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**THE RESURGENCE OF NAXALISM:
HOW GREAT A THREAT TO INDIA?**

by

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June 2008

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**THE RESURGENCE OF NAXALISM:
HOW GREAT A THREAT TO INDIA?**

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ABSTRACT

Despite its remarkable recent growth and dynamism, India still faces a number of challenges to its internal security and further development. Of these, the threat posed by Naxalism, a Maoist insurrection active in the eastern half of the country for over four decades, is the most overlooked and analytically neglected in Western academic and security circles. In the past seven years, Naxalite activity has grown in scope, breadth, and violence, in a “Red Corridor” stretching from Nepal to Tamil Nadu, and killed or displaced tens of thousands of people. By 2006, the problem was so severe that India’s Prime Minister characterized the insurgency as the greatest internal security threat ever faced by his country. Given India’s bloody history with separatist and communal violence, such a pronouncement is truly startling.

This thesis undertakes an historical analysis of the Naxalite movement to assess how great a danger its current iteration truly poses, and what the implications might be for India’s continued rise. Soberingly, it finds that the insurgency is indeed stronger and more dangerous today than at any time in the past. Furthermore, while it does not pose an existential threat to the state in the same way as its counterpart in Nepal, it will prove extremely disruptive to India’s further growth and development if not swiftly and effectively countered. New Delhi’s efforts in this regard are so far unimpressive, but it is not too late to act. The United States has a vested interest in the emergence of a strong and stable India, and may be able to help its new “strategic partner” address the challenge of Naxalism’s resurgence.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AICCR	All India Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries
AICCCR	All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries
APRCC	Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee
BDI	Backwards District Initiative
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRGF	Backwards Region Grant Fund
CCOMPOSA	Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia
COC-(ML)	Central Organizing Committee of the CPI-(ML)
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI-Maoist	Communist Party of India, Maoist
CPI-(M)	Communist Party of India, Marxist
CPI-(ML)	Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist
CPI-(ML) S.N. Singh	CPI-(ML) Satyanarayan Singh Group
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
INC	Indian National Congress (Congress Party)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCC	Maoist Communist Center
MCCI	Maoist Communist Center of India

MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MISA	Maintenance of Internal Security Act
NREGP	National Rural Employment Guarantee Program
PDFI	People's Democratic Front of India
PESA	Panchayat – Extension to the Scheduled Areas
PLGA	People's Liberation Guerrilla Army
PU	Party Unity
PWG	People's War Group
RCC	Revolutionary Communist Center
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
UDF	United Democratic Front
UCCRI	Unity Center of Communist Revolutionaries of India
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

“It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country.”¹ With this startling pronouncement in April 2006, India’s Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, finally drew the West’s attention to an insurgency that had plagued his country for more than four decades, taking nearly 20,000 lives in the process.² While the world was fixated on the violence in Kashmir, fundamentalist Islamic terrorism, and intermittent bouts of Hindu-Muslim sectarian violence, an archaic Maoist ideology, rejected even in the land of its birth, was growing in scope, breadth, and violence. Over the past seven years in particular, Naxalite rebels have come to control large swathes of the Indian countryside in a “Red Corridor” stretching from Nepal to Tamil Nadu and killed thousands of Indian security forces and civilians. This thesis will examine the evolution of the Naxalite threat, from its humble beginnings in 1967 to the present, to ascertain the true danger posed to India’s rise as a twenty-first century Asian power.

B. IMPORTANCE

Since the end of the Cold War and economic reforms in the early 1990s, India’s performance has been truly staggering. It would be difficult to overstate the key role the country is expected to assume in the global community over the coming decades. With a population of over 1.2 billion, a young, growing, and increasingly educated workforce, and persistent real GDP growth rates in the area of 8 percent over the last decade, India is emerging as a powerful driver of the world economy.³ Its demographic clout and

¹ Manmohan Singh, “Prime Minister’s Speech to the 2nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers on Naxalism,” (speech, New Delhi, India, April 13, 2006), Government of India Press Information Bureau, http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page.asp?relid=17128 (accessed August 10, 2007).

² Jane’s Information Group, “India’s Mosaic of Conflict,” *Jane’s Terrorism and Security Monitor*, July 14, 2004, <http://www8.janes.com/> (accessed August 7, 2007).

³ Ibid.

political ambitions are also thrusting it increasingly into positions of international leadership, as the debate on its accession to permanent membership on the UN Security Council attests. If the twenty-first century is truly to be the “Asian Century,” India, along with China, will likely be leading the way.

Since the late 1990s, India has also emerged as an increasingly important strategic partner to the United States. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, India was one of the first countries in Asia to extend its support in the Global War on Terror, offering refueling rights to U.S. ships and aircraft on their way toward Afghanistan. The strategic partnership has grown since then, most famously with the 10-year defense accord signed in 2005 and the U.S.-India civil nuclear cooperation agreement of 2006.⁴ The United States has been assiduously cultivating a closer relationship with New Delhi, and greater military and strategic ties between the two countries are clearly important components of future U.S. foreign policy in Asia.

However, India’s effectiveness as a world leader and U.S. strategic partner is contingent upon its continued internal stability and economic development. If Naxalism is as great a threat as many believe, its continuing spread will have serious negative repercussions on both fronts, to the detriment of India, the United States, and the larger world. A comprehensive examination and analysis of the phenomenon, and its potential to derail India’s development, is therefore both timely and important.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Naxalist movement emerged in 1967 as an uprising of disaffected and disenfranchised peasants in Naxalbari, West Bengal. Given its four decade long existence, there is generally a surprising dearth of academic study on the movement. Western scholarship on insurgency in South Asia usually focuses on the conflict in Kashmir and (perhaps surprisingly) the plethora of smaller insurrections in India’s

⁴ Jane’s Information Group, “Sentinel Security Assessment - South Asia: India, External Affairs,” *Jane’s Military and Security Assessments*, April 26, 2007, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed August 6, 2007).

Northeast.⁵ What little attention is paid to Naxalism is focused almost solely on the underlying causes of insurgent movements in general, treating Naxalism simply as one case in a larger group. Nevertheless, these treatments do provide valuable insight on contributing factors to the movement's rise and persistence. There seem to be two main schools of thought on this issue. The first is that insurgencies arise out of unmet political demands, usually from a minority that feels it is being oppressed.⁶ The second school of thought cites economic inequality as a reason for insurgent uprising, typified by the revolts of lower class social groups against what they feel is lack of access to economic gain.⁷ A third, smaller body of literature stresses the importance of contributing factors, asserting that uprisings are more likely to occur where the terrain provides sanctuary to small groups that can train, equip, and educate their followers outside the reach of government forces.⁸ In the case of Naxalism, elements of all three theories seem to be at play, and are echoed in the literature from outside the West.

Unsurprisingly, the study of the Naxalite movement is more extensive in India itself. Here, however, the problem seems to be not so much a lack of analysis, but the questionable objectivity, quality, and relevance of much of the scholarship. A few works on the early phases of Naxalite activity are extant, but many of these are biased to varying degrees, written by the movement's sympathizers or even the Maoist revolutionaries themselves.⁹ Of somewhat greater objectivity are a handful of histories authored by journalists, but their scope, too, is limited to the earliest years of Naxalite

⁵ Lawrence E. Cline, "The Insurgency Environment in Northeast India," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17, no. 2 (June 2006): 126-147; Sumit Ganguly, "Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 76-107.

⁶ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75-90; Ashutosh Varshney, "Why Democracy Survives," *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 3 (1998): 36- 50.

⁷ Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. Seligson, "Inequality and Insurgency," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 2 (June 1987): 425-452; Jenkins, Rob, "Democracy, Development and India's Struggle Against Corruption," *Public Policy Research* 13, no. 3 (September 2006): 147-165.

⁸ D. M. (John) Mitra, "Understanding Indian Insurgencies: Implications for Counterinsurgency Operations in the Third World," (MS thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005).

⁹ For examples, see: Biplab Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974); Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (London: Zed Books, 1984).

activity.¹⁰ Moreover, the analytical rigor of many of these treatments leaves something to be desired. With respect to more recent analysis, there appears to be relatively little peer-reviewed research on the subject. In its place is a fairly large volume of study, of varying quality, from numerous interested parties and private organizations. While this situation presents a unique opportunity for original research, it also poses the challenge of separating objective, factual analysis from more biased or skewed reporting.

Within this latter body of more recent literature, the vast majority of debate focuses on the causes of the current phase of Naxalite insurgency and speculation as to the most effective ways to deal with it. Broadly speaking, two groups with competing viewpoints emerge from all this contention. The first, or “law and order” camp, considers the Naxalite problem primarily a security issue. The main proponents of this point of view are security analysts and researchers like K.P.S. Gill and Ajai Sahni, many of them associated with India-based think tanks like the Institute for Conflict Management.¹¹ While acknowledging socio-economic marginalization as a contributing factor, they view the lack of effective state and municipal policing, poor coordination of security efforts with New Delhi, and lenient policies toward Naxalite groups as the root causes of the insurgency. Citing numerous failed efforts at peace talks with what they view as an intransigent, nihilistic enemy, this group advocates strongly for the active suppression of Naxalism by force, with increased utilization of central government forces if necessary.¹²

¹⁰ For examples, see:
Sankar Ghosh, *The Naxalite Movement: A Maoist Experiment* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1974);
Sohail Jawaid, *The Naxalite Movement in India: Origin and Failure of the Maoist Revolutionary Strategy in West Bengal 1967-1971* (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1979).

¹¹ The Institute for Conflict Management, “An Introduction,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/icm/index.html> (accessed July 19, 2007).

¹² Much of the literature generated by these analysts is published on the ‘South Asia Terrorism Portal.’ Organized by K.P.S. Gill, the controversial ‘supercop’ who crushed the Sikh insurgency in Punjab in the early 1990s, the SATP is a comprehensive resource for writings and analysis on terrorism and related security issues in South Asia. In particular, see:
K.P.S. Gill, “Imperatives of Justice,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, April 30, 2005, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/kpsgill/governance/07june25pio.htm> (accessed July 20, 2007);
K.P.S. Gill, “Blood Sweat and Anger,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, July 13, 2006, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/kpsgill/governance/06dailynewsjuly13.htm> (accessed July 20, 2007);
Ajai Sahni, “The Angry Men of Mao,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, February 4, 2006, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/ajaisahni/dailynews&analysis13022007.htm> (accessed July 20, 2007).

In contrast, the “development” camp views Naxalism as fundamentally the result of poverty and political disenfranchisement. Represented by NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and the Asian Center for Human Rights, and think tanks such as the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, this camp takes a far more holistic attitude toward the most desirable means of combating Naxal violence.¹³ Stressing the need for poverty reduction, land reform, and better local governance, adherents to this line of reasoning reject government sponsored violence as a solution to the Naxalite problem except in the most extreme circumstances.¹⁴ As P. V. Ramana puts it, “If the military option were effective, then the problem should not have resurfaced after the initial Naxalbari uprising was suppressed.”¹⁵ Indeed, this group views overly aggressive action on the part of security forces as one of the contributing causes of further radicalization in the countryside.

At first blush, the position of Ramana and his cohorts strikes one as an oversimplification of an extremely nuanced security situation. How, for example, is development aid supposed to be distributed if the people in the process of doing so are consistently under the threat of Naxalite attack? The same can be said, however, of the “law and order” argument, and its rather singular emphasis on the use of force to quell an insurgency that doubtless draws much support from the disaffection of the rural poor. Analysis of many prior guerrilla conflicts has certainly drawn attention to the need for addressing the underlying causes of rural discontent in order to draw support away from

¹³ For examples, see:

Asian Centre for Human Rights, “Naxal Conflict in 2006,” Asian Centre for Human Rights Report, <http://pdfdownload.bofd.net/pdf2html.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.achrweb.org%2Freports%2Findia%2FAR07%2F..%2F..%2F..%2Freports%2Findia%2Fnaxal0107.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2007); Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, “Left Extremism in India: Naxal Movement in Chattisgarh & Orissa,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Special Report 25, June 2006; <http://pdfhtml.ganjalinux.org/pdf2html.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ipcs.org%2FIPCS-Special-Report-25.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2007).

¹⁴ Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, “Naxalism and Internal Security in India,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Seminar, August 4, 2007, <http://www.ipcs.org/newIpcsSeminars2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2362> (accessed August 6, 2007).

¹⁵ Ibid.

the insurgent base.¹⁶ Additionally, neither group adequately examines the efficacy of previous governmental policies and responses, a rather glaring oversight if one hopes to prescribe a current course of action.

Compounding the debate is disagreement on the nature of the threat currently posed by the insurgency. The “law and order” crowd focuses almost exclusively on the movement’s implications for political stability in India, but their analysis tends to be a bit shrill.¹⁷ While there has certainly been a greater level of political instability in the regions affected by Naxalism, it has tended to remain in the country’s remote rural areas. Their assertions that the ‘Red Menace’ threatens to split India in two and seriously undermine central authority seems hyperbolic, especially given the fact that the movement draws on, at the most, 10,000 - 20,000 hard-core cadres.¹⁸

The “development camp,” by contrast, tends to view the Naxalist threat primarily in terms of its humanitarian dimension. These analysts focus on the recent internal displacement of tens of thousands of rural and tribal peoples, and the atrocities committed by both Maoist rebels and the government security forces, as the insurgency’s greatest dangers.¹⁹ While this argument is emotionally compelling, it is by no means clear that this aspect of the threat represents a serious strategic problem for New Delhi in and of itself. India’s population is enormous, and the small percentage directly affected account for only marginal contributions to overall GDP.²⁰

What seem to be greater threats are the larger economic implications of the Naxalite insurgency in the context of India’s growth and development, and its potential for further spread as the social impacts of globalization are felt throughout the country.

¹⁶ For an excellent example of this argument, see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Ajai Sahni, “Left Wing Extremism in India: Evolving Strategies for Containment,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, October 2006, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/ajaisahni/crpfdelhi.htm> (accessed August 6, 2007).

¹⁸ Reuters, “Indian Maoist Violence,” *Reuters AlertNet*, June 27, 2007, http://www.alertnet.org/printable.htm?URL=/db/crisisprofiles/IN_MAO.htm (accessed August 6, 2007).

¹⁹ See the aforementioned Asian Center for Human Rights Report, “Naxal Conflict in 2006” and Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Seminar, “Naxalism and Internal Security in India.”

²⁰ Ibid.

As *The Economist* recently noted, the five states most affected by insurgent violence account for significant mineral deposits and a majority of the nation's energy resources.²¹ Also, while Naxalist expansion into the Western and Southern Deccan has received some scrutiny, no serious attention is being given to its possible spread into India's wild Northeastern states. On initial inspection, the political stability, development level, and demography of this region appear eerily similar to those areas already afflicted by Naxalite violence.²² The fact that the Northeast also contains significant fossil fuel deposits only adds to the threat of the Maoists gaining a foothold.²³ Clearly, any worthwhile examination of the dangers posed by Naxalism must take into account the changing nature of the social and economic contexts within which it operates.

The analytical oversights and divergences of opinion discussed above are also reflected within the administration in New Delhi, where contradictory statements, confusion, and inconsistent policymaking characterize governmental responses to the most recent Maoist threat.²⁴ As might be expected, these efforts have proven less than effective in countering the Naxalite problem, or even checking its growth in recent years. This manifest intellectual incoherence on the part of leaders, analysts, and policymakers has many causes, but is mainly due to a lack of perspective on the nature of the challenge confronting them.

In an examination of the literature on this subject, from all the various points of view, the most striking feature is the absence of any comprehensive historical analysis of the Naxalite movement, the evolution of its organization, aims, and leadership, or how India's own political, economic, and social development has contributed to (or ameliorated) the virulence of the movement. Given the relatively long lifespan of this

²¹ *Economist*, "India's Politics," Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire, March 19, 2007, http://www.economist.com/agenda/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8875555 (accessed August 7, 2007).

²² Cline, 126-149.

²³ Jane's Information Group, "Sentinel Security Assessment - South Asia: India, Natural Resources," *Jane's Military and Security Assessments*, April 27, 2005, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed August 6, 2007).

²⁴ P.V. Ramana, "Dealing With Naxalism: Shotgun Approach," Observer Research Foundation, January 17, 2007, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=5560&macmaid=5561> (accessed August 6, 2007).

insurgency, it seems unlikely that a full understanding of Naxalism, or a true appreciation of its threats, can be gleaned solely by analyzing its most current iteration. With the recent spread of Naxalite activity and the notable concern it has elicited from high levels of the Indian government, this lack of an objective, realistic, and comprehensive examination represents a significant gap in the existing literature on the subject. This thesis will aim to fill that gap.

D. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This thesis will use the comparative case study method to analyze the evolution of the Naxalite movement and assess the danger posed by the most recent upsurge in Naxalite activity. To draw an important distinction, it will not directly address the veracity of Prime Minister Singh's assertion that "Naxalism is the single greatest internal security challenge ever faced" by his country. Given the plethora of insurgencies and violent communal movements still active in India, such an assessment would provide enough material for several lengthy theses. Instead, the central question posed here is whether the Naxalite movement currently represents a qualitatively different, and more dangerous, challenge to Indian political stability and development than it has in the past. As mentioned previously, the Naxalite insurgency is not a new phenomenon in India, and has been a thorn in the side of the country for over four decades. Generally speaking, its history can be broken down into three distinct periods, most easily distinguished by their level of insurgent activity and violence.

The first period runs from the movement's beginning in 1967 to its temporary suppression in 1972. This era encompassed the initial organization of the Naxalite movement and the rather rapid spread from its birthplace in West Bengal to a number of other states, notably Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The second period, from 1972 until about 1991, was notable for the ideological and physical fragmentation of the movement, and its mostly localized activity in pockets of rural India. The third period (perhaps not coincidentally contemporaneous with India's economic reforms) runs from 1991 to the present, and is distinguished by a process of gradual consolidation, culminating in the merger of the two most powerful insurgent groups (Maoist Communist Center and the

People's War Group) in late 2004.²⁵ The years since 2000 have witnessed the most dramatic escalation in the scope, breadth, and intensity of Naxalite violence.

These three periods of activity will comprise the individual cases under investigation. To assess the nature and danger of the insurgency in each era, we will examine how variations in three independent variables (the socio-economic and political milieu, internal characteristics of the Naxalite movement, and governmental response) affected the dependent variable, the overall level of threat posed by the movement. These three cases will then be compared to determine whether or not the Naxalite movement indeed represents a greater danger to India than it has in the past, what specifically that danger is, and how it is likely to develop in the future. Finally, I will explore the implications for India's continued rise and its prospects as a strategic partner of the United States.

Primary and secondary source materials are utilized to the maximum extent practical. Primary sources consist largely of internal documents from the Government of India and Naxalite organizations, as well as quotes and speeches from government and insurgent leaders. As mentioned in the literature review, there is not as much rigorous academic source material on this issue as one might like. What peer-reviewed work there is receives primacy of place, but publications and studies from interested NGOs, think tanks, and security analysts also contain valuable information, and are included in this study. Finally, significant tertiary source material, in the form of coverage from reputable news media like *The Economist*, *Frontline* (an Indian weekly), and the *Times of India*, is required to fill factual gaps in the existing literature.

E. TERMINOLOGY ISSUES

For the purposes of this thesis, the generic term *Maoist* will refer to the Indian variety and be used interchangeably with *Naxalite*. Obviously, Maoist movements and organizations exist in many forms throughout the world and there are a number of others active in South Asia, most famously in Nepal. Other than a shared political ideology and

²⁵ P.V. Ramana, "The Maoist Movement in India," *Defense and Security Analysis* 22, no. 4 (December 2006): 435-449.

sympathy with each other's causes, these groups remain separate and distinct entities, and care should be taken not confuse or conflate Naxalism with other Maoist movements more generally. When referring to Maoist organizations other than the Naxalites, the full name and country of origin are provided to avoid ambiguity.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL PERIOD (1967–1972)

A. INTRODUCTION

To inform an assessment of the relative threat posed by the current Naxalite insurgency, this chapter will undertake an historical analysis of the movement's organization and initial activity in the period from 1967 to 1972. This era encompasses the birth of Naxalism and its fairly rapid rise as a force on the Indian political scene, and therefore presents a potentially illuminating parallel to the resurgence of violent Maoism in recent years. It also witnessed the movement's initial failure, and so may contain useful lessons for countering the modern threat. To begin, a brief look at the history of Indian communism is in order.

For the world's largest democracy, India has a surprisingly long and complicated relationship with Marxist ideology. First emerging in 1920, in the fires of the Indian independence movement, it has grown into a major force on the sub-continent's political scene. While all of its proponents adhere to the ultimate goal of building a utopian classless society, they have not always agreed on the most desirable method of achieving it. Nevertheless, whether motivating an underground subversive element or an aboveground, election-contesting political party, the basic ideology has proven remarkably resilient in the Indian context. Any examination of the birth of the Naxalite movement in the latter half of the 1960s requires an understanding of its development within this larger phenomenon.

Jawaid Sohail, an Indian academic studying the origins of the Naxalites, divides the evolution of the Indian communist movement into six broad periods.²⁶ From its birth until 1941, the Communist Party of India (CPI) suffered from poor organization and leadership. Outlawed by the British colonial authorities, it languished in relative obscurity. However, when Great Britain formed an alliance with the Soviet Union following the outbreak of World War II, the communists enjoyed a new legitimacy,

²⁶ Jawaid, 4.

which they exploited by allying themselves with the popular Indian National Congress from 1941-1945. After World War II, this alliance foundered on the emerging international split between East and West, and the CPI moved into opposition against the growing power of Congress in New Delhi.

Around the time of India's independence in 1947, a struggle erupted between the peasants and their ruler in the princely state of Hyderabad, which was vacillating on accession to the Indian union. Inspired by the contemporaneous example of Mao's "People's Revolution" in China (and encouraged by its ideological benefactor, the Soviet Union), the CPI embarked on the fourth phase of its activity, supporting an armed agrarian uprising against feudal oppression in Hyderabad that became known as the Telangana movement. In 1948, when the Indian armed forces moved in to forcibly annex the Hyderabad principality, the Telangana insurgents turned against New Delhi. While this initial struggle achieved some degree of early success, temporarily "liberating" more than 3,000 villages and 16,000 square miles of territory, a confluence of events resulted in its ultimate demise. The strength of the Indian armed forces eventually proved overpowering, and a large number of the rebels were killed. Additionally, in an attempt to curry favor with India, the Soviet Union (which had encouraged the uprising in its earlier days) summarily withdrew its support. Taking the hint, the CPI dutifully followed suit in 1951.²⁷

The failure of Telangana inaugurated the fifth period of communist activity, when the CPI, again at Soviet urging, sought to contest national and state elections in a bid to bring about the peaceful imposition of communist rule through democratic conduct. For many of the CPI's more radical cadres, however, this decision was viewed as a betrayal of the Party's revolutionary heritage. The memories of Telangana loomed large in their ideological imaginings and a sizeable faction of the CPI began to drift toward a more Maoist interpretation of Marxism-Leninism as the 1950s progressed.²⁸

²⁷ Ajay Mehra, "Naxalism in India: Revolution or Terror?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12, no. 2 (2000): 40-42.

²⁸ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 20-22.

This rise of factionalism within the CPI defines the last of Sohail's six phases and would reach its zenith in the 1960s. With the growing Sino-Soviet split from 1958-1964, the ideological tensions within the CPI continued to mount. These were only exacerbated by the emerging Sino-Indian border dispute in the early 1960s, in which the CPI leadership came down firmly on the side of New Delhi. The pro-Chinese leftists within the party branded this policy as revisionism of the worst sort, and attempted to wrest control from the pro-Soviet faction. Unable to muster sufficient support, they instead broke away from the CPI in 1964 to form the Communist Party of India-Marxist, or CPI-(M).²⁹

However, the CPI-(M) was almost immediately beset by the same kind of ideological infighting that had precipitated its formation. The relatively more restrained group that formed the party's leadership, though still hostile to the Soviet Union, grudgingly embraced electoral politics as a means of bringing about a more or less peaceful revolution in India. Consequently, when the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War broke out, it quickly condemned Pakistan and its Chinese patron in an effort to capitalize on the wave of nationalist sentiment sweeping India. This tactic proved remarkably successful, and CPI-(M) candidates enjoyed surprising success in the 1967 elections in West Bengal, firmly entrenching the new party within the Indian political process. This proved to be too much for the more radical Maoist faction, and it was within this contentious milieu that the Naxalite movement was born.³⁰

There were now three major communist strands within India: the CPI, the CPI-(M), and the violently radical Maoists. This last group, eventually named for the birthplace of their armed struggle in Naxalbari, West Bengal, would in due course form a third, underground organization, the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist, or CPI-(ML). Unlike its progenitors, the CPI-(ML) was totally opposed to the electoral process and espoused violent revolution as the only legitimate means of realizing its political agenda. In short, this entailed nothing less than the complete overthrow of the existing

²⁹ Dipak K. Gupta, "The Naxalites and the Maoist Movement in India: Birth, Demise, and Reincarnation," *Democracy and Security* 3, no. 2 (May 2007): 166.

