Targeting Naxalism

COUNTER-INSURGENCY ENDGAME
FIGHTING THE IDEOLOGICAL ADVERSARY
IT’S GOVERNANCE, STUPID!
THE ROAD TO KABUL
ENOUGH AUSTERITY
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INTERNAL SECURITY

An ideological adversary

Ground realities of the Naxalite movement

V BALACHANDRAN

“A MAOIST who surrenders shall get a three year fixed deposit of Rs 300,000 and in addition to this, Rs 2,500 will be paid every month to the Maoist”, says a Union Home Ministry spokesman. This is based on the assessment that Naxalites are mostly indulging in criminal activities and that the right financial incentive will wean them away.

Such a policy will result in a miserable failure. While a minority of the Maoists are indeed conducting their operations for criminal gains, most of their activities are concerted, ideology-based operations. There is no doubt that these have the colour of crimes against the state. It is surprising that the central government is unaware of this fact. At a time when the home ministry is evaluating policy options, it is opportune to consider the ground realities of the Naxalite movement. Here are some observations based on discussions with experts, one of who was part of the aborted Naxalite dialogue with both the Telugu Desam and Congress governments.

Violence as a ’hook’
Social inequalities, the widening gulf between the rich and the poor, exploitation by the higher castes in Andhra Pradesh and more importantly the loss of self-respect by the downtrodden helped in establishing Kondappally Seetharamiah’s Peoples’ War Group (PWG) in the 1960s. The PWG used violence as a tactic to motivate and encourage the lower cadres. The first such brutal murder of an exploitative landlord was in 1978 when one Pitambar Rao was killed publicly. Such killings came to have social acceptance among the lower classes of society. Further, Seetharamiah sent young students to the forests to indoctrinate the tribals and agriculturists. They used to look after the needs like education and conduct medical camps during epidemics while governments hardly did anything. Gradually people in these areas started accepting the PWG’s parallel government which was free from corruption.

The three phases
Naxalite philosophy runs into three stages: First, the “organisational” phase when overt activities will be pursued to gain influence. They work with villagers and spread influence. At this stage the violence is less but the need for an organisation is
more. This is the stage when they appropriate popular causes, as now seen in several states like West Bengal (Nandigram and other SEZs), Kerala and Delhi through front organisations. In this stage the “state” is more powerful than the Naxalites. During this stage they also develop grassroots contacts to migrate into the second stage. Kondappally Seetharamiah had sent nine volunteers thirty years ago to Dandakaranya to spread Naxalite philosophy. The result is now seen in this area which straddles Chhattisgarh, parts of Madhya Pradesh & Maharashtra, where a parallel Naxalite government functions.

The second stage involves identifying “guerilla zones” where they undertake punitive strikes. At this stage the state and Naxalites are equal in power. The third & final stage is a “peoples’ mobile war” where they try to overrun weak states, as we see in several pockets now. They also undertake killings of political leaders to create a vacuum into which they step in and take over the reins of power.

Many years’ work
All the present top leaders of the Naxalite movement were student leaders and volunteers in 1977-80 who lived with villagers and tribals, making lists of atrocities. They followed a system of 1+2 (One leader and two followers) while interacting with the affected villagers. What we see today as parallel government in these areas is the result of these efforts twenty years ago. The government neglected all this until it became a gigantic problem. In fact, the seeds of the movement date back to the Telangana armed resistance (1946-1951) where bonded labour and hill tribes revolted against the landlords under the Nizam rule. Village squads numbering 10,000 members were formed while the guerrilla forces numbered nearly 2,000. It was said that nearly 3,000 villages were “freed” from Nizam’s rule. All that the present leadership had to do was to reignite the fire—the exploitation had not changed much since Independence. It is difficult to eradicate the Naxal movement as long as the reasons exist.

Naxalites have re-invented themselves and are now taking up new causes which automatically follow from what they call “LPG”: Liberalised, Privatised & Globalised Society. They are now taking up popular issues like displacement, caste equations and retail businesses. They are also considering having a “Pan-Asia Maoist Group” for better coordination among the likeminded across the region.

The third & final stage is a “peoples’ mobile war” where they try to overrun weak states, as we see in several pockets now. They also undertake killings of political leaders to create a vacuum into which they step in and take over the reins of power.

Last resort
So, why do people join the movement despite the hardship of life in the jungle and facing a constant threat from the police? According to the experts in Hyderabad, the life of the common man in many Indian villages is so miserable that they have no hope of any solution to their problems, whether it’s because of exploitation by landlords or atrocities by the upper classes. There has always been a “disconnect” between the administration and the masses. They have no faith in the bureaucracy. They find the Naxalite parallel government to be more effective and honest. One of the welcome developments in rural India is the respect for the downtrodden by upper classes after the Naxalite phenomenon.

A different objective
It is commonly asked why Naxalites—the Indian Maoists—cannot abjure violence like their Nepali counterparts and join the parliamentary system. Such a question ignores the differences between the two movements. The Nepali stream wanted abolition of Monarchy and establishment of a multi-party democracy, which they have nearly achieved. Nepalese Maoists are more like the Indian Communist parties. On the other hand the aim of Indian Maoists is to overthrow the present “semi-colonial & semi-feudal” government which increasingly resorts to violence to maintain its hold over society. An interview with the spokesman of the Indian Maoists, the October 2007 issue of People’s March, the mouthpiece of Indian Maoists clearly reveals the differences between the Indian Maoists and their Nepali counterparts over the constitutional approach being undertaken by the latter. Indian Maoists are more like the “Anarchist” ideologues of Europe.

Though the European anarchists could not practice what they preached, the Indian Maoists have succeeded in putting in practice a smooth
As the Naxalites use “Hit & Run” tactics, counter-violence by police usually targets innocent villagers who then turn against the state.

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INTERNAL SECURITY

Hope is the antidote to Naxalism

Scant attention is paid to good governance at the local level

RAJ CHERUBAL

Two young auto rickshaw drivers were in the queue at the Road Transport Office (RTO). They had already lost two days’ income with no end in sight for their registration nightmare. They pointed to a decrepit old man standing outside, looking dejected in hot, humid Chennai. “He has been there for two days and has come all the way from Andhra Pradesh. Officials have been giving him the run around. A rich man can afford a tout but what will that poor man do?”

One of them added, “Naxalites should take over and ‘take care’ of all these bastards.”

A chill should shoot down our collective spine. If the urban annoyed of reasonably well governed cities feel this way, what do the helpless, in badly governed, feudal lands of India feel?

As one reads Comrades: A World History of Communism, a fascinating and sometimes sarcastic account of various attempts at utopia, one question keeps popping up—Why did communism take root in some but not other parts of the world? The author Robert Service, whose low opinion of communism is palpable, argues that communism was welcomed by people in societies that denied them basic freedoms. Unfortunately, these oppressed people found themselves living under an even more oppressive system.

Communist parties and their fellow travellers existed in practically every democratic, liberal and capitalistic society. In the 1920s and ‘30s, especially after the economic devastation in the wake of the Great Depression, it even appeared that many of these societies would go the communist way. But they didn’t.

The Communists’ misfortune was that these nations, even in depth of economic misery, afforded their citizens basic freedoms and better governance. Even under glaring income and wealth disparities, most people could afford to be hopeful—if not them, their children would have a better life; opportunity for upward mobility existed. Hope—near and distant—acted as barrier to the growth of communist power.

Lands which denied its citizens any hope of upward mobility, justice and rule of law fell to communist revolutionaries, many of whom were motivated by visions of an egalitarian society devoid of class and the privilege of birth.

The constituency of Naxalism comprises of those devoid of justice and even the hope of progress. Most cadres come from groups like the tribals that have been traditionally and systematically abused for long. The so called Red Corridor covers areas that have not seen governance or growth worthy of a modern nation even while other parts of India practice a vibrant democracy and chalk near double digit growth.

