

TRENDING TODAY	(https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-landmark-1991-economic-reforms/article35547510.ece)	Reliving the landn (https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-landmark-1991-economic-reforms/article35547510.ece)	(https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/to-the-editor/article35547338.ece)	Le (h to
-------------------	---	---	---	----------------

Opinion

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-state-is-not-serious-about-naxalism/article22996116.ece>)

INDIA IN TRANSITION

The state is not serious about Naxalism

SAMEER LALWANI | | Updated on July 15, 2014



([https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://api.whatsapp.com/send?](https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://api.whatsapp.com/send?text=The%20state%20is%20not%20serious%20about%20Naxalism&url=https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-state-is-not-serious-about-naxalism/article22996116.ece?utm_campaign=webwhatsapp_article_share%26utm_medium%3dreferral%26utm_source%3dwhatsapp.com)

text=The%20state%20is%20not%20serious%20about%20Naxalism

[https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-state-is-not-serious-about-naxalism/article22996116.ece?](https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-state-is-not-serious-about-naxalism/article22996116.ece?utm_campaign=webwhatsapp_article_share%26utm_medium%3dreferral%26utm_source%3dwhatsapp.com)

utm_campaign=webwhatsapp_article_share%26utm_medium%3dreferral%26utm_source%3dwhatsapp.com)



Anybody listening? Clearly, the voices don't carry too far Vivek Bendre

Naxals, unlike other insurgents, are not seen to threaten economically and strategically important regions

On the campaign trail, Chief Minister Narendra Modi touted muscular rhetoric and a “zero tolerance” policy towards Naxalism. But those expecting Prime Minister Modi’s Government to overhaul the existing strategy should not hold their breath. The Naxal

insurgency was described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as India's "single biggest internal-security challenge" and estimated to affect one-third of India's districts.

In practice, the threat has been met with "vacillation and *ad hocism*". Naxals do not threaten major urban centres or critical regions that the Indian state most values, nor do they trigger the kind of fear or distrust elicited by other socially distant rebel groups. Instead, the Naxal insurgency has been, and likely will continue to be, treated as a chronic but manageable problem amongst a group deserving empathy and rehabilitation.

More bark than bite

Naxals re-emerged in a big way in 2004 with the formation of the Communist Party of India-Maoist. By 2009, Naxal violence had escalated to eclipse separatist violence in the Northeast and Kashmir. Armed cadres have grown from 5,000 in 2001 to as high as 20,000 with another 50,000-militia support.

These trends likely motivated Singh's warning and the flurry of government activity including new security programmes, development schemes, and paramilitary deployments. But despite these efforts, noted analysts derided government efforts as timid and weak.

While it is true that the Indian state has chosen to fight Naxals with armed force, it relies on a minimalist strategy. States facing rebellion can select from different counter-insurgency options balanced against competing crises and priorities. Even strong states generally only employ significant effort to defeat rebels when their valued, core regions are threatened. Furthermore, governments are relatively more restrained against groups tied to the dominant national identity compared to those seen as outsiders.

Consequently, the Indian state's strategy is narrowly focused on mitigating violence rather than defeating political subversion. It has eschewed the deployment of battle-tested counter-insurgency forces

in favour of an often-criticised “developmental” approach and limited collateral damage.

There is a certain humanism expressed about the Naxals that has not been afforded many other insurgent groups. Indian leaders describe them in inclusive language — “backward Hindus” and “true Indians” — characterising them as less distant than Kashmiri or Naga rebels, demanding greater restraint. Former Home Minister Shivraj Patil described Naxals as “our children” and a leading police official explained that “Naxals are our own people” requiring selective action. Many regard Naxals as “misguided” people who only rebel “tactically”.

Not worth the cost

In the past, India has marshalled tremendous manpower, money and material to defeat insurgencies in Punjab and Kashmir. However, when it comes to insurgency in less important territory like the Northeast or the Naxal belt, the Indian Government has preferred limited strategies of containment.

For now, Naxals do not project violence in major urban areas. State elites, in step with public opinion, generally treat the Naxal threat as a nuisance and, as one retired officer argued, maintain the appearance of doing something.

Since Delhi has opted not to deploy the military, police forces are the main line of defence despite being 20 per cent under strength and often misused. Police can prove effective counter-insurgents with major investments and overhauls as demonstrated in Punjab, and eventually Kashmir. But neither state nor Central police forces have been adequately trained, equipped, or reinforced enough to contend with the Naxals.

The exception may be Andhra Pradesh’s efforts, but even its storied Greyhound force only made gains after almost two decades of vacillating policies and drove a Naxal tactical retreat by displacing violence to neighbouring states.

Ambivalent approach

Even the Government's developmental approach has failed to introduce political and economic reforms. A focus on infrastructure has crowded out spending on human development to 3 per cent of allocated funds. When accounting for the affected population size, the annual spending on security-related expenditure and the Integrated Action Plan (₹700 crore/year) is still a drop in the bucket compared to counter-insurgency spending in Kashmir and Punjab.

Federalism certainly poses some obstacles to comprehensive strategies but it cannot sufficiently explain the current ambivalence. When sufficiently threatened, the Central Government has deployed coordinated counterinsurgency campaigns across multiple states, as it did with the army's 1971 Operation Steeplechase (in West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha) or even some coordinated operations during the Punjab campaign (across Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi).

Federalism also did not prevent Operation Green Hunt in 2009 across multiple states, but disinterest may explain why it was poorly planned, under-resourced, unsustainable, and overextended.

The Central Government can still invoke Article 355 to protect states from internal threats and exercise its powers of coordination and inducement for a more comprehensive campaign. But the Naxal belt is not considered to be worth the material and political costs.

What the state most values – economic and strategically critical regions – remain unthreatened. A threatened region of strategic or economic import may compel the costly and sustained inputs that an effective counter-insurgency campaign demands, but in other regions, the costs prove prohibitive.

A more efficient, less-corrupt Modi Government is unlikely to significantly change strategy towards the Naxal insurgency.

Modi recently expressed compassion for the Naxal base and has previously called for dialogue over violence against “our people”. His Tribal Affairs Minister recently described Naxalism as a “social problem”.

Significant escalation of counter-insurgency efforts is unlikely as Modi’s primary constituency is more concerned about corruption, economic issues, religious extremism and border threats over Naxalism.

The writer is a doctoral candidate in the department of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This article is by special arrangement with the Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania

Published on July 15, 2014

Follow us on Telegram

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://t.me/HinduBusinessLine>),

Facebook

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.facebook.com/TheHinduBusinessLine>),

Twitter,

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://twitter.com/businessline>)

Instagram

(https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.instagram.com/hindu_businessline/),

YouTube

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.youtube.com/user/HinduBusinessLine>)and

Linkedin

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://www.linkedin.com/company/business-line-aka-the-hindu-business-line?trk=biz-companies-cym>). You

can also download our Android App

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mobstac.thehindubusinessline>)or IOS App.

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20210729184646/https://apps.apple.com/in/app/business-line-for-iphone/id855182339>)