³⁰ Jawaid, 76-78.

political structure, corrupted as it was by the four evils of “U.S. imperialism, Soviet social-imperialism, feudalism, and comprador-bureaucrat capital.”³¹ From 1967-1972, this group embarked on a campaign of political terror that caused no small amount of consternation to national and state governments, and resonated, at least initially, with many poor residents of West Bengal, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. To understand why, one must appreciate India’s broader political, economic, and social contexts during this period.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Political Developments

The first seventeen years of India’s independence were marked by the political hegemony of the Congress Party, personified in the undisputed leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru.³² Under his charismatic influence, the fissiparous tendencies of India’s many ethnic, linguistic, religious, and social groups were kept in check, and the country emerged as a surprising beacon of political stability in South Asia. His passing in 1964, however, (and the subsequent death of his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, after only two years in power) left the Congress Party rudderless, and the leadership that had united India’s various groups under the mantle of nationalism was gone. Over the next few years, the INC embarked on a process of infighting that diminished its iron grip on political power and allowed alternative forces of social mobilization to pose new challenges to its authority.³³

From 1966-1972, this drama played out at the national level in the struggle between Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai for the position of Prime Minister and head of

³¹ Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), “Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist),” May 1970, reprinted in Sankar Ghosh, *The Naxalite Movement: A Maoist Experiment*, (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1974), 190-199.

³² For outstanding one volume histories of India, see: John Keay, *India: A History* (New York: Grove Press: 2000); Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India: 7th Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³³ Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, “Party System and Electoral Politics in the Indian States, 1952-2002: From Hegemony to Convergence,” in *India’s Political Parties*, ed. Peter Ronald DeSouza and E. Sridharan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006), 80, 94-96.

Congress. While Mrs. Gandhi emerged at the head of a coalition of Congress factions, the structure proved too unwieldy to contest the 1967 national elections as effectively as it had in the past. Beset by a number of economic and social crises (discussed below), Congress suffered its worst electoral performance in history, winning only 40% of the popular vote and barely hanging on to majority in a parliament it had previously dominated.³⁴ With its attention again focused inwardly, factional battles quickly resumed. Following another disappointing performance in the mid-term elections of 1969, the party officially split into two competing camps: Congress (O) under Morarji Desai, and Congress (R) under Indira {later Congress (I)}.³⁵ Though she still commanded a plurality in parliament, Mrs. Gandhi now had to rely on a coalition of leftist parties to give her a working majority, a fact that complicated her ability to respond forcefully to the growing Naxalite movement.

The decline in Congress hegemony at the center was mirrored by its performance in the state elections of 1967. From a position of complete dominance in nearly all the state legislatures, the party won only 1,661 of a total 3,453 contested seats.³⁶ Moreover, for the first time, non-Congress led coalition governments came to power in a number of states. These included West Bengal and Orissa, both of which would shortly be affected by the growing Naxalite movement. Notably, the United Democratic Front (UDF) government that formed in West Bengal contained a large and influential bloc of CPI-(M) legislators, a fact that proved important on a number of counts. As previously mentioned, the party's successful embrace of electoral politics served to further radicalize the already restive militant faction within the CPI-(M). Additionally, while the moderate members of the CPI-(M) and the Naxalites did become bitter enemies, as we shall see, the legacy of their earlier cooperation and shared ideology would greatly complicate the state government's efforts to effectively counter their activities.

The structural shifts underway on India's political scene thus served to facilitate the emergence and spread of Naxalism in a number of ways. The temporary decline of

³⁴ Wolpert, 382-383.

³⁵ Ibid., 385.

³⁶ Ibid., 383.

legitimacy at the center created greater instability that allowed alternative ideologies to take root, while the rise to power of a number of leftist parties (including the Communists) provided breathing room for their more extreme ideological brethren. Concurrently, the new requirements of coalition building diverted politicians' attention from the essential task of ensuring security in their constituencies.³⁷ To these must be added one more consideration: the fractious nature of political activity undoubtedly complicated the policymaking process at a time when the country faced a range of serious economic problems. While these did not necessarily arise as a result of the political turmoil, the ability of the system to effectively address them was certainly curtailed.

2. Economic Developments

In spite of a series of Soviet-inspired Five Year Plans from 1951-1966, India remained a predominantly rural, agrarian economy. Burdened by generally inefficient and backward agricultural methods, it was extremely prone to underproduction and food shortages, a situation exacerbated by the country's rapidly expanding population. The lack of proper irrigation and over-dependence on the seasonal monsoon rains caused widespread famine in 1952-53, and severe (if localized) food shortages in Bihar and West Bengal from 1965 to 1967.³⁸ Perennially reliant on foreign food aid, particularly from the United States, Indira's government was forced to seek even greater assistance from America in 1966, which she received in the form of increased wheat shipments and over \$400 million U.S. for the implementation of India's fourth Five-Year Plan.³⁹

The focus of this plan was, in the words of Mrs. Gandhi, to "lay the foundation for a breakthrough in agriculture in the countryside," primarily through state subsidization for a host of agrarian technology reforms that came to be known as the Green Revolution. Indeed, the combination of expanded irrigation networks, increased use of fertilizer and pesticides, and the utilization of higher-yielding crop varieties that had become available in 1965 did improve the food situation; by the early 1970s, India

³⁷ Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 115.

³⁸ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 212; Wolpert, 362, 380.

³⁹ Wolpert, 380-381.

was self-sufficient in grain production for the first time in its history.⁴⁰ Like most revolutions, however, this one took time to develop and produced a large amount of economic dislocation. Nowhere was this more evident than in West Bengal.

These new technologies, while partly government sponsored, still required a fairly significant initial capital outlay to procure and utilize to their fullest advantage. Moreover, they tended to be best employed on relatively large tracts of land so cultivators could reap economies of scale in the new methods of production. As Edward Duyker points out in his study of the predominantly agrarian Santal tribe in West Bengal, this had the effect of economically favoring large landholders over smaller farmers, widening what were already significant income disparities between the two.⁴¹ In a system that had its roots in the *Zamindars* of the British colonial era, most of these smaller farmers were in fact sharecroppers, forced to give up as much as 50% of their harvest in rent to their *jotedars*, or landlords. To make matters worse, if smaller farmers were to avail themselves of the new technology at all, they often had to take out loans from village moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest, usually only worsening their economic situation.⁴²

What these long-suffering peasants were most in need of was a comprehensive system of land reform and rural development. Given the strongly socialist leanings of both Nehru and his daughter, the failure of the government to effectively tackle these problems previously was an indication of the power of entrenched vested interests. To be sure, a number of initiatives had been implemented, notably the Community Development and Rural Extension Program under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, the *Panchayati Raj* program, and a series of land reform laws in the 1950s and 60s.⁴³ Unfortunately, a combination of corruption, cronyism, and loopholes in the legislation prevented any of these measures from having much of an impact on the landless laborers,

⁴⁰ Keay, 524.

⁴¹ Edward Duyker, *Tribal Guerrillas: The Santals of West Bengal and the Naxalite Movement* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55-57; Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1984), 9-12.

⁴² Jawaid, 40-41; Gupta, 163.

⁴³ Wolpert, 363-364.

tribals, and small farmers they were designed to help.⁴⁴ On the contrary, larger landowners and *jotedars* were often able to twist the new regulations in their favor, worsening the plight of many of the rural poor, particularly in West Bengal.

Nor were economic hardships confined to the countryside. Like most of India, Calcutta had been suffering from economic stagnation for a number of years, and when the Indian government was forced to devalue the rupee in 1966, it had financial repercussions that hit the city hard. The resulting inflation spawned an industrial recession in 1966-67, causing unemployment to increase to dangerous proportions, particularly among the educated youth. While precise figures for this period are unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests that from one third to one half of all the unemployed were aged 16-24.⁴⁵ With so much economic frustration in the cities and the countryside, it is not surprising that incidents of social unrest increased as well.

3. Social Developments

Given the feudal socio-economic nature of much of its history, peasant uprisings in India were not uncommon. From 1783 to 1900 alone, at the height of the British Raj, over 100 such incidents affected the region to greater or lesser degrees, many of them in the perennially restive province of Bengal.⁴⁶ As the Telangana uprising in the late 1940s showed, post-independence Indian society was no less susceptible to their occurrence. In retrospect, it appears obvious that many of the factors that had precipitated these events in the past were present in the latter half of the 1960s. As the living situation deteriorated for a substantial number of India's peasants, strikes and food riots became increasingly frequent in the later 1960s.⁴⁷ By 1967, many Bengali newspapers carried accounts of impoverished rural citizens driven to suicide by their dire economic straits.⁴⁸ While the

⁴⁴ Banerjee, 7-9.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁶ Mehra, 39.

⁴⁷ Wolpert, 382.

⁴⁸ Banerjee, 1.

authenticity of all these accounts is difficult to establish, they were emblematic of the desperation and discontent of a large segment of the Indian countryside.

The situation in urban society was showing signs of similar strain. Disease, overcrowding, and a lack of adequate infrastructure had long been endemic to most of India's major cities. Now, as a result of the chronic unemployment discussed in the previous section, increasing numbers of young people were also turning to petty criminality and other anti-social behavior. Known as the "lumpen-proletariat" in Marxist circles, the activities of these idle and angry youth served to further destabilize an already fragile social situation.⁴⁹ Compounding this tendency was the wave of student radicalism sweeping the world in the latter 1960s. Anti-establishment rhetoric and leftist activism were common on university campuses throughout India, but especially prevalent in Calcutta. In 1965, the Communist faction captured the leadership of the student's union at the prestigious Presidency College and embarked on a campaign of disobedience, strikes, and protests, many of them violent.⁵⁰ As clashes between police and urban youths worsened over the ensuing years, Calcutta's student population grew more radicalized.

Watching these developments from their safe houses, the leaders of the Maoist faction in the CPI-(M) grew more confident by the day. The contradictions inherent in India's "semi-feudal and semi-colonial" society, it seemed to them, were reaching their breaking point, and the situation was ripe for the masses to rise up and finally deliver India from its centuries of capitalist domination. To ignite this potent mixture of urban and rural unrest, all that was needed was a spark.

⁴⁹ Banerjee, 33.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 50-52.

C. INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NAXALITE INSURGENCY

1. Organization and Leadership

Two men in particular laid the groundwork for Naxalism's emergence in 1967. Kanu Sanyal, a long-time CPI-(M) organizer active among the Santal tribals in Darjeeling, was among those within the party who disagreed strongly with its newly conciliatory leanings toward New Delhi and electoral politics. He discovered an ideological mentor in a passionate but lesser known party functionary, Charu Mazumdar.⁵¹ Mazumdar, born to a high caste family in Darjeeling district in 1918, had joined the Communist movement as a young man while attending university, and remained active in the CPI and CPI-(M) for most of his adult life. By the mid-1960s, he had wholeheartedly embraced Maoism as the only valid form of Communist struggle for the Indian situation. Adhering to Mao's dictum that "political power grows from the barrel of a gun," Mazumdar utterly rejected electoral politics and sought to apply the lessons of the Chinese revolution, as he saw them, to the struggle in his own country.⁵² In this, he was greatly influenced by the writings of Lin Biao, the Vice-Chairman of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and his strategic formulations for guerrilla warfare.⁵³ Mazumdar laid out his theories in a series of essays penned between 1965 and 1967 that served as something of a manifesto for his more radical comrades, particularly in West Bengal.⁵⁴ In those two years, elements of the CPI-(M) started veering on a more overtly militant course.

Under the guidance of Sanyal and Mazumdar, on March 3, 1967, an uprising of poor tribals and peasants erupted in the village of Naxalbari, in the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling. While initially confined to the seizure of land and food-grains hoarded by the *jotedars*, it soon turned violent and began spreading to other villages in Siliguri. By

⁵¹ Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2006), 268-274.

⁵² Jawaid, 55.

⁵³ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 126-127.

⁵⁴ Biplab Dasgupta, "The Naxalite Movement: An Epilogue," *Social Scientist* 6, no. 12 (July 1978): 8-10.

July 5, the movement had grown large enough to attract the attention of its ideological progenitor, the Communist Party of China (CPC), which, in an editorial in Beijing's *People's Daily*, lauded it as "a peal of spring thunder [that] has crashed over the land of India," and "a development of tremendous significance for the Indian people's revolutionary struggle."⁵⁵ In reality, the rebellion was not quite that momentous at this stage, as the ease with which it was put down by the West Bengal government would attest. In late July, increased police action and a near total lack of coordination within the movement began to take their toll, and the initial uprising disintegrated by September.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the fire had been lit. Mazumdar emerged as a revolutionary leader and his ideology attracted an increasing number of adherents. Now known as Naxalites, militant groups inspired by Mazumdar's theories began appearing throughout India. Emboldened by China's rhetorical support, Mazumdar and these like-minded radicals officially broke from the CPI(M).

In November 1967, the All India Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries (AICCR, later renamed the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries, AICCCR) was formed in an attempt to gather the various strands of Naxalism under the banner of one revolutionary party.⁵⁷ Though largely successful, the deliberations in this body revealed a number of ideological differences among the groups that would prove extremely divisive in a few years. In two cases, that of the Andhra faction of the AICCCR led by Nagi Reddy and another group known as Dakshin Desh, the differences proved insurmountable at an early stage, resulting in their exclusion from the nascent organization. Nevertheless, in April 1969, the formation of the CPI(ML), with Mazumdar at the head, was announced in Calcutta and quickly endorsed by the CPC.⁵⁸ It had an estimated 17,000 members at its founding, the majority in Andhra

⁵⁵ *People's Daily*, "Spring Thunder Breaks Over India," July 5, 1967, reprinted in Prakash Singh, 259-264. While China did offer significant rhetorical support to the Naxalite movement early on, particularly through editorials in the *People's Daily* and broadcasts on the government controlled *Xinhua News Agency*, there is little evidence of any more concrete assistance. .

⁵⁶ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

Pradesh and West Bengal.⁵⁹ For the next three years, the CPI-(ML) would be the dominant face of Naxalism in India. With the pronouncement that the “Chinese Chairman is our Chairman, the Chinese path is our path,” Mazumdar’s agenda for the Naxalites was codified at the First Party Congress in May 1970. It explicitly called for a Maoist inspired violent overthrow of the Indian government by establishing liberated bases in the countryside, surrounding the cities, and eventually subsuming all of India within its “people’s democratic revolution.”⁶⁰ While Mazumdar’s heady optimism may be understandable in the international political context of the late 1960s, the techniques he advocated for accomplishing these objectives were questionable, to say the least.

2. Strategy and Tactics

Mazumdar’s strategy was predicated on the assumption that the contradiction between feudalism and the masses of India’s rural poor had reached the breaking point.⁶¹ In his estimation, the situation was ripe for a spontaneous uprising of the beleaguered peasants that would sweep the old political order from the scene in a few short years. In a 1968 article in *Liberation*, the Naxalites’ primary propaganda mouthpiece, Mazumdar opined that the People’s Liberation Army would be marching through the countryside “by the beginning of 1971, if not in 1970.”⁶² This outlook informed his strategic formulations in a number of ways.

The first was an emphasis on the rural peasants as the true base of the revolution.⁶³ The focus of revolutionary activity was squarely on the countryside, with urban agitation initially prohibited. However, with the majority of the rural population illiterate, Mazumdar was forced to rely on educated ideologues to form the ground level leadership of his organization. To this end, he encouraged the recruitment and

⁵⁹ Rabindra Ray, 108.

⁶⁰ “Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist),” May 1970, reprinted in Ghosh, 199; Jawaid, 36.

⁶¹ Ibid., 194.

⁶² Charu Mazumdar, writing in *Liberation*, Nov 1968, as reported in Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 62.

⁶³ “Programme of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist),” May 1970, reprinted in Ghosh, 194.

participation of educated urban youth, but demanded they leave the cities and adopt the ways of the local villagers to better indoctrinate and lead them in their revolutionary struggle.⁶⁴ While a large number of radicalized college students (especially from Calcutta) heeded this call, their insinuation into rural society was highly problematic. Most were quite incapable of adapting to village life, and their different customs engendered suspicion from the more parochial tribals and farmers.⁶⁵ As a result, while peasants were often capable of being motivated for local actions, they generally failed to adopt Naxalism's broader ideology.⁶⁶ As Dipak Gupta notes, the vast majority of activist cadres were educated and from upper caste Hindu families, with poor, illiterate peasants accounting for less than 20% of the committed membership.⁶⁷

One reason for this apathy among the peasants may have been the Naxalites' renunciation of mass movements, the second pillar of Mazumdar's strategy. In his estimation, since the country was on the verge of a spontaneous revolution, it needed no organizing force to guide it. Indeed, mass organizations could only hurt the movement, as they would give the enemy a focus for retaliation.⁶⁸ While the formation of the CPI-(ML) may seem to contradict this outlook, in reality, the party functioned more symbolically than as a classical political or military organization. While Mazumdar's ideology did reign supreme, operational control was actually quite decentralized, with village and district level organizations enjoying almost complete autonomy. This situation utterly precluded the development of any sort of broader economic or social agenda that might have been useful in attracting greater peasant support. In fact, Mazumdar believed that attention devoted to social or economic programs could only detract from the primary goal of seizing political power from the state, and actively discouraged their formulation.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ghosh, 109.

⁶⁵ Gupta, 173-174; Jawaid, 95.

⁶⁶ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 57-59.

⁶⁷ Gupta, 171.

⁶⁸ Ghosh, 101.

⁶⁹ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 58-59.

Rather than offering hope, Mazumdar contended that the way to inspire India's poor was to offer the opportunity for revenge. This accounted for the third pillar of his overall strategy, which he dubbed the "annihilation of class enemies."⁷⁰ As the name suggests, this entailed the deliberately brutal murder of *jotedars*, moneylenders, and agents of the government in an effort to spread "red terror" throughout the countryside.⁷¹ With the injunction that "he who has not dipped his hand in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a communist," the implementation of this campaign became the primary goal of Naxalite cadres throughout India.⁷² While it did succeed in driving off the landowning elite in some of the affected areas, the sadistic nature of the killings eventually alienated many more of the peasants than it inspired.⁷³

The tactics that Mazumdar prescribed for the execution of the annihilation strategy were similarly self-defeating. Believing that an obsession with the acquisition of firearms would only distract the peasants from their spontaneous revolutionary zeal, he initially forbade their use by any but the party's leadership, and even these he limited to purposes of self-defense. In the application of the terror campaign, the cadres were only permitted to use traditional weapons like spears, sickles, and bows and arrows. His emphasis on decentralization also stressed the primacy of village level squads, usually of no more than seven members, at the expense of larger formations of fighters.⁷⁴ Though he later paid lip service to the need for organizing a 'People's Liberation Army' along more conventional lines, there was never any serious attempt to form such a force.⁷⁵ These tactical decisions left the Naxalites at a decided disadvantage against the comparatively well armed and organized government security forces that eventually moved in to counter them.

⁷⁰ Charu Mazumdar, "A Few Words About Guerrilla Actions," *Liberation*, February 1970, reprinted in Ghosh, 290-297.

⁷¹ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 45-46.

⁷² Mazumdar, "A Few Words About Guerrilla Actions," reprinted in Ghosh, 294.

⁷³ Dasgupta. *The Naxalite Movement*, 58, 64.

⁷⁴ Mazumdar, "A Few Words About Guerrilla Actions," reprinted in Ghosh, 291.

⁷⁵ Banerjee, 204-206.

For all their operational errors, however, a temporarily accommodating political climate allowed the Naxalites to embark on a series of campaigns that caused no small amount of instability in the regions they affected. From the formation of the party in 1969 until July of 1971, they were a force to be reckoned with in a number of Indian states.

3. Naxalite Activity

While Naxalite activity and violence in this period were reported from as far afield as Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, the Punjab, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, the bulk remained confined to West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.⁷⁶ It was in these two states that the annihilation program was most effectively implemented and where the Naxalites had their greatest political impact. Perhaps surprisingly, the first large-scale campaign after Naxalbari came not in West Bengal, but in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.

Srikakulam's history of peasant unrest predated the Naxalites, emerging as early as 1961 in the form of agitation by the native Girijan tribals against the economic oppression of the landholding class. While this was usually relatively peaceful, the example and influence of Naxalbari soon turned it violent. By late 1968, under the leadership of a number of imported Naxalite cadres, the Girijans were becoming increasingly militant. In 1969, they embarked on a classic annihilation campaign for political control, killing more than 150 people and eventually extending their writ over more than 500 square miles. While Mazumdar's hopes were high for this "liberated area," the movement proved more fragile than it appeared. Coordinated action by the security forces resulted in the deaths or arrests of top Naxalite leaders in the district, and Girijan support for the insurgency dissipated by mid-1970.⁷⁷

In late 1969, the Naxalites launched another offensive in the Midnapur district of West Bengal. Like Srikakulam, it was a classic annihilation campaign with exclusively

⁷⁶ Singh, 45-81.

⁷⁷ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 46-52.

political aims. In Midnapur, however, the leadership that instigated the rebellion was not composed of older party cadres, but young students from Calcutta.⁷⁸ Led by Ashit Chatterjee and Santosh Rana, the movement achieved some early success, accounting for the deaths of around 100 ‘class enemies’ and considerable economic disruption. Like Srikakulam, however, the uprising proved unsustainable and collapsed in the face of pressure from the security forces in early 1970.⁷⁹

Birbhum in West Bengal, Muzzafarpur in Bihar, and the Palia district of Uttar Pradesh also witnessed organized Naxalite activity in 1969-1970. Like all the other rural uprisings, however, their early intensity masked fundamental weaknesses, and they died out almost as dramatically as they had flared up.⁸⁰ Ironically, Naxalism’s last major campaign in this period occurred not in the countryside, but in Calcutta. Perhaps in desperation at the failures of its rural campaigns, the CPI-(ML) made an abrupt strategic reversal and launched a “cultural revolution” in West Bengal’s teeming capital in April 1970.⁸¹ While some observers have described this surprising development as a spontaneous movement by the urban Naxalite cadres, it is clear that Mazumdar himself guided the emergence of this new front at an early stage. Initially, the focus of the movement was on the destruction of symbols of bourgeoisie culture. These included cinemas, universities, and statues of iconic Indian figures like Mahatma Gandhi. Within a few months, however, the annihilation campaign appeared in Calcutta. Initially targeting police officers, its focus soon shifted to CPI-(M) politicians and activists, and even middle-class businessmen.⁸² The fact that Naxalite violence had now arrived in a major city occasioned great alarm throughout the country, not least in New Delhi.

As the insurgency grew more violent through 1970 and early 1971, however, it became apparent that it was losing its ideological focus. In large part, this was due to a dramatic shift in the makeup of the party’s membership. While upper class university

⁷⁸ Ghosh, 78-79; Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 57.

⁷⁹ Singh, 63.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 64-74.

⁸¹ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 68-77.

⁸² Ibid., 79-91.

students had been an important component of the early Naxalite movement, by 1970, most had either been arrested or dropped out in revulsion at the excesses of the annihilation campaign. In their place, shiftless youth, petty criminals, and other anti-social elements had risen to prominence in the urban faction of the CPI-(ML). Under the guise of class struggle, extortion, theft, and personally motivated murders by party cadres grew increasingly common. Unsurprisingly, this did little to endear the Naxalites to the majority of Calcutta society. Already alienated by the statue smashing campaign and other petty vandalism, the public turned decisively against them in 1971.⁸³

As a result of this string of failures, the ideological cracks in the leadership of the CPI-(ML) that had been evident at its founding widened into chasms. Mazumdar was increasingly the target of pointed criticism from other Naxalite leaders on a number of issues.⁸⁴ Prominent among these were his adoption of the annihilation strategy as the primary form of struggle, his total neglect of the urban proletariat as a target of agitation, and the wisdom of his prohibition of all mass organization - in short, all the tenets of his grand strategy. To make matters worse, he had also lost the rhetorical support of the CPC. In late 1970, the Chinese government sent a message to Mazumdar echoing many of the same criticisms that were emanating from within his own party.⁸⁵ Shortly thereafter, its radio broadcasts in support of the CPI-(ML) ceased.⁸⁶ Though still claiming allegiance to Beijing, Mazumdar diverged from the CPC line in 1971 by vocally supporting the uprising in East Pakistan against Yahya Khan's government. This proved to be the last straw for many other Naxalite leaders, who finally broke ranks with this betrayal of China's ideological direction.⁸⁷ With the leadership hopelessly divided, the rural campaign in tatters, and the lumpen-proletariat dominating the urban scene, the

⁸³ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 94-102.

