

# No Need to Talk Answering the Maoist Question♦

Uddipan Mukherjee\*

It no doubt appears interesting and away from the normal when the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh says he is ready to talk to the Maoists.

It is all the more surprising when this comes from the top political leadership of a state which has been negotiating Left-Wing Extremists (LWE) since its formation – with the history of the insurgency in the region going back to the 1980s. The Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Raman Singh however puts across one definite condition – the top leadership of the Maoists must come to the parleys. He is categorical as he says that the government won't budge until the ultras plead for discussions.

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♦ The author dedicate this piece to the memory of his respected father, Bimal Kumar Mukherjee.

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Fine enough.

Raman Singh asserts that the government is ready, but cannot talk to district-level Maoists since as per strict hierarchy, the district-level leaders only follow the directions of top Maoists. Whenever there are talks – and it needs to be noted with attention – it would be with the top leadership; Singh stresses the point.

For Singh, the ‘top leadership’ includes the Politburo members of the Communist Party of India – Maoist (CPI-M). Perhaps, in his statement he also implicitly includes, and justifiably so, the members of the Central Military Commission, along with the Politburo.<sup>1</sup>

#### DATA IS IMPORTANT

On April 16, 2018, a few days before Raman Singh came out with his approach to ‘talks’ with the Maoists, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA) released a report<sup>2</sup>, which took stock of the Left-Wing insurgency that India is facing since 1967 – the erstwhile Naxalbari metamorphosing into the post-2004 ‘Maoist rebellion’.<sup>3</sup>

The report projected a fresh and encouraging dimension. Though it considers Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and

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1 Brajendra Nath Singh, “Willing to talk to top Maoist Leadership: Chhattisgarh CM”, *The Quint*, April 4, 2018, accessed on June 8, 2018, <https://www.thequint.com/hot-news-text/willing-to-talk-to-top-maoist-leadership-chhattisgarh-cm>.

2 “Maoists area of influence shrinks; 44 districts removed from affected list: Union Home Secy”, *The Economic Times*, April 15, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://economictimes.com/news/defence/maoists-area-of-influence-shrinks-44-districts-removed-from-affected-list-union-home-secy/articleshow/63769620.cms?>.

3 For an exposition on Naxalism, read Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, 1987 Oxford University Press, Oxford, and Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Shishu Sahitya Samsad, Kolkata, 2008.

Bihar as states that are severely affected by LWE; West Bengal, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are now considered partially affected. Interestingly, between 2004 and 2011, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh were a part of the severely affected category. Efficient counter-insurgency tactics through the elite ‘Greyhound’ squads in Andhra Pradesh and the targeted approach against the top Maoist leadership in West Bengal (the elimination of Kishenji in 2011 being the game-changer) surely bore fruits.

Another riveting yet expected aspect of the report is that the Maoists are making a foray into Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and planning to link the Western and Eastern Ghats through these states. After being repeatedly hounded out of their present guerilla base in the Dandakaranya region, it is quite logical for them to establish a fresh base at the tri-junction of these three states. The report further notes that the Maoists are attempting to make inroads into Northeast India – again implying a variety of strategic issues.

If one turns the pages of history, an interesting story pops up. In the early 1970s during the Bangladesh Liberation War, a number of Manipuri activists and leaders ended up in prison; especially in Tripura, where they came into contact with Naxalite prisoners. This in turn influenced the Manipuri groups with the ideology of Mao Zedong’s strategy of Protracted People’s War (PPW).<sup>4</sup>

It is not unlikely that Maoists could spread their net in the Northeast – more so, with the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) existing in Manipur since 1980.

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4 For details on the terror network of the Maoists in the North-East, see Uddipan Mukherjee, “Maoists, North-East and China- Expanding net of terror”, *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, December 19, 2011, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.claws.in/744/maoists-north-east-and-china-expanding-net-of-terror-uddipan-mukherjee.html>.

Being a geographical continuity to North Bengal via the so-called Chicken's Neck Corridor, and with the historical origin of the insurgency at Naxalbari in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Assam proffers an extension of base for the Maoists – especially due to the presence of tea plantations and its proletariat workers. Exploitation of workers and concomitant grievance fuel an anti-establishment sentiment, augmented by the urban-bred-cum-intellectual Maoist leadership. Similarly, tribal and ethnic issues are intricately entwined with the political realm to give rise to a militant insurgency in other states of the Northeast – at times facilitating inroads for the Maoist ideology, which seems to offer amelioration for the neglected and deprived.