Contrary to what the anti-liberalisation crowd says, these are not victims of liberalisation, but are areas untouched by liberalisation. Here, decentralised government is unknown. Crony capitalism and state-directed industrialisation usurp tribal land and resources, and rule of law, infrastructure and services that would have helped poor create wealth and a better future are non-existent.

The antidote to Naxalism, as syrupy as it may sound, is hope. Hope is no food package to be dropped from helicopters; it needs to be built through good governance at the local level. Central planning has failed the world over. The people, especially in remote areas, must have the power and resources to script their future.

Countless crores are spent by central and state governments in the name of the poor, especially rural and tribal. This is not only wasteful, but very often, counterproductive as well. As a starting point, abolish all central government ministries...
that purport to work for the upliftment of the poor.

_India Today_ (June 18th, 2007) found that abolishing, restructuring and merging about 20 central ministries—agriculture, human resources, tribal affairs, coal, rural and the like—will save the taxpayer around Rs 76,000 crores. Why not parcel this and more, say, equally to rural and tribal families and to Gram Sabhas? Let them decide where to dig canals and lay roads, how much fertiliser to buy, how, where and when to farm and so on. Growth and progress will follow.

Wealth and income transfers are realities in any society, especially democracies. No society will tolerate drastic income and wealth disparities, especially in light of mass starvation and policy driven suicides.

Until self-governance and policy sanity is restored, the real issue is how transparent and efficient such transfer processes are. Are the intended recipients receiving the maximum allocated resources? Are there simple mechanisms the redress the wrong?

Cash transfer in various forms, combined with smart cards based identification, will bring much needed efficiency and transparency to poverty mitigation programs. Which hopefully would also be the death knell of centralised planning. Even the Left has extended great support for programmes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) which has effectively become a scheme of simple cash transfers.

It is a sad irony that much of the Red Corridor is not only extremely poor, but extremely resource rich, with enough land for potential factories and advanced and efficient farming these regions are also rich in coal, uranium, bauxite and other minerals. But who owns all this wealth? No one and surely not the tribals under whose feet much of this wealth lies.

How one divides up natural resources like oil is clearly a challenge anywhere in the world. How much should each citizen of Iraq earn from the sale of a barrel of Iraqi oil? Yet there are solutions and these must be customised for local realities through a serious and deliberative process. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, is an attempt in this direction, albeit with loops and holes.

While General Electric can own and operate nuclear reactors around the world, why should the tribals of Jaduguda be condemned to inherit solely “disease, death and environmental destruction” from its uranium mines? Currently, in the absence of clear property rights, the tribals cannot even collect and use more mundane forest products, let alone be part of the military-industrial complex.

Improvements in the overall property rights framework must be hastened. Also, the division of resources among the original owners in a democratically consensual and transparent manner must be hastened.

Warriors who see the world through the prism of class alone rightly point out that caste and tradition, and not economics alone, are also causes for oppression and injustice. As an aside, this is interesting, coming from class warriors, since caste and tradition seem to have trumped class in much of India.

**Government institutions must focus on the rule of law. Most humans will tolerate oppression, injustice and abuse as ephemeral if convinced about the existence of legal and civilised recourse.**

Undoubtedly greater devolution of power to panchayats, democratically protected participation of all castes and gender in governance, monitoring by activists and human rights agencies, greater assault on caste and gender atrocities and so on have made deep dents into oppressive and unjust structures that have existed for centuries. Programs like NREGS, cash transfers and vouchers for empowering the poor in education, insurance and health are already showing signs of accelerating this much needed redistribution of power and dignity.

This brings us to the area where government institutions must focus: the rule of law. Most humans might tolerate oppression, injustice and abuse as ephemeral if convinced about the existence of legal and civilised recourse. A functioning democracy would have enough safety valves with its judicial, police and civil society structures. But these too have atrophied in much of India, especially in the Red Corridor.

The much ballyhooed reform of police and judiciary must start, and along with this the ostensibly necessary, but much abused provisions like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) must go. The very existence of provisions like this is, in a democratic society, a sign of decay of the rule of law and governance.
Finally, the Naxalites’ bluff must be called. There are two kinds of Naxalites: those who might join the democratic, parliamentary process when conditions are right or out of necessity; others constrained by ideological steel will negate current and future Constitutions, Parliaments and all organs of Indian democracy as a bourgeois confidence trick. The battle with the latter is eternal and needs to be fought with great stamina and long term vision. While empathising with their reading of conditions in much of India and the need for revolution, armed or peaceful, it would be foolish to deny or underestimate their long term objectives.

The power of ideology cannot be underestimated. Any group that pays obeisance to Marx—a pioneer in advocating violent revolution and one party dictatorship—and to Lenin, Stalin and Mao—main exhibits in the gallery of mass murderer—needs to be taken seriously. Further, the Naxalites are just one of the many groups of nihilists claiming to represent the oppressed.

But with the first group of Naxalites, the best way to prove the hollowness of their ideology and to defeat the rebellion would be to hand over power to the rebels through a fair democratic election. Communism has failed no matter which nation tried it and under whatever banner. Let them have another chance to architect their ruins.

The Red Corridor must have more democratic options. Naxalites who are willing to contest, win elections and implement their programmes must be encouraged.India is too large, too complex and too wise to fall apart, due to yet another tried and failed ideology. Call the red bluff. If history of economic policy is any guide, the elected Naxalites will fall to the well-known ‘anti-incumbency’ factor (euphemism for the electorates’ rejection of a government that did not deliver)

The debate is not whether Indian society needs a revolution or not. That it needs. The debate is what the revolution will replace the current reality with. To hasten that revolution and what it brings, the rest of us only have very few, yet powerful, weapons like democracy, good governance and rule of law. These are too important to be left blunt in the hands of distant leaders and underdeveloped institutions. They must be sharpened.

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INTERNAL SECURITY

Why trying to buy surrender will not work

Financial incentives for surrender will result in an increase in violence

ATANU DEY

As folk wisdom goes, pre-empting problems is better than curing them. If not prevented from arising in the first place, the next best thing is to resolve them with appropriate solutions. The worst thing to do is to allow a problem to develop and then attempt to solve it so ineptly as to make a bad thing worse. The case of the problem of Naxalite violence in certain parts of India falls into the last category.

Across many states in India, especially Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Orissa, Naxalites have been at war against the state. Through their violence, they have held the state at ransom and it appears that the government has decided to capitulate and pay the ransom.

A collection of schemes at the central and the state government levels are being discussed that aim to address the problem of Naxalite violence. One involves the payment of Rs 300,000 into a fixed deposit scheme and which becomes available to a surrendered Naxalite after three years. There is an additional stipend of Rs 2,500 per month.

There is also a “buy back” scheme for arms, a reward for turning in arms. Surrendering a light machine gun is worth Rs 300,000, and for an AK-47 the reward is Rs 200,000. The central government expects to attract 10,000 Naxalites under the scheme which would cost around Rs 4 billion.

There are two parties involved in this conflict: the government and the Naxalites. While the schemes speak of getting the Naxalites to surrender, the only surrendering being done is by the government.

This response by the government is inappropriate for a number of reasons. The policy is inef-
fective in the sense that it will not achieve the stated goal. It can be seen to be a tacit admission of impotency. It is because the government has not been able to control the Naxalites using legitimate force that it has resorted to financially bribing the insurgents. This admission by the state has two very dire consequences. It sends a signal to all groups—not just to the Naxalites—that violence is an appropriate strategy for gaining the upper hand in any conflict with the state. And that the state can be blackmailed into submission provided sufficient violence is employed.

In effect, by rewarding the Naxalites, the government has set in motion a mechanism that increases violence instead of reducing it.