⁸⁴ Sohail, 45-49.

⁸⁵ Ghosh, 12-21.

⁸⁶ Banerjee, 170.

⁸⁷ Banerjee, 247-248; Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 192-193.

Naxalite movement was foundering badly. Nevertheless, it would take concerted action by the central and state governments to definitively put an end to this era of Naxalite activity.

D. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

1. Center Responses

Initially, the government in New Delhi paid scant attention to the outbreak of violence in Naxalbari. Viewing the situation primarily as a localized law and order problem, it did little more than express its opinion to West Bengal that the situation should be dealt with swiftly.⁸⁸ To be fair, in spite of the attention it received as a result of the CPC's endorsement, the early movement was too weak and disorganized to merit much more of a reaction. Even as Naxalism organized and spread through 1968-69, it still failed to elicit much of an official response. As mentioned previously, this was probably due to the distraction provided by the leadership battles and other political machinations that occupied the center during these years. By 1970, however, the situation was beginning to change.

The emergence of Naxalite violence in Calcutta, one of India's largest cities, was too worrisome a development to ignore. On August 11, 1970, Indira Gandhi pronounced that the government would fight the Naxalites with "all the strength at its command."⁸⁹ Securing the elections in early 1971 provided a pretext for the deployment of military and paramilitary forces to some of the worst Naxal-affected districts.⁹⁰ In July 1971, the center launched Operation Steeplechase, a coordinated campaign by the Indian army, the Central Reserve Police Force, and local police across contiguous districts in West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa that were still affected by Naxalite violence. This area encompassed West Bengal's Midnapur and Birbhum districts, and the cadres still active were largely holdovers from those earlier campaign. While Steeplechase was not a complete success,

⁸⁸ Ghosh, 37.

⁸⁹ Singh, 112.

⁹⁰ Ghosh, xxii.

in that a sizeable number of activists escaped the police dragnet, it did achieve some noteworthy results: hundreds of Naxalites were arrested, large caches of weapons were seized, and most importantly, the rural population's confidence in the strength of the government was restored.⁹¹

New Delhi also attempted to undercut the grass-roots appeal of Naxalism by championing a number of rural development and land reform schemes.⁹² The West Bengal Land Reform Act, passed in January 1970, was one such initiative. It imposed ceilings on the total acreage individual families were allowed to hold and reduced the maximum rent that landlords could charge their sharecroppers. As usual, the law was filled with loopholes, and the ever-present corruption and conflicts of interest severely curtailed its overall efficacy.⁹³ Nevertheless, it did help some of the landless poor and scored political points at the expense of the Naxalites.

For all the efforts of the central government, however, Naxal violence remained fundamentally a state problem. India's Constitution devolved authority over internal security to the states, and it was their policies and initiatives that mattered most.⁹⁴ Of course, if a state proved incapable of handling its own affairs, there was a constitutional answer for that, too.

2. State Responses

In Andhra Pradesh, a determined state government, united under firm Congress Party rule, was able to cope with the violence in Srikakulam on its own. While allegations of police brutality and 'encounter killings' were common, the swift and effective application of force by the state police broke the back of the insurgency there in a matter of months.⁹⁵ The situation in West Bengal was somewhat more complicated. With the CPI-(M) occupying key leadership positions in the United Democratic Front

⁹¹ Singh, 99-100.

⁹² Wolpert 389; Jawaid, 98-100.

⁹³ Jawaid, 86-89.

⁹⁴ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2006-07*, 1.

⁹⁵ Ghosh, 84.

government, West Bengal's response to the emergence of Naxalism was initially quite tepid. This was largely due to infighting between the members of the coalition. While other parties argued for a strong response to the initial outbreak of violence in Naxalbari, the CPI-(M) vacillated. Though it wanted to reign in its adventurist cadres in Siliguri, it was fearful of damaging its revolutionary credentials by authorizing too forceful a response. Additionally, the agitators were still members of the CPI-(M) at this stage, and the party was hopeful of bringing them back into its fold. As a result, police actions in response to the increasing violence through July 1967 were quite circumscribed.⁹⁶ By the time a deteriorating situation forced the government's hand in August and September, the movement had already attracted a sizeable following. While the insurrection in Naxalbari was effectively put down in a relatively short period of time, the damage had been done.

Though the inability of the UDF to effectively govern forced its dissolution in November 1967, mid-term elections returned it to power in February 1969. With broadly the same makeup, it proved even less capable of agreement in policymaking, particularly with respect to the Naxalites. Not only did the government fail to outlaw the movement, some of its constituent parties actually sought to curry favor with the Maoists in a bid to strengthen their popularity with rural voters.⁹⁷ Again, this resulted in a generally weak security response, with the police budget actually reduced just as the activity in Midnapur and Calcutta was beginning to heat up.⁹⁸ With the coalition hopelessly polarized and the security situation deteriorating, New Delhi imposed President's Rule on West Bengal in March 1970.

President's Rule, an administrative device under Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, allows the center to assume executive authority in a state if the ruling government can no longer form a majority in the state legislature.⁹⁹ With the governor

⁹⁶ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 9.

⁹⁷ Jawaid, 96-97.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁹ Government of India, *Constitution of India*, Ministry of Laws and Justice, <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/welcome.html> (accessed December 11, 2007).

(as an agent of New Delhi) now firmly in charge, the security situation began to improve rapidly. The 1932 Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrage Act was quickly revived, giving the police expanded powers of detention.¹⁰⁰ Funding for the state police forces more than doubled, and the number of officers rose dramatically.¹⁰¹ Augmented by personnel from the center's Border Security Force, these additional men were posted to hotbeds of Naxalite activity, especially Siliguri, Midnapur, and Calcutta. In April, a joint operation by the Indian military and the Central Reserve Police Force, in coordination with state police, successfully put down the Midnapur uprising in a matter of weeks.¹⁰² Though it took a while longer, the expanded presence in Calcutta also proved effective. Aided by government sponsored volunteer militias, ironically drawn from the same lumpen-proletariat element the Naxalites had utilized, forceful policing resulted in the deaths or arrest of thousands of Naxalite cadres and sympathizers.¹⁰³ As in Andhra Pradesh, abuses by the anti-Naxal forces were not uncommon – in one notorious instance, 300 armed members of a volunteer militia rampaged through a Naxalite stronghold in the Cossipore-Baranagore neighborhood of Calcutta, killing nearly 100 suspected Naxalites in cold blood.¹⁰⁴ Though brutal, the tactics were effective. By the end of 1971, Mazumdar was forced to officially abandon the urban campaign in the face of mounting losses.¹⁰⁵

The movement was by this time a spent force, and its fortunes continued to decline as top leadership was caught up in the tightening police dragnet through the first half of 1972. Finally, on July 16, 1972, Charu Mazumdar himself was arrested from a safe house in the Calcutta suburb of Entally. On July 28, he died in police custody at the age of 54. The death of Mazumdar was a fittingly symbolic denouement to the movement that had burned so brightly for over five years. With the departure of its spiritual and ideological leader, the first phase of Naxalite activity in India was over.

¹⁰⁰ Jawaid, 83-84.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰² Gupta, 171.

¹⁰³ Jawaid, 84.

¹⁰⁴ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 92.

¹⁰⁵ Banerjee, 213.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter has analyzed the birth, rise, and eventual decline of the Naxalite insurgency from 1967-1972. The emergence of Naxalism in 1967 was ultimately attributable to a number of factors. Persistent poverty and growing inequality in the countryside produced a groundswell of discontentment in the poor rural population. Deeply frustrated with their government, some peasants and tribals were willing to entertain any alternative ideology that promised empowerment and greater equity; though it was certainly the most violent, Naxalism was just one of a number of socio-political movements that began to emerge at this time.¹⁰⁶ Concurrently, political instability brought by the initial weakening of the INC's hegemony provided room for these alternative ideologies to grow. Finally, leftist revolutionary rhetoric was ubiquitous in the late 1960s, both domestically and internationally. This provided a veneer of ideological sophistication to a movement that offered little more than violence, and allowed it to challenge the state's legitimacy, at least for a while.

However, while the Naxalite movement during this period drew much attention from the press and occasioned a great deal of worry in New Delhi and elsewhere, it seems clear in hindsight that the danger was not as great as many feared at the time. Although Naxalism touched almost every part of the country from 1967-1972, its activities were widely dispersed, and it never controlled more than 200 of India's 56,000 rural villages at any one time.¹⁰⁷ As militant Communism blossomed throughout much of the third world in the late 1960s, it may seem surprising that it failed to gain more traction in the Indian context, beset as it was by many of the same socio-economic problems evident in Southeast Asia or Latin America. In the final analysis, much of the responsibility for the ultimate failure of the Naxalite movement in this period must be laid at the feet of Charu Mazumdar.

¹⁰⁶ Some others included movements based on language, caste, and even the rural-urban divide. For a discussion of these phenomena, see: Yadav and Palshikar, 92-96.

¹⁰⁷ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 62.

The man regarded as 'India's Mao Zedong' proved to be a much less competent leader than his Chinese namesake. Ideologically, his blind application of the Chinese revolutionary model to India overlooked fundamental differences between the two countries. India's governmental apparatus was much more powerful than its Chinese counterpart had been in the late 1940s. The institution of parliamentary democracy had become well entrenched in India, and it would take more than temporary economic hardships to undermine its widespread support. Additionally, despite its faltering in the elections of 1967, the Congress Party proved to be enduringly popular. The INC was granted an impressive mandate in the 1971 and 1972 elections at both the state and national levels, demonstrating that it retained the support of a majority of the Indian population.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, while Mazumdar correctly identified the rising levels of discontent in Indian society, he totally misread the resultant potential for a rapid revolution. The majority of India's peasants were concerned with local social and economic issues, and remained unmoved by Naxalite political ideology.

As it turned out, most of Mazumdar's strategic and operational initiatives actually proved counterproductive in winning over India's masses. His single-minded focus on the seizure of political power and utter contempt for mass organization precluded the development of any socio-economic agenda that might have been useful in garnering broad rural support. While this was supposed to be achieved through the application of the annihilation campaign, the brutality of this program actually alienated the majority of peasants. When it was extended to urban areas during the Calcutta campaign, it had the same effect on most city residents; the ill-conceived "cultural revolution" and the excesses of the lumpen-proletariat faction only exacerbated this revulsion. In the end, Mazumdar's strategic choices effectively denied his movement any base of popular support.

Nor did he better acquit himself in his tactical formulations. The curious prohibition on firearms left his cadres woefully outgunned by the military and police. Additionally, his penchant for decentralization severely restricted the Naxalites' ability to

¹⁰⁸ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 229-231; Wolpert, 389.

adapt to changing military circumstances. Even as the scale of the government's security operations grew from 1967-1972, the Maoists continued to emphasize small, village-level units at the expense of a more sizeable and coherent military organization. Time and again, these proved incapable of mounting an effective resistance to the larger, better equipped, and more highly organized forces arrayed against them.

While Mazumdar's inept leadership set the stage for the movement's demise, the overall effectiveness of the government's response must also be acknowledged. With the exception of the UDF initiatives in West Bengal, robust and forceful responses by state and central security forces were eventually successful in putting down all the uprisings. While these did involve a number of human rights abuses, the growing public disgust with Naxalite violence meant that most Indians seemed to accept these aggressive policing methods.¹⁰⁹ Simultaneously, all levels of government increased funding for land reforms and rural development programs in an effort to address the socio-economic inequities that had helped spark the outbreak of violence. While these did not always work as they were intended, they did succeed in winning back the support of the rural poor.

The final contributor to the failure of the Naxalite movement in this period was its overall organizational weakness. Mazumdar's charismatic personality had papered over the movement's fissiparous tendencies in 1967, but these forces could not be contained for long. Ideological differences and powerful egos erupted again in late 1970, and the leadership had irrevocably fractured by 1972. The CPI-(ML) splintered into a number of different factions, including the Maoist Communist Centre, the Proletarian Party, and a grouping of the CPI-(ML)'s Regional Committees of West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.¹¹⁰ Along with Dakshin Desh and the Nagi Reddy Group, these localized, weakened, and divided organizations would be the diminished face of Naxalism through its next period of activity, 1972-1991.

¹⁰⁹ Gupta, 173

¹¹⁰ Jawaid, 94.

III. THE FRAGMENTARY PERIOD (1972-1991)

A. INTRODUCTION

In 1972, the Naxalites emerged from the failures and setbacks at the end of the Organizational Period in a critically weakened state: their founder and most influential leader, Charu Mazumdar, was dead; their surviving leadership was rotting in jail after a brutally effective government crackdown; their activists were disillusioned and demoralized after a succession of defeats; and the excesses of revolutionary zeal had alienated them from the vast majority of the Indian public. Given this litany of woes, most observers could be forgiven for assuming that the movement was as good as dead.

As it turned out, the flame ignited at Naxalbari had not extinguished – it was, however, reduced to a smoldering ember that was very nearly snuffed out over the course of the next two decades.¹¹¹ The years from 1972-1991 unquestionably marked the nadir of the Naxalite movement in India. Battered by the government's security forces in the previous period, it desperately needed to reunify and consolidate its position. Instead, it was repeatedly fragmented by disagreements over ideological abstractions, strategic formulations, and even personal egos. The result was a proliferation of small, localized groups that proved utterly incapable of mounting any effective challenge to the Indian government. In short, the story of the Naxalites in this period is a rather boring one compared to the events of 1965-1972.

It is, nonetheless, one worth examining. For the purposes of analyzing Naxalism's resurgence after 1991, this period is important on three counts. First, it acted as a bridge between the two periods of relatively high Naxalite activity. Secondly, it gave rise to the factions that turned into the dominant Naxalite groups of the current era; clearly, any study of these organizations must take into account the circumstances of their birth. Lastly, determining the reasons for the movement's inability to gain traction in the past should help in prescribing effective ways to counter its spread in future.

¹¹¹ This analogy is borrowed, with appreciation, from Prakash Singh's *The Naxalite Movement in India*.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Political Developments

The 1970s and 80s were a transitional period in Indian politics. The instability of 1965-1971, discussed in the preceding chapter, was the first indication that the institution of one-party hegemony known as the ‘Congress System’ was not as unshakeable as it had previously appeared.¹¹² Though Indira’s party enjoyed landslide victories at the state and national levels in 1971 and 1972, successfully consolidating the INC and the country under the banner of her leadership, this apparent return to the stability of the old ‘Congress system’ belied a number of emerging structural changes in the Indian polity. Chief among these were the increasing politicization of lower and middle classes and castes, the rising importance of local-level issues, and the resultant emergence of regional and state level parties. While these processes evolved gradually, they set the stage for the tremendous changes that would occur on the Indian political scene in the 1990s, and helped make politics in these two decades more complex than it had been in the past. Though a thorough examination of these phenomena is outside the scope of this thesis, they indirectly impacted the course of Naxalism in a number of ways.¹¹³

One was through political developments in New Delhi. As previously alluded, Congress (I) emerged in 1972 with firm control of the national government. In light of the changing political scene, the party was remarkably effective in maintaining its grip on power for the remainder of this period, only relinquishing it during two brief interludes of Janata Party-led coalition government, in 1977-1980 and 1989-1991. In retrospect, this success was largely due to Indira’s political guile and capacity for heavy-handed authoritarianism. Recognizing that anti-colonial nationalism was no longer an effective rallying cry for the masses, she sought to mobilize support by turning to a more populist

¹¹² Rajni Kothari, “The Congress ‘System’ in India,” in *India’s Political Parties*, ed. Peter Ronald DeSouza and E. Sridharan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006), 58-70.

¹¹³ For an excellent examination of structural changes in Indian politics during this period, see: Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, “Party System and Electoral Politics in the Indian States, 1952-2002: From Hegemony to Convergence,” in *India’s Political Parties*, ed. Peter Ronald DeSouza and E. Sridharan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006), 73-113.

message.¹¹⁴ Though Congress remained the party of India's industrial classes, it also began to reemphasize its socialist roots. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, agricultural development, poverty reduction, and economic self-sufficiency featured prominently in Congress' platform, successfully attracting significant portions of the lower classes and castes.¹¹⁵ This shift in message did more than win elections – it also boosted the government's legitimacy with India's poor, thereby undercutting the appeal of alternative ideologies like Naxalism.

When rhetoric proved insufficient in maintaining Congress hegemony, however, the party was not averse to taking more extreme measures. The imposition of the 'Emergency' from June 1975 to March 1977 demonstrated this most strikingly. Faced with declining popularity and a series of legal challenges to her rule, Mrs. Gandhi temporarily abrogated the constitution, suspended all civil rights, jailed opposition political figures, and instituted martial law throughout the country.¹¹⁶ Though democracy and the rule of law were reinstated with the national elections in 1977, Indira, and the Congress Party more generally, showed themselves more than willing to deal harshly with political opposition. As we will see, this resulted in a usually muscular response to separatist movements and other insurrections, including those of the Naxalite groups.

Developments at the state level were also important. Throughout the early 1970s and the period of the Emergency, Congress governments retained power in the vast majority of the Indian states. However, after the INC's temporary defeat at the center in 1977, the number and influence of state-level parties accelerated dramatically. Significantly, this phenomenon began in those areas most affected by Naxalism during the previous period, with the emergence of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh and the resurgence of the CPI-(M) in West Bengal.¹¹⁷ The growth of these parties, many of which depended on tenant farmers and landless laborers for their

¹¹⁴ Yadav and Palshikar, 96.

¹¹⁵ Wolpert, 389-410.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 398-399.

¹¹⁷ Yadav and Palshikar, 106-112.

primary constituencies, gave a new political voice to groups that had been effectively disenfranchised in the past. Their inclusion in the political process helped keep rural unrest in check and brought an added impetus for meaningful action on economic issues that were dear to this large demographic.

2. Economic Developments

India's economy during this period was something of a mixed bag. At the macro level, Congress' socialist policies, the persistence of an overbearing public sector epitomized by the 'License Raj' and a strategy of import-substitution industrialization introduced significant distortions in the economy that stifled growth the country so desperately needed. While overall GDP increased at an average of 3.5 percent throughout the 1970s, an exploding population meant the corresponding rate per capita was only 1.3 percent, far below that of the rest of the developing world. Though tepid attempts at liberalization resulted in slightly higher growth rates in the 1980s, their incomplete nature resulted in a balance of payments crisis that ultimately proved unsustainable and precipitated the economic reforms of the 1990s.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the benefits of the Green Revolution were finally becoming more evenly distributed, and Congress' newfound political populism translated into a slew of rural and agricultural development initiatives and aid programs.¹¹⁹ For the country's poor farmers at least, the picture was finally becoming a bit brighter.

Indira's initial reforms after the 1971 elections were ambitious in scope and included land-reform legislation, rural employment programs, nationalization of food markets, and investment in transportation infrastructure designed to help farmers get their product to market. These were consolidated in the country's Fifth Five Year Plan, launched in 1974, the explicit aims of which were the "removal of poverty" and the "attainment of economic self-reliance." For all its optimism, the plan's designs were complicated by the same corruption and conflicts of interest that had plagued reform efforts in previous eras. Additionally, the worldwide oil shocks of the early 1970s

¹¹⁸ Gurcharan Das, "The India Model," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 4-5.

¹¹⁹ Wolpert, 387-388; Jawaid, 100-102.

brought massive inflation that substantially diminished economic growth in real terms. Bihar and Gujarat erupted in riots and protests at the diminishing economic situation, and a national railroad strike threatened to bring the country to a standstill and compound its economic problems.¹²⁰

Though political factors contributed more directly to the imposition of the Emergency in 1975, Indira used her newfound power to tackle the economic challenges facing the country. Her ‘Twenty-Point Program’ of economic development was very similar to the country’s Fifth Five Year Plan, but with political opposition sidelined, Mrs. Gandhi was able to force its implementation more effectively.¹²¹ For all its authoritarianism, the Program was remarkably successful in getting the economic situation under control and finally bringing some relief to farmers and the rural poor. Inflation was successfully tamed, food prices retreated to their 1971 levels, and agricultural investment and subsidies began reaching the people that truly needed them.¹²²

When the Emergency was repealed and the Janata government came to power in 1977, the coalition proved so weak and the government so ineffectual that economic problems returned almost immediately. Inflation and unemployment skyrocketed, and Congress returned to power in 1980 with the slogan “Elect a Government that Works!”¹²³ Though she initially tried to cut agricultural subsidies, the political backlash convinced Indira and her party that the rural interests would still have to be placated. The Sixth Five Year Plan brought numerous anti-poverty initiatives like the Integrated Rural Development Program and the National Rural Employment Program, and inaugurated huge agricultural subsidies that continued throughout the 1980s.¹²⁴ In sum, while overall economic performance throughout this period was relatively mediocre, the numerous development initiatives meant the plight of the rural poor ceased to deteriorate as it had

¹²⁰ Wolpert, 396-397.

¹²¹ Ibid., 400.

¹²² Ibid., 403.

¹²³ Ibid., 407-410.

¹²⁴ Banerjee, 293.

from 1965-1972. In fact, the rural poverty rate declined relatively dramatically over this period, from 56% in 1973 to only 39% by 1988.¹²⁵ This is not to imply that these programs were unqualified successes; corruption and conflicts of interest continued to hamper their implementation, and their benefits were far from uniformly distributed. Nevertheless, they were successful enough to alleviate some of the income disparities that had stoked the fires of Naxalism in the previous period, and diminished economic and class issues as a source of social unrest.¹²⁶

3. Social Developments

Despite the attenuation of economic inequity as a source of social strife, the 1970s and '80s witnessed the birth of new ethnic and religious cleavages in India's heterogeneous society, precipitating the rise of a number of new communal and secessionist movements. Though none of these were directly connected to the phenomenon of Naxalism, their emergence and the government's response did have implications for the Maoists' fortunes. Two of the most prominent of these movements occurred in the Punjab and India's wild Northeast.

In the late 1970s, a wave of unrest swept India's 'Seven Sisters,' the small and predominantly tribal states east of the Siliguri corridor. While the trouble started in response to an influx of Bengali refugees in the wake of the 1971 Indo-Pak War, it soon took on a distinctly separatist character.¹²⁷ Historically, the region had only the loosest association with the rest of the subcontinent and was much more culturally bound to neighboring areas of Burma than to the rest of India. By the early 1980s, the Assamese, Bodo, Naga, and Mizo peoples had launched a series of violent secessionist movements, many of which continue to the present day. In response, New Delhi imposed martial law and dispatched the military and central police forces to put down the rebellions. Rajiv

¹²⁵ Poverty statistics based on consumption data from India's National Sample Survey, as reported on: Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, "Central Statistical Organization: Reports and Publications," http://mospi.gov.in/mospi_cso_rept_pubn.htm (accessed February 28, 2008).

¹²⁶ Jawaid, 98-100.

¹²⁷ Wolpert, 411.

Gandhi was able to negotiate a temporary suspension of hostilities in the late 1980s, but the arrangements soon fell apart, with the military redeployed to the Northeast in force by 1990.¹²⁸

On the other side of the country, another, even bloodier secessionist movement emerged at roughly the same time. The Sikh community had agitated for a separate Sikh nation, notionally known as Khalistan, since around the time of Partition and Independence in 1947. The movement had been largely peaceful in the intervening decades, but by the late 1970s, it was becoming more belligerent. Under the leadership of J. S. Bhindranwale, a Sikh religious guru, armed members of the separatist Akali Dal Party stormed the Golden Temple at Amritsar in a direct challenge to New Delhi's authority. In response to the rising violence and lawlessness throughout the Punjab, Indira's actions were swift and uncompromising. In June of 1984, the Indian Army launched 'Operation Bluestar,' retaking the Golden Temple by force and inflicting massive casualties on its Sikh defenders.¹²⁹ The operation cost Mrs. Gandhi her life (she was shortly thereafter assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards) and did not end the Khalistan movement immediately. It did, however, set the tone for the center's response through the remainder of the decade.¹³⁰ Extremely aggressive security actions continued, and ultimately proved successful in putting down the insurrection by the early 1990s.

For the Naxalites, the impact of unrest in the Punjab and the Northeast was twofold. First, it seems likely that the threats to the integrity of the nation served to rally significant portions of the electorate to the government, giving New Delhi an added source of legitimacy. Much as the government enjoyed a boost of popularity in 1971-72 during the Indo-Pak war, the actions against the animist tribals and (especially) the Sikhs played well with India's majority Hindu polity.¹³¹ This doubtlessly helped curtail the popularity of an anti-government ideology like Naxalism. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the aggressive response to each of these movements presented a daunting

¹²⁸ Wolpert, 425-426.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 416-418.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 423-425.