The upshot of the UMHA report of April 16, 2018 was that 44 of the 126 LWE-affected districts reporting negligible violence were removed from the list. Eight new districts, however, which witnessed Maoist activities, were added to the account. Curiously and with somewhat ominous portents, out of eight districts, three belong to Kerala. Currently, just 30 worst affected districts contribute to 90 per cent of LWE violence in the country.<sup>5</sup>

On the occasion of Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary on April 14, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the Maoists to give up the path of violence. Nevertheless, he was pragmatic and tactical enough to expose the 'true nature' of the ultras, stating, "None of their chiefs is from your area. They have come from outside to your state. If you read their names, surnames, you will understand who they are. They do not die. They hide safely in the jungles. They send your children in

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5 Rahul Tripathi, "The contours of the new Red map", *The Indian Express*, April 17, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/naxalism-maoist-attacks-home-ministry-modi-govt-national-policy-and-action-plan-5140028/>.

front to face the bullet. Would you leave your children behind such people”<sup>6</sup>

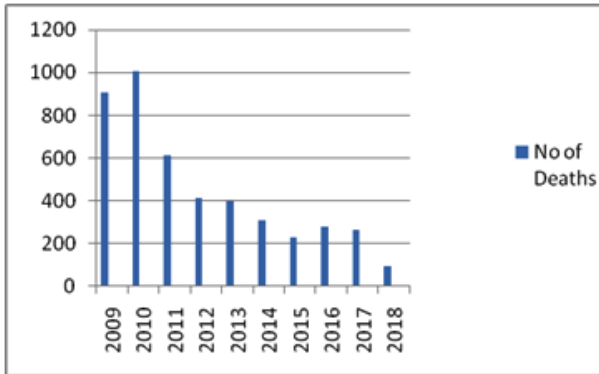


Table 1- Number of Deaths in Maoist Violence<sup>7</sup>

### WHAT’S HAPPENING IN PHILIPPINES, COLOMBIA AND NEPAL?

Separated by over 4,000 km from the place of conflict in India, the daughter of the President of Philippines Rodrigo Duterte appealed to her father to reconsider his decision to resume talks with communist insurgents. Her words echoed the obvious, “Mr. President, the country will move forward if the government is able to eliminate the rebels and end this senseless rebellion. Just like a battered lover, there is a time to finally say no to pain and suffering”<sup>8</sup>.

6 “PM Modi urges Maoists to shun path of violence”, *The Times of India*, April 14, 2018, accessed on June 8, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-urges-maoists-to-shun-path-of-violence/articleshow/63765933.cms>.

7 The Histogram clearly indicates fall in violence after 2010, when Azad and Kishenji were eliminated by the security forces. Data is taken from *Union Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, <https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/LWEO300520180945.pdf>.

8 Manolo B. Jara, “Duterte asked to end talks with Red rebels”, *The Gulf Today*, April 15, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.gulftoday.ae/portal/a2a42fb8-1916-45ee-acb7-514e3b8943f7.aspx>.

Quite similar to its Indian counterpart, the Communist insurgency which Manila is combating began in the historic year of 1969, when not only the South Asian people, but even people in Latin America as well as Europe, were demanding ‘change’. An ambience of resistance swept all over the globe. While chasing his dream of a Communist world, Che Guevara was being hunted down within the confines of land-locked Bolivia and when Mao Zedong voiced his concerns regarding revisionism creeping into the domain of Communism through the controversial Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution – guns were taken up by a section of the populace in the erstwhile colonies of the European powers. The Philippines was one of these. India was another. Interestingly, both the countries are still witness to the two movements which commenced almost in parallel – at nearly the same time, only separated spatially.