How the state responds to organised violence has repercussions on the long run stability of society. If the response is weak and ineffective, and is perceived to be so by the aggressors, it makes the problem even worse.

The policy is inefficient also because it does not address the underlying problem which gives rise to the insurgency. Even if the current batch of disaffected people surrender, because the underlying causes persist, others will emerge to replace those that surrender. The supply of insurgents is not inelastic—depending on the incentives, more people can be expected to join. By offering to pay the ransom, the state is essentially increasing the supply of Naxalites through “demand-pull.”

In economic terms, the government program of paying a lump sum to those who have engaged in violence increases the incentives for being a Naxalite, and therefore the quantity of Naxalites supplied increases—clearly not the desired nor the intended result. Similarly, payments for surrendered arms actually increase the supply of smuggled arms. The supply of illegal arms cannot be perfectly inelastic. Therefore increasing their “street price”—which is effectively what the buyback scheme for arms does—just increases their supply through demand-pull.

The problem of organised violence—regardless of whether it is politically motivated or economically motivated—is a systemic problem. The solution therefore has to be systemic rather than idiosyncratic. One basic feature of the problem is that governments, at the state or the central level, have an interest in papering over it by addressing the symptoms and not attempting to address the underlying cause of the problem. Expediency demands that they somehow get the violence to stop for at least as long as they are in power. That their current actions will have seriously adverse consequences for the well-being of the nation is not of interest to them because those future problems will be the concern of the succeeding generations of citizens and governments.

The problem can be seen as a repeated prisoner’s dilemma game but where the players change in each iteration of the game. The current administration will be replaced by a future administration and the Naxalites by some other disaffected group with their own particular griev-
ances. In this game of complete information, the players will have knowledge of the previous outcomes of the game. Government capitulation will set up the reasonable expectation that the current government will also capitulate. And the then present government will have the same incentive to hand over the problem—at a much greater cost—to the future generation of citizens and governments. The outcome as predicted by game theory is an equilibrium that no party would have chosen.

The solution therefore is to change the rules of the game. The solution has to strengthen the government’s incentive to address the problem instead of merely suppressing the symptoms. The apparently paradoxical move is to handicap the government to make it more capable of solving the underlying problem instead of merely postponing it. One way to do this is for the government to announce an unambiguous policy of no-negotiations with any violent group. But given our history and federal structure, such a commitment is unlikely to be seen as credible. The best—but harder—method is to have a constitutional measure barring all governments from negotiating with armed groups.

If the constitution prohibits any government from giving in to the demands of groups that use violence as a means of achieving their goals, every government will be forced to seek a solution to the problem instead of just paying off some aggrieved group the ransom they demand.

The constitutional restriction of non-negotiation must be well understood and become common knowledge. Not just to the government but also to any potential or actual group of insurgents it should be clearly known that the government does not have the ability to bribe or capitulate to the demands of any violent group.

This will force, first of all, governments to seek appropriate solutions: to redress economic grievance, for instance, instead of just buying off some group more vocal or violent than the norm. Second, it will convince violent or potentially violent groups that the government does not have the flexibility of responding to their demand by paying them off.

A large, diverse and heterogeneous country such as India can be reasonably expected to have groups with seriously conflicting interests. There has to be some systematic way of resolving these conflicts. Most importantly, the system has to be designed such that it precludes the instrumental use of violence. Non-violent methods of resolving conflicts have a special place in India given its history and its civilisational ethic. For non-violent methods to work, however, groups with grievances need to fully understand that violence precludes all negotiations. That can only happen if the constitution does not allow any government from surrendering to terrorists.

Atanu Dey blogs on India’s development at deeshaa.org

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INTERNAL SECURITY

Money and friends

Tracing the Naxalites’ linkages to crime and other armed groups

ANKUR KUMAR

THEY HAVE claimed to represent the poorest and most oppressed sections of society for around four decades now. Their attacks have primarily targeted representatives of the state, including politicians and the police, as well as the rich landlords and infrastructure developed by multinational companies. There is little doubt that the Naxalite threat had been severely underestimated over the past few years as was candidly admitted by the home minister recently. It is important to step back and analyse the way the Naxalites have managed to carve out their unique identity as a terrorist entity. This is an issue which cannot be dismissed entirely as a “law and order” problem—as suggested even by the Prime Minister of India—but needs a holistic solution.

Naxalites have acquired their funding from consistent sources, having established their own, parallel governments in many Indian states. Common methods of funding include extortion and taxes. Since the area under their de facto control is usually heavily forested and rich in natural resources, the Naxalites often extract protection money from trade in timber and other forest produce.

Furthermore, their connection with narcotics cultivation is well documented. According to the Narcotics Control Bureau in India, the Naxalites thrive on money earned through illicit cultivation. Its 2007 report found out that of the total quantity of marijuana seized in the country, a disproportionately high percentage came from Naxalite controlled pockets in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Prakash Jaiswal, then minister of state for home affairs in India, informed the Parliament in April 2008 that cannabis cultivation and its trade has become a source of finance for the Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. He further stated that Naxalites get “protection money” from narcotics traders who engage in trafficking, and also safe passage money from narcotics smugglers.

A more subtle mode of financing comes from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), some of who have often been accused of diverting funds to the Naxalites. According to June 2007 report by CNN-IBN, a television channel, 22 NGOs had been issued a show cause notice by the Bihar government for allegedly funding the Naxalites. Similarly, in 2006 DNA newspaper revealed that 57 NGOs and social groups had been blacklisted by the Jharkhand state intelligence department for funding the Naxalite movement.

One of the factors which exacerbates the already violent threat posed by the Naxalites are the growing external linkages which the Naxalites appear to have cultivated or are in the process of cultivating with other terrorist entities. The Indian Naxalites have historically had a deep connection with their ideological brethren in Nepal. This connection has been extensive on a tactical level too with reports of the Naxalites and the Nepalese Maoists receiving training and obtaining weapons and explosives in each others’ territories.

Recent events in Nepal—where the Nepalese Maoists joined mainstream politics—have shaken up their counterparts in India. The Naxalites do not appear to support this transition, with CPI (Maoist) politburo member Koteswar Rao openly calling it a mistake. At the same time the Nepalese Maoists have demonstrated that they have not necessarily given up on their radical ideology—they still maintain their armed cadres. The volatile situation in Nepal leaves open the possibility of a return to violence there, with which their ties with the Indian Naxalites could well pick up, if they had indeed ever waned.

An even more worrying aspect of the Naxalites’ growing tentacles is its strengthening rela-

Naxalites raise funds through extortion, ‘taxes’ and the narcotics trade. There are allegations that some NGOs are being used to finance the Naxalite movement.
tionship with insurgent groups in the North-east such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) in Assam, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in Manipur. In an interview earlier this year, Mr Rao talked of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) being signed with these groups based on opposition to a common enemy, the Indian state. The Naxalite linkages to insurgencies and separatist movements are not restricted to India. Their links with the Tamil Tigers were reported to be close, particularly with respect to arms procurement and training. Their empathy with the Tigers’ cause was evident when Velupillai Prabhakaran’s killing evoked strong condemnation from the Naxalites and was one of the reasons for the Naxalites calling for a two-day all-India bandh in June this year.

The Naxalites’ linkages to domestic and international Islamist organisations has been overstated. More worrying is their connection to insurgent groups in India’s North-eastern states.

The Naxalites’ linkages with Islamist organisations based inside and outside India are more abstruse and may well be speculative. The arrest in June this year of Lashkar-e-Taiba’s (LeT) leading terrorist in Nepal, Mohammad Umair Madani led to rather interesting revelations regarding LeT’s intentions to align with the Naxalites. His task of integrating LeT militants with Naxalites might not be enough to shed light on the extent of their links or to the possible benefits that both intend to gain from this possible alliance. The Naxalite sympathy for the cause of Islamist organisations in India such as the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)—as was seen in its condemnation of extension of SIMI’s proscription—may well reflect a purely rhetorical support.