¹³¹ Ibid., 418.

challenge to any other would-be troublemakers. As historian Stanley Wolpert notes, “The stunning, shocking violence of Operation Bluestar served to put every minority in India on immediate notice of just how dangerous continued opposition to Delhi could be.”¹³² The Naxalites could certainly be included as one of these minority groups. As we shall see, however, the most potent enemy of Naxalism in this period was the internal disarray of the movement itself.

C. INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NAXALITE INSURGENCY

1. Organization and Leadership

Following the death of Charu Mazumdar in 1972, the Naxalites underwent a process of fragmentation that severely crippled the movement over the ensuing decades. Though their total numbers stayed relatively steady, with most estimates in the neighborhood of 15,000 activists nationwide, the leadership was increasingly driven by ideological and operational differences of opinion.¹³³ While the failures of the previous period were the immediate catalyst for this phenomenon, the movement had displayed factionalist tendencies almost from its inception.

At the organizational meetings of the AICCCR in 1969, two groups parted ways with the nascent CPI-(ML) from the outset. The first of these was the Andhra faction of Naxalites under the leadership of Nagi Reddy. Reddy differed with Mazumdar’s formulations on a number of points, most crucially the blanket ban on elections and the single-minded emphasis on the annihilation strategy at the expense of economic struggles and mass organization.¹³⁴ After being disaffiliated from the AICCCR, Reddy formed his own organization in 1969, the Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Committee (APRCC). While the APRCC was initially larger than the CPI-(ML), Reddy’s arrest in late 1969 severely curtailed its activities.¹³⁵ In the 1970s, the APRCC broke up into a

¹³² Wolpert, 418.

¹³³ *New York Times*, “Maoist Extremists Reappear in India,” October 12, 1980.

¹³⁴ Dasgupta, *The Naxalite Movement*, 154-156.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

number of smaller organizations, the two most significant of which were the Unity Center of Communist Revolutionaries of India (UCCRI) led by Nagi Reddy himself and Chandra Pulla Reddy's Revolutionary Communist Center (RCC).¹³⁶ While both groups were marginally active in Andhra Pradesh through the 1970s, they underwent numerous splits themselves in the latter half of the decade. By 1990, these smaller groups had either withered to inconsequence or been absorbed by other Naxalite outfits.

The other faction that split from the AICCCR in 1969 was known as Dakshin Desh. Its leaders, Amulya Sen and Kanai Chatterjee, also disagreed with Mazumdar over the necessity of mass organization and established their own group, initially based in West Bengal. With the government crackdowns of 1970-71, Dakshin Desh moved its operations to Bihar, changing its name to the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) in 1975.¹³⁷ Though relatively small, the MCC remained a more or less coherent organization over the course of these two decades.

The same could certainly not be said for Charu Mazumdar's CPI-(ML). The party had always been a relatively fragile construct of disparate personalities and ideologies, but after the setbacks of 1971-1972, it underwent a dizzying process of fractionalization that resulted in the emergence of literally dozens of competing groups. As the smaller organizations were often short-lived and of little real significance in the future development of the movement, only the most important will be enumerated here.

Following Mazumdar's death in 1972, the CPI-(ML) split into two broad camps: those who supported his ideology, strategy, and tactics, and those who opposed them. The pro-Mazumdar camp was further divided in 1973, with Lin Biao's fall from grace in the Chinese Communist Party. A source of great inspiration for Mazumdar's ideology, his disavowal by the Chinese generated contentious ideological debate within this branch of Naxalism.¹³⁸ The pro-Mazumdar/pro-Lin Biao faction, a distinct minority, regrouped in West Bengal under the leadership of Mahadev Mukherjee.¹³⁹ The pro-Mazumdar/anti-

¹³⁶ Banerjee, 166, 298.

¹³⁷ Prakash Singh, 115-116.

¹³⁸ Banerjee, 246.

¹³⁹ Ghosh, 175-177.

Lin Biao faction emerged in Bihar as CPI-(ML) Liberation, and in Andhra Pradesh as the Central Organizing Committee CPI-(ML), or COC-(ML).¹⁴⁰ The COC-(ML) would itself split in 1977, with one faction, led by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, reestablishing itself in 1980 as CPI-(ML) People's War Group, or PWG, in Andhra Pradesh.¹⁴¹

Among the anti-Mazumdar camp, the shakeout in this period was somewhat less confusing. The largest group emerged under the leadership of Satyanarayan Singh, the erstwhile Secretary of the CPI-(ML)'s Bihar State Committee. Singh had fallen out with Mazumdar in late 1971 over the latter's authoritarian tendencies and seemingly suicidal tactical injunctions. In November of that year, Singh and a number of similarly disenchanted leaders formed a parallel leadership and actually expelled Mazumdar from his own party.¹⁴² Though most of the Naxalite rank-and-file did not initially accept this, Singh attracted a sizeable following after Mazumdar's passing. His organization, known as CPI-(ML) S.N. Singh, was the largest and most influential of the post-Mazumdar Naxalite groups in the 1970s.¹⁴³ The only other sizeable anti-Mazumdar group to emerge was Bihar's CPI-(ML) Unity Committee, led by Khokan Mazumdar (no relation to Charu). In 1982, this group merged with the Bihar faction of the COC-(ML) to form the CPI-(ML) Party Unity, with Naveen Prasad as its new leader.¹⁴⁴

While the proliferation of groups in this period might give an impression of vitality, the splintering of the movement was actually indicative of a great deal of uncertainty and acrimony in the ranks. While all still agreed on the need for a Maoist-inspired political revolution in the country, Mazumdar's death and the fallout from the failures of the 1965-1972 period had left the Naxalites confused and quarrelsome, on issues both practical and ideological. Cries of 'revisionism' by one group were answered with counteraccusations of 'left-adventurism' from another. The resultant infighting left

¹⁴⁰ Prakash Singh, 156; Dasgupta, "The Naxalite Movement: An Epilogue," 22.

¹⁴¹ Prakash Singh, 130.

¹⁴² Ghosh, 139-144, 151.

¹⁴³ Dasgupta, "The Naxalite Movement: An Epilogue," 10.

¹⁴⁴ Prakash Singh, 159-160.

the cadres demoralized and the leadership even more hopelessly divided.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps no issue generated more contention than the most appropriate strategy to pursue in the post-Mazumdar era.

2. Strategy and Tactics

Following the security crackdowns in 1971-72, most of the Naxalite groups initially continued to advocate a violent strategy. With the memories of government repression fresh in their minds, this was not altogether surprising – most of their leaders continued to languish in prison, often under harsh conditions. Dakshin Desh and the pro-Lin Biao faction in West Bengal were particularly vociferous in their agitation for a continuation of the annihilation policy. The other groups placed more rhetorical emphasis on building up mass organizations, but they too were initially unwilling to forswear armed struggle against the hated oppressors.¹⁴⁶ However, with the end of the Emergency and the rise of the first Janata government, a more moderate position began to emerge within a key segment of the Naxalite movement.

The CPI(ML) S.N. Singh was the first major organization to change tack. Negotiating with Janata politicians from his jail cell after the 1977 elections, Singh's aversion to electoral politics and compromise with the state softened. In a surprise move, he released a press statement in April 1977 expressing his "critical support" for the new Janata government and vowing that his group would participate in the assembly elections of June of that year.¹⁴⁷ The formerly staunch advocate of the annihilation strategy went so far as to announce, "We wish to state categorically here that violence is not our ideology. Our ideology is Marxism-Leninism."¹⁴⁸ Though he justified this ideological reversal on the grounds that it would secure the release of political prisoners and enable the Maoists to present their platform to more of the population than ever before, his move

¹⁴⁵ Jawaid, 94-95.

¹⁴⁶ Dasgupta, "The Naxalite Movement: An Epilogue," 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴⁸ Prakash Singh, 121-122.

was viewed as treason by the rest of the movement.¹⁴⁹ However, when the Janata government delivered on its promises of clemency and one of Singh's candidates was actually elected in West Bengal (Santosh Rana, formerly the leader of the Midnapur uprising), his approach was vindicated in the eyes of many Naxalites. Even such old-school stalwarts as Kanu Sanyal and Ashim Chatterjee eventually gave Singh's strategy their grudging endorsement.¹⁵⁰

Throughout the rest of the 1970s and 80s, CPI-(ML) Liberation and various lesser organizations followed the CPI-(ML) S.N. Singh's lead and slowly moderated their stance. To be sure, it took time for the incidences of violence to diminish, and many of these groups stressed that they still retained the option of armed revolution.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, they increasingly normalized their activities, allying themselves with leftist political parties and contesting elections at the state level through front organizations in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal.¹⁵² For other groups, however, rapprochement with any government forces, whatever their political stripes, remained anathema.

The MCC, COC-(ML), and CPI-(ML) Unity Committee acknowledged the need for a greater emphasis on mass organization, but only in support of armed agrarian revolution.¹⁵³ The latter two organizations splintered in the late 1970s, but their descendants carried on their two-pronged strategy of mass mobilization and violent opposition in the subsequent decade. Both the PWG and Party Unity continued the killing of *jotedars* and other class enemies, but not as single-mindedly as the CPI-(ML) had in the past. They also established aboveground organizations to agitate for land reform and minimum wages, and began setting up parallel administrations to dispense justice and other government functions that were lacking in the remote areas where they operated.¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, the PWG was also able to attract some support by waging a

¹⁴⁹ Dasgupta, "The Naxalite Movement: An Epilogue," 14-15.

¹⁵⁰ Prakash Singh, 123.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁵² Tilak, 19-20; Prakash Singh, 123.

¹⁵³ Prakash Singh, 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 133-134.

campaign against social vice in the villages, which included crusades against drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution.¹⁵⁵ Despite their avowed commitment to a similarly multi-pronged approach, the MCC was generally less successful in these secondary endeavors. During the 1980s, the group was best known for the gruesome nature of its continuing annihilations, still directed primarily at upper caste landlords.¹⁵⁶

At the tactical level, those groups espousing violence began implementing more realistic methods in their continued pursuit of armed revolution. Discarding the Charuist aversion to modern weaponry, most actively encouraged the capture of guns from *jotedars* and police.¹⁵⁷ While this slowly improved the Naxalites' firepower, their operations remained dominated by small squad-level actions, and were generally unsophisticated in terms of their planning and execution. In the late 1980s, the PWG did receive some training from LTTE rebels in more advanced tactics, including the use of explosives. This enabled them to successfully carry out a land-mine attack against police forces in 1989, providing a deadly portent of things to come.¹⁵⁸ For the most part, however, major improvements in the Maoists' operational capabilities would not come until well into the next decade.

3. Naxalite Activity

As fundamental as it was, the split between those groups that followed the Singh line of political normalization and those that continued with the strategy of violence was just one of a host of divisions that spread like a cancer through the movement. Even groups on the same side of the strategic divide remained pitted against one another over issues of personality or ideology, and fratricide was not uncommon.¹⁵⁹ In this contentious environment, there was little hope of consolidation or cooperation. Split as

¹⁵⁵ Prakash Singh, 137-138.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 151-153.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 136, 151.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

they were into numerous smaller groupings, the Naxalites' activity in this period was generally circumscribed and remained restricted to a few small geographic areas.

Throughout the early and mid-1970s, a combination of effective security efforts and the imprisonment of most of the leadership put a stop to almost all violent Naxalite activity. Indeed, brief periods of unrest were recorded in only two places: northern West Bengal and Bhojpur district in Bihar. The agitation in West Bengal erupted in 1973, led by the pro-Mazumdar/pro-Lin Biao faction of Mahadev Mukherjee. For about a year, actions against police forces resulted in several dozen deaths and the seizure of a similar number of firearms, but the uprising fizzled with Mukherjee's arrest towards the end of 1974.¹⁶⁰ The activity in Bhojpur was slightly longer lived, lasting from 1972-1977, and was led by CPI-(ML) Liberation. Still committed to violent revolution at this stage, the group carried out a number of annihilations against class enemies with the support of local tribes. Still, the uprising was a small-scale affair, accounting for only around ninety deaths over the entire five-year period, with its longevity due more to the state government's anemic response than the actual strength of the insurgency. Like its counterpart in West Bengal, it was put down relatively easily with the introduction of more aggressive security measures, this time from the center.¹⁶¹

The late 1970s witnessed the dramatic announcements of Satyanarayan Singh and the political normalization of a number of Naxalite groups. Though gradual, this proved to be an enduring phenomenon, and the CPI-(ML) S.N.Singh and its followers largely retreated from violent activities. Though still active politically, their strategic course change effectively removed them from the Naxalite fold by the early 1980s, at least for the purposes of this thesis. As for the more recalcitrant Maoists, two dozen smaller groups remained minimally active in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and a number of southern states.¹⁶² Between them all, however, they accounted for only a handful of incidents and even fewer deaths. Throughout the 1980s, the only groups of

¹⁶⁰ Ghosh, 175-177.

¹⁶¹ Prakash Singh, 117-119.

¹⁶² Ibid., 124.

any real significance were the PWG in Andhra Pradesh, and what the Indian security official Prakash Singh dubbed the ‘New Left’ in Bihar.¹⁶³

Formed in April 1980 by Kandapalli Seetharamaiah, the PWG quickly became the most powerful Naxalite organization in the country. Though this latter fact was admittedly not much of a boast during this period, they were a disruptive influence in their primary area of operations, the perennially restive and underdeveloped Telangana region.¹⁶⁴ While the group did engage in rudimentary social projects and set up a number of peasant organizations to help mobilize the masses in pursuit of economic goals, Seetharamaiah was also a firm believer in Mazumdar’s annihilation strategy. As

Table 1 shows, the group grew increasingly violent under his leadership, with attacks on *jotedars*, police, and police informants.¹⁶⁵ Though still relatively contained by the end of the 1980s, the PWG was already demonstrating the bloody ruthlessness that would distinguish it in later decades.

The ‘New Left’ in Bihar emerged at roughly the same time as the PWG. Comprised of the MCC, Party Unity, and CPI-(ML)

YEAR	INCIDENTS	KILLED
1981	53	10
1982	98	18
1983	172	17
1984	306	30
1985	308	30
1986	161	25
1987	252	63
1988	453	59
1989	456	84
1990	735	94

Liberation, the title may give a misleading impression of cooperation amongst the groups. In reality, they fought each other nearly as often as they engaged ‘class enemies,’ often in petty squabbles over turf or ideological nuances.

¹⁶³ Prakash Singh, 124.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 129-141.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 140

Nevertheless, they too managed to make an impact at the state level. Like Telangana, Bihar remained beyond the reach of many of the government's reform initiatives, and pockets of rural unrest continued to provide havens for Naxalite cadres.¹⁶⁶

Though Liberation was the largest of the three groups, its gradual embrace of electoral politics over the course of the decade made it the least violently active. It maintained an armed wing into the 1990s, but its aboveground political organization, the Indian People's Front, increasingly supplanted the influence of its more belligerent cadres.¹⁶⁷ The faction favoring normalization gained dominance in 1992, and Liberation thereafter functioned primarily as an aboveground outfit, focused almost exclusively on peaceful mass organization.¹⁶⁸ In a telling signal of the extent of their moderation, its leaders even called for rapprochement with the formerly despised CPI and CPI(M), in an effort to build a more coordinated leftist political front.¹⁶⁹

By contrast, the MCC and Party Unity remained exclusively committed to armed revolution. Mass organization was desirable, but in the context of a burgeoning caste conflict in the state during this period, often difficult to mobilize along exclusively class lines. Instead, the annihilation strategy was pursued with a decidedly grisly purpose, particularly by the MCC. In most cases, upper caste *jotedars* and their families were the primary targets but, with the conflation of caste and class conflicts in the state, the sadistic nature of the killings failed to generate the same backlash that had occurred previously. As a result, both the MCC and Party Unity were able to carve out small areas of influence in Bihar over the latter half of the 1980s.¹⁷⁰ As in Andhra Pradesh, however, this level of activity remained a far cry from that of 1967-1972.

¹⁶⁶ Prakash Singh, 148-160.

¹⁶⁷ Tilak, 19.

¹⁶⁸ Prakash Singh, 158.

¹⁶⁹ Tilak, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Prakash Singh, 148-156, 159-160.

D. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

1. Center Responses

From the halls of power in New Delhi, Naxalism appeared to be a spent force after 1972. With the center caught up in the drama of systemic political change and the growth of ethnic secessionist movements over these two decades, relatively scant attention was paid to the fractured and localized Maoist movement in the country. Nevertheless, as alluded in Section 3.2, developments at the national level did have an impact on the Naxalites.

With the INC's turn to a more populist platform, new rural development and land reform initiatives effectively undercut the movement's base of support. With rural inequality receding rather than growing, the more militant cadres had a much harder time finding sympathetic base areas from which to operate. Even for those sections of the movement that drifted in a more moderate direction, the government's schemes were successful in stealing their rhetorical thunder and foiling most attempts at mass organization; Naxalite candidates did not generally have much success at the polls, Santosh Rana's success notwithstanding.¹⁷¹ While these developments posed indirect problems for the Naxalites, a much more immediate challenge emerged with the imposition of the Emergency in 1975.

Though not primarily directed at the Naxalites, the resultant political and security crackdowns hit the movement hard. Like most other opposition groups, all Naxalite organizations were banned and scores of leaders and party activists rearrested under the newly instituted Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA).¹⁷² Among them were some of the Maoists' most effective organizers, including Kanu Sanyal, Ashim Chatterjee, and Satyanarayan Singh. Moreover, the security forces were given wide latitude in dealing with whatever opposition escaped the prison cell. Frequently, this entailed direct action like that of 'Operation Thunder,' which crushed the long-simmering

¹⁷¹ Prakash Singh, 211-212.

¹⁷² Banerjee, 297.

unrest in Bhojpur with combined operations by the military and Central Reserve Police forces in 1977.¹⁷³ Already in tatters after Mazumdar's death, the Naxalite movement was nearly destroyed by the center's expanded powers during the Emergency.¹⁷⁴

Ironically, it was also New Delhi that granted it a new lease on life. The Janata government's promises to undo the excesses of the Emergency resulted in the release of hundreds of Naxalite prisoners all across the country in 1977 and 1978, the legalization of most of their organizations, and the easing of pressure by government security forces.¹⁷⁵ While this ultimately had the effect of moderating several factions and co-opting them into the political process, it also freed the more hard-core cadres to resume their subversive activities.

Though the INC returned to power in New Delhi in 1980, it did not resume its previous activities against the Naxalites. In part, this was due to the still extremely weak state of the movement. More importantly, however, the government already had its hands full with the growing unrest in Punjab and the Northeast. Nevertheless, the center's security initiatives with respect to these other regions reverberated among the Naxalites. The extremely aggressive response to these insurgencies likely helped convince the more moderate Maoists that the path of armed rebellion was untenable and provided some deterrent effect even to their more violent-minded brethren. Whatever the case, Naxalite violence remained at a sufficiently low ebb through the 1980s to permit the central government to largely dismiss it as a local law and order problem. The same could not necessarily be said for those states that were more directly affected.

2. State Responses

As the birthplace of Naxalism, West Bengal had the longest history in dealing with the insurgency. While effective policing put down the 1973-74 uprising of Mahadev Mukherjee's faction, rural unrest continued to simmer under a series of Congress administrations. When a Left Front coalition government returned to power in 1977,

¹⁷³ Prakash Singh, 119.

¹⁷⁴ Mehra, 51-52.

¹⁷⁵ Prakash Singh, 122; Tilak, 12.

however, the situation changed dramatically. Led by the CPI-(M), the new administration proved much more competent and enduring than its predecessors. Under its direction, West Bengal instituted a series of land redistribution and rural development initiatives that proved remarkably successful. One of these was ‘Operation Barga,’ which established strict ceilings on total landholdings by individuals and granted inheritable ownership rights to tenant farmers and sharecroppers.¹⁷⁶ Unencumbered by the political compromises, conflicts of interest, and enforcement issues that so often plagued center-led efforts, these state-level reforms removed the Maoists’ *raison d’être* in a few short years. By the early 1980s, Naxalism had ceased to be a force of any consequence in the state.¹⁷⁷

Though not as successful as West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh was able to mount an intermittently effective counter to its Naxalite problem. The TDP, which came to power in 1983, initially pursued a policy of appeasement with the PWG in an effort to lure them to peace talks. When it became clear that the group had no intention of negotiating in good faith (and had, in fact, used the opportunity to consolidate and strengthen their positions), the state’s Chief Minister, N.T. Rama Rao, adopted a hard line against the Naxalites.¹⁷⁸ Rao authorized aggressive policing measures against PWG cadres and oversaw the formation of the Greyhounds, the state’s elite anti-Naxal police unit, in the late 1980s.¹⁷⁹ Though he supported aggressive security measures, Rao did not neglect the rural development initiatives that had proved so successful in West Bengal. Land reform and rural employment initiatives were implemented with moderate success, but a lack of government infrastructure in remoter parts of the state made their implementation there difficult.¹⁸⁰ In 1989, the INC returned to power in state elections, but initially made the same early mistakes as the TDP. The new Chief Minister, Chenna Reddy, tried to

¹⁷⁶ Prakash Singh, 179.

¹⁷⁷ Mehra, 56; Prakash Singh, 236.

¹⁷⁸ Prakash Singh, 139.

¹⁷⁹ Andhra Pradesh State Police, “Units: Greyhounds,” http://www.apstatepolice.org/AboutUs/units/units_greyhounds.htm (accessed February 4, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ K.C. Suri, “Telugu Desam Party,” in *India’s Political Parties*, ed. Peter Ronald DeSouza and E. Sridharan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006), 294-295.

appease the PWG in a vain attempt to lure them into the mainstream, releasing several hundred Naxalite prisoners rounded up under the previous administration.¹⁸¹ When this approach failed again, Reddy reverted to Rao's combination of tough policing and socio-economic development. Despite these ups and downs, the state was relatively successful in confining the PWG to the Telangana region and a few neighboring districts throughout the 1980s.

By contrast, the containment of the MCC and Party Unity in Bihar had little to do with the state government. The Janata Party captured control of the state briefly, from 1977 to 1980, but the remainder of this period was dominated by INC administrations. In reality, however, it scarcely mattered who controlled the government. Corruption, cronyism, and maladministration took root in Bihar in the 1970s and continued to flourish through the 1980s.¹⁸² Unable to mount effective security or development initiatives of any kind, the government essentially left the rural parts of the state to their own devices, providing space for the embers of Naxalism to smolder. While the growth of caste conflict in the state, as well as internecine fighting between the MCC and PU, were enough to keep the Naxalites more or less in check during these decades, the state's appallingly poor governance would become an issue in the future resurgence of Naxalism.

E. CONCLUSION

The Fragmentary Period was a prolonged low point in the history of Naxalism in India. After its brief but significant surge from 1967 to 1972, the movement underwent a period of stagnation and decay that lasted nearly two decades and effectively removed it from the public consciousness. Though not as captivating a story as the vitality of the previous period, the impotence of the movement and its singular inability to gain traction during these years are still worthy of examination.

¹⁸¹ Sanjoy Hazarika, "Indian Rebel Group is Linked to Train Attack," *New York Times*, October 21, 1990.

¹⁸² Prakash Singh, 148-150.

The most obvious reason for the failure of Naxalism in this period was its own organizational weakness. Fractured into dozens of smaller, competing factions, it was too dispersed and fragmented to mount any kind of meaningful challenge to the forces of the Indian state. In large part, this was a failure of leadership. Consumed by their personal egos, strategic and tactical differences, and ideological arguments incomprehensible to any but the most dogmatic Marxists, the heads of the various Naxalite organizations were utterly incapable of resolving their disputes and coordinating the activities of their disparate groups. As a consequence, a large portion of the movement effectively abandoned the revolutionary line, and those that remained were confined to a few small pockets of activity in the hinterlands. With the structure of the movement in such a state, its success would have been unlikely in even a permissive security environment.

As it turned out, the security environment was decidedly unfavorable. The imposition of the Emergency in the 1970s granted the state a great deal of leeway in dealing with opposition movements, and it used them to devastating effect against the already fragmented Naxalites. Indeed, the movement was very nearly destroyed by policing actions like Operation Thunder and the imprisonment of hundreds, if not thousands of its activists. The situation in the 1980s was hardly any better. Though New Delhi's aggressive reactions to the various secessionist uprisings in the country were not directed against the Maoists, they still provided a powerful deterrent effect.