Another look from India’s zone of conflict – this time towards the west – across 15,000 km over the Atlantic, presents a similar yet different view. In the year 2016, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) reacted angrily to the arrest of one of its prominent members, Seuxis Paucis Hernández Solarte, *alias* Jesús Santrich, on drug charges, while part of the main delegation at the negotiations that led to the peace deal announced in Cuba.<sup>9</sup> They warned the government that the move is an obstacle to peace – a peace whose initial failed attempt bestowed the Nobel Peace Prize on Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016. Of course, a conflict which had claimed 220,000 lives and displaced eight million people since 1964 deserved topmost attention by the world

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9 “Colombian president says Nobel peace prize win helped end civil war”, *The Guardian*, December 10, 2016, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/10/colombia-nobel-peace-prize-juan-manuel-santos>.

at large. However, the Cuban and Norwegian governments, which sponsored the talks and the peace agreement, expressed concerns.<sup>10</sup> To make matters more volatile, 64 former combatants have been killed since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016. Chris Kraul, writes on June 5, 2018, that FARC claims 17 relatives of its ex-rebels have also been killed.<sup>11</sup>

In the Colombian case, an unprecedented military offensive – first under President Álvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010, which continued with minor adjustments under Santos – reduced FARC’s total strength. The military onslaught by the government dramatically reduced FARC’s territorial control and pushed the guerrillas into ever more remote and sparsely populated hideouts, often close to territorial or internal border regions. This sustained action by the state ‘pushed’ the guerrillas to sit for negotiations.

A fourth vertex of the ‘insurgency quadrilateral’ is Nepal – with India, Philippines and Colombia being the remaining three vertices. The final outcome in Nepal is analogous to that of Colombia, but the process which led to it is quite dissimilar. A strategic lesson to be gleaned from peace talks is the fact that rebels, especially communist ultras who believe in protracted guerrilla warfare, come to the negotiating table either when they see a victory on the horizon or are cornered in the military sphere and find peace to be the viable alternative to survive

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10 “Cuba, Norway Say Colombia-FARC Peace ‘Living Difficult Moments’”, *Telesur TV*, April 16, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Cuba-Norway-Concerned-About-Colombia-Peace-Accord-With-FARC-20180416-0008.html>.

11 Chris Kraul, “Killings of demobilized rebels threaten peace process in Colombia”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-colombia-farc-killings-20180605-story.html>.

for the time being, as well as to exist in permanence.<sup>12</sup> FARC agreeing to talk with the authorities under the tutelage of Cuba and Norway is an instance of the latter, while the peace offer of the Nepali Maoists was a typical example of the former.

Against this checkered backdrop, the moot point of the discourse is whether an option for talks is viable/feasible/profitable enough for the Indian Government from tactical or strategic perspective – more so, when it is in a ‘position of strength’ and the Left-Wing hardliners are losing their traditional ground.

The laying down of arms by FARC rebels or by the Nepali Maoists can serve as a Conflict Resolution Model for the sub-continent, no doubt. One issue, however, is worth noting.

Though the strength of FARC rebels diminished over the years, the civil war was still very much ongoing. It created ripples down the Santos administration and that meant the Colombian government was way too eager to resolve the conflict, even through negotiations mediated by third parties. Nepal, on the other hand, was always hanging on the anachronistic pendulum of a monarchical government and with its ‘not so challenging’ armed forces, couldn’t offer a tough resistance to the Maoists.

The Maoists in India are cornered due to loss of leaders and cadre. Though they are extending themselves and attempting to spread their tentacles to other parts of the country, towards the north-east and into the south, this is essentially a long term perspective. With its formidable Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) at the forefront and the mighty Army to back up them, the Indian Government is not under any serious threat so as to even sit near the discussion table.

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12 For a brief history of the Maoist Civil War in Colombia, see Uddipan Mukherjee, “Fragile Peace in Colombia”, *Diplomatic Courier*, March 18, 2016, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/fragile-peace-in-colombia/>.



Moreover, the Indian authorities appear confident that they will weed out the insurgency permanently through a security-cum-development model. In May 2017, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh announced a new strategy against the Maoists<sup>13</sup>, called SAMADHAN. The acronym elaborated into S: Smart leadership, A: aggressive strategy, M: motivation and training, A: actionable intelligence, D: dashboard-based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas), H: harnessing technology, A: Action Plan for each theatre and N: no access to financing.