The strength of the Naxalite movement has hitherto relied on the lack of attention paid by respective state governments to alleviate poverty and tackle perceived discrimination faced by the tribals and dalits. It is also a testimony to the success achieved by the Naxalites in convincing the disoriented poor that joining ranks with them is the only way to overcome their suffering. This undeniable social inequity and large scale destitution has resulted in the increasing appeal that the Naxalites have among significant sections of Indian society, which not only includes the tribal communities and disillusioned rural youth but also the members of the intelligentsia. This gave the Naxalite movement a certain gloss which has helped them distinguish themselves from the common criminals or terrorists.

But the situation may well turn grim for the Naxalites if recent actions by the central government are reflective of a change in strategy and will in executing it. The Naxalite problem has been treated largely as a state problem till now since law and order is a state subject. But with the Naxalite affected states reporting more violent incidents this year than Jammu and Kashmir and the North-east put together, the central government has finally woken up to this threat. The government appears serious about trying to eliminate the Naxalites by large scale use of paramilitary forces, with talks of the special forces of the army being called in at a later stage. While necessary to contain the burgeoning influence of Naxalites, securing the population can only be the first stage of the government strategy. It will have to be followed by a cogent and equitable developmental policy to wean the locals away from the pernicious influence of the locals. Simultaneously, the government also needs to do more to take the sheen away from the Naxalites and their ideology. The recent media campaign launched by the government showing Naxalite brutalities is designed primarily to prove that the Naxalites are common criminals with no ideological moorings and is a step in the right direction. But a lot still needs to be done if we are to hear the end of this bloody conflict.

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INTERNAL SECURITY

Winning the counter-insurgency endgame

India must raise a new agency to ‘fight’ the last stage of counter-insurgency

SUSHANT K. SINGH & NITIN PAI

IT HAS been recognised that successful counter-insurgency strategy—recently popularised as the Petraeus doctrine and implemented successfully by the United States in Iraq—has three distinct but overlapping stages: “Clear, Hold and Build”. The first involves military operations to clear territory of insurgents, the second calls for holding territory and protecting the population from insurgent attacks, and the third consolidates military successes by building functional institutions of state that in turn can deliver effective governance.

Despite Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s characterisation of the Naxalite movement as the biggest threat to India’s internal security, the Shivraj Patil-led home ministry during the UPA government’s first term showed little imagination and even less resolve in earnestly confronting the growing threat. While the Naxalite movement consolidated across the country, moving cadre, arms and funds across state and international borders, the Indian government’s response was inefficient and lacked coordination. Not only did this result in Naxalites gaining strength unchecked, it also resulted in dubious and poorly-conceived responses such as the use of tribal militias like Salwa Judum in Chattisgarh and ham-fisted police action against rural and tribal populations in the worst-affected areas.

In its second-term, the UPA government has demonstrated more seriousness in tackling what it calls Left Wing Extremism. Intelligence and law-enforcement efforts have succeeded in the arrest of a number of top leaders of the Communist Party of India-Maoist, or CPI(Maoist). Concerted action by central and state paramilitary and police forces—called Operation Green Hunt—targeting Naxalite forces across several Indian states has started. Unsophisticated as it may be, the home ministry has also attempted to counter the Naxalite movement in the psychological space by using...
the media to project the Naxalites as the "cold-blooded murderers" as they often are. Some poorly conceived proposals to buy out Naxalites cadres apart, India, at last, appears to have begun fighting the war of counter-insurgency that it must.

It will be a long war, and although late, the Clear stage has begun. The UPA government must not allow its resolve to be weakened in the face of the expected psychological operations that will be launched by the Naxalites, their over-ground operatives and other sympathisers.

While the security forces are equipped, trained and prepared to handle the Clear and Build stages, they find themselves inadequate to take on the challenge of the third, Build stage (more correctly, the Rebuild stage, after the destruction caused by the insurgents and collateral damage caused during counter-insurgency operations). By then, on the one hand, the local civil agencies would have atrophied and left without substantive capacity to undertake development in a conflict-ravaged area. On the other, media, public and political attention will move on to other issues once the statistics of violence show a degree of improvement.

Yet, neglect of the Build phase inevitably leads to a relapse of the Naxalite pathology. The vacuum in capacity to impose rule-of-law, provide basic public services and economic development—filled to a degree by NGOs and some central agencies—leaves the third stage of counter-insurgency unfinished or poorly executed. It is for this reason that successful counter-insurgency practitioners—from Lieutenant-General Ajai Singh in Assam in the 1990s to General David Petraeus in Iraq in 2007—are wary of the dangers of "mowing the lawn". The insurgency seems to just grow back after extensive, ostensibly successful, military operations. A lack of political, economic and social development triggers this regression and pushes the security forces to repeat the Clear and Hold stages of counter-insurgency operations in the area.

As evident from the experience in the Northeast and in Jammu & Kashmir, neglecting the third stage merely lowers the level of violence for years or even decades, necessitating the continued employment of central security forces on internal security duties. This is an undesirable outcome. Not only does it drain government resources, it also leaves the local population, the security forces and the political class dissatisfied. Worse, it results in the entrenchment of a conflict-economy, where vested interests have incentives to keep the conflict alive, at the cost of the well-being of the population.

It is therefore difficult to overstate the importance of a sound Build strategy. As it launches into the war against Naxalites, the UPA government must realise that it cannot be successful unless it has a strategy for the endgame.

Security forces cannot play the endgame

Ideally, civilian agencies of the state and local governments should step in to provide govern-
mechanisms to informal advisories to state governments, the security forces have been placed at the fore of most developmental activities in conflict-ravaged states in the North-east and Jammu & Kashmir. Alarmingly, this politically expedient option is now finding favour in Naxalite-affected states as well. Expedient as it may be, it is also a bad solution.

The much publicised example of security forces recently ensuring the construction of a concrete road in the Red Corridor in Chhattisgarh—with heavy attendant costs, both financial and human—is one such case of misperceived success. It serves a limited purpose of signalling the might of the state to complete a project against the will of the Naxalites. But road construction, in this particular case, is first an instrument of security and not of development. The road construction model cannot be replicated or scaled for other vital development projects. The security forces cannot build and operate schools, hospitals, markets and community centres on a large scale. Moreover, getting security forces to build roads is a grossly inefficient use of resources.

**Raise CIMPCOR—a new civilian agency**

No security force—not even the Army—has the capacity to carry out these tasks on the necessary scale. Even if financial resources are expended to create this capacity it would fundamentally detract them from their core competence.

The solution, therefore, is to create a new form of civilian capacity with the specific purpose of tackling counter-insurgency at the fundamental level. Civilian capacity is both relatively cost-effective and better suited to delivering governance and development. Placing counter-insurgency management under civilian command will accord greater legitimacy for the mission—it will not be seen as an ‘occupation’ by central security forces—and facilitate eventual hand-over of the area to the local administration.

If India is to break from the vicious cycles of the past—where insurgencies are never quite extinguished—the central government must create a new, dedicated statutory organisation to engage in the endgame of counter-insurgency. We shall use the acronym CIMPCOR, or Civilian Military Partnership for Conflict Resolution to describe it. It will enable the government to extend its non-military authority and lay the foundations for the rule of law and basic governance in areas cleared of Naxalites.

**Mandate.** CIMPCOR’s mandate should be to fill the gap between emergency humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance. It should be charged with the responsibility to put in place the building blocks for sustainable development, by building basic infrastructure, delivering basic public services and unleashing economic freedom. It should have institutional mechanisms to partner with the security forces, the local political and community leaders and specialist government agencies engaged in agriculture, education, power, telecommunications and water resources development.