Lastly, the social, economic, and political conditions in the country were not conducive to the spread of Naxalite ideology. Political changes at the systemic level gave a new voice to groups the Maoists traditionally relied on for support, making the government more responsive to their needs. As a result, land reforms and rural development became a priority at both the state and national levels. While these programs were not always perfectly implemented, poverty rates did decline, and real and perceived inequity were alleviated to some degree. These issues had been drivers of rural unrest in the previous period, and the government's efforts to address them proved generally successful in keeping the countryside peaceful during these decades.

To most observers in 1991, the Naxalist threat appeared to be over. The movement had been wiped out in the state of its birth, sizeable numbers of its former adherents were embracing electoral democracy, and, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Communism was being discredited around the world. In isolated pockets of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, however, the embers of the Maoist revolution continued to smolder. In places the rural reforms had scarcely reached, the People's War Group, Maoist Communist Center, and Party Unity continued to cling to existence, waiting for the right moment to reignite the fire of Naxalbari.

IV. THE RECONSOLIDATION PERIOD (1991-PRESENT)

A. INTRODUCTION

With an analysis of the first two periods of Naxalite activity complete, this chapter now turns to the most recent iteration of Maoist violence in India. In an examination of the historical evolution of Naxalism, the period from 1991 to the present is certainly the most paradoxical. In the course of little more than 17 years, India has transformed from a large, but isolated and relatively weak state, to one of the central players in the emerging geopolitical order. Its macroeconomic growth is astounding, second only to China in the developing world, and its diplomatic clout on the world stage has increased commensurately. To many outside observers, India looks to be successfully integrating itself into the modern world.

And yet, in those same 17 years, an archaic Communist ideology, rejected even in the place of its birth, was also in the ascendancy. Written off by most security analysts in the ashes of the Fragmentary Period from 1972-1991, Naxalism staged a spectacular comeback in the following decades, growing in scope, breadth, and violence. By 2006, its impact was so great that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was forced to declare, “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the problem of Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country.”¹⁸³ This is certainly a startling announcement for a nation that suffered through the chaos of Partition, witnessed the violence of a Sikh rebellion in the Punjab, and is still confronted by the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, various insurgencies in the Northeast, fundamentalist Islamic terrorism, and continuing Hindu-Muslim communal strife. What explains Naxalism’s phoenix-like rebirth in a period that has witnessed such phenomenal growth and national development?

¹⁸³ Manmohan Singh, “Prime Minister’s Speech to the 2nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers on Naxalism,” 13 April 2006, Government of India Press Information Bureau, http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page.asp?relid=17128, (accessed August 10, 2007).

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1. Political Developments

Since 1991, the most striking development in Indian politics has been the emergence of a truly multi-polar power structure. The declining hegemony of the INC (discussed in the previous chapter) dramatically accelerated during the 1990s, fuelled by the emergence of the “Three M’s” on the political scene: Mandir, Mandal, and Market Reforms.¹⁸⁴ In 1998, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition unseated the previous INC administration and inaugurated the longest period of uninterrupted rule by a non-Congress party since independence. Though the INC returned to power in 2004, the BJP’s ascendancy in the 1990s definitively marked the end of one-party dominance in India, resulting in a more complex and contentious political setting than at any other time in the nation’s history. Minority governments and coalition politics are now the order of the day, severely restricting New Delhi’s freedom of action in addressing many pressing issues.

In many ways, this increasing gridlock at the national level is reflected in interactions between the central government and those of the states. India’s political structure is distinctly federal, with the 28 state and 7 union territory governments retaining high levels of autonomy from New Delhi, barring the infrequent imposition of ‘President’s Rule’ from the center. This is particularly true with respect to internal security, an area in which the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India grants the individual states great authority and latitude.¹⁸⁵ Such a division of powers presents obvious problems for policy coordination, especially when different parties control the various levels of government. This situation was not much of an issue in earlier decades,

¹⁸⁴ ‘Mandir’ refers to Hindu Nationalism, ‘Mandal’ to the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report on the status of backward castes, and ‘Market Reforms’ to the economic reforms inaugurated in 1991. For an excellent exposition of these phenomena and their impact on Indian politics, see:

Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, “Party System and Electoral Politics in the Indian States, 1952-2002: From Hegemony to Convergence,” in *India’s Political Parties*, ed. Peter Ronald DeSouza and E. Sridharan (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 2006), 98-106.

¹⁸⁵ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2006-07*, 1.

when most states and territories were firmly under Congress' control. Since 1991, however, the INC's continued decline has resulted in smaller parties becoming dominant in many more states; significantly, of the 14 states affected by Naxal violence in 2008, Congress controls the legislature in only two. As we will see, this presents a significant obstacle to the development of a coherent response to the Naxalite threat.

For all the dramatic changes to the Indian political structure in recent years, a number of institutional weaknesses from earlier periods also pose challenges. Corruption, cronyism, and conflicts of interest remain enormous problems. While some progress towards cleaning up administration is visible at the federal level, these problems are still quite apparent in many, if not most, lower level governments. Unsurprisingly, they are most pronounced in many of the Naxalite affected states and districts, particularly Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.¹⁸⁶

One contributing factor to this persistent maladministration is the gross inefficiency of the Indian legal system. Despite a 2005 amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure Act that mandated significant legal reforms, significant problems still abound.¹⁸⁷ The most pressing of these are corruption within the justice system itself and an overwhelming backlog of cases pending adjudication. Litigation is often held in the dock for decades awaiting trial, and powerful interests are frequently able to influence court decisions through bribery.¹⁸⁸ The lack of recourse to a fair and impartial legal system prevents citizens from holding their elected officials accountable or seeking a redress of specific grievances, and directly contributes to the growing disaffection of the rural poor in many areas.

2. Economic Developments

If political changes in India since 1991 are significant, those in the economic sphere are almost revolutionary. The collapse of India's most important international

¹⁸⁶ Michael F. Martin and K. Alan Kronstadt, CRS Report, "India – U.S. Economic and Trade Relations," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RL34161 (August 31, 2007): 13.

¹⁸⁷ Asian Centre for Human Rights, "SAARC Human Rights Report 2006," Asian Centre for Human Rights Report, 117. <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/saarc2006/main.htm> (accessed August 10, 2007).

¹⁸⁸ Jo Johnson, "How Justice is Delayed and Denied in India," *Financial Times*, September 6, 2007.

benefactor, the Soviet Union, coupled with a dramatic rise in world energy prices during the first Gulf War, presented enormous challenges to the country's quasi-socialist and isolated economy. In response, then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (the current Prime Minister), an Oxford educated economist, engineered a series of liberalizing trade, investment, and market reforms in an effort to revitalize his nation's competitiveness. The results have been impressive, to say the least. India's GDP growth surged from 3-4% a year in the 1980s to 5-7% throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.¹⁸⁹ In 2006, real economic growth was 9.2%, second only to China among Asian economies.¹⁹⁰ While living conditions for most Indians have improved, an emerging urban middle class is the largest beneficiary of this growth, rising from less than 10% of the population in the 1980s to nearly 20% currently. In a country of over 1.2 billion people, this represents over 100 million lifted out of poverty.¹⁹¹

For all this success, however, poverty remains a persistent problem. The urban-rural divide is stark, and while incomes in large cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore have grown substantially, the vast majority of India's population remains employed in the agricultural sector, usually with extremely low wages. A recent study by the government-sponsored *National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector* revealed that nearly 80% of the Indian population was living on less than U.S. 50 cents a day (about 20 rupees).¹⁹² While corrections for purchasing power parity make this statistic somewhat less odious, as of 2006, it still left an estimated 26% of the population below the official poverty line of 12 rupees.¹⁹³ India has endured higher poverty rates in the past, but increasing inequality is a new and potentially explosive phenomenon. Whereas the 1980s actually witnessed a reduction of inequality

¹⁸⁹ Martin and Kronstadt, 6.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹¹ CIA World Factbook 2007, "India," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>, (accessed September 16, 2007).

¹⁹² Government of India, National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector, "Report on Comprehensive Legislation for Minimum Conditions of Work and Social Security for Unorganized Workers," July 2007, http://nceus.gov.in/Report_Bill_July_2007_index.htm (accessed September 17, 2007).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

(particularly in rural areas), since the reforms of the early 1990s, the incomes and consumption of the richest third of Indian society have grown at a far faster pace than those of their poorer neighbors.¹⁹⁴ The structure of India's economic growth is partly to blame, as relative declines in manufacturing and agriculture, at the expense of a surging services sector, have meant very little net job creation.¹⁹⁵ This is a curious feature of the country's economic growth to date and one that may have serious implications for the stability of that growth in the future.

In an effort to address this problem and lure more manufacturing jobs to the country, New Delhi recently took steps to further liberalize the investment environment and draw more FDI from abroad. Most notably, in February 2006, India implemented the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Act, allowing the establishment of SEZs (similar to those in China) with tax, regulatory, and tariff incentives for foreign invested enterprises. By August 2007, over 230 such zones were approved, with hundreds more in various stages of planning.¹⁹⁶ The effort enjoyed considerable success, doubling inbound investment from U.S. \$6 billion in 2005 to over \$11 billion in 2006.¹⁹⁷ In recent months, however, the policy has attracted significant controversy, most pointedly over the issue of land appropriation. The federal and state governments have extensive rights of eminent domain, and their often heavy-handed methods for evicting the (usually poor) owners of land needed for SEZ development have generated angry protests. In March 2007, violent demonstrations by rural residents in Nandigram, West Bengal, resulted in the deaths of 14 people when security forces opened fire.¹⁹⁸ Though the SEZ policy has since been put on hold, it remains a focal point for growing rural disaffection with government development policies in the affected regions, particularly West Bengal and Bihar.

¹⁹⁴ Petia Topalova, "India: Is the Rising Tide Lifting All Boats," Working Paper WP/08/54 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, March 2008): 12, 22.

¹⁹⁵ International Monetary Fund, "India: 2006 Article IV Consultation – Staff Report," Country Report No. 07/63 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, February 2007): 26.

¹⁹⁶ K. Alan Kronstadt, "India-U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RL33529 (August 3, 2007): 41.

¹⁹⁷ Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry: Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, "FDI in India Statistics," http://dipp.nic.in/fdi_statistics/india_fdi_index.htm (accessed September 17, 2007).

¹⁹⁸ Kronstadt, "India-U.S. Relations," 41.

A third salient feature of India's recent economic growth is the increasing demand for natural resources to fuel this rapid development. Demand for raw materials of all sorts has soared since 1991, particularly for forest products, minerals, and energy. This often results in further conflict between the government and poor rural populations, as many of these resources are located on land occupied by this demographic. Many of these areas are also hotbeds of Naxalite activity: Bihar and Jharkhand have extensive iron ore deposits; Andhra Pradesh produces bauxite, a key input for aluminum production; and over 85% of India's known coal deposits are located in the five most heavily Naxal-affected states.¹⁹⁹ The fact that India relies overwhelmingly on coal for its electricity production (and is already facing serious shortfalls in electrical supply) makes the last point all the more sobering.

The country's economic development over the past 17 years is certainly impressive. However, the uneven nature of this growth, both structurally and demographically, poses new challenges for New Delhi. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rising levels of social inequality and unrest in certain segments of the population.

3. Social Developments

Indian society was never known for its egalitarianism. The caste system institutionalized discrimination centuries ago, with the indigenous tribals (*Adivasis*) and lower castes (*Dalits*) comprising the bottom rung of the social ladder. Victimized and exploited for generations, it should come as no surprise that these groups are also the most left behind, and in many cases directly victimized, by the inequitable economic growth discussed above. In the context of the current Naxalite insurgency, their social plight deserves the greatest attention.

¹⁹⁹ *Economist*, "Maoist Insurgency Continues to Undermine Internal Security," EIU ViewsWire, Mar 22, 2007, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=0&did=1264465691&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1190076527&clientId=11969> (accessed September 15, 2007); *Economist*, "The East is Red," *Economist* Print Edition, April 12, 2006, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_GRDVJSN (accessed September 17, 2007).

Accounting for 8.2% of India's total population, the *Adivasis* (or Scheduled Tribes, STs) are spread out in two broad swathes of territory, one along the southern foothills of the Himalaya in northern India and the other in the eastern half of the lower peninsula, extending into the seven Northeastern states. Living in the forests and hills of India's poorest and least developed areas, these groups were ignored by all levels of government for decades, with extremely little civil or administrative support in the form of schools, hospitals, police, or basic infrastructure. This neglect is evident in an examination of literacy rates, educational attainment, life expectancy, and other indicators of human development; by any measure, the *Adivasis* lag the rest of India by wide margins. The STs are disenfranchised economically, too, with nearly 50% of the tribal population below the poverty line.²⁰⁰ Accounting for 16.2% of the overall population, the *Dalits* (or Scheduled Castes, SCs) face similar neglect. Though spread more evenly over the subcontinent, their concentrations are highest in the poorer states that, not coincidentally, also comprise the *Adivasi* homelands.²⁰¹

As the demand for natural resources increases, these populations feel a disproportionate share of the pressure from developers. According to the Asian Center for Human Rights, a New Delhi based South Asian monitor, despite their small share of the overall population, *Adivasis* "constituted 55.1% of the total displaced persons as a result of so called developmental projects like dams, mining, industries, and conservation."²⁰² As mentioned in the same report, *Dalits* are facing similar denial of their land rights. To make matters worse, the methods by which these dispossessions occur are frequently coercive and sometimes violent – *Adivasis* and *Dalits* that oppose their evictions have faced beatings, rape, and even murder.²⁰³ Legal recourse through the state judicial system is often unavailable or tainted by corruption, and protection or

²⁰⁰ Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Annual Report 2006-07*, 26-29; Asian Centre for Human Rights, "ACHR Review: No Rights, Only Charity for India's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples," Asian Centre for Human Rights Review, July 21, 2004, <http://www.achrweb.org/Review/2004/30-04.htm> (accessed September 13, 2007).

²⁰¹ Asian Centre for Human Rights, "The Dalits and Naxalism," Naxal Conflict Monitor, April-June 2007, <http://www.achrweb.org/ncm/dalits-naxals.htm> (accessed September 17, 2007).

²⁰² ACHR, "SAARC Human Rights Report 2006," 123.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 122-128.

support from the local administration is usually sorely lacking. With hostility toward the government and its development policies growing in many of these communities since 1991, it is little wonder that Naxalism would find its new support in precisely this demographic.

C. INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NAXALITE INSURGENCY

1. Organization and Leadership

Since 1991, a number of organizational factors have contributed to the growing strength of Naxalism. Arguably the most significant of these is the trend toward unification. In the wake of the earlier period of fragmentation, over forty individual groups were operating in the eastern half of India. Three in particular emerged as the largest and most dangerous offspring of Naxalbari: the CPI-(ML) People's War, or People's War Group (PWG), active primarily in Andhra Pradesh and neighboring districts of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh; the Maoist Communist Center (MCC), confined mainly to Bihar (and later Jharkhand); and the CPI-(ML) Party Unity (PU), also active in Bihar. Between the three of them, they accounted for an estimated 80-90% of all Naxal-related violence through the 1990s. Beset by ideological differences, however, they were frequently antagonistic when operating in the same areas.²⁰⁴

An infusion of new leadership in the early 1990s marked the beginnings of a thaw between the groups. In 1992, following the ouster of the legendary PWG leader Seetharamaiah, a 42-year-old school teacher, Muppalla Lakshmana Rao (alias Ganapathy) took over the reins of a stagnating organization. Ganapathy set himself apart from the old guard almost immediately, with an appreciation of the realities on the ground that his more idealistic predecessors had lacked. Realizing that the movement

²⁰⁴ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2004-2005*, 39.

could never succeed in its divided state, he immediately set out to bring the various factions together, noting, “to advance the cause of the revolution, unification is the only way.”²⁰⁵

Initial merger talks between the PWG and MCC began in 1992, but had broken off by 1994. In 1993, the PWG, MCC, and PU came together on a more limited scale in the formation of the All India People’s Forum, ostensibly to coordinate their activities in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra.²⁰⁶ While this movement enjoyed limited success, notably in the organization of a political rally in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, that drew over 100,000 people, ideological divisions forced its disassociation by 1996. Undeterred, Ganapathy pursued rapprochement with the CPI-(ML) Party Unity on a bilateral basis. His persistence was rewarded in 1998, when the PWG and PU were merged to form the CPI-(ML) People’s War. For all its prickliness, the MCC was not totally averse to the idea of consolidation, as it proved in its merger with a smaller faction, the Revolutionary Communist Center of India (Maoist), forming the Maoist Communist Center of India (MCCI). When Ganapathy reached out to the MCCI again in 2002, he found them much more receptive. Negotiations dragged on for over two years, but in September 2004, the formation of the CPI-Maoist announced the merger of the PW and MCCI factions (in addition to five smaller ones). While other, marginal groups still exist in various parts of the country, given its size, strength, and geographical presence, the CPI-Maoist is, for all intents and purposes, the current face of Naxalism in India.

Ganapathy’s successful unification of the different militant factions is unprecedented in the movement’s history, eclipsing even Charu Mazumdar’s efforts in building the CPI-(ML) in the 1967-1972 period. The ideological rifts that plagued the movement in the past appear to be over. Significantly, the 9th Unity Congress of the CPI-

²⁰⁵ Muppalla Lakshmana Rao (Ganapathy), interview by Chindu Sreedharan, “The Rediff Interview/Ganapathy,” Rediff On the Net, October 7, 1998, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/07gana.htm> (accessed September 16, 2007).

²⁰⁶ Institute for Conflict Management, “Maoist Assessment – 2006,” South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2006, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/Assessment/index.html> (accessed September 14, 2007).

Maoist, held in January-February 2007 (a full 36 years after the last Party Congress), presented a united ideological front that reconciled the historic differences of opinion among the various parties.²⁰⁷ It also clearly established a unified command structure for the organization, with Ganapathy, unsurprisingly, at the top. The political organization of the CPI-Maoist mirrors those of the erstwhile PWG and MCCI, with a Central Committee, Regional Bureaus, Zonal or State Committees, District or Division Committees, and Squad Area Committees at the local level.²⁰⁸ Militarily, a Central Military Commission was established (again, with Ganapathy at the head) to coordinate the activities of the party's People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), formed from the merger of the PWG and MCCI's respective armed wings. Constituted shortly after the initial merger in December 2004, the PLGA is composed of three types of forces: the Main Force (platoons of regular cadres), the Secondary Force (guerrilla squads), and a Base Force (people's militia).²⁰⁹ The Central Military Commission directs these forces through Regional and State/Zonal Military Commissions.²¹⁰ Higher echelon leadership in both the political and military wings rests exclusively with senior cadres, most of whom appear fairly well educated. This is likely a holdover from earlier periods, when students and intellectuals were drawn to the movement in fairly substantial numbers.

Most estimates of the total strength of the PLGA run from 10,000 to 20,000 armed fighters as of 2006, though figures vary widely. The Ministry of Home Affairs' Internal Security Report for 2004-05 listed their number at 9,300, with approximately 6,500 regular weapons.²¹¹ Security analyst P. V. Ramana has speculated that they may

²⁰⁷ Ganapathy, "CPI-Maoist Completes its Much-Awaited Historic Unity Congress – 9th Congress – A Turning Point in the Indian Revolution," Press Release of the CPI-Maoist, February 19, 2007, transcribed on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/19feb07.htm#doc2> (accessed September 14, 2007).

²⁰⁸ Institute for Conflict Management, "Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist)," South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/terrorist_outfits/CPI_M.htm (accessed September 13, 2007).

²⁰⁹ P.V. Ramana, "The Maoist Movement in India," 436.

²¹⁰ Institute for Conflict Management, "People's Guerilla Army," South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/terrorist_outfits/peoples_guerrilla_arms_left_wing_extremists.htm (accessed September 13, 2007).

²¹¹ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2004-2005*, 44.

have as many as 40,000 more full-time cadres.²¹² Given recent aggressive Naxalite drives toward recruitment and arms acquisitions, these numbers are likely to have grown considerably in the intervening years.²¹³ The rank-and-file membership is predominantly rural, comprised of poor agricultural laborers and tenant farmers, primarily from the *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities. Most are illiterate, and in a number of encounters with journalists, their ideological sophistication appeared to be quite basic.²¹⁴ Leadership positions at the platoon and squad level are held almost exclusively by cadres from a lower-middle class background with at least a modicum of education (some at the collegiate level).²¹⁵ The ideological fervor of this group appears to be much more pronounced.

2. Strategy and Tactics

While the 2004 merger brought much needed coherence to the Naxalite command and control structure, it also precipitated a radical and highly effective shift in strategy and tactics. Here again, the influence of Ganapathy's pragmatism would be difficult to overstate. The CPI-Maoist still adheres to the long-standing Naxalite aim of violently seizing political power through an agrarian-based 'New Democratic Revolution,' drawing heavily from the philosophy of Mao Zedong. This entails, inter alia, a 'people's war' to establish 'liberated zones' in the countryside, the gradual expansion of these areas until the cities are surrounded, and a final push into urban centers, culminating in the overthrow of the 'comprador bureaucrat bourgeoisie' regime.²¹⁶ While this overarching goal has not changed in the four decades of Naxalism's existence, the CPI-Maoist's plans

²¹² *Economist*, "A Spectre Haunting India," *Economist Print Edition*, Aug 19, 2006, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=7799247 (accessed September 20, 2007).

²¹³ Jane's Information Group, "Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 01, 2006, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed September 17, 2007).

²¹⁴ John Lancaster, "India's Ragtag Band of Maoists Takes Root Among Rural Poor," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2006; Associated Press. "Among India's Maoists: A Rebel Homeland in Places Forgotten by India's Economic Miracle." *Naxal Terror Watch*, May 18, 2007, <http://naxalwatch.blogspot.com/2007/05/among-indias-maoists-rebel-homeland-in.html> (accessed October 5, 2007).

²¹⁵ Lancaster, "India's Ragtag Band of Maoists..."; Associated Press, "Among India's Maoists,"; Ramachandra Guha, "A War in the Heart of India," *The Nation* (Pakistan), July 16, 2007.

²¹⁶ Ganapathy Press Release of February 19, 2007.

for carrying it out mark a clear break from previous periods. Eschewing the naiveté of Charu Mazumdar's belief that class-enemy annihilation alone would be sufficient to spark an immediate revolution, the CPI-Maoist has embraced the idea of a protracted conflict, one likely to last decades, not years.²¹⁷ To this end, Ganapathy's strategy focuses on the consolidation and expansion of Naxalite controlled territories through a number of new methods.

The first is an attempt to form cross-border and cross-ideological links with other insurgent movements in South Asia. Significant groundwork for this approach was laid in 2001, with the formation of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), encompassing Maoist movements in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.²¹⁸ While CCOMPOSA members have mostly offered each other only rhetorical support, the Maoist movements in India and Nepal are an exception. At the first CCOMPOSA meeting, the two groups put forward the idea of a 'Compact Revolutionary Zone,' or 'Red Corridor' of contiguous Maoist controlled territory stretching from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh.²¹⁹ Links between Naxalites and the CPN extend as far back as the 1990s, with increasing evidence of transfers of manpower and materiel from 2003 onward.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Ganapathy interview with various foreign journalists, "Interview with Ganapathy, General Secretary, CPI(Maoist)," April 24, 2007, <http://naxalresistance.wordpress.com/2007/05/13/interview-with-ganapathy-general-secretary-cpimaoist/> (accessed September 13, 2007).

²¹⁸ Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia, "Declaration of CCOMPOSA," August 2002, transcribed on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/ccomposa2002.htm> (accessed September 14, 2002).

²¹⁹ P.V. Ramana, "Left-Wing Extremism in India," Observer Research Foundation, December 18, 2003, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=2543&macmaid=794> (accessed September 15, 2007).

²²⁰ Institute for Conflict Management, "Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/nepal/terroristoutfits/index.html> (accessed September 10, 2007).

The CPI-Maoist has also expressed its support for nationalist struggles in South Asia, particularly those in Sri Lanka and India's Northeast.²²¹ Evidence of a Naxal-LTTE nexus exists as far back as the mid-1980s, when the PWG received instruction and training in the use of explosives from the LTTE. Despite denials from Ganapathy, many analysts believe that the CPI-Maoist still maintains relations with the Sri Lankan separatists.²²² Proof of an actual connection between the Naxalites and various Northeast insurgency movements is much more tenuous, but it appears that on at least one occasion the Assamese ULFA provided arms to CPI-Maoist cadres.²²³

Another change is the incorporation of economic and infrastructure targets into the CPI-Maoist's agenda. From 1967 through most of the 1990s, targets of Naxal violence were predominantly individuals dubbed 'class enemies' – landowners, police officers, and politicians. While these individuals are still targeted, railways, mines, power stations, and large industrial complexes are increasingly being hit as well. Ganapathy's recent call to "turn every SEZ into a battlefield" is just the latest manifestation of this change in emphasis.²²⁴ Most recently, the Naxalites' coordinated blockade in six states across eastern India caused tens of millions \$U.S. in damage and lost revenue.²²⁵ The most recent pronouncements of the CPI-Maoist and CCOMPOSA also rail against large multinational corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, and (predictably) the United States for what they consider the inherent iniquities of global

²²¹ Communist Party of India(Maoist), "Call of the Unity Congress-9th Congress of the CPI(Maoist)," February 19, 2007, transcribed on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/callofunity.htm> (accessed September 13, 2007).