The Maoists too, especially their top leadership is not eager to ‘talk’ because it is obvious that, at this stage, they have to ‘lay down arms’ as a pre-condition for talks. Hence, the ultras are not willing to put across the idea of talks *suo moto* and lose grounds in the negotiation at the very outset. Unlike the instance of Colombia, third party mediation in the Indian case is out of question – at least for now, since the issue is not of such gravity as to pull in the world’s major powers. Moreover, the Maoist issue in India does not affect any border areas and has remained primarily a domestic problem.

All said, the peace processes in Colombia and Nepal do provide empirical evidence of conflict resolution. Rebellions may systematically decline because of the following features:<sup>14</sup>

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13 S K Gurung, “SAMADHAN: Rajnath Singh coins an acronym to wipe out left-wing terror”, *The Economic Times*, May 8, 2017, accessed on June 09, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/rajnath-singh-calls-for-unity-of-purpose-to-tackle-naxals/articleshow/58571588.cms>.

14 For detailed discussions, see Paul W. Staeheli, “Collapsing insurgent organizations through leadership decapitation: a Comparison of targeted killing and Targeted incarceration in insurgent Organizations”, Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School March 2010, file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/10Mar\_Staeheli.pdf and Martha Crenshaw, “How Terrorism Declines”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 1991, pp 69-87.

1. physical defeat
2. decision of the group to abandon terrorist strategy
3. organisational disintegration.

In the Indian context, it may be proposed that some or all of these features may be achieved through ‘talks’. But ‘talks’ or any attempts towards negotiation with the Maoists, have failed in the past. Moreover, bringing the guerrillas to the negotiating table is always accompanied by the danger of giving them the space to regroup.

When government officers are abducted as a quid-pro-quo mechanism to release some ultras, ‘talks’ between the Government and the Maoists are a natural fallout. This has happened a couple of times at least since 2010.

Rights activists and mediators like Swami Agnivesh had even appealed to both the Government and the Maoists to opt for a 72-hour ceasefire to facilitate a peace process.<sup>15</sup> According to Agnivesh and others, the peace process probably could have shaped up, but was abruptly halted when reports of the death of the Maoist spokesperson Cherukuri Rajkumar *aka* Azad surfaced in the first week of July 2010.

In 2009, the year when the Lalgarh uprising re-ignited the flames of the insurgency in West Bengal – Azad had stated his party’s intentions of holding talks with the Government, in a letter to Swami Agnivesh.

However, in May 2010, speaking to the media from the confines of Bastar in Central India, Ramana, a senior Maoist leader, rejected the offer for ‘talks’ by the Government and said, “We cannot give up our weapons.”<sup>16</sup>

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15 Joseph John, “Won’t shy from talks with Naxals”, *MSN News*, February 13, 2011, accessed on February 22, 2011, <http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=4915485>.

16 Anuj Chopra, “India’s Maoist rebels spurn government offer of talks”, *The National*, May 19, 2010, accessed on June 9, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/india-s-maoist-rebels-spurn-government-offer-of-talks-1.556371>.

Referring back to the Filipino case, the Philippines Government and the Maoist-guerrillas had been involved in ‘stop-start’ negotiations over the past 25 years, without any concrete results. In the meantime, the fighting has consumed close to 40,000 lives.

In a seminal work titled: “How Insurgencies End”, published by RAND Corporation in 2010, researchers Ben Connable and Martin Libicki demonstrated on the basis of data that, the longer an insurgency lasts, the more likely the government is to win.<sup>17</sup> In tune with this finding, it may be stated that the state-actors would generally benefit if a low-intensity insurgency lasts long. Besides, until the rebellion spills into major towns and cities, the danger from an insurgency to the security of the nation-state is not really significant.

### **CAN GANDHI COME TO THE RESCUE?**

The messiah of peace, non-violence and truth, Mahatma Gandhi was pragmatic in his approach while spearheading the Indian National Movement. He followed a methodology of Struggle-Truce-Struggle, so as to conserve the energy of the masses and on each occasion, carry on the Satyagraha with renewed vigour.

This was sensible and tactical. After all, Gandhi’s war was also a protracted war by and for the people. If the people were drained of their adrenaline too soon, even though it was a non-violent movement, the very objective of pressuring the British Raj would hardly have been served.