**Governance.** Administratively, CIMPCOR should be placed under a revamped home ministry—but with senior-level staff drawn from various ministries and the Planning Commission. At the present time the home ministry has too much on its plate to be able to devote its resources towards internal security, leave alone development in conflict situations. The case of the National Disaster Management Authority—which remains a fledgling years after its formation—suggests that merely creating a new specialised agency is not the full answer: the ministry itself must re-orient itself towards the new priorities. If this is not possible for any reason, the next best alternative is to place CIMPCOR as an autonomous agency under the Prime Minister's Office.

**Staffing.** CIMPCOR’s staffing could be drawn from three streams: first, a core staff charged with building and maintaining the capacity to engage in short to medium-term interventions anywhere in India. Second, its deployable resources could be "lend-leased" from the armed forces, central paramilitary forces, government departments, NGOs and some public-sector units (banks, for instance). Third, it could draw from a reserve of individual specialists—with expertise in various
domains and experience in various regional contexts—employed through a system of call-down contracts.

To ensure co-ordination with the security forces engaged in the Hold stage, CIMPCOR should have adequate representation of serving and retired security forces personnel at all levels. To use the ‘Rotterdam principle’, CIMPCOR “should be as civilian as possible and as military as necessary.” Where circumstances dictate that the security forces play a key role in executing development tasks—like the road through the Red Corridor—their role would be clearly defined, with the transition process identified. In any case, the responsibility for carrying out the development work should rest with CIMPCOR.

If insurgencies in general and Naxalism in particular are the biggest threats to internal security, then it must follow that CIMPCOR must be staffed and led by exemplary individuals—from government and private sectors.

**Readiness.** In terms of operational readiness, CIMPCOR should be capable of deploying planning teams within ten days and project execution teams within two months.

It must have the capability to conduct assessments; design, implement and evaluate development programmes; provide local administration; manage contractors and funding agencies; and provide consultation and training to state government departments to facilitate early transition to local control. Its role should be catalytic—by providing staff and trainers—in rejuvenating the state governments agencies and personnel.

**Deployment terms.** CIMPCOR’s deployment could vary from six months to two years, but should be capped—perhaps at no more than three years. This is important: for a long-term deployment of CIMPCOR would undermine the very purpose of creating an institution; the aim being to facilitate a quick and smooth return to normalcy, without affecting the development goals while preserving the military success achieved by the security forces against the insurgents. An exit strategy should be written into CIMPCOR’s charter, mandating the transfer of responsibilities to the state government to start within one year of its deployment.

There are several areas in India where CIMPCOR is needed today. In the future, it is conceivable that as India’s global role expands in tandem with its economic and geopolitical interests, CIMPCOR might even have to be deployed in foreign contexts. Investing in a robust, competent and professional final-stage counter-insurgency force is not only timely, but will be forward-looking as well.

In his book *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done about It*, economist Paul Collier has shown that only economic growth decisively reduces the risk of a return to civil war. This does not mean that insurgencies are only about economics but that an upward growth trajectory makes a recurrence of war less probable. Indeed, Mr Collier found that the higher the post-war growth rate was, the harder it was to shatter the peace. Thus, growth and development, alongside security for the population, has to be the utmost priority of any counter-insurgency campaign.

If the struggle against Naxalism is not to be Sisyphean, India cannot be flippant about the endgame of counter-insurgency. It can be said with confidence that given political will and leadership, India’s security forces are competent enough to succeed against the Naxalites in the military space. Without adequate capacity to rebuild the lives, livelihoods, communities and societies ravaged by the Naxalites and the war to eliminate them, successes will be ephemeral. India needs CIMPCOR now.

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*CIMPCOR’s deployment should typically be between six months and two years, during which it catalyses the state and local governments to acquire the necessary capacity to govern. Long-term deployments will be counterproductive.*

Sushant K Singh and Nitin Pai are editors of *Pragati*. 
Where our MPs stand

M R MADHAVAN

ONE OF the main functions of Parliament is to make national laws. Bills are introduced by the government, examined by committees, discussed in the House and then voted into law. In many countries, voting records of legislators indicate their individual policy leanings, and are often debated when they contest for re-election. However, voting records of MPs rarely form the subject of public discourse in India.

A key reason for this missing analysis is the absence of voting records. Most votes in Parliament are conducted by voice votes. That is, the Speaker asks the MPs who support a motion to say “aye” and those who oppose it to say “no”. Then the Speaker rules which side has greater support. Any MP can dispute the ruling and ask for “division”, which results in recorded voting: however, this is rarely done.

The anti-defection law is also a factor that makes it difficult to draw inferences about the preferences of MPs. The argument is that MPs do not have the option to vote their view. They are bound to vote according to the party diktat, and could lose their parliamentary seats if they go against the party line. Thus, any vote indicates the preference of the party and not the preference of the MP.

It is still instructive to see how our MPs respond to government Bills. We have used a proxy to measure voting trends— their speeches during the debate on each Bill. Parties nominate MPs to speak during the debate. Usually, in their speech, MPs express their support or opposition to the Bill. We use these as an indicator of their vote. Given that these MPs are nominated by their parties, we can also extrapolate these speeches as representing the party line on the Bills.

The results are interesting. During the entire term of the 14th Lok Sabha, 92 percent of all speeches were in favour of the proposed Bill, 7 percent were opposed to the Bill, and 1 percent, ambiguous.

MPs from the main opposition party BJP supported government Bills on 84 percent of their speeches, opposed on 13 percent occasions and were ambiguous on 3 percent of the occasions. Of the 173 Bills passed by Lok Sabha (excluding finance and appropriation Bills) over five years, MPs from BJP opposed only 10.

It is interesting to see the list of Bills that the party opposed. These include the repeal of POTA and the amendment to the UAPA in 2004—which was a reversal of the NDA’s action; a Bill to establish the National Commission for Minorities Institutions; the Office of Profit Bill (that among other offices, exempted the chairperson of the National Advisory Council from the list of offices of profit); the AIIMS Amendment Bill that resulted in the termination of its director Dr. Venugopal (and was subsequently struck down by the Supreme Court); the Bill to change the name of Uttarakhand state to Uttaranchal (which was in the Congress campaign manifesto). Interestingly, they also opposed the Food Safety and Standards Bill stating that several provisions of these Bills should be reworked. The BJP’s position is surprising on two Bills: the Patents Amendment that amended the Indian system to conform to international agreements; and the Bill that permitted sale of a cement plant owned by Cement Corporation of India as part of the revival scheme of BIFR. They also opposed the Bill that modified the depiction of pictorial warnings on cigarette packets.

The CPI-M too supported most Bills. The three Bills that they opposed included the formation of the Andhra Pradesh legislative council, the establishment of the Maritime University headquartered in Chennai and the amendment to the SBI subsidiary banks that permitted greater public voting rights. Of course, in several cases, the government did not proceed with Bills that the Left parties were against; these Bills were either not introduced, or not taken up for consideration and voting. Some examples include Bills related to the pension sector, forward contracts and banking regulation. The government’s agenda included these Bills a number of times, but they were never taken up for consideration.

There could be several reasons for the lack of opposition to government proposals. First, many of the policies of the UPA government were carried over from earlier policies of the NDA government. This is especially true in the financial sector. Second, it is possible that the government brings in only those proposals which have a wide political consensus. Many Bills which faced objections from the Left parties were not taken up for consideration. Third, some proposals may still be politically difficult to oppose. The parliamentary system is supposed to be an adversarial system, with the opposition parties trying to expose the government’s weaknesses. However, the data from the 14th Lok Sabha shows that the opposition has supported the government’s proposals in an overwhelming majority of cases. This indicates that much of consensus-building occurs outside parliament, and that in several issues, there is not much of a difference between the positions of Congress and BJP.