²²² Devyani Srivastava, "Naxal-LTTE Nexus in Tamil Nadu: An Alliance in the Making?" Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, August 14, 2007, <http://www.ipcs.org/whatsNewArticle11.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2371&status=article&mod=b> (accessed September 23, 2007).

²²³ Jane's Information Group, "Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India."

²²⁴ Ganapathy Interview of April 2007.

²²⁵ Ajai Sahni, "The Red Spreads," *Outlook* (India), July 5, 2007, <http://www.outlookindia.com/author.asp?name=Ajai+Sahni> (accessed September 13, 2007).

capitalism.²²⁶ Given the dislocations occasioned by India's economic opening and the forces of globalization, these pronouncements doubtless find a receptive audience.

A third significant shift is a newfound emphasis on mass movements and social mobilization. While precursors to this approach can be found in the aforementioned 1994 Hyderabad rally, the CPI-Maoist has pursued it much more aggressively. Formed in 2005, the Revolutionary Democratic Front, now known as the People's Democratic Front of India (PDFI), is the organizational arm of the CPI-Maoist charged with coordinating and organizing mass movements in pursuit of the Party's political agenda.²²⁷ Its efficacy was clearly demonstrated in early 2007 by the outbreak of riots and protests against SEZs throughout the country, actions the PDFI is alleged to have help organize.²²⁸

On the military side, the Naxalites' ability to mobilize large segments of the population is also evident in their shift to 'mobile warfare,' a tactic that first appeared in 2004. Utilizing hundreds of its peasant militia to augment a much smaller force of regular cadres, the Naxalites are able to overrun well-armed targets like police stations through sheer force of numbers. These swarming tactics have increased substantially in recent years, with one in 2004, three in 2005, nine in 2006, and twelve from January-June 2007.²²⁹ The infamous Jehanabad jailbreak in November 2005 was one such attack, and resulted in the deaths of four police officers, the release of 341 prisoners, and the seizure of large quantities of firearms and ammunition.²³⁰

Indeed, since 1991, Maoist tactics in general have grown more sophisticated and violent. Still armed predominantly with crude homemade weapons in the early 1990s, the quality of Naxalite armaments improved substantially throughout the period. From sources in Bangladesh and Nepal, as well raids on police stations, the CPI-Maoist now

²²⁶ Communist Party of India (Maoist), "Call of the Unity Congress – 9th Congress of the CPI(Maoist).

²²⁷ Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Naxal Terror," *Frontline* (India), September 21, 2007, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921500400400.htm> (accessed October 5, 2007).

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ajai Sahni, "The Red Spreads."

²³⁰ Jane's Information Group, "Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India: Case Study Bihar," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1, 2006, <http://www8.janes.com/> (accessed October 3, 2007).

has access to modern assault rifles, pistols, mortars, and explosives.²³¹ In many Naxal-affected districts, the cadres are better armed than the security forces. The use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), a staple in the Naxalite arsenal since the late 1980s, also skyrocketed in recent years, with over 220 successfully detonated from January 2004 to September 2005 alone.²³² The targets of most of these attacks were police vehicles and the occasional politician targeted for assassination.

The lethality of their operations also shows a marked increase, with the Naxalites effectively adapting to police countermeasures. In late 2005, an armored personnel carrier, specifically designed to withstand an IED, was destroyed in Chhattisgarh when over 80 kilograms of explosive lifted it 35 feet in the air, killing 24 of the 27 policemen inside.²³³ More conventional attacks also demonstrate greater sophistication and coordination, with increasing use of radios and communication equipment that allow the cadres to monitor police frequencies.²³⁴ In an assessment of recent Naxalite tactics, security analyst P.V. Ramana noted, “systematic preparation for an attack, meticulous planning, fine execution, a good degree of coordination, launching synchronized attacks on multiple targets within a given area and, significantly, involving large numbers of cadres, are among the most striking features of this rise in Maoist militarization.”²³⁵

To fund these more ambitious operations, the Naxalites are also proving quite adept at more prosaic criminal activities. Kidnapping for ransom now features prominently in their repertoire, with rich businessmen their preferred targets. Extortion of industries operating in their strongholds and drug running are also highly lucrative. While more recent figures are unavailable, in 2003, it was estimated that the Naxalites took in nearly U.S. \$25 million in the state of Bihar alone.²³⁶ With the subsequent

²³¹ Jane’s Information Group, “Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India”.

²³² Sandeep Unnithan and Manoj Verma, “Renewed Battle,” *India Today*, September 19, 2005: 24.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Jane’s Information Group, “Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India.”

²³⁵ P.V. Ramana, “The Maoist Movement in India,” 437-438.

²³⁶ Jane’s Information Group, “Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India”; P.V. Ramana, “Left-Wing Extremism in India,” Observer Research Foundation, December 18, 2003, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=2543&macmaid=794> (accessed September 15, 2007).

merger and consolidation of territory in 2004, their annual nationwide haul is now likely to be several times larger, giving them ample funding to pursue their more aggressive political and military agendas.

Taken in sum, the strategic and tactical adjustments made by the Naxalites over the course of the last decade have been sweeping. Under Ganapathy's leadership, they are increasingly violent and ambitious. Just as worryingly, they are also expanding their areas of operation.

3. Naxalite Activity

As throughout most of the 1980s, the 1990s saw Naxal violence confined primarily to northern Andhra Pradesh and southern Bihar. There, the PWG, MCC, and PU factions maintained their positions by working with tribal and lower caste communities in the most impoverished parts of the states.²³⁷ In these backward districts, the writ of the government runs thinly, if at all. Civil administration (police, courts, hospitals, schools, etc.) is practically nonexistent, and the *Adivasis* and *Dalits* frequently suffer abuse from the landed upper and middle castes. Capitalizing on this dearth of governance, the Naxalites set up alternative administrations in many of these areas, dispensing their own versions of governmental and social functions in addition to more traditional forced land redistributions. While the delivery of these services (particularly justice) frequently entails singularly brutal methods, it has nonetheless won the support of many residents in these impoverished areas.²³⁸

With their bases established in the backwaters of these two states, the Naxalites were able to begin branching out as they merged their operations and territories in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Exploiting similarly disadvantaged districts in neighboring states, they expanded their operations to Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa. By 2006, they had also made small but significant inroads in

²³⁷ Guha, "A War in the Heart of India."

²³⁸ P.V. Ramana, "Left-Wing Extremism in India."

Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal.²³⁹ Table 2 lists the number of incidents and deaths attributed to Naxalite activity from 2001 to 2006. Official figures for previous years are incomplete or nonexistent.

However, an examination of what is available reveals that overall Naxalite activity was in decline from 1991 until about 1998, picked up again from 1998 through 2003, and accelerated quickly from 2003 to the present.

STATE	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Andhra Pradesh	461(180)	346(96)	575(139)	310(74)	532(206)	183(180)	138(90)
Bihar	169(111)	239(117)	249(127)	323(171)	183(94)	107(51)	135(69)
Chhattisgarh	105(37)	304(55)	254(74)	352(83)	380(165)	715(462)	582(435)
Jharkhand	355(200)	353(157)	341(117)	379(169)	308(118)	310(144)	482(170)
Maharashtra	34(7)	83(29)	74(31)	84(15)	95(53)	98(61)	94(30)
Orissa	30(11)	68(11)	49(15)	50(46)	42(14)	44(23)	67(24)
Other	54(18)	72(17)	48(10)	50(46)	54(19)	52(29)	67(17)
Total	1208(564)	1465(482)	1590(513)	1533(566)	1594(669)	1509(950)	1565(835)

Source: GOI Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Reports

Table 2. Total Naxalite Incidents (Figures in brackets indicate deaths).

Statistics on the number of districts affected by Naxalism vary widely, with those of the Indian government tending to be on the low end. In 2006, the Ministry of Home Affairs reported only 76 districts affected in nine states.²⁴⁰ Some estimates from Jane's Intelligence Review put the tally closer to 200.²⁴¹ The most well respected and widely reported number comes from the Institute for Conflict Management, a New Delhi think

²³⁹ Jane's Information Group, "Communist Party of India-Maoist," *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, October 13, 2006, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed September 18, 2007).

²⁴⁰ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2004-2005*.

²⁴¹ Jane's Information Group, "India Wakes Up to its Maoist Threat," *Jane's Foreign Report*, Oct 06, 2005, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed September 18, 2007).

tank, that reports 192 districts in 16 states (out of a total of 602 districts in the country) were affected by various levels of Maoist mobilization and violence in early 2008.²⁴² Figure 1 is a map of the Naxal-affected districts from the Institute for Conflict Management. As this graphic clearly shows, the ‘Red Corridor’ mooted at the first meeting of CCOMPOSA in 2001, and cavalierly dismissed as a pipedream by many in New Delhi, is indeed taking shape in the eastern half of India.

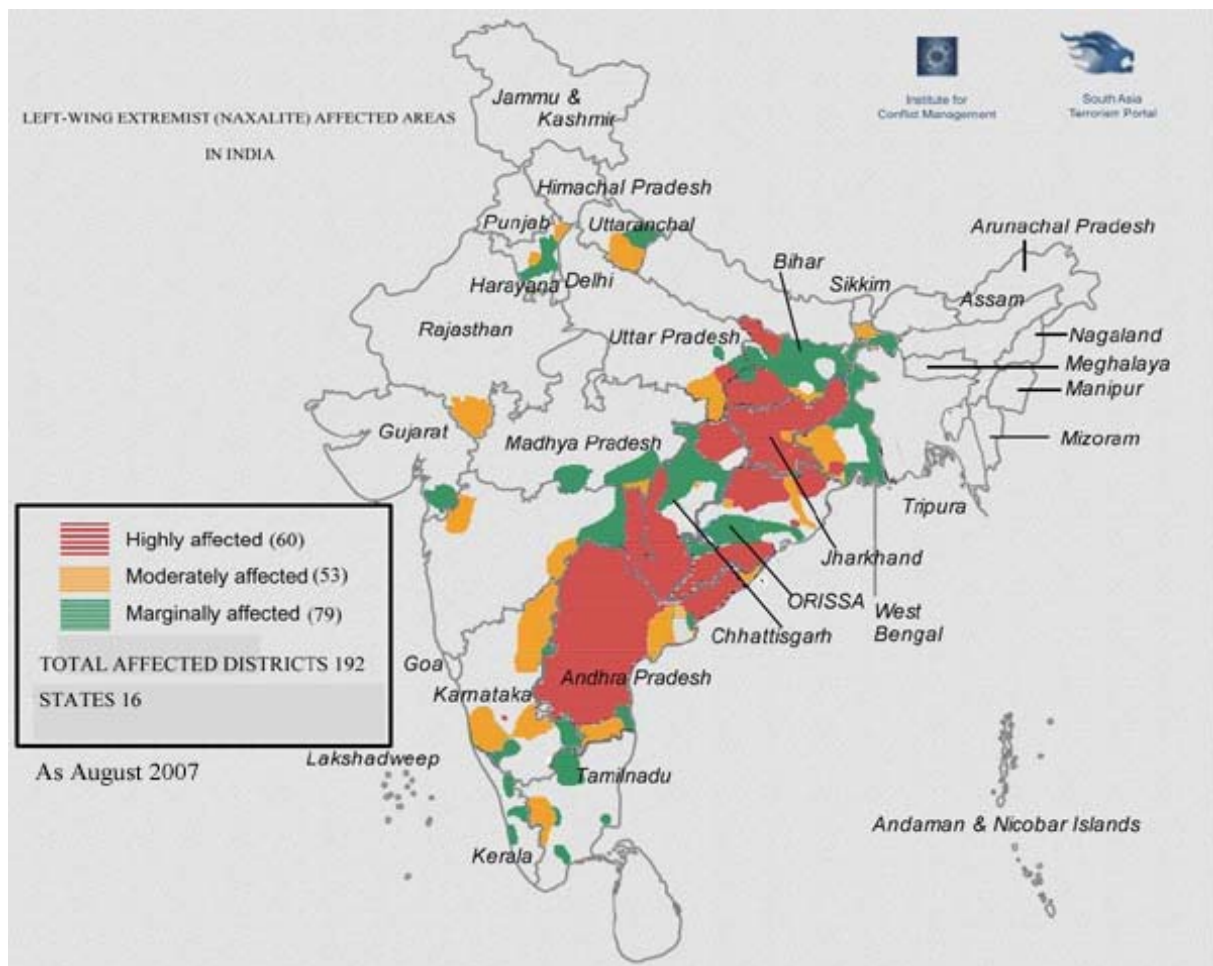


Figure 1. Map of Naxal-Affected Territory

²⁴² Institute for Conflict Management, “Maoist Assessment – 2006.”

Ajit K. Doval, the retired head of India's Intelligence Bureau, recently predicted that if the Maoist threat were not effectively dealt with, it could spread to over 260 districts by 2010, affecting over one-third of Indian territory.²⁴³ Other federal intelligence sources indicate that the Maoists have established operational bases and launched recruitment drives in New Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat.²⁴⁴ With these sobering assessments in mind, an examination of the Indian government's response to the resurgent Naxalite threat is in order.

D. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

1. Center Responses

Overall, India has been extremely reluctant to recognize the danger posed by the Maoist insurgency. Throughout the 1990s, New Delhi habitually characterized the movement as a localized law and order problem that posed no direct danger to the state. To be fair, this was probably true while the insurgency remained confined to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, but the inertia of this opinion prevented the acknowledgment of Naxalism's growing strength as the unification process progressed through the early 2000s. This development caught the central government flatfooted, and its response to the insurgency has thus far been incoherent and inadequate.

While the Prime Minister's Office has issued numerous statements on the growing threat of Naxalite activity since 2004, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the department responsible for internal security, tends to downplay it. Though Manmohan Singh identified Naxalism as India's greatest internal security threat in April 2006, as recently as August 2007, the Union Home Minister was quoted as saying that "the Naxal

²⁴³ Jane's Information Group, "Maoist Insurgency Spreads in India."

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

movement is little more than in the past.”²⁴⁵ Such contradictory assessments have doubtless undermined the urgency and efficacy of the government’s response.

New Delhi has voiced its preference for a ‘two-pronged strategy,’ the details of which are enumerated in the MHA Annual Report for 2006-07.²⁴⁶ When closely scrutinized, however, most of the measures seem quite ad hoc. On the security front, these include concrete steps like additional central funding for the modernization, training, and expansion of state police forces, the augmentation of state units with battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and the provision of specialized equipment, including armored personnel carriers and unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicles. Less tangibly, New Delhi has also established numerous committees, commissions, coordination centers, and joint task forces that bring together representatives from the Naxal-affected states, central government ministries, and security forces in an effort to enhance intelligence sharing and coordinate counter-insurgent activities. Ironically, there seems to be little coordination among these consultative groups themselves, often resulting in confusion and duplication of effort.²⁴⁷ Indeed, many of the organizations cannot even agree on which states are affected by the insurgency, with the Task Force on Naxalism listing nine and the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers naming thirteen.

On the development front, the Backward Districts Initiative (BDI) and Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) were established to augment state government spending on infrastructure and development projects. Additionally, through the Standing Committee of the Chief Ministers of the Naxal-Affected States, the states are urged to ensure implementation of existing legislation (like the *Panchayat* Extension to Scheduled Areas

²⁴⁵ Manmohan Singh, “Prime Minister’s Speech to the 2nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of Chief Ministers on Naxalism”; Shivraj Patil, quoted in Ajai Sahni, “Heart of the Red Corridor,” *Outlook* (India), September 4, 2007, <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20070904&fname=ajai-jharkhand&sid=1> (accessed September 16, 2007).

²⁴⁶ Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2006-07*, 25-30.

²⁴⁷ P.V. Ramana and Gen. V.P. Malik, “Policy to Fight Naxalism: Need for Political Consensus,” Observer Research Foundation, April 3, 2006, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=2561&macmaid=818> (accessed September 13, 2007).

(PESA) Act and the Forest Rights Bill) that guarantee the land rights of Scheduled Castes and Tribes.²⁴⁸ While other bodies also address development issues, none of these are anything but advisory in nature, with local governments retaining control of program implementation.

The individual initiatives outlined above look nice on paper, but the lack of coordination among the various agencies prevents them from amounting to a coherent strategy as yet. Potential steps in the right direction appeared in late 2006 with the establishment of the Naxal Management Division (within the MHA) and the Inter-Ministerial Group (an inter-departmental panel chaired by the MHA). The charters for these organizations notionally give them some power to oversee the coordination of the security and development efforts respectively, but it remains to be seen whether they will be able to impose order on the existing bureaucratic mess. Even if they can, given the fact that India's constitution places internal security and development matters firmly under the purview of the states, it is unlikely that these groups will be able to exercise much directive control of the anti-Naxal effort. Much therefore depends on the efficacy of state efforts to address the insurgent problem.

2. State Responses

Unfortunately, the track records of most states in the anti-Maoist fight since 1991 leave little room for optimism. As indicated earlier, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar were the only two affected initially. Bihar, persistently one of the poorest, least developed, and poorly governed states in India, was totally incapable of dealing with the MCC and PU cadres operating in its territory.²⁴⁹ It has a long history of bitter caste conflict, and the Naxalites were able to capitalize on the hostility of the marginalized *Dalits* and *Adivasis* to strengthen their positions through the 1990s. Attacks on upper caste landowners were common, and in the absence of a state response, the *Ranvir Sena*, an upper caste militia

²⁴⁸ For further details on this and similar legislation, see: Government of India, "National Common Minimum Programme: Recommendations on Tribal Welfare and Development," National Advisory Council, May 2004, nac.nic.in/communication/tribalannex2.pdf (accessed May 15, 2008).

²⁴⁹ *Economist*, "Survey: An Area of Darkness," February 21, 2004, http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_NQNPTDN (accessed October 5, 2007).

founded in 1994, took matters into its own hands. A combination of class and caste warfare followed, with rampant human rights abuses on both sides.²⁵⁰ At present, the conflict continues to simmer. Bihar's ineffective police force, with the lowest number of officers per capita in India, is unable to stop the violence.²⁵¹ The corrupt state government has also failed to carry out land reforms or effective development projects, and funds from New Delhi are habitually misallocated or squandered. Bihar, in short, is a mess.

While Andhra Pradesh does not share Bihar's legacy of totally inept governance, it too has had its political problems combating Naxalism. Though still eschewing democracy, the PWG proved itself extremely adept at manipulating the state political process for its own purposes. Throughout the 1990s, by pretending to consider the abjuration of violence, the Naxalites were able to intermittently secure a more lenient counter-insurgency effort, buying time to consolidate, regroup, and rearm.²⁵² While this conciliation typically ended when the politicians realized the Maoists had no intention of actually giving up, successive administrations continued to make the same mistakes.

When the PWG approached the government in 2002 and 2004 with offers of peace talks, Hyderabad (with urging from New Delhi) again took the bait, with predictable results. Angered by the Naxalites' betrayal, in 2005 the Chief Minister authorized a security crackdown that has returned surprisingly good results (see figures in Table 4.1). Competent police work, an effective surrender policy, and firm political will have so far succeeded in driving the Maoists from all but 4 districts in the state.²⁵³ Nevertheless, as many analysts have noted, Andhra Pradesh experienced success against the Naxalites in the past, only to have them return again with even greater virulence.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Jane's Information Group, "Maoist insurgency spreads in India: Case study Bihar."

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ajai Sahni, "Delusion of Peace," *Frontline* (India), October 21, 2005, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2221/stories/20051021008612800.htm> (accessed September 18, 2007).

²⁵³ N. Rahul, "Down But Not Out," *Frontline* (India), September 21, 2007, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921500601000.htm> (accessed September 30, 2007).

²⁵⁴ Ajai Sahni, "The Red See-Saw," *Outlook* (India), September 20, 2007, <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fodname=20070920&fname=ajai&sid=1> (accessed September 20, 2007).

Additionally, while the number of Maoists killed by the security forces has gone up since the most recent crackdown in 2005, most of the recent reduction in violence can likely be attributed to the temporary retreat of many of the insurgents across the border into neighboring Chhattisgarh.²⁵⁵ The recent discovery of a huge cache of weapons and explosives in Andhra Pradesh raises the specter of more violence to come.

While the more recently affected states might do well to follow Andhra Pradesh's example, unfortunately they seem to be going more the way of Bihar. Despite their abundant mineral resources, states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Orissa are also some of the poorest in India, and the quality of governance, especially in the hinterlands, reflects this relatively shallow resource base.²⁵⁶ Though the extent of state breakdown is not as advanced as in Bihar, it is significant. Corruption and administrative incompetence are both issues. A combination of apathy and poor budgeting results in significant under-utilization of development grants from New Delhi, with millions of \$U.S. sitting idle.²⁵⁷ As a result, state mandated development programs for the *Adivasis*, *Dalits*, and poor agricultural laborers are woefully under-funded, with many communities seeing little or no improvement.²⁵⁸ Given their manifest unwillingness or inability to deliver on the socio-economic front, it is little wonder that governments in these states tend to stress the law-and-order approach almost exclusively.²⁵⁹

This too, however, has proven highly problematic. In all of the most heavily Naxal-affected states, security forces are seriously undermanned for the size of the population, with many station houses sitting empty.²⁶⁰ As in Bihar, some states have turned to semi-official citizen's militias to provide an inexpensive and local means of combating the Naxalites. These groups include the NSS in Jharkhand and the Salwa

²⁵⁵ Ajai Sahni, "The Red Spreads."

²⁵⁶ Martin and Kronstadt, 13.

²⁵⁷ V. Venkatesan, "A Flawed Concept," *Frontline* (India), September 21, 2007, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921501702100.htm> (accessed September 30, 2007).

²⁵⁸ Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Naxal Terror," *Frontline* (India), September 21, 2007, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921500400400.htm> (accessed September 29, 2007).

²⁵⁹ Asian Centre for Human Rights, "Naxal Conflict in 2006," 23.

²⁶⁰ Swami Praveen, "Dealing With the Danger," *The Hindu*, October 19, 2003, <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/10/19/stories/2003101900011400.htm> (accessed September 13, 2007).

Judum in Chhattisgarh.²⁶¹ However, with little or no oversight from authorities, many of these militias perpetrate human rights abuses rivaling those of the Naxalites. Their habit of drawing forces from local populations also invites reprisals from the Maoists that can broaden the scope and lethality of the conflict. According to the Asian Centre for Human Rights, the Salwa Judum campaign dramatically increased the number of civilians killed in the fighting in Chhattisgarh, displaced nearly 50,000 villagers to inadequately equipped refugee camps, and squeezed the *Adivasis* between equally vicious sides in what amounts to a low-intensity civil war.²⁶² After two years of conflict and over 900 killed, the Naxalites are still as powerful as ever in Chhattisgarh.

Given the administrative weakness in most of the affected states, it is not surprising that efforts at coordinating anti-Naxal efforts among them have failed. In spite of the best efforts of New Delhi to cajole them into cooperation, all the committees, commissions, and task forces have so far amounted to little more than talking shops. While modest improvements are being made in intelligence sharing, the state strategies remain, by and large, individual efforts.²⁶³ As long as the central government lacks the capacity to direct the effort more forcefully, the prospects for a comprehensive strategy appear dim.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the reemergence, growth, and spread of Naxalite activity since 1991. It appears that Naxalism's resurgence and increasing virulence in this period are the result of a confluence of factors. The first of these, perhaps ironically, is a

²⁶¹ Asian Centre for Human Rights Review, "Naxalism and Looming Civil Wars of India," Asian Centre for Human Rights Review, September 21, 2005, <http://www.achrweb.org/Review/2005/91-05.htm> (accessed September 13, 2007).

²⁶² Asian Centre for Human Rights, "The Adivasis of Chhattisgarh: Victims of the Naxalite Movement and Salwa Judum Campaign," Asian Centre for Human Rights Report, March 17, 2006: 2-7, <http://www.pdfdownload.org/pdf2html/pdf2html.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.achrweb.org%2Freports%2FIndia%2FChattis0106.pdf&images=yes> (accessed October 5, 2007).