The Maoists however are no Gandhians – not even ‘Gandhians with guns’, though some commentators choose to elevate them to that level. Nevertheless, as far as strategy and tactics are concerned, they reflect an uncanny resemblance

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17 Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, “How Insurgencies End”, *RAND Corporation*, 2010, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG965.html>.

with the Gandhian variety. Periods of peace are to be treated as punctuation marks in the path of the Protracted People's War (PPW), suitably adjusted, keeping in view the relative power exercised by the state and the insurgents.

Talking with/to the state authorities is a viable option, but only as a tactical choice for the Maoists, in periods of a downslide for them, or if they plan to re-group/re-orient/re-configure their efforts. Peace is definitely an asset in times of distress or more technically speaking, 'strategic defensive'. In other situations, when the Maoists aim to push the ground towards a strategic offensive, peace is a liability. However, during the middle phase of a guerrilla war – that is, the strategic stalemate,<sup>18</sup> the choice of peace is influenced by several factors, sharply analysed and thereafter decided. Considering the geographical spread of India and the relative 'spread' of the Maoists, it will be hard for the insurgents to come to a definite conclusion at any particular abscissa of time, whether it is in a situation of strategic defence, stalemate or offensive, since the situation could vary vastly across different regions. For instance, if there happens to be a Lalgarh 'bull' for the insurgents, then it could turn out to be a 'bear' of *Operation Anaconda* in the Saranda forests at the same time. The Andhra Talks of 2004 and the Bengal Talks of 2011 need to be viewed against this phenomenological backdrop.

Amit Bhaduri, with visible sympathies towards the insurgents, writes that every time the authorities say they want to initiate a peace process, they want their armed adversaries to 'abjure violence'. This peace, he continues –

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18 In a Strategic Defence state, the insurgents retain their militia status and being weaker than the security forces, primarily depend on guerrilla warfare. However in a Strategic Offence phase, the ultras form a conventional people's liberation force and take on the government forces in a head-on war.

without categorical guarantee of safety from the government's onslaught – is dangerous for underground Maoist leaders. Bhadhuri even goes to the extent of saying that the state policy all along has been to liquidate illegally its Maoist opponents in the name of 'peace talk'.<sup>19</sup>

Intriguingly, such rhetoric fails to appreciate the fact that, for a compact modern state to flourish, the 'monopoly' of using force lawfully must be with the state itself. Allowing armed groups to loiter around in any significant segment of the state's territory is a clear signal of the failure of the state apparatus. Furthermore, it is strange to expect peace negotiations to commence while a parallel war is going on. A mutual ceasefire is a pre-requisite to any 'talks' with the adversary. The luminaries who spew venom against the state regarding the latter's approach towards peace talks again seem to have a poor memory – abysmally failing to grasp the varied maneuvers adopted by the Indian state in dealing with the Maoists in the Andhra Talks and with several insurgent groups in the Northeast as well as in Jammu and Kashmir.

In this context, it is interesting to note that Sujato Bhadro – the West Bengal based historian and TV commentator, who was interestingly also an interlocutor during the Bengal Talks with the Maoists in 2011, writes that the Maoists took the lives of three activists [of other political parties] in a ruthless manner even after a round of peace talks with them was completed on a positive note. Bhadro further notes: "On September 29, however, thanks to the government's willingness to continue the dialogue process, the peace talks got a chance..."<sup>20</sup>

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19 Amit Bhadhuri, "Peace That is More Dangerous Than War, In Peoples' War As Strategy and Peace Talks as Taktics, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, Setu Prakashani, 2012, Kolkata, pp. 18-19.

20 Sujato Bhadro, "Peace-talk Process in Junglemahal: A Brief Review", in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, p. 62.

Further, Act 5 of the Joint Declaration (on behalf of the West Bengal Government and the Civil Society) issued in July 2011 stated: “In Jangalmahal, and the whole of West Bengal, all parties have to withdraw arms.” And as another interlocutor Chhoton Das predicates,<sup>21</sup> ‘all parties’ implied the Maoists as well as the government – and obviously not the government alone!

The joint forces started operation in Lalgarh on June 18, 2009. A week later, Das writes, the mass organisation *Lalgarh Mancha* issued a press statement whose main thrust was: “Stop Joint Forces’ operation in Lalgarh and begin talks.” There was no demand of withdrawal of the Joint Forces. In fact, the CPI-Maoist ‘state secretary’, in a statement issued on September 30, 2011, demanded just one condition for the creation of a congenial environment for peace talks and that was the government’s promise to halt joint operations for one month.<sup>22</sup> To ask for halt of operations and later on dissolve the talks on the allegation that the state reneged on the promise of ‘withdrawal’ of the security forces, was merely a ruse.