The first full session of the 15th Lok Sabha witnessed the opposition getting their act together and stalling the introduction of the judges’ assets Bill. It would be interesting to see whether this is bodes any change to the way the opposition acts in the next few years.

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The road to achieving India’s objectives in Afghanistan lies, unfortunately, through Washington

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR

FEW CHALLENGES to India’s national security loom as large as those presented by the recent deterioration of Afghanistan. While the political implications of failure for the current US-backed government will naturally be severe for the West, last year’s terrorist attacks in Mumbai suggest that it is India that may be much more directly affected from a purely security standpoint. But despite the grave dangers posed to Indian interests by a fragile Afghanistan, New Delhi has very little room to effect changes in its favour. There is added irony in the fact that the entity most capable of shaping the outcome in Afghanistan—the United States—broadly shares most of India’s objectives. One would have to considerably amend Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s publicly stated vision of the region’s future to get it right: the road from India to Kabul lies not through Lahore, but rather through Washington. The vigorous debates underway on the subject in the United States are therefore of some significance for India.

While public discussion of the situation in Afghanistan has been rife with uninformed analysis regarding American calculations, misperceptions run both ways. India’s role is variously portrayed in the United States as that of an ambitious regional power mercilessly attempting to extend its sphere of influence (to Pakistan’s detriment) or that of irrelevant non-player. Last month, The Wall Street Journal misinterpreted a comment made by foreign minister SM Krishna as a suggestion that the United States negotiate a political settlement with the Taliban leadership, something no right-minded Indian official would publicly endorse. Evidently, the Indian government has a sizeable task ahead of it, if its intention is to convey its vision of an ideal end-state in Afghanistan to an American audience.
The American debate
The current US government inherited a rapidly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan from the George W Bush presidency. The number of violent incidents had risen over 35 percent in Kabul, and over 75 percent in southern Afghanistan between 2007 and 2008, while civilian casualties resulting from fighting more than doubled in the two years after 2006. During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama repeatedly framed the Afghanistan war as the “good” war, contrasting it to the unpopular war in Iraq, which was widely perceived in the United States as an avoidable conflict. His political base, though, had little appetite for increasing the United States’ presence in Afghanistan.

Mr Obama’s election victory spurred a vigorous debate on the path forward, an evolved form of which continues today. The battle lines have been unusual, not adhering to traditional ideological, partisan or sectoral differences. A diverse group of individuals advocated decreasing the American footprint in Afghanistan, although for varying, and sometimes conflicting, reasons. British diplomat-turned-writer Rory Stewart, conservative newspaper columnist George Will, Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin and military scholar Andrew Bacevich, all influential but coming from very different backgrounds, argued in favour of a limited counter-terrorism mission, which scrapped the more involved and expensive aspects of “nation-building”. Their rationales were equally varied, and included the belief that a fiercely tribal and increasingly resentful Afghan society was beyond salvation, a view that fostering democracy in Afghanistan was a fruitless, expensive and unnecessary enterprise, and a calculation that the means being used to attain the United States’ narrow objectives were counter-productive and damaging. Vice-President Joseph Biden became the leading voice favouring limited American objectives within Mr Obama’s inner circle.

On the other side of the debate was an equally motley crew. Ex-CIA and National Security Council official Bruce Riedel, staunch neo-conservatives including many former Bush administration officials, and a large number of counter-insurgency practitioners and experts argued in favour of a comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy, as did individuals like Sarah Chayes, a former reporter for National Public Radio and grassroots organiser based in Kandahar. The mistakes of the Bush administration, all of them felt, involved treating Afghanistan strictly as a limited counter-terrorism mission.

The initial differences within the Obama administration on the exact goals of the Afghanistan war led to a two-month-long review led by Mr Riedel. The resulting white paper reminded Americans of the casus belli and provided a clear diagnosis of the problems the United States faced. The “core goal” according to the review was “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.” This specific end-state, in the minds of the review committee, logically necessitated a set of broader objectives. In its final form, however, the white paper was interpreted differently by different constituents. Counter-terrorism advocates saw in it a justification of their views: if the ultimate objective was to defeat al-Qaeda and affiliate groups, the prescriptions should naturally be limited in scope and investment.

In fact, they could conceivably be based on a strategy involving drone attacks, special forces, and some form of ideological containment. Not so, argued others. The goal of comprehensively defeating al-Qaeda could not be accomplished properly without a concerted effort to ensure that the Taliban could not re-establish its presence in Afghanistan or Pakistan, which would in turn involve securing local populations while building up infrastructure and governing institutions.

Yet another strategy?
Implementing a strategy to achieve the goals outlined by the Obama administration has proven considerably more difficult than distilling American objectives. That task falls to a smaller set of senior civilian and military leaders, including Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, military commander General Stanley McChrystal, ambassador to Kabul Karl Eikenberry, and commander of US Central Command General David Petraeus, among others. Problems of implementation are complicated considerably by the short timeframe. McChrystal believes he has one to two years to demonstrate progress, although political resistance in the United States and Europe points to that being a generous estimate.

For the political leadership in Washington, one eye is possibly on November 2010, when midterm Congressional elections will serve as a barometer of public satisfaction with Obama’s performance as president. A strategic review conducted under General McChrystal and submitted to the White House in August was meant to outline his strategy for salvaging the Afghanistan enterprise.
General McChrystal’s report places considerable emphasis on government corruption, local governance, developing the Afghan army and police, cultural sensitivities and improved civil-military coordination. All of that sounds good, even, one might say, obvious. Yet there remain serious questions about whether the resources will be available for some of the more ambitious targets. One such example is raising 42,000 army recruits “by Fall 2010” (a date advanced, perhaps coincidentally, to precede US Congressional elections). It is precisely in cases such as this that India has the potential to play a constructive but non-intrusive role.

While the report avoids defining the exact strength of US forces required to implement the suggested strategy, General McChrystal repeatedly calls for more troops, and some of his informal advisors have stated their desire to see an infusion of as many as forty thousand. Deployment on that scale will naturally prove politically unpopular, as would the implications of General McChrystal’s suggestion that US troops take on higher risk by venturing outside safe areas, a policy which could likely lead to higher casualties.

Roadblocks to success
Mr Holbrooke has publicly outlined three factors that could lead to US failure in Afghanistan: terrorist safe havens in Pakistan, rising civilian casualties, and endemic government corruption. The first is being dealt with by a combination of pressure on Pakistani security forces and the much-maligned strategy of targeted killings east of the Durand Line using Predator or Reaper drones which, while not ideal, appears to be garnering some short-term successes. The second involves an extended counter-insurgency campaign, to be waged under General McChrystal. Unfortunately, as the recently-concluded Afghan elections demonstrated, there is far less attention being paid to the third. In part, this is because there is little that the United States or any other external actor can do to overcome the problems associated with corruption and questions of legitimacy in such a limited timeframe. Again, India—as a multi-ethnic, economically developing, parliamentary democratic powerhouse with strong cultural ties to Afghanistan—has the potential to make sizeable contributions on matters of governance, in accordance with its own interests.

If not for the daunting timeframe dictated largely by political considerations, there would be room for cautious optimism on Afghanistan. The new US assessment of the major challenges in Afghanistan has clarified objectives considerably and, in theory, the United States has the resources to salvage the situation. Leading members of the Obama administration charged with crafting and implementing policy towards Afghanistan have made a compelling case in favour of a more ambitious counter-insurgency strategy. However, this strategy continues to be held hostage to increasingly vocal critics. Many of their arguments, while often logical and grounded in considerable local expertise, fall short in their appreciation of long-term political implications of failure and their faith in Afghan society. Unfortunately other, less informed, analyses can be more than a little patronising in their characterisations of Afghanistan and short-sighted in their assessments of history.