²⁶³ P.V. Ramana, "Naxalism and Internal Security in India," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, August 4, 2007, http://www.ipcs.org/nmt_militaryIndex2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2362&military=1015&status=article&mod=b (accessed September 20, 2007).

consequence of India's stunning economic growth. For all its dynamism and macro-level successes, the country's development remains extremely uneven. The vast majority of the rural poor, particularly in the *Adivasi* and *Dalit* communities, have so far realized very little personal benefit from the economic reforms undertaken since 1991. In fact, many have witnessed an actual deterioration of their circumstances, as the demand for raw material inputs to an expanding economy results in encroachment on what little land they actually possess. Unsurprisingly, this results in a large measure of distrust in the fairness of the development strategy, and increasing hostility toward the government carrying it out. As in the past, this situation provides fertile ground for the spread of an alternative ideology like Naxalism with its emphasis on the rights of the rural dispossessed.

The second factor is the emergence of new, pragmatic, and effective leadership in the Naxalite movement. The death or retirement of many of the old guard members, most of whom were jaded by decades of infighting, allowed new personalities like Ganapathy to work their way into senior positions. Less encumbered by the legacy of ideological sclerosis, these senior members proved much more flexible, both philosophically and operationally. Able to reconcile the differences of their forebears, they successfully engineered the reunification of a movement long crippled by factionalism, allowing it to finally reap organizational economies of scale. Their pragmatism and adaptability also paid dividends on the strategic and tactical fronts, as the movement is now able to respond more effectively to challenges and opportunities in its operating environment than at any time in the past. The impact of this leadership on the movement's success would be difficult to overstate.

Finally, the Maoists benefited from the singular inability of the state or central governments to mount a coordinated and effective counter to their expanding activity. In this respect, both the federal nature of India's governmental structure and the increasing factionalism within national and state politics are key factors. While seemingly everybody now agrees that the Naxalites represent a threat to India's continued growth, there is far less consensus on how large that threat is, let alone what specific measures should be taken to stop it. The absence of a coherent and holistic national strategy

continues to leave the Maoists more than enough room for maneuver and expansion. With the ambition of shrewdness of their current leadership, it is little wonder they have continued to do just that.

V. CONCLUSION

With a detailed historical examination of the various periods of Naxalite activity complete, this final chapter seeks to answer the central analytical question posed at the beginning of this thesis: Does the Naxalite movement currently represent a qualitatively different and more dangerous threat to India than it has in the past?

To address this fundamental question, the first section will compare the three periods of Naxalite activity in terms of their historical context, the internal characteristics of the insurgency, and the nature and efficacy of the governmental responses, informing a determination of the present movement's relative strength, vitality, and danger.²⁶⁴ The second section will then examine the specific threats posed to India, with a focus on both current challenges and the most likely or dangerous future scenarios. The third section turns to the implications of Naxalite resurgence for the United States' regional foreign policy goals, and identifies any possible challenges to their attainment. Finally, I will offer some cursory policy recommendations with the aim of checking Naxalism's future spread and mitigating the dangers it already poses.

A. A COMPARISON OF THE THREE PERIODS

1. Historical Context

As evident from the preceding case studies, India's political, economic, and social milieu have always had a strong impact on Naxalite strength. An unstable and deteriorating national situation contributed to the outbreak of violence in 1967 and the initial support for the movement over the five subsequent years. Conversely, a generally more stable and improving situation in the country from 1972-1991 greatly diminished Naxalism's appeal, helping to keep it at a low ebb for over two decades. After 1991,

²⁶⁴ The supporting evidence for this comparative analysis is largely drawn from the preceding three chapters, and what has been previously cited will not be footnoted again here. For attribution of any factual information not annotated, please refer to the applicable chapter.

however, despite unprecedented GDP growth and national advancement on many fronts, a number of issues emerged that are strongly reminiscent of the first period of high Naxalite activity.

The first of these are developments in the political sphere. From 1967 to 1972, the political instability occasioned by infighting in the previously dominant Congress Party served to temporarily delegitimize the central government in New Delhi. With the faith of the Indian public shaken, alternative political ideologies like Naxalism were able to take root and flourish among certain sectors of the electorate. At the same time, the increasingly fractious nature of Indian politics, and the new requirements of coalition building, curtailed the government's freedom of action and distracted it from emerging security challenges.

After the elections of 1971, Indira Gandhi was able to orchestrate a new Congress hegemony (if sometimes in an authoritarian fashion) that brought political stability for almost two decades and enabled the government to more effectively counter the Naxalite threat. In the 1990s, however, Congress Party dominance came to a definitive end with the emergence of the BJP, Janata Dal, and a host of regional and state level parties as effective challengers. Since then, increased structural fragmentation and instability have paralleled the conditions prevailing in the late 1960s. As a result, the same restrictions, distractions, and crises of public confidence that existed in the Organizational Period have returned, only now in a much stronger and arguably more permanent form.

Some aspects of the current economic situation also bear a closer similarity to the first period of Naxalite activity than the second. The mid to late-1960s witnessed economic stagnation throughout the country, but the landless laborers, sharecroppers, small farmers, and tribals that made up the rural poor felt the pain most acutely. The Green Revolution was in its infancy, and while it eventually brought tremendous benefit to the Indian countryside, its initial implementation further disadvantaged the already marginalized groups listed above - many small farmers lost what little land they possessed, and rural inequality increased substantially. By contrast, a more populist economic agenda after 1972 introduced a series of land reform and development initiatives at the national and state levels that significantly improved the lot of the rural

poor, even if they did little for the overall economy. As a result, inequality and poverty declined through the 1970s and 80s, particularly in the countryside.

The liberalization that began in the 1990s certainly brought greater macroeconomic success, but with benefits conspicuously skewed toward the higher end of the socio-economic scale. Although overall poverty rates continue to drop, disparities between rich and poor (and especially urban and rural) reemerged as sources of economic frustration. Increased industrialization, SEZ development, and resource extraction also reintroduced land issues as a potent source of disaffection. In sum, while India's recent market reform and development initiatives ushered in levels of growth unprecedented in the nation's history, they also occasioned economic dislocations that were all too familiar in the late 1960s. Moreover, with New Delhi's commitment to these reforms tempered by a desire for gradualism, the current economic complications could persist far longer than those occasioned by the Green Revolution.

Unsurprisingly, these dislocations have resulted in a number of social developments that are also reminiscent of the Organizational Period. Then, the anger and desperation of the rural poor manifested themselves in demonstrations, strikes, and food riots; stories of farmers driven to suicide by their dire economic straits further highlighted the growing dissatisfaction in the countryside. Social strife was prevalent in the 1970s and 80s, too, but usually organized along separatist, nationalist, or communalist lines. While these other triggers of unrest persist in the modern era, it is clear that economic issues have returned as a potent force for social mobilization.

Food riots may be a thing of the past, but rural protests and demonstrations, like those at Nandigram in 2007, are becoming increasingly common.²⁶⁵ In another disturbing parallel, suicides by indebted small farmers have also spiked in recent years.²⁶⁶ The growing anger and alienation is felt most strongly in India's rural *Dalit* and

²⁶⁵ As global commodity prices continue to rise through mid-2008, India's continued ability to feed itself is no longer as certain as it once was. For details, see: *Economist*, "The Silent Tsunami," *Economist* Print Edition, April 17, 2008, http://www.economist.com/opinion/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11050146 (accessed May 15, 2008).

²⁶⁶ *BBC News*, "India Farm Suicides Hit New High," BBC Online, September 4, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/5312600.stm> (accessed February 20, 2008).

Adivasi communities. In many ways, these two groups are the most left behind by India's inequitable climb to modernity, and are proving to be uniquely amenable to the Naxalites' populist rhetoric.

The purpose of this analysis is not to suggest that India's current political, economic, and social situations are identical to those that prevailed in the late 1960s; clearly there are numerous differences, many of them significant. Nevertheless, in comparing the historical contexts of the three relevant periods, it seems obvious that the current era of Naxalite activity bears many striking similarities to the movement's previous high point. In addition, while many of the conditions that gave rise to the initial Naxalite movement were transitory in nature, they are likely to prove more enduring in the current context. It is also evident that many of the factors that helped keep Naxalism in check from 1972-1991 are no longer present in modern-day India. While these facts do not necessarily imply the inevitability of a resurgent Maoist threat, they do suggest that the current situation in India provides a potentially fertile breeding ground for the movement's expansion.

2. Characteristics of the Naxalite Insurgency

In contrast to the discussion above, when comparing the internal characteristics of the current insurgency with those of previous periods, one searches in vain for any strong parallels. Though a cursory analysis might find a basic similarity between the Organizational and Reconsolidation Periods, in that they were both eras of relatively high violent activity, a more careful study reveals this impression to be misleading. With the exception of its most basic aims, the current iteration of the Naxalite insurgency demonstrates fundamental and striking differences with any of those that came before.

In terms of organization and leadership, the movement from 1967 to 1972 initially gave an impression of vitality. Charu Mazumdar's authority appeared unquestioned, and the formation of the CPI-(ML) in 1969 seemed to unite most of the Maoist revolutionaries under one powerful organization. In reality, however, Mazumdar's supremacy proved short-lived, and numerous challengers to his leadership appeared within a few years. Even when he had control, Mazumdar ultimately proved to be

relatively incompetent, as evidenced by his total misreading of the potential for revolutionary agitation and his ultimately self-defeating organizational, strategic, and tactical formulations. The CPI-(ML) was similarly weak and ineffectual, functioning more as a symbol than a unifying or guiding force. After 1972, the Naxalites were even more hampered by inept and divided leadership, which fragmented the movement and rendered it impotent for two long decades.

Since 1991, however, a new generation of able and pragmatic leaders, Ganapathy foremost among them, have found a way to reconcile ideological differences that previously splintered the insurgency. Under their guidance, the largest of the formerly competing groups united under the banner of the CPI-Maoist, an institution far stronger and more effective than its predecessor. With the benefit of firm central guidance exercised through subsidiary organizations like the PLGA and the PDFI, the Naxalites are able to coordinate their activities to an extent unheard of in the movement's long history.

The impact of this new leadership and organizational structure is particularly evident in the revolution that has occurred in Naxalite strategy and tactics. During the Organizational Period, Mazumdar's belief that the situation was ripe for a rapid, spontaneous, and nationwide rebellion resulted in the employment of a sadistic 'annihilation program' to arouse the revolutionary zeal of the masses. His myopia led to the willful neglect of any mass organization along economic or social lines, which, as it turned out, were far more likely to garner the support of the rural poor than exclusively political ambitions. As a result, while the Naxalites were able to win the initial support of certain segments of the countryside, this usually proved fleeting. Tactically, the Maoists favored unsophisticated small-unit operations with primitive local weapons, leaving their cadres woefully outmanned and outgunned against police and security forces.

The failure of these approaches contributed to the fragmentation from 1972-1991, and resulted in severe strategic dissonance among the various smaller groups that dominated the movement during this period. While some continued to espouse a strictly violent line and were quickly crushed, a sizeable number of others opted for political normalization. A third group, while remaining committed to armed revolution, gradually

began to expand their activities beyond purely political violence. It was not until after 1991, however, that this last approach truly came to fruition.

During the Reconsolidation Period, the most successful Naxalite groups adopted a two-pronged strategy that married overtly political violence with greater mass organization and agitation along socio-economic lines, a shift that precipitated a number of operational changes. With respect to their violent activities, the Maoists still liquidate the usual 'class enemies,' but increasingly focus their attention on economic and infrastructure targets, as well. Railroads, telephone exchanges, mines, and industrial plants have been attacked recently, in addition to the more typical litany of jails, police stations, *jotedars*, and politicians. The tactical acumen demonstrated in these operations is usually quite impressive, and frequently entails coordinated attacks by hundreds, if not thousands, of well-armed cadres. The extent and sophistication of these recent actions is unprecedented and marks a major break from the largely ineffectual efforts of the past.

More aboveground activity is also evident, with well-coordinated strikes and demonstrations against SEZs and locally unpopular development initiatives added to the Naxalite arsenal. In the more remote areas of their activity, they have also stepped up social efforts at the village level to provide judicial, administrative, and other governmental functions so sorely lacking in many of India's poorer states. Such initiatives win support from the rural *Dalit* and *Adivasi* communities, and help assuage resentment towards their more violent activities that undermined the Maoists in previous periods. By most accounts, the movement currently enjoys more sympathizers and activists than it ever did in the past.

Partially as a result of this expanding support base, the extent of Naxalite activity is also greater than it has been at any time in its history. For all its grandiose aims of national revolution, the total area affected by Maoist violence was relatively modest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Individual flare-ups were reported from many Indian states, but the bulk of activity was confined to West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and a few contiguous territories in adjacent states. With the movement's decline in the following two decades, the areas touched by violent activity shrank to a few isolated pockets of its former strongholds.

By contrast, during the Reconsolidation Period, and particularly since 2001, the Naxalite phenomenon has spread virulently. In large part, this was a direct result of the leadership's more pragmatic vision. Finally rejecting Mazumdar's naïve belief that the revolution could be achieved quickly, the CPI-Maoist embraced the notion of a protracted struggle. To achieve victory, they set the goal of slowly and deliberately growing their areas of operation in the countryside with the ultimate aim of encircling the government's strongholds in the major cities. In the first part of this plan, at least, they have enjoyed remarkable success. Estimates by Indian security analysts suggest the movement currently affects over 182 districts in 16 states.²⁶⁷ Most of these areas are in the eastern half of India, giving rise to what is dubbed the 'Red Corridor,' running from Nepal to the southern half of Andhra Pradesh.

In another recent development, the Naxalites broadened their expansionist aims by forging new cross-border linkages with Maoist groups in neighboring countries. These were inaugurated in 2001 with the formation of CCOMPOSA, which networked movements in several South Asian nations. While most of these contacts remain relatively tenuous, those between the CPI-Maoist and their Nepalese counterparts, the CPN, grew quite strong over the first half of this decade. Besides other revolutionary communist parties, the Naxalites also reached out to other regional insurgent movements, most notably the LTTE in Sri Lanka. This web of contacts brought numerous logistical and tactical advantages, and is another reason for the movement's current success.

From this analysis, it seems obvious that the Naxalite insurgency itself is much stronger and more widespread today than it was in any previous period. While its ideology and ambition remain roughly the same, new leadership has reorganized and reinvigorated the movement, and brought about highly effective changes in strategy and tactics. As a result, both its base of support and geographical area of influence have increased substantially, finally drawing the attention of the Indian government.

²⁶⁷ Ajai Sahni, "Maoists: Creeping Malignancy," South Asia Terrorism Portal, July 2, 2007, http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/5_51.htm, (accessed September 13, 2007).

3. Efficacy of the Governmental Response

The state's ability to counter the Naxalite threat has varied quite a bit over the past four decades. These fluctuations were largely determined by India's broader political context, specifically the central and state governments' freedom of action and relative levels of policy coordination. Given the proliferation of new parties and the evolution of political dynamics in recent decades (discussed earlier in this chapter), it should come as no surprise that dealing with Naxalism is more complicated now than in the past.

New Delhi's initial response to the insurgency in the Organizational Period was generally weak, distracted as it was by the temporary instability at the center from 1967 until 1971. As it reconsolidated its authority, however, the Congress-led government's response became much more effective. The imposition of President's Rule in West Bengal and the provision of security for upcoming elections gave it the freedom to pursue the Naxalites aggressively, which it did with devastating efficiency and sometimes heavy-handed tactics. With the stick of the security forces augmented the carrot of cursory development and land reforms, the initial outbreak of Naxal violence was quashed in little more than a year. The INC retained its firm grip on political power at the center over the subsequent two decades, and while Naxalism was not much of a threat during this period, New Delhi dealt with it effectively when the occasional flare-ups occurred. Rural economic and development initiatives undercut the Maoists' support, and what remained of the movement was all but destroyed by government security actions, especially during the Emergency.

Since the 1990s, however, structural shifts in Indian politics have handicapped the center's efforts in dealing with Naxalism. The persistent weakness and fragility of India's coalition governments constrained state action in addressing domestic security concerns, a situation compounded by New Delhi's initial reluctance to acknowledge the growing problem of Naxalite violence. Even today, significant confusion exists among the relevant government agencies as to which areas are actually affected and the level of coordination among these organizations remains remarkably low. This results in

generally incoherent anti-Naxal policymaking and has prevented the development of a concerted national strategy to address the insurgency.

Changes in the center-state relationship also influenced the ability of local governments to confront the Maoists' activity. Since 1947, responsibility for matters of internal security has been constitutionally devolved to the individual states. In the 1960s and 1970s, Congress' hegemony at the center extended to the governments of most Naxal-affected states, resulting in generally well-coordinated efforts against the Maoist threat. Central Reserve Police and military forces augmented local efforts to put down the first phase of the insurgency, and the state administrations generally toed the line in implementing many of the rural aid and reform packages dictated by the federal government during the Emergency.

As the INC began to lose its grip at the state level after 1977, center-state cooperation against the Naxalites started to falter. Given the greatly diminished force of the insurgency through most of the 1980s, however, this scarcely mattered. The non-Congress administrations that emerged in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh proved quite successful going it alone. A competent Communist government in West Bengal initiated aggressive land reforms and development legislation that effectively removed the Maoist threat in a few short years, and the TDP pursued a combination of security and economic initiatives that constrained Naxalite activity in Andhra Pradesh to a few isolated pockets. In light of the resurgent Maoist threat over the following decades, however, the ability of states to independently counter the insurgency is increasingly suspect.

The proliferation of regional and state-level political parties after 1991 further strained center-state relations. The states have so far proven incapable of coordinating their current anti-Naxal efforts with any administration in New Delhi. Inter-state cooperation remains similarly elusive. Though political competition is an important part of this problem, another contributing factor is the poor level of governance in many of the Naxal-affected areas, as incompetent leadership sabotages efforts to synchronize policies across state lines.

This persistent maladministration (particularly in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Orissa) severely undermines these states' ability to fight the insurgency in other ways, as well. A dearth of effective local government leaves an administrative vacuum the Naxalites are able to exploit, while rampant corruption and the misallocation of resources contribute to popular unrest in the countryside. With development initiatives failing and their police forces underfunded, many of these states are turning to poorly supervised vigilante groups to counter the Maoists, usually only exacerbating an already volatile situation. While Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal continue to enjoy success in their fight against the Naxalites, the less than salutary efforts by most of the other affected states leave little hope that the current insurgency can be checked by their efforts alone.

In most respects, it thus appears that India is presently confronted with more internal challenges to countering the Naxalite threat than it experienced in any of the previous periods. Administrative confusion and inertia at the national level, persistent corruption and governance problems at the state level, and systemic political changes at all levels are conspiring to constrain the state's freedom of action and prevent it from confronting the Maoists as aggressively as it did in the past.

4. Summary

In summary, the current iteration of Naxalism does represent a qualitatively different threat to India than those that came before. While the, political, economic and social contexts in which it presently operates are in many ways reminiscent of those prevailing during the other high period of Naxalite activity, nearly everything about the movement itself has changed. An infusion of new leadership in the early 1990s brought about the unification of previously disparate and antagonistic groups under the banner of one overarching organization, the CPI-Maoist, allowing for greater centralized control and coordination of effort. It also occasioned a revolution in strategy and tactics that has made the movement more operationally effective now than it ever was in the past.

By contrast, the government's ability to counter the insurgency is more circumscribed today than in previous periods. Systemic changes in the political structure

that manifested themselves after 1991 have resulted in generally weaker governments in New Delhi and far less cooperation between the states and the center. Additionally, corruption and poor governance currently hamper counterinsurgency efforts in many of the most heavily affected states. As a result, India's most recent anti-Naxal policies have thus far been anemic, disjointed, and incoherent when compared with those of the preceding decades.

With this combination of a reinvigorated insurgency and a relatively impotent governmental response, it seems clear that the Naxalite movement poses a greater danger to India today than it has at any point in the 40 years of its existence. The precise nature of this threat is the subject of the next section.

B. THE CURRENT THREAT TO INDIA

With an analysis of the Naxalite movement's vitality complete, this section examines the specific challenges posed by the insurgency. Concern has certainly been growing among most observers in India, and many now agree with its characterization as the country's greatest internal threat. While the purpose here is not to assess the accuracy of Prime Minister Singh's famous assertion, a thorough and objective evaluation of the movement's dangers is a necessary precursor to the formulation of effective policies to counter them.

1. Political Dangers

In spite of the grandiose aims Maoists' grandiose aims, and the hyperbole generated by some in New Delhi's security establishment, the Naxalites probably do not pose a long-term political threat to the viability of the Indian state. After 60 years, liberal parliamentary democracy is too deeply entrenched in the national psyche and too firmly institutionalized within the political culture for an obviously authoritarian ideology to supplant it. Indeed, even during the late 1960s, arguably the heyday of international revolutionary communism, Naxalism's political agenda failed to gain any lasting traction in the Indian context. Over the subsequent decades, as communism retreated from the

world stage and India embraced free-market capitalism with remarkable, if uneven, success, Maoism's general appeal as an alternative economic and political system can only have receded.

While it is true the movement probably enjoys more membership now than it did previously, it is also the case that the majority of these activists, drawn from the impoverished rural *Adivasi* and *Dalit* communities, are still motivated more by local socio-economic goals than explicit political rhetoric. As in the past, they would be extremely difficult to mobilize further once their personal grievances were addressed. Moreover, while the Naxalites' daring attacks certainly grab headlines, it should be remembered that even if the largest numerical estimates of their activists and supporters are utilized, they still account for less than 1/100th of 1% of India's estimated 1.2 billion population. For all these reasons, it is highly unlikely the Naxalites will be able to instigate a widespread political revolution even in the states where they are strongest, let alone garner enough strength to allow them to seize political power from New Delhi.

Nevertheless, the Naxalites do pose a serious threat to security and stability at the local and regional levels. This is already a problem in the remote areas where they are currently active. In states like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, where the government's writ is already questionable, their activities undercut what little legitimacy the legal authorities still possess. This not only contributes to the breakdown of law and order, but also hinders the delivery of governmental and administrative services that most of these areas so desperately need.

The threat to internal stability posed by the insurgency could be significantly higher, however, were it to spread beyond its present confines in the rural parts of eastern India. One particularly dangerous development would be the movement's migration from the countryside to the nation's cities. While these have been the greatest beneficiaries of recent growth, they also contain some of the world's largest concentrations of urban poverty, with India's slum population doubling in the last 20 years alone.²⁶⁸ Though Naxalite ideology has historically struggled to find an audience

²⁶⁸ Jeremy Page, "Indian Slum Population Doubles in Two Decades," Times (London), May 18, 2007, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article1805596.ece> (accessed March 29, 2008).

in India's metropolitan areas (as its early failure in Calcutta would attest) there are indications the CPI-Maoist may be willing to try again. The Naxalite document "Urban Perspective" details their strategy for expanding the revolution by mobilizing disaffected segments of the urban community, and an interview with Ganapathy in 2007 quoted him stressing "the need to go deeply into other sections of the urban areas – the working class, students, youth, middle class, small traders, hawkers, and so on."²⁶⁹ The Maoists' ability to translate their rural appeal to these new groups may be suspect, but any agitation in India's teeming cities could be severely disruptive.

A more plausible, and potentially even more dangerous, destination for Naxalite expansion would be to rural areas already harboring other insurgent movements. Were these groups to make common cause with the Maoists, even if only on a logistical or tactical level, the resulting quantum of violence could be high enough to threaten the integrity of parts of Indian territory. While such potentially synergistic movements do not, by and large, exist in the 'Red Corridor' they can be found in abundance in India's turbulent Northeast. While many security analysts point to the threat of Naxalism's expansion to the south and west, little attention has thus far been paid to the implications of its spread to this already volatile area.

More than any other region, the political, economic, and social conditions in the states comprising India's 'Seven Sisters' bear a striking resemblance to those prevailing in areas already afflicted by Naxal violence. The plethora of insurgencies active in the Northeast have already challenged New Delhi's authority for decades and accounted for more than 50,000 deaths. They also bear more than superficial similarities to the Naxalite movement: nearly all are fueled by the same potent mixture of underdevelopment, poverty, social strife, and political disenfranchisement that sustained Indian Maoism for over four decades; disaffected tribal populations make up the bulk of the insurgents; and while all of these uprisings have strong ethnic components, many of

²⁶⁹ Communist Party of India(Marxist-Leninist)(People's War), "Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas," document transcribed on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/Urbanperspective.htm> (accessed March 29, 2008); Ganapathy interview of April 24, 2007.

the largest and most violent, including those in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura, are also explicitly leftist in their ideology.²⁷⁰

In the past, this was enough to justify some tentative logistical links between Naxalite groups and separatist organizations like the ULFA. Now, however, with the Maoists looking to broaden their area of operations, more significant overtures have been forthcoming. The Political Resolution of the Third Conference of CCOMPOSA in 2004 and the Ninth Party Congress of the CPI-Maoist in 2007 both expressed support for the nationalist struggles in the Northeast, and called for all revolutionary organizations to work together in their fight against “feudalism and imperialism.”²⁷¹ Were this cooperation to actually come about, the challenge to India’s internal security would be much greater.