Kunal Chattopadhyay seems sceptical<sup>23</sup> and to a large extent cynical about the productivity of peace talks. He argues that the Indian state uses the pretext/bogey of the Maoist insurgent to unleash violence on the Adivasis. Naturally, on Chattopadhyay’s analysis, the Indian state would be reluctant to engage in ‘true’ talks. On the other hand, the Maoists too, are not serious about talks since they are built on the solid

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21 Chhoton Das, “Why the Talks Failed?”, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, pp. 73-74.

22 Ibid.

23 Kunal Chattopadhyay, “Maoists and the Indian State: Is Peace Possible?”, in *People’s War as Strategy and Peace Talks as Tactics*, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, p. 179.

platform of Stalinism-Maoism, which hardly believes in the precepts of socialist democracy. Chattopadhyay continues, “given its ideology, which involves the principle that any struggle other than ‘armed struggle’ is revisionist, a sell-out to the ruling establishment, the Maoists cannot engage in fruitful peace talks.”<sup>24</sup>

Actually the problem is broader and runs deep. The fundamental ideology of Maoism rests on the protracted people’s war in order to topple the so-called ‘reactionary bourgeoisie regime’. Similar movements, launched in Cuba under the Castro-Guevara combo, in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas or in Peru under Guzman have all done exactly the same: followed the prototype model of the Chinese Revolution of Mao Zedong. Whether all these movements have been fully successful or not is not the point of debate; the fact remains that these insurgencies followed a set, well-planned model of ‘people’s war’ through ‘guerilla tactics’.

And forget about the manifesto; ‘holding talks’ was never even in the agenda of these non-Indian Maoists.

Only the Nepalese Maoists deviated to a degree by joining mainstream politics. However, that is held to be the ‘Prachanda Path’ and their Indian counterparts are still to acknowledge it unequivocally. Furthermore, Prachanda had a solid reason to renounce arms temporarily and join national politics. That was a ‘tactical alliance’ by the Nepalese Maoists with the parliamentary parties in order to effect a strategic victory of capturing power at Kathmandu. The common enemy of all the parties at that point in time was the monarch and hence that ‘tactical alliance’ was consequential.

In the Indian context, at present, the Maoists have no ‘tactical partners’ in the mainstream political fray. They cannot even consider forging an alliance like the Nepalese

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24 Ibid.

Maoists. The oil price hike, inflation and Indian camaraderie with the Western Hemisphere can still be relevant issues of commonality between the different communist parties (say, the Communist Party of India-Marxists) and the Maoists, but that cannot be the foundation of their friendship; more so when each attacks the others' comrades.

The best the Maoists would do by accepting the 'offer for talks' is to utilise the interregnum to bolster their party infrastructure and acquire some breathing space and time. A ceasefire would give the rank and file of the ultras ample scope to regroup. But this argument holds good for the government too, as had been pointed out by this author.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a mutual ceasefire would not only be beneficial to both the parties, but also bring succour to the Adivasis who are caught in the crossfire.<sup>26</sup>

It can be well agreed that the ultras have their own set of demands. They want the release of their top leaders such as Kobad Ghandy, who are languishing in prisons. On this count, it is worth mentioning that the Maoists are also not very clear about their 'pre-conditions'. Earlier, as reported in 2010, CPI-M 'general secretary' Ganapathy had put in place three demands as pre-requisites for talks with the government. The first one was stopping of Operation Green Hunt by withdrawal of paramilitary forces. The second demand was lifting the ban on the party and its mass organisation wings. And, the final one was the release of 'their comrades'.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Uddipan Mukherjee, "The Bad War: Analysing Dantewada", Boloji, April 27, 2010, <http://www.boloji.com/articles/9341/the-bad-war-analysing-dantewada> and "The Bad War", *Newslines*, April, 2010, <http://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/the-bad-war/>.

26 Uddipan Mukherjee, "Caught in the Crossfire", *Newslines*, February 2010, <https://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/caught-in-the-crossfire/>.