For example, one argument frequently forwarded is that of Afghanistan as the “graveyard of empires.” Its inhospitable terrain, tribal social structures and fierce militarism mean that it has never been conquered, and may in fact be unconquerable. That narrative is informed almost solely by the Soviet experience in the 1980s (when the Afghan mujahideen received considerable external support from the United States), and the campaigns of the British in the nineteenth century (whose purpose was not to conquer and rule so much as pacify in order to create a buffer zone). Yet prior to that, present-day Afghanistan was home to numerous empires, including those of the Bactrians, Kushans, Ghaznavids, Mughals, Sikhs and Durransis.

A second myth is that democracy or stable government is incompatible with tribal values. This line of reasoning is reminiscent of such notions of democracy being inconsistent with “Asian values”, a fiction that has only too recently been exposed as such. Finally, Afghanistan is often believed to be irredeemable due to its widespread illiteracy. But India, which admittedly benefited from stronger institutions inherited from decades of British rule, managed to forge a successful pluralistic democracy with a population that was just one-fifth literate in 1947.

The challenges to establishing some level of authoritative government and population security in Afghanistan are indeed daunting. Yet India, which has much to lose by the United States’ failures there, is well-positioned to do its bit, not least by the promise of its example.

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POPPULAR CINEMA in general, and the Indian film industry in particular, is frequently accused of caricature. The critics are not wrong: with its song and dance routine; muddled story lines; and escapist fare, popular cinema of which Bollywood fantasy dramas represent an apogee frequently bear little semblance to reality.

Unrealistic and simplistic as Bollywood may be, its exaggerations are still reflective of the prevailing social norms. The evolution of Amitabh Bachchan, easily the tallest Bollywood star over the last few decades, reflects the changing milieu of Hindi cinema, which, in turn, draws inspiration from how the Indian society has evolved.

In a typical potboiler of the 1970’s, Mr Bachchan, the “angry young man”, frequently played characters, who, despite being poor, were generally happy; mouthed the best dialogues; and wooed the prettiest heroines. Satisfied with their station in life, their angst was directed against the archetypical ‘system’ which denied them the happiness their poverty provided. In contrast, the rich industrialist might live in chandeliered houses, and drive opulent cars, but was left alone, broken and lonely, till he realised the error of his ways. A visitor from outer space could be forgiven for thinking that poverty was a blessing in disguise, while being moneyed was an unmitigated disaster.

Mr Bachchan, the aged superstar, has travelled a fair distance from those apocalyptic days. Now in movies expressly made for the nostalgic Non-resident Indians (NRIs), he plays the stern patriarch, presiding over joint families who despite the riches have not forsaken their Indian roots and traditions. Money is no longer a matter of scorn or derision but of admiration.

The two extremes of Mr Bachchan’s oeuvre capture the distance India has travelled: From a extremely poor, cynical, and angry country to the post-liberalisation India, which, despite its poverty, has acquired a sense of confidence and self-worth and indeed, perhaps even cockiness.

But despite its celebration of entrepreneurship and wealth creation, there remains a hesitancy—particularly among the political and intellectual elite—to openly embrace the idea of a consumerist culture. A romanticised vision places self-denial—howsoever hypocritical and meaningless—at a higher pedestal vis-à-vis those find nothing abhorrent about individuals who choose to spend their wealth as they deem fit. Perhaps, the angst stems from India’s traditional ethos which has always eulogised the idea of abnegation. Or perhaps it is due to the fact that India remains an extremely poor country—as the critics ask: In a country where millions go hungry, should ‘vulgar’ displays of wealth be condoned?

It would be useful to examine the recent public debate on the UPA government’s austerity drive in this light. While the government has argued that its emphasis on austerity merely reaffirms its pro-poor credentials, the critics have dismissed it as a symbolic exercise—after all, the savings accrued from ministers traveling in economy class are hardly substantial enough to deserve the brouhaha. Others have pointed out that the government’s stand is hypocritical: Shashi Tharoor and SM Krishna were virtually hounded out of five star hotels when the entire cost was reportedly being borne by the aforementioned ministers while government denizens continue to live in regal bungalows in Lutyens Delhi at the taxpayers’ expense.

While valid, these criticisms miss the larger point. The Indian government can hardly be accused of efficiency; the opulent ministerial houses

As long the Indian society remains comfortable with the idea of poverty, the policy prescriptions will remain statist in nature, designed not to pull people permanently out of poverty but to make their stay in their preordained state a little more comfortable.
are merely a small manifestation of it. And as Pratap Bhanu Mehta, president of the Centre for Policy Research, has pointed out, symbolism has its own value in polity and in shaping of public opinion—after all, even the grand 26th January parade is only a symbolic celebration of the Indian Republic.

The fundamental problem with the austerity drive and its glorification in certain quarters is that like Mr Bachchan’s movies from the 1970’s, it legitimises poverty. The clarion calls for return to days of Gandhian socialism might be mere sloganeering but it still represents the idea that poverty is an elevated state of consciousness attaching to it an ill-deserved moralistic value. Now that large swathes of India are enveloped in the darkness of poverty is undeniable. Whether couched in terms of “inclusive growth” or “growth with human face”, Indian growth story needs to embrace hundreds of millions who continue to live in poverty.

But an essential pre-requisite for a successful war against poverty is its recognition as a debilitating and dehumanising experience for those who are really poor. As long the Indian society remains comfortable with the idea of poverty, the policy prescriptions will remain statist in nature designed not to pull people permanently out of poverty but to make their stay in their pre-ordained state a little more comfortable: the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), currently the flavour of the season after the UPA government’s spectacular electoral victory in the 2009 general elections, is a classic example of this muddled thinking. Unsurprisingly, the representative of this regressive line of thought, Congress Party leader Rahul Gandhi tells David Miliband, the visiting British foreign secretary, that the rural hinterlands of Amethi represent the “real India”, willy-nilly arguing that those with access to comforts which money provides are not part of the republic.

Admittedly, the nouveau riche can be frequently be crass and offensive to aesthetic sensibilities; others may find Epicurean lifestyles morally troubling. But ultimately what constitutes excessive consumption and what is merely meeting the basic necessities of life is a subjective judgment best left to the individual. Moral outrage which is necessarily the function of idiosyncratic attitudes and experiences should not guide public policy. In any case, is not lack of class preferable to deification of poverty? Or to borrow from Shiv Vishwanathan’s idiom, is not conspicuous consumerism better than debilitating poverty?

Those naturally inclined to prefer a simple lifestyle—Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, for instance—can continue to do so. The operative word here is a naturally. The celebration of austerity merely insults the poor. After all, what comfort is to a poor struggling man in a remote village if the marriages in New Delhi are less ostentatious? Or if Sonia Gandhi flies economy class and the young Gandhi scion takes the train? Indeed, much more column space and television sound bytes have been devoted to these spectacles vis-à-vis the tragedy of the drought-hit Indian farmer.

Yes, as already conceded, symbolism is an important part of public life. But it is merely means to an end; it should not become the end itself for that results in feel-good policies which do little except provide succour to some ‘concerned’ souls. The former American ambassador to India, JK Galbraith, once described Nehruvian commitment to public enterprise as “post-office socialism for it operated at no profit, hopefully no loss, with no particular efficiency and with no other clear purpose in mind.” Replace public enterprise with austerity and Galbraith’s pity comment wonderfully captures the import of the austerity drive: a meaningless, self-serving and ultimately dangerous exercise.
Nukes and neighbours
RORY MEDCALF, director at the Lowy Institute for International Policy focuses on the complications in North Asia in the wake of a renewed push by Washington towards nuclear disarmament. In an article "Wicked weapons North Asia's nuclear tangle", the author provides the background of the intersecting interests of North Asian powers such as the United States, China, and Japan and highlights potential trajectories that demand mutual and coordinated concessions of Washington, Beijing, Tokyo.