2. Economic Dangers

While some of the aforementioned dangers are admittedly only future possibilities, the resurgence of Naxalism already poses a number of significant threats to India in the present. The most serious of these is arguably on the economic front. Though the areas currently affected by the insurgency directly account for only a small percentage of India’s total GDP, they contain a disproportionate share of many natural resources that are vital to its continued growth and development. The country’s energy supply, overwhelmingly reliant on coal-fired power plants, is particularly threatened. Over 85% of India’s coal deposits are located in heavily Naxal-affected states, and the Maoists have repeatedly targeted mines and distribution centers in their attacks on economic targets. With the country already facing crippling shortfalls in electricity production, these actions are proving increasingly disruptive. Efforts to develop hydroelectric alternatives are similarly hampered by Maoist attacks on dams and

²⁷⁰ For an excellent summary of the insurgent situation in the Northeast, see: Lawrence E. Cline, “The Insurgency Environment in Northeast India,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 17, no. 2, June 2006: 126-147.

²⁷¹ Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia, “Political Resolution of the Third Conference of CCOMPOSA,” March 19, 2004, posted on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/THIRDCONFERENCEOFCCOMPOSA.htm>, (accessed March 29, 2008); CPI(Maoist), “Call of the Unity Congress – 9th Congress of the CPI(Maoist).”

electrical supply lines.²⁷² As a report for the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security noted, “Naxalism puts almost half of India’s total energy supply at serious political risk.”²⁷³

Nor is it only energy resources that are threatened. Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa contain the bulk of India’s iron ore and Andhra Pradesh has large reserves of bauxite, key inputs in any industrialization effort. The January 2007 report of the CPI-Maoist’s Central Military Commission explicitly identified a number of industrial plants and resource development initiatives in these states as potential targets.²⁷⁴ In light of several recent attacks on steel mills and other industrial complexes, many corporations are taking threats like this seriously and shying away from the most unstable areas.²⁷⁵ As a result, India loses access to badly needed raw materials, and outside investment is denied to those parts of the country that need it most.

With its famously inadequate infrastructure, India is also vulnerable to another of the Naxalites’ recent tactical innovations, the coordinated economic blockade. The transshipment of goods between states is already grossly inefficient, and anything that further complicates this process can produce significant economic disruption. One such blockade, carried out over two days in June 2007, targeted railroad, highway, and communication infrastructure across six states and resulted in over \$U.S. 30 million of lost revenue.²⁷⁶ The knock-on effects of these actions are also quite significant. As the

²⁷² Bikramjit Ray, “A Band of Maoist Rebels Terrorizes an Indian Region,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 13, 2007.

²⁷³ Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, quoted in Mark Sappenfield, “In the Heart of India, a Little-Known Civil War,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 1, 2007.

²⁷⁴ Rajat Kumar Kujur, “From CRZ to SEZ: Naxal Reins of Terror,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article no. 2271, April 21, 2007, <http://www.ipcs.org/whatsNewArticle1.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2287&status=article&mod=b> (accessed February 2, 2008).

²⁷⁵ *Economist*, “The East is Red: India’s Revolutionaries,” April 12, 2006, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_GRDVJSN (accessed February 17, 2008).

²⁷⁶ Devyani Srivastava, “Economic Blockade: Will the Maoist’s New Strategy Succeed?” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article no. 2332, July 06, 2007, <http://www.ipcs.org/newKashmirLevel2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=2347&subCatID=null&mod=null> (accessed January 32, 2008).

increased costs are passed along to consumers nationwide, they contribute to an inflation rate that has recently hovered around a troublingly high 7%.²⁷⁷

If all that were not enough, Naxalite activity directly threatens India's broader economy in one other way. Besides access to raw materials and energy resources, the country's further growth and development are contingent upon greater market liberalization and inflows of foreign capital. The Maoists' violent opposition to SEZ development, dramatically announced in their call to "turn every SEZ into a battlefield," has helped to stall an initiative that promised to circumvent many of the repressive regulatory holdovers from the 'License Raj' and bring in badly needed foreign investment. If the plan is not put back on track, India will forgo an estimated \$U.S. 13.5 billion in FDI and over 890,000 new jobs over the next two years alone.²⁷⁸

3. Social Dangers

While the monetary ramifications of the insurgency are sobering, Naxalism's costs are not confined to India's economy. On the social front, the movement's resurgence brought more tangible, and bloodier, consequences. Of the more than 20,000 deaths attributable to Naxalite violence over the four decades of the insurgency's existence, a disproportionately high number have occurred during the Reconsolidation Period.²⁷⁹ The vast majority of these were innocent civilians, collateral damage in the ongoing battle between Maoist and security forces. The fighting has also created tens of thousands of refugees, mostly in those states least able to provide assistance; predictably, most of those affected belong to the rural *Adivasi* and *Dalit* communities. As a result of these humanitarian crises, India's already strained social fabric is in danger of unraveling in many parts of the countryside, seriously complicating the task of rural development.

²⁷⁷ *Economist*, "Inflation in India: Something to Cry About," February 15, 2007, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8708934 (accessed February 17, 2008).

²⁷⁸ *Economist*, "A Peasant Surprise," January 25, 2007, http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8597150 (accessed February 19, 2008)..

²⁷⁹ Jane's Information Group, "Grappling with Nepal-India Cross-Border Maoism," *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor*, April 12, 2006, <http://www8.janes.com> (accessed March 20, 2008); Government of India Statistics on Left-Wing Extremism, as reported on the South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxalmha.htm, (accessed March 25, 2008).

Nowhere is this more evident than in Bihar and Chhattisgarh, where the culture of violence has virtually paralyzed the government, economy, and society in most parts of the states.

4. External Dangers

Compounding all these dangers are recent developments in Nepal. In 1996, Nepal's own Maoist organization, the CPN, launched a violent insurgency of its own against the government in Kathmandu. In 2006, following ten years of bloody fighting that claimed over 13,000 lives, an alliance between the CPN and seven mainstream political parties forced King Gyanendra to hand over power to an interim government charged with drafting a new constitution for the troubled country. The Maoists control one of the largest voting blocs in this new government, and are reckoned by many observers to comprise "the most organized political force in the country."²⁸⁰ Still heavily armed, they have also threatened a return to violence if their political aims are not met.²⁸¹ The CPN enjoyed an overwhelming victory in the constituent assembly elections of April 2008, and it seems inevitable they will emerge as the most powerful force in Nepal's new government.²⁸²

The consequences for India's fight against the Naxalites are potentially dire. On the one hand, New Delhi helped broker the deal that brought the CPN into the political mainstream, and the Maoists' second in command, Baburam Bhattarai, recently stated that his organization would do nothing to threaten his country's relationship with India.²⁸³ On the other hand, judging by its rhetoric and recent activities, the CPN

²⁸⁰ Bruce Vaughn, "Nepal: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RL31599 (July 30, 2007): 2.

²⁸¹ Asian Centre for Human Rights, "Nepal's Maoists: Running Out of Issues," Asian Centre for Human Rights Review, September 12, 2007, <http://www.achrweb.org/Review/2007/184-07.htm> (accessed March 25, 2008).

²⁸² Charles Haviland, "Electoral Thunderbolt for Nepal," *BBC News*, April 15, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7348049.stm (accessed May 15, 2008).

²⁸³ P.V. Ramana, "No Clarity on Nature of Naxalite Threat," Observer Research Foundation, November 2, 2006, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=5026&macmaid=5027> (accessed March 25, 2008).

remains committed to the goal of spreading Maoism throughout South Asia, by force if necessary. As recently as September 2005, Prachanda (the leader of the CPN) and Ganapathy released a joint statement pledging to “fight unitedly until the entire conspiracies hatched by the imperialists and reactionaries are crushed and the people’s cause of socialism and communism are established in Nepal, India, and all over the world.”²⁸⁴ And in late 2006, after they had agreed to join the Nepalese parliament, the CPN adopted a joint resolution with the other members of CCOMPOSA that declared South Asia should “turn into a flaming field of people’s revolutionary upsurges and burn to ashes imperialism (particularly U.S. imperialism), Indian expansionism and all reactionaries in the region.” It went on to state that it had “decided to enhance coordination and cooperation among the Maoist forces in its various fields of activity.”²⁸⁵

Given its devout ideological commitment and the long history of cooperation with the Naxalites, these latter statements are probably a better indication of the CPN’s intentions with respect to their Maoist brethren to the south than any platitudes about noninterference in India’s internal affairs. Though they may be more carefully concealed in the future, the ties between the CPN and CPI-Maoist will almost certainly remain strong. Nepal will continue to provide a haven for Naxalite cadres, and with the greater resources of the government in Kathmandu at their disposal, the materiel and manpower support from the CPN will probably increase. These developments will obviously strengthen the Naxalites’ position and make New Delhi’s efforts to counter them that much more complicated.

5. Summary

In the final analysis, the resurgence of Naxalism probably does not pose a long-term danger to the viability of the Indian state. History has proven the Maoist ideology to

²⁸⁴ Joint statement by Ganapathy and Prachanda, reported by Jane’s Information Group, “Grappling with Nepal-India Cross-Border Maoism.”

²⁸⁵ Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia, “Joint Statement and Press Release of the Fourth Conference of CCOMPOSA,” as reported in P.V. Ramana, “No Clarity on Nature of Naxalite Threat,” Observer Research Foundation, November 2, 2006, <http://www.observerindia.com/cms/sites/orfonline/modules/analysis/AnalysisDetail.html?cmaid=5026&macmaid=5027>, (accessed March 25, 2008).

be demonstrably bankrupt, and this fact is not lost on the overwhelming majority of the Indian populace. While the movement has recently grown in geographical breadth, it has not commensurately increased the depth of its appeal. Outside a small core of committed ideologues, most of the movement's sympathizers are motivated by local socio-economic grievances and remain unmoved by its calls for political revolution. Given time, provided India's economic development can be kept on track and the resulting benefits spread more broadly, the country will likely grow itself out of the Naxalite phenomenon.

In the short to medium term, however, the Naxalites do represent a significant threat to India on a number of fronts. Even if they ultimately prove too weak to challenge the authority of New Delhi, the Maoists can generate substantial political instability at a local and regional level, particularly in those states where governance is already an issue. This situation would only be exacerbated by a linkup with other insurgent groups, a very real threat in certain regions of India. Economically, too, the Naxalites can be far more disruptive than their numbers alone would suggest. The areas in which they are strongest are vital to the country's economic expansion, and their activities have already proven extremely disruptive. The violence attendant to the insurgency carries significant social costs as well, and the resulting insecurity and breakdown in civil society hold back development in some of the poorest corners of India.

What is more, given the intractability of many of the movement's contributing causes, its potential for spread, the efficacy of its new strategy and tactics, and the difficulties faced by the state in mounting an effective challenge, the Naxalite problem will probably get worse before it gets better. Clearly, then, the Maoists do pose a danger to India's continued growth and stability, and deserve their characterization by New Delhi as a serious threat to internal security. With a country so important to the international system, however, and in an increasingly globalized world, the implications of this determination extend far beyond India's shores. The next section will examine the impact of these conclusions on United States interests in South Asia.

C. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

While Naxalism is obviously not as serious a threat to the United States as it is to its home country, it still poses a challenge to American interests in South Asia. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of a strong, stable, and prosperous India to United States foreign policy goals in the region. As the world's largest democracy, it provides a powerful example of the benefits of political freedom to neighboring countries, many of which are still burdened with authoritarian governments. At the same time, its economic success is an increasingly vital contributor to world economic growth, and its rapidly expanding market provides a destination for American exports and investment. Strategically, the country's growing military and diplomatic clout provide useful counterweights to China's rising influence, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Its commanding presence on this body of water also uniquely positions it to contribute to the security of world energy supplies, particularly those leaving the Persian Gulf. Finally, India's own experience with Islamist violence and proximity to many of the most troubled parts of the Muslim world make it a key ally in the Global War on Terror.

It is little wonder, then, that the United States has been assiduously cultivating a strategic partnership with New Delhi in recent years, even vowing to "help India become a major world power in the 21st century."²⁸⁶ This burgeoning relationship is multifaceted, but generally hinges around cooperation in three key areas: security, economic, and energy.²⁸⁷ While the energy aspect has received the most attention lately (in the form of debate over the Civil Nuclear Cooperation agreement), advances on the economic and security fronts are far more significant. After years of strained economic relations, the United States is now India's single largest trading partner and the source of most its inbound FDI.²⁸⁸ Military and security cooperation have also expanded greatly,

²⁸⁶ Condoleezza Rice, Statement to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in March 2005, as reported in Alex Perry, "Why Bush is Courting India," *Time*, February 28, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1168486,00.html> (accessed March 20, 2008).

²⁸⁷ For a concise summary of all factual aspects of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership, see: K. Alan Kronstadt, "India-U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress RL 33529, January 22, 2008.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

especially since the “New Framework for the U.S.-India Defense Relationship” was signed in 2005.²⁸⁹ While this partnership is notionally based on shared political values and ideals, it is also firmly grounded in the growing compatibility of the two countries’ foreign policy goals, and promises significant benefits to each. If India is to live up to its potential as a strategic partner, however, it will need to ensure its own internal stability and the continuation of its economic growth and development.

Naxalism threatens India’s ability to become the sort of partner the United States desires in a number of ways. The instability generated by the insurgency tarnishes India’s reputation as a successful, functioning democracy in a region that badly needs such a model. It also necessitates a shift of its security focus inwardly, occupying millions of dollars in defense resources and diminishing the country’s ability to respond to external threats like an expansionist China or international terrorism.²⁹⁰ The threat to India’s domestic energy supply also makes cooperation on other issues more difficult. Because of the greater insecurity, policymakers in New Delhi are more likely to pursue unilateral efforts to procure their own foreign sources, efforts that may not be in line with American strategic objectives. This behavior can already be seen in India’s relationship with Iran, where New Delhi’s eagerness to secure oil and natural gas has put it at odds with United States policies towards Tehran.²⁹¹ The insurgency also carries economic costs for the United States – by jeopardizing India’s continued growth and appetite for liberalizing reform, it helps restrict access to an enormously important market.

As United States economic and security cooperation with India deepen, the Naxalites may come to pose a more direct threat to the nation’s interests, as well. Maoist literature is already replete with diatribes against what it calls “US imperialism,” going so far as to call it “the number one enemy of the world’s people.”²⁹² Large multi-national corporations, Western capitalism, and the Global War on Terror are all seen as part of an

²⁸⁹ Kronstadt, “India-U.S. Relations,” 36-44.

²⁹⁰ For statistics on the cost of the Maoist insurgency to the central government, see GOI Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Reports for 2004-2007, http://www.mha.gov.in/uniquepage.asp?Id_Pk=288.

²⁹¹ Kronstadt, “India-US Relations,” January 22, 2008: 42-44.

²⁹² CCOMPOSA, “Political Resolution of the Third Conference of CCOMPOSA.”

American conspiracy toward global domination and singled out for particular invective. The CPI-Maoist goes so far as to call the Islamist insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan “heroic armed resistance,” vowing that it “lends full support to these anti-imperialist movements.”²⁹³ The group put force behind this anti-American rhetoric in 2003 when it attacked a PepsiCo warehouse in Andhra Pradesh, apparently in retaliation for the United States invasion of Iraq.²⁹⁴

While a report in the *Christian Science Monitor* quoted Naxalite commanders offering aid and refuge to al Qaeda operatives, no evidence yet exists for concrete ties between the movement and Islamist terrorism.²⁹⁵ Indeed, given Islamic aversion to an atheist ideology like Maoism, such a link-up is difficult to fathom. Nevertheless, the Maoists’ statements and actions leave little doubt of the enmity they harbor toward the United States. As American investment in India grows, other corporations may, like Pepsi, become symbolically charged outlets for this hatred. Should United States military assets or personnel ever come to be based in India (a distinct possibility given the two nation’s growing security cooperation) they would be similarly tempting targets.

Therefore, while Naxalism remains primarily an Indian problem, its recent resurgence does have ramifications for the United States. The movement already poses a number of indirect threats to American foreign policy goals in the region, and as time wears on, it may represent a more direct danger to its economic and security interests within India. Clearly, then, the United States has a stake in seeing the Maoist insurgency defeated, and in assisting its new strategic partner in bringing this about as expeditiously as possible.

²⁹³ CPI(Maoist), “Call of the Unity Congress – 9th Congress of the CPI(Maoist).”

²⁹⁴ Institute for Conflict Management, “People’s War Group (PWG),” South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/terrorist_outfits/PWG.htm (accessed September 13, 2007).

²⁹⁵ Jane’s Information Group, “Communist Party of India-Maoist,” *Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism*, October 13, 2006, <http://www8.janes.com/> (accessed September 17, 2007).

D. FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The True Nature of the Problem

At its heart, the current Naxalite problem is primarily a socio-economic one. The core of the movement is composed of committed political ideologues, but the vast majority of its supporters and activists are simply poor members of the rural community, primarily *Adivasis* and *Dalits*, who have turned to it out of frustration at being left behind by India's uneven growth. While the former will probably never be persuaded they have a place in a modern, democratic, and capitalist India, the latter would likely prove quite easy to convince, provided the benefits of development could reach them sufficiently. Given India's systemic corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the cumbersome nature of its federal structure, this is admittedly a tall order. Nevertheless, some progress is being made, as the persistently declining poverty rates of the last several years attest.

Unfortunately, several factors external to governmental competence are conspiring to keep the pace of development sufficiently slow to allow the Maoists' appeal to spread ever farther throughout rural India. One is the magnitude of the challenge, with literally hundreds of millions still languishing in abject poverty. Another is the structural reality of India's growth to date, as job creation in the services sector has come at the expense of similar progress in industry and agriculture. A third is the Naxalite insurgency itself, since the instability and social breakdown it occasions in the areas where it is prevalent disrupt economic activity and prohibit the supply of desperately needed investment, economic aid, and governmental services. For this reason alone, Naxalism presents itself as more than just a socio-economic problem – it also has a security dimension. To some degree, the movement must be actively checked now if the benefits of development are to undercut its appeal in the future.

There are other compelling reasons to address Naxalism from a security standpoint. The movement poses a number of immediate dangers on the political, economic, and social fronts, threats already enumerated previously in this chapter, and ones that India needs to counter swiftly if its rise to great power status is to happen any time soon. These security efforts will be for naught, however, if the underlying reasons

for Naxalism's persistence are not adequately addressed. What emerges is a two-part problem that will, by necessity, require a two-part solution. This thesis is not intended as a policy paper, but with an analysis of the Naxalite phenomenon complete, the insights gained into the nature and danger of the insurgency allow for some cursory recommendations.

2. Recommendations for India

There does seem to be a growing awareness in New Delhi of the dual nature of the Naxalite problem, with Prime Minister Singh voicing his preference for a 'two-pronged' strategy to deal with the Maoists. India must pursue this approach at a national level, but with significant modifications to the initiatives advanced thus far.

The most glaring needs are the formulation of a coherent national policy to address the insurgency and unified direction of the federal and state governments' efforts to implement it. The multiplicity of anti-Naxal committees, agencies, and task forces that currently exist in New Delhi have so far generated more bureaucratic inefficiency and confusion than cogent policymaking. The recent formation of the Naxal Management Division and the Inter-Ministerial Working Group should help address this problem, but these bodies still probably lack the administrative authority to direct counterinsurgent efforts at the local level. This is desperately needed, since most of the worst affected states are proving incapable of formulating any kind of effective challenge to the Maoists on their own – indeed, some state strategies are actually making the problem worse. P. V. Ramana has recommended the creation of an Independent Ministry, reporting directly to the Prime Minister, which would take charge of all Naxalite-related security and development efforts throughout the country.²⁹⁶ Given the constitutional and political constraints, such an effort would likely prove contentious – nevertheless, it is a necessary first step.

With such a body established, India would be able to more effectively implement the measures necessary to counter the insurgency. On the socio-economic front, efforts

²⁹⁶ P.V. Ramana, "Dealing with Naxalism: Shotgun Approach."

at national development (like market reforms and the SEZ initiative) should continue, but in a way more sensitive to those it will disadvantage in the short-term. Laws designed to protect the land rights of the rural poor, like the Scheduled Tribes Recognition of Forest Rights Bill and the PESA Act, have been on the books for years but are honored mostly in the breach.²⁹⁷ Enforcement of such legislation must be dramatically improved, and funding increased for other rural aid and development initiatives, like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Program, that can address the problem of rising inequality in the countryside.²⁹⁸ Such efforts proved quite successful in helping to keep Naxalism in check in the 1970s and 80s, and there is no reason to believe they will be any less effective now.

To ensure the efficient implementation of these programs, however, corruption needs to be rooted out and local governance improved, particularly in states like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. Besides holding back the provision of badly needed social services, their persistent maladministration undermines faith in the Indian state, giving a critical boost to the Maoists' legitimacy. Cleaning up problems this pervasive will not be easy, but New Delhi could increase the use of President's Rule to begin to address the challenge.

On the security front, extremely aggressive center-directed policing actions were effective in the past but are probably not currently viable. India is already under significant pressure over human-rights issues, and widespread offensive security operations carry significant risk of abuses and collateral damage.²⁹⁹ These are already visible in the excesses of the Salwa Judum campaign. Instead, New Delhi should strive to improve local policing in Naxal-affected areas, shore up the border with Nepal to inhibit collaboration with CPN, prevent the movement's spread to other areas, and kill or

²⁹⁷ Aman Sethi, "New Battle Zones," *Frontline* (India), September 9, 2007, <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2418/stories/20070921501101800.htm> (accessed February 20, 2008); Richard Mahapatra, "The PMO Backs Out from Counter-Naxalite Strategy," *Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies*, April 16, 2005, <http://www.ipcs.org/newKashmirLevel2.jsp?action=showView&kValue=1714&subCatID=null&mod=null> (accessed March 30, 2008).

²⁹⁸ *Business Standard* (India), "Sarpanches Clash with Govt. Over NREGP," MSN News, February 5, 2008, <http://news.in.msn.com/business/article.aspx?cp-documentid=1225539> (accessed March 30, 2008).

²⁹⁹ Kronstadt, "India-U.S. Relations," January 22, 2008: 61.

capture the Naxalite leadership. Maoist insurgencies have historically been vulnerable to decapitation strikes, (witness the Naxalites themselves in 1972 or Peru's Shining Path after the capture of Abimael Guzman), and the removal of Ganapathy and the other members of the CPI-Maoist Central Committee would be a serious setback for the movement throughout the country. Dedicated counterinsurgency units, modeled on Andhra Pradesh's highly successful Greyhounds, would be the most effective means of carrying out this targeted offensive action.

3. Recommendations for the United States

As for the United States, all assistance possible should be rendered to India in its efforts to combat the Naxalite insurgency. Some efforts have already been made in this regard, under the rubric of the two nations' security cooperation agreements. The State Department's Counterterrorism Office listed the CPI-Maoist among its 'Other Groups of Concern' in 2004, and has since trained hundreds of Indian security officers in its Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program.³⁰⁰ In 2006, United States forces conducted a series of small-scale joint anti-terrorism exercises with the Indian Army, and in May of that year, *Reuters* reported that the United States had offered the state of Chhattisgarh counterinsurgency training, demining assistance, and humanitarian aid for refugees created by Maoist violence.³⁰¹

Nevertheless, more can and should be done. Officially declaring the CPI-Maoist a 'Foreign Terrorist Organization' would allow for greater direct assistance to New Delhi in its fight against the insurgency. This designation has already been applied to the New People's Army in the Philippines, a much smaller Maoist movement that arguably offers a relatively minor threat to American interests. India would benefit most, however, from expanded anti-terrorism training for its security forces, modern weapons and communication equipment for its local police, and greater monetary aid to fund its rural

³⁰⁰ United States Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2005," Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2006: 147.

³⁰¹ Reuters, "US Offers Help to Fight Maoists: Official," May 26, 2006; United States Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2006," Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2007, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2006/82734.htm> (accessed March 30, 2008).

development efforts. These steps would do more than just help defeat the Naxalites; they would also strengthen a burgeoning alliance, one the United States is likely to depend on more and more in the future.

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