27 "Interview with Comrade Ganapathy, the General Secretary of Communist Party of India (Maoist)", *People's March*, November 19, 2010, <https://ajadhind.wordpress.com/tag/ganapathy/>.



The then Maoist ‘spokesperson’ Cherukuri Rajkumar *aka* Azad had clarified the ‘prisoner release’ agenda. He in fact had diluted Ganapathy’s original hard line and interpreted the demand to be a part of the talks: that is, leaders and other prisoners may be released as the talks proceeded toward a fruitful direction.

It is clear that there are conditions and pre-conditions of going ahead with the talks from both sides and none of the incumbents till date have really expressed their proclivity toward any amicable settlement of the dispute.

It must be borne in mind that nobody, be it Karl Marx, or Vladimir Lenin or Mao Zedong, on whose theoretical principles the CPI-M bases itself, talk of ‘talks’. They strictly abhor partnering with the ‘bourgeois regime’. They speak of overthrowing the existing parliamentary democracy. They hate ‘revisionism’

And the present Maoist leadership idolises Mao Zedong’s Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of 1966. They despise the deviationist line adopted by Deng Xiao Ping, the maker of modern China, which espouses State controlled Capitalism

#### **LET’S HAVE SOME EXPERT OPINION**

On a rather positive note, Peter Sederberg of the Department of Government and International Studies, University of South Carolina, proposes the ‘war model’ and the ‘rational actor model’ – through which he shows that these models actually incorporate conciliatory strategies while the state negotiates with the terrorists.<sup>28</sup> Though he acknowledges that conventional wisdom suggests that regimes should never bargain with terrorists, Sederberg also notes that conciliatory strategies have

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28 Peter C. Sederberg, “Conciliation as Counter-Terrorist Strategy”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Volume 32, Number 2, 1995, pp. 295-312.

been used, sometimes with considerable success. In the paper, he identifies a number of tactical factors that might affect the choice of conciliatory strategies.

Stephen Stedman, at the Centre for International Security and Arms Control of the Stanford University, also appears optimistic. He agrees that the greatest source of risk in peacemaking comes from the spoilers – that is, leaders and parties who believe that peace threatens their power and necessarily use violence to undermine attempts to achieve peace. But as Stedman points out, not all spoilers do succeed in stalling peace processes. In support of his argument,<sup>29</sup> he cites the cases of the Mozambique National Resistance and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia – the latter being more pertinent to this discussion as it represented the most obnoxious form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

And speaking from an American perspective, Daniel Byman asserts that talking with the insurgents is often a necessary first step toward defeating them or reaching an acceptable compromise. Interestingly, along the lines of what the Colombian government and FARC rebels had been doing, Byman further states<sup>30</sup> that these talks must often be gone ahead with even as insurgents shoot at U.S. soldiers and they, in turn, shoot at them. More apposite to this discussion is how Byman cogently concludes:

Talks with insurgents are politically costly, usually fail, and can often backfire. Nevertheless, they are often necessary to end conflicts and transform an insurgent group into a legitimate political actor or wean them

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29 Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”, *International Security*, Volume 22, Number 2, 1997, pp.5-53.

30 Daniel Byman, “Talking with Insurgents: A guide for the Perplexed”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 32, Number 2, 2009, pp. 125-137.

away from violence. Policymakers and analysts alike must recognize that the conditions for success are elusive.<sup>31</sup>

### ARE THE INDIAN MAOISTS INTERESTED IN PEACE?

Or to ask a far more practical question, are they amenable to negotiations? As already highlighted in this paper, they are more concerned with ‘hoisting their Red flag of revolution over the historic Red Fort’. They are far more interested in materialising their New Democratic Revolution (NDR) within the periphery of Marx’s historical materialism. They are obdurate in pursuing their combat role against the Indian state. They are eager to push forward, occasionally trudge forward as a tactical move, in this asymmetric yet long war. They have a vested interest in prolonging the violence, provoking state structures to initiate a reaction, which can then be misconstrued as ‘state repression.’