Hatoyama doctrine
YUKIO HATOYAMA, Japan's new prime minister, states that the creation of an East Asian community to support economic cooperation and national security in the wake of declining US power and expanding Chinese power was one of his goals.

In "My Political Philosophy", an op-ed in Wall Street Journal, he argues that the underlying structures required for the formation of a regional economic bloc were already in place and that the way to reduce bilateral tensions was to move towards greater regional integration targeting the establishment of a future common Asian currency.

China sees a strategic window of opportunity
EVAN S MEDEIROS, analyst at the Center for Asia Pacific Policy at RAND institute analyses the multiple layers that constitute China's foreign policy strategy, and assesses the challenges for China in implementing its strategy and implications for US policy and interests.

In a RAND monograph "China's International Behaviour - Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification", he posits that Chinese leaders have concluded that their external security environment is favourable and that the next 15 to 20 years represented a "strategic window of opportunity" for China to achieve its leading objective of national revitalisation through continued economic, social, military and political development while deftly leveraging the current international system.

Beijing and Naypyidaw
An INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP report, titled "China's Myanmar Dilemma", examines Chinese national and provincial policy towards Myanmar and its implications for international approaches toward Myanmar. The authors suggest that China's influence on Myanmar may have been overstated and call for continued pressure by the West in the Security Council and other fora while emphasising to China the unsustainable nature of its current policies.

Pakistan's jihad factories
AYESHA SIDDIQA claims that Pakistan's South Punjab has become a jihadi hub due to a potent mix of economic stagnation, Islamic fundamentalism and ideological indoctrination at madrassas. In an article "Terror's Training Ground" in Newsline, she also claims that the authorities continue to be in denial while the number of madrassas in the Punjab rose to more than 3000, converting people to Salafism and training jihadis; and the state apparatus as well as the political parties have tie-ups with the militant groups. She offers a strategic solution wherein the state takes care of the economic and developmental interests of the local population.

Counter-corruption and COIN
MICHAEL O'HANLON, director of Research at Brookings Institution and JANE HARMAN, member of the US Congress lament that anti-corruption campaign had been largely overlooked in the west's strategy to address the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan.

In an article for Brookings Institution, "Troops to Progress on Afghanistan's Corruption", they argue that the counter-insurgency strategy would not succeed if a larger anti-corruption effort including such measures as ombudsmen at various levels to handle citizen complaints and firing of corrupt officials, were not implemented.

Terrorism and public opinion
ALAN KRUEGER, assistant secretary at the US treasury department and JITKA MALECKOVA of the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences examine the effect of public opinion in a country on the number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by its citizens or groups against other countries by analysing Gallup poll data of public opinion in 19 Middle Eastern and North African countries who disapprove of the leadership of nine world powers. In an article "Attitudes and Action: Public Opinion and the Occurrence of International Terrorism" in Science they refute the assertion that terrorists act independently of their countrymen's attitudes toward the leadership of the countries they attack.

Mitigating commitments and emission rights
ARVIND PANAGARIYA, professor at Columbia University, states that developed countries have chosen to play strategically on climate change by framing the negotiation in terms of mitigating commitments rather than emission rights that could let them claim the moral high ground for large cuts and yet walk away with maximum rights to pollute in the future. In an article for Brookings Institution, "Climate Change and India: Is There a Basis for US Pressure!", he calls on the developed countries to substantially cut their emissions before asking developing countries to commit to mitigation.

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Partners and their naturalness

A balanced and even-handed account of India-US relations

DHARUVA JAISHANKAR

WHILE IT has received extraordinary attention, especially in recent years, the bilateral relationship between India and the United States has been the subject of surprisingly few book-length studies by Americans. While a handful have been well-researched and well-informed, fewer still can be considered definitive, in the sense of having been widely read and somewhat influential in shaping policymakers’ perceptions. The absence of authoritative policy-oriented studies is surprising at several levels. The traditional arguments concerning India’s importance to the United States are well known, but several factors that might otherwise impede researchers, such as language, are certainly not applicable. Rather, two other factors appear to have led to this state of affairs: inaccessibility and the unfortunate lack of demand.

Among earlier works, Dennis Kux’s India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991 remains the most significant American account of the bilateral relationship and continues to cast an imposing shadow over the policy landscape. Yet the subsequent sea changes in India’s economic performance, its nuclear policy and its overall political orientation after 1991 render his book of little value to the contemporary policymaker beyond the historic, although it remains remarkably useful in that regard.

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Several other studies by leading American experts have limited themselves to narrow foci, such as nuclear matters. These include George Perkovich’s magnificent India’s Nuclear Bomb, and Strobe Talbott’s engaging memoir, appropriately titled Engaging India. Yet it is lamentable that the most influential book-length studies on the bilateral relationship linger on uncomfortable periods in the increasingly remote past, or on trenchant but one-dimensional differences.

This literary backdrop makes Teresita Schaffer’s recently-released book India and the United States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership, all the more necessary. Ms Schaffer, who served for three decades in the US Foreign Service, including for a time as the senior-most State Department official dealing with South Asia, is particularly well-placed to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the subject. Clearly capturing the many different aspects of the evolving relationship, Ms Schaffer portrays both the United States and India from the other’s vantage point, a commendable and not entirely easy task. Rising above common misperceptions in Washington and New Delhi concerning the other’s national objectives, her study provides a lucid and pithy overview of each country’s worldview, and where the other fits in to it. Topically, Ms Schaffer’s strength is in incorporating economic factors into the political and military facets of the relationship, something the traditionally security-focused American expert community often overlooks.

Apart from seizing upon the centrality of economic considerations in India’s national interests, Ms Schaffer clearly appreciates India’s sense of autonomy, security and position in the global order. Central to US calculations, she argues, are India’s growing clout in Asian affairs, its attraction as a viable economic and commercial partner, and its effective veto power on a host of global issues. But while she is correct to downplay the effect of democracy as a binding factor (“[T]he United States and India should not assume that their common commitment to democracy automatically leads to a foreign policy partnership”) Ms Schaffer does appear to overstate both India’s perceived reluctance to engage in meaningful security cooperation (“Indian policymakers [have] difficulty in deciding how publicly they are willing to be associated with the United States on regional security issues”) and the promise of traditional energy security—that is, involving fossil fuels—furthering the partnership (“India’s energy needs lie at the heart of some of the most impor-
Beyond the major thematic aspects of Indo-US ties, Ms Schaffer dedicates a good portion of her book to a tour d’horizon of third parties as varied as Japan, Russia, Israel, China, Afghanistan and Europe, all of whom have the potential to play either facilitator or spoilsport to the relationship between her two primary subjects. Among other things, she puts to rest the notion—still widely accepted in Washington—of deep and broad Indian support for the current regime in Tehran. As she observes, Indian and US attitudes towards Iran’s nuclear program mark “an important point of strategic convergence” but the two governments “do not agree on what to do about it.” That assessment, or a variant, crops up repeatedly in the course of her study.

The greatest assets of Ms Schaffer’s book are arguably its balance and level-headedness. Emphasising those qualities may sound uncharitable, but they are in fact less common than one might suppose, given the tendency of policy-oriented writers to exaggerate the importance of their subjects for rhetorical purposes. Critics may deride balanced and evenhanded books as simply encapsulating conventional thinking, but in the days when popular discourse is regularly hijacked by conspiracy theories in New Delhi about US intentions and gross mischaracterisations in Washington of India, a comprehensive assessment of the two countries’ relationship presented in a clear and concise manner deserves a warm welcome.

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