

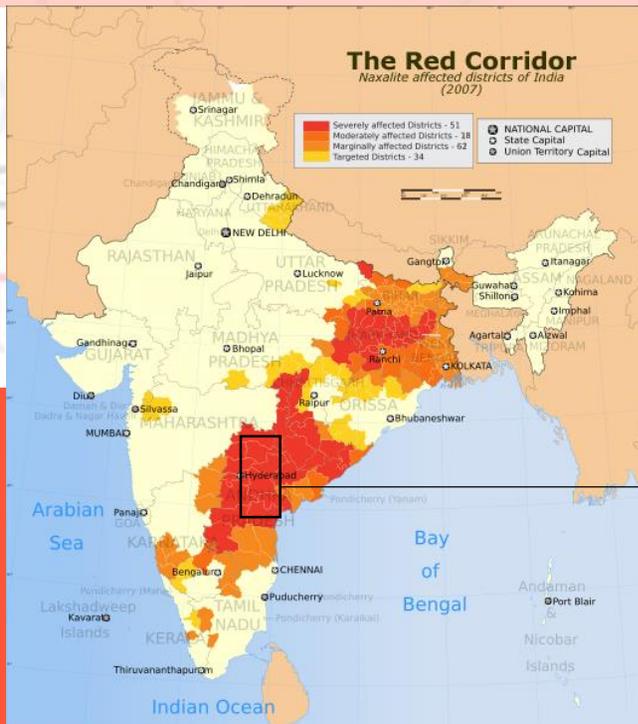
QUICK LOOK



BASTAR, INDIA

SITUATION

The Indian Government and Maoist Insurgents have been locked in a conflict for over five decades that is responsible for the deaths of over 10,000 people. Today, Maoist insurgents have influence in 15 states and control more than 200 of India's 640 districts in an area called the "Red Corridor." Caught in the middle of this conflict are the rural communities that live in the mineral rich forest areas. Although rich in natural resources, the Red Corridor is isolated from modern development, lacks basic infrastructure and its diverse ethnic and tribal society is reliant on subsistence farming to survive.



Chattisgarh



“This insurgency is the biggest internal security challenge facing India.”

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

2009

Bastar

Due to its vast natural resources, the Red Corridor is the lynchpin needed to fuel India's rapid industrialization. In the state of Chattisgarh, Bastar district alone contains 20% of India's entire coal reserve and is home to the Bailadia mine, the largest mechanized mine in Asia. However, pressure from Maoist insurgents and Government forces to control the land and communities fuels instability and jeopardizes private company's investments in mineral extraction. If not addressed, the ongoing conflict could negatively impact India's economic growth and political stability, and accelerate internal fracturing of India's states.

APPROACH

Maoist insurgents exploit social tensions resulting from ethnic, religious and caste-based divisions, along with land rights issues between peasant farmers and the Indian government. ENODO Global's analysis explores Bastar District's unique feudal, post-colonial socioeconomic, and cultural dynamics to pinpoint the core grievances that drive social unrest within communities that attract left-wing uprising. This approach enables us to design effective engagement strategies, development initiatives and narratives that reduce the influence of Maoist insurgents over the population, mitigate social tensions, and create areas of security to operate.



RECENT EVENTS

The Modi government has cautiously agreed to invest USD 5 billion in Chattisgarh's Bastar district—the heart of the Red Corridor—for rail and steel projects to maximize the iron ore and bauxite potential. In Bastar, the government's shovel-ready steel and rail projects as well as Tata and Essar's combined USD 3 billion steel investments are halted due to the ongoing insurgency.

FINDINGS

Fissures within the Maoist organizational structure along with the rural population's growