has been talking about the naxal problem and the Maoist problem, and sometimes get confused between the two. The objective of the CPI (Maoist) Party is the armed overthrow of the Indian State. The people must realize before anybody says that I am a Maoist or I am for what the CPI (Maoists) is, that he is in favour of the armed overthrow of the Indian State. They do not have any belief in parliamentary democracy. In fact they call parliament a pig-sty. It is part of their official documents and

---

G.K. Pillai is Union Home Secretary, GOI.

statements which have been made. Documents which we have captured reveal some of the strategy and tactics of the Indian Revolution by the CPI (Maoist). It

The people must realize before anybody says that I am a Maoist or I am for what the CPI (Maoists) is, that he is in favour of the armed overthrow of the Indian State.

is basically a text book, which they teach and I feel it would be very useful to see some of what they are talking about. They are talking about building up of armies. They want finally to draw out and inflict decisive defeat on the armed forces of 'the enemy'. They talk of the Indian State as the enemy. Therefore, the first priority should be given to the work in the principal strategic areas in accordance with the line of protracted people's war with the concrete conditions of India. Building peoples army, establishing base areas, etc., to liberate the entire country with the people's army. Without mobilizing masses into innumerable struggles and raising their political consciousness, over throw of

the State is not possible. Of course, they quote a lot from Mao's words, Lenin's words and so on and so forth. They talk about how they have to infiltrate. They want to influence the workers in the trade unions, which can be done through

The objective is to gradually gain the military strength to overwhelm 'the enemy' as 'the revolutionary war' draws out and finally inflict decisive defeat on 'the armed forces of the enemy'.

legal trade union organizations, workers' magazines, pamphleteering etc., and by sending comrades to secretly develop factional work from within the industry and the existing trade unions, within existing organizations. They are all part of the grand strategy of the CPI (Maoists). They talk about city movements. In other words, the objective is to gradually gain the military strength to overwhelm 'the enemy' as 'the revolutionary war' draws out and finally inflict decisive defeat on 'the armed forces of the enemy'. The Indian State in one sense, for the first time, is facing an enemy which is looking at the armed overthrow of the Indian State.

If you look at the approach and the methodology, we use the word naxalites broadly, in order to avoid confusion with approach and methodology of the Maoists. The Maoists' objective is initially to develop base areas which they would like to develop as liberated areas. They typically operate in what they see as a perceived administrative vacuum in many of these areas. It is not something which they are responsible for; the responsibility is of the Indian State. There is an administrative vacuum because these are remote areas where the State Governments or the Central Government has not posted people in those areas. So there is a little bit of an administrative vacuum in many of these areas. There are some areas as in Malkangiri area. Many of you may not know that as a result of a dam which came up in late 1960s, there are more than 141 villages which got isolated. Believe me if I say today many

people will be surprised those 141 villages have not been seen by anybody in either the State or Central Government since 1969. Nobody has ever gone to them. There is not a single road, there is no BDO, no village officer, but we know they exist because the Maoists have come there, been their friends, indoctrinated them. You can call it neglect if you want. Many areas in the fringes of the administration, where you had the weakness of the administration, is where the real basic growth of the Maoist movement has taken place. People are not posted in all these remote areas because of lack of development of infrastructure, schools, hospitals and so on and so forth. It is termed as a punishment posting. Everybody wants to work close to urban areas, close to State capitals and for postings in these remote areas you don't send the best people sometimes and therefore you post people who are punished and persons who are punished go there and, literally, in one sense, take out their punishment on the people

The Maoist strategy is that not only do they oppose development, development as they see it, development in a parliamentary democracy, but also they take advantage of this feeling of neglect in remote underdeveloped areas. It is a very significant aspect to be brought out. People do not obey the law and in many of the areas because of the lack of administration. It is the officers at the lower level who are all powerful in the absence of the district collector or superior officers who never visit. It is the village officer or the forest officer or the sub-inspector in the police stations etc., who have authority. And the Maoists what they have really done is to show that this authority is really a paper tiger. They tell the villagers in an isolated area that they could go and catch hold of the village officer, catch hold of the forest guard, catch hold of the station house officer, tie him to a tree and tell the villagers, look this guy has been troubling you, he is just another human being and you can beat him up. He is just as much as flesh and blood as any of us. Take a gun, shoot him and once you have shot him, you realize in one sense that the myth of administrative power or the aura of state power which is there, disappears and you are able to get what they say the authority of the State in many of these areas. That is what has happened through violent attacks on the police, the field level functionaries etc. They say they are ineffective which is why when they attack a police station, the message they are trying to tell is, look if the police can't protect themselves, where are they going to protect you. They go after police informers. In last year's little over 500 killings, about 300 of

They tell the villagers in an isolated area that they could go and catch hold of the village officer, catch hold of the forest guard, catch hold of the station house officer, tie him to a tree and tell the villagers, look this guy has been troubling you, he is just another human being and you can beat him up.

them are allegedly police informers because they don't want anybody to be giving information to the State authorities. They deliver rough and ready justice. A climate of fear is created whereby if you want to survive in these areas, you have to be unflinchingly loyal only to the Maoists. Many a times, they come back and say we made a mistake and so on and so forth but by that time, the life is lost. It is Kangaroo justice and they project tribals as victims and not the beneficiaries of development. Then as I have mentioned earlier, as a result of this book on Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution, they have built up a variety of front organizations, and I do not wish to criticize any of these organizations for they are unwitting pawns of the Maoists. I still remember an article by Director ICRIER, Rajiv Kumar. Many of you may know him, he wrote that he joined the naxal movement in 1969, went to the jungles thinking it is a great idea. Everybody is a revolutionary or a communist when they are young and then he said they asked me to go and kill somebody. It was then he realized that this was not what he expected to be doing as part of the revolution or change. He ran away from there and came back. This is where the various front organisations get trapped in for very genuine causes but the very genuine causes, also to an extent, support the Maoists, in their long term strategy to overthrow of the Indian State. The overthrow of

The power of the left-wing extremist groups is immense and they can in one sense if they want to, bring many sectors of the Indian economy to its knees even today but they don't want to do that.

the Indian state is not something which they are willing to do tomorrow or day after. Their strategy according to these books is that they are looking to overthrow the State around 2050. There are some documents talking of 2060. They are not looking at the overthrow of the Indian State in 2012 or 2013. It is a long steady progress. I am always reminded of that example of the frog in the hot water. When you put a frog in a flask and you heat it up slowly the frog will never jump out, because it is slowly being cooked to perfection. But if you put a frog in hot water, it jumps out and escapes. This is exactly what has happened to the Indian State over the last ten years, when Maoists have slowly built up their movement. It is extremely slow. The power

of the left-wing extremist groups is immense and they can in one sense if they want to, bring many sectors of the Indian economy to its knees even today but they don't want to do that. They won't do it today because they know that the State will come down very hard and they are not fully prepared to face the full onslaught of the State machinery and therefore they will move very slowly. This is how that we have lost areas and control over the last so many years.

If you see the violence profile of the left wing extremism itself, it has been going up year after year. Last year was possibly one of the bloodiest years and our estimate is this year it is only likely to go up whether we like it or not. Because for the first time I think in the last 8-9 months, the State has decided that we will tackle this head on. We will no longer allow this policy of continued expansion

by the Maoists to continue unabated and the State has now decided that this must stop and we will take back areas which we have lost. Areas which you might call 'liberated' where officers would not go and where there is no civil administration. We are in one sense taking back those areas and much of the shouting and violence which is going on is because some of the areas we have, in fact, started to take back. It is a very small area, something like 4000 sq.km. We have now taken back areas which were not there in our control last year. It is now slowly getting into our control and we are getting back civil administration slowly into these areas.

Let me now give you a glance of what the left wing extremist violence is like. If you see the 908 killings which took place last year, it is the highest since 1971 when you had 849 killings at the height of what you call naxalism. We have crossed that. It is quite likely that it will go up in 2010 and perhaps even in 2011 before, in fact, the tide will begin to turn. Almost 50% of the activities are in Jharkhand, another 20-25% in Chattisgarh which is the real backbone of the left wing extremist movement. In Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, they have got some portions under their control and you can see that to a certain extent the armed cadres are building up year by year. They have three basic modules, the real armed cadres which is the real fighting force and I wish to mention that we have not yet hit even 5% of this real hardcore force yet. All the fighting which is taking place is at the next level, the militia and what they call as the village supporters and so on. These are the ones with which we are interacting. The real armed cadres are yet to be tackled. So, that is why I say that we still have a long bloody battle ahead of us because we still have not hit the real fighting machine which is still held back. They don't want to bring it into direct conflict with state armed forces yet. The CPI (Maoist) is responsible for 90-94% of the incidents. They use IEDs considerably, mobilize through front organizations and are very highly motivated and very well trained. I am quite certain that there may be some ex-army or some paramilitary people who are helping them because they do a rigorous post mortem of their incidents. For every attack which has been done, they do a post mortem of the attack and they come out with an analysis which is as good as done by the armed forces of any country. They analyzed how they went about targeting the particular target, how they surveyed it for six months or eight months and how they detected various weaknesses. In some cases, when they actually carried out the attack, they found that their knowledge was not sufficient and they first faced certain setbacks. Their analysis is very well documented. Like any other military doctrine, they bring out bulletins for circulation among their cadres so that everybody is aware of the lessons learnt.

The real armed cadres are yet to be tackled. So, that is why I say that we still have a long bloody battle ahead of us because we still have not hit the real fighting machine which is still held back.

The approach of the Central Government in one sense has been that you cannot deal with the naxal and the Maoist situation just by saying I will do socio-economic development. It is a very crude illustration but somebody told me in Kolkata that the Marxists who wanted to settle the issue politically called the Maoists for a discussion on the respective strategy for people's development. The Marxists would convince the Maoists that their line is the correct line. After the statement of the Marxists was over, the Maoists leader said, "have you finished"? The Marxists said, "yes, "now you listen to my line". The Maoists took out a gun and shot the Marxist representative and said, "anyone else want to come for political discussions?". In West Midnapore alone they have killed 159 party workers from the area committee member to the grass-root party workers from June to December 2009. You really cannot have any discussion with the Maoists because they don't believe in discussion as a matter of any principle. They only believe in armed struggle to overthrow the Indian state

My own assessment is that the Maoists are not under much pressure at the moment.

and therefore even a discussion is only a ploy to regroup or buy time because they don't believe in parliamentary democracy. It is only a strategy and I am sure if a few of their top leaders get arrested and so on, they will be far more willing to say they will come for talks just to get them released or regroup but they will not come until the pressure is there. My own assessment is that the Maoists are not under much pressure at the moment. Therefore, all these talks of discussion and cessation of hostilities

and so on and so forth are more to confuse the situation rather than anything else. My assessment is that they will start feeling the pressure maybe about a year or so from now when we get our acts together fully.

You might ask why we are taking so much time to get our acts together. Part of the reason is that the police force, I don't have to say it, is in one sense possibly one of the most neglected, exploited, abused forces in India. We have over 3 lakh vacancies in the police force. As against a normal strength of 220 policemen to a lakh population, we have only an average of 138 in the country today. For example, in Bihar, the police to a lakh population ratio is only 56. It is one fourth of what should be normal and I am comparing it with Delhi which has 480 or western countries which have in this range 400-500. West Bengal is something like 82 policemen per lakh population. So, when you have such low strength and I have seen many of the police stations in some of these States. They have a police station where the sanctioned strength is about 12 and the actual strength because of casual leave, etc. is about 6 or 7 people and they are to police a naxalite infested area. So, you can just imagine what they can do. They just lock the door and play cards inside and the naxals are allowed to do what they want to do outside. They don't bother the Maoists, the Maoists don't bother them either. So, if you don't have 50, 60, 80 people in a police station well armed, well guarded police station etc., you will find this situation of lawlessness and anarchy.

In fact the 13th Finance Commission report which has come out the first time and Rs.2200 crores have been allotted for police training to the States. The 13th Finance Commission has possibly done a yeoman's service for the police force in the country and for the first time it has been realized that police training is so important. If you don't have well trained policemen, you cannot effectively maintain law and order. If you see states like Bihar and Jharkhand, they were separated 10 years ago, but Bihar has still not got a basic police training institute. Many policemen who are just recruited barely do a basic elementary training. There are States where the sanctioned strength of some police training institute is zero and where the people have been posted in an adhoc manner without any training. I went to Manipur the other day to their police training institute. The capacity is 1100 and they have got 4800 people to train. All training classes and everything else have been converted into barracks and the classes are held in the open. They are all being trained under the trees. So you have gone back to the old days of gurukul training for constables. You are teaching them law and legal forensics etc., under the trees. It is a tremendous neglect which has happened over the years and that is why taking steps to increase the effectiveness of the police force is going to take a few years. These 3 lakh vacancies will take about 3 years to fill up. Then a year of training. So, in about four years you will fill up these 3 lakh vacancies. That is only to bring it to 140 per lakh population, not even 220. Otherwise, there is a need of another 5 lakh people, so you need about 8 lakh additional policemen. I always wonder why when giving jobs is such an important thing, why chief ministers have not filled up these vacancies all these years.

The 13th Finance Commission has possibly done a yeoman's service for the police force in the country and for the first time it has been realized that police training is so important.