Still, in this carefully engineered process, the Maoists, specifically the leadership – intellectuals, non-intellectuals or even pseudo-intellectuals – are cautious about winning the hearts and minds of the *Adivasis* and other inhabitants of the projected Red Corridor – keenly adhering to Mao’s maxim: “The Guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.” The moment the guerrilla loses his safe havens among the people, the movement fizzles out. After all, it is a war for the people and has necessarily to be fought by the people. This is exactly where the fundamentals reside.

The Indian state needs to and is knowledgeable enough to target the real stakeholders in this war – a rather ‘bad war’. The *Adivasis* in Chhattisgarh or the deprived lower-castes in Bihar-Jharkhand or the malnourished in Amlasole and Lalgurh in West Bengal; they are the real stakeholders and needs to be

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31 Ibid.

targeted as far as appropriate governance and developmental schemes are concerned. In a Euclidean parallel, the leadership of the Left Wing ultras could be pruned – systematically, as a strategy. Extreme caution must, however, be ensured so that a rampage of violence is not unleashed – at least at a scale which affects the population, and in turn depletes intelligence gathering by the Security Forces. Violence or power (as the interpretation may go) could be skilfully used by the state to diminish the movement without permitting humanitarian excesses and rights violations, which would only result in a defeat in the war of propaganda at a mammoth scale, both in the national and international arena.

With *Al Jazeera* getting interested in the Maoist insurgency and interviewing the 1960s Debra-Gopiballavpur veteran, the now de-scaled and politically stigmatised Ashim Chatterjee; with young scholars in top notch US universities trying to script their Masters and Doctoral theses on this insurgency; and articles on the issue even popping up in established and stylised magazines such as *Foreign Policy* and the *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, the issue is certainly serious. For the Indian state, it is important to contain the insurgency – but equally important to win the war in the media, national and international. And for that, an unrestrained use of force, devoid of rationale, could be catastrophic. At the same time, any lapse into passivity would be scoring a duck in the field – which the state can ill afford. In this context, Home Minister, Rajnath Singh’s categorical statement acquires tremendous significance, “There is no question of any talks now. We will take a balanced approach. But the forces will give a befitting reply if the Naxals launch attacks.”<sup>32</sup>

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32 Vijaita Singh, “Rajnath Draws Hard Line on Maoists”, *The Indian Express*, June 28, 2014, accessed on October 7, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/rajnath-draws-hard-line-on-maoists-no-talks-attacks-will-get-befitting-reply/>.

The Greyhounds' success in flushing out the Maoists from Andhra Pradesh is recent enough not to have been forgotten. No wonder freshly recruited IPS officers are now undergoing gruelling training in counterinsurgency warfare and attachments with Greyhounds units, and also enduring short exposure to life in the jungle, in order to 'fight the guerrilla like a guerilla'. Later in their careers, they would be taking on an enemy whose cadres take pride in being inflicted with malaria every few weeks in the jungles, describing disease as 'men's menstruation'; feeding on snake-soup in the Dandakaranya. Police leaders will have to be conditioned to equally adverse situations if they are to win the war. If tomorrow's unit-level and district-level Police leaders are sufficiently trained, equipped and mentally prepared to confront to counter-insurgent's task of 'eating soup with a knife'<sup>33</sup>, the country would have little cause for worry.

Edward Luttwak once wrote in his seminal essay in *Foreign Affairs*, "Give War a Chance."<sup>34</sup> With the Andhra Talks<sup>35</sup> of 2004 breaking down, the Bengal parleys of 2011 crumbling, and the ever obstinate stance of the top Maoist leadership in their commitment to violence, talks are not impossible but have probability of success 'tending to zero'. It can, consequently,

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33 John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya, Vietnam, and Iraq*, 2005, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

34 Edward N. Luttwak, "Give War a Chance", *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug 1999, p. 36, <https://peacelearner.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/edward-luttwak-give-war-a-chance1.pdf>.

35 A 3-month ceasefire commenced in Andhra Pradesh in June 2004. The discussions ended without any agreement and the guerillas went back to their hideouts. Maoists did not agree to put down their arms. Clashes with police and security forces resumed in January 2005. The intensity of Maoist violence increased after the failed talks with the merger of the Maoist Communist Centre based in Bihar-Jharkhand and the People's War Group of Andhra.

safely be concluded that, for the Indian state, there is *no need to talk* to the Maoists – at least at this juncture and as long as the Leftist insurgents refuse to give up arms.

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