If you look at the government with the type of the situation and the constraints that we have, we are really looking at the six most affected States – Bihar, West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Maharashtra – for focused action because it is not possible for us in one sense to focus everywhere. Even here we are focusing in key districts. The entire strategy is primarily basically to put in the local forces and additional para military forces which are coming in. Take back what we call as areas where there is no civil administration, and then once you have provided the basic security by establishing a police station, by establishing a security grid across the area, then the civil administration literally moves into providing basic facilities like NREGA scheme, roads, health facilities, doctors. The work is to be done on a very concentrated manner in these areas. The deficiency in one sense is so immense. We had a meeting with some of the district magistrates recently. In one of the districts the total number of MBBS doctors is only 3 in the district. If you have three doctors in a district what kind of health services can you provide? In West Midnapore

district there are 4000 vacancies for teachers. 4000 in one district! So, these are critical areas which unless we start focusing on what we call as effective governance, making sure that these people are there. A lot of relaxation is being given in recruitment and we are saying that you can appoint doctors on contract basis, pay them extra money, provide them incentives. In Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, that district alone as a result of the incidents that have taken place in the last two years, has now got 2000 policemen whereas many districts have got a total strength of barely 100 policemen in some of the insurgency affected areas. So, here you have 2000 and they are going to raise that to 3000. So, when you have 3000 policemen in a district and half the policemen recruited from the local tribes and local people etc., you are

All these people posted in these remote areas get 15 to 30% extra allowances to work in these areas.

able to then maintain law and order. In Gadchiroli district, you will be surprised that the DM mentioned that 3/4th of the district had no mobile phone connectivity. Therefore, he stated need for satellite phones. Therefore, apart from trying to fill the large vacancies in the State forces, we are looking at special incentives. All these people posted in these remote areas get 15 to 30% extra allowances to work in these areas. Protection of the police building is vital because if the police cannot protect itself, it cannot protect the people.

Specialized training, intelligence based operations, and I must say that the intelligence based operatives are slowly getting us results. We have arrested 2 politburo members in the last six months. We have arrested 4 central committee members, we have arrested another State committee member Deepak Talgu in West Bengal and we are slowly starting to get that intelligence. People are going to come and give information only where they feel that Government is going to stay there. In each of these areas, the central para military forces and the state police forces are going to stay there for at least three years till such time as basic administrative infrastructure like roads, PDE, Schools, hospitals, everything is set up. Then only they will move to the next area and so on and so forth. Therefore, our basic aim in one sense in conclusion is basically to build up capacities in the State police which is absolutely essential and for which I think the 13th Finance Commission has provided funds. I think next year about Rs.500 crores will come for police training itself. In the last 20 years they would not have got for police training that amount of money. In the next year alone they will get about Rs.500 crores. In the meantime, with deployment, sharing of intelligence, inter State coordination and providing basic services there is a slow progress.

There are many more problems which I have not touched. The causes are many starting from the origins of the Forest Conservation Act. We had Forest Conservation Act, which created problems because even the minor forest produce was the property of the government. With the recent Forest Act, we have said that it is the property of the tribals. You had lakhs of cases by the



forest guard against the tribals for collecting even minor forest produce. Some of them have been withdrawn and directions have been given to withdraw the remaining cases. Tribal land rights are another issue which needs to be focused upon. We have looked at what I call the wild life sanctuaries which came in and we had all these wild life sanctuaries whether it is a tiger reserve or lion reserve and so on and so forth. The first priority (I am not blaming anybody), became the animal rather than the people who stayed in the forest. Therefore those who stayed in the forest were prime targets for the Maoists etc, to say look the government is more concerned about the animals than you and therefore you come on our side, the government is against you. There are so many issues which are interlinked in this entire thing and these are all issues which have to be tackled from land acquisition to power plants which have come up in many of these areas. The Power Plants supply power to urban areas but the villages surrounding the power plants are without power and therefore they did not get any benefit out of a power plant where they lost their land. Now polices are changing to say that every power plant which comes up should have an area around the power plant where literally free power would be supplied, so that all the villagers feel that a power plant coming there means some benefits to them in perpetuity. The same goes with the mining. You must have seen the new draft Mining Act which is on the website. We hope to bring it before the Parliament shortly where again you have provisions in the Mining Act that not only to compensate and rehabilitate but also put some portion of the profit into a separate fund which will go for the benefit of the tribals and others who are residing around that mining area/lease area and that would be again in perpetuity so long as that company is there. These are some of the other measures that are coming in. It is a slow process. We have a long way to improve the governance, the State police and the State administration. I am quite confident that the strength of the Parliamentary democracy will prevail in the long term. People will realize that armed violence will not bring them any development. People have seen such armed revolution in the past and it did not lead anywhere. They talked of Maoism and they know where Maoism finally ended up in China, and where it has come to. That is the key issue, which everybody will have to focus on. The states will have to focus on many of these issues. 

There are so many issues which are interlinked in this entire thing and these are all issues which have to be tackled from land acquisition to power plants which have come up in many of these areas.

We have a long way to improve the governance, the State police and the State administration. I am quite confident that the strength of the Parliamentary democracy will prevail in the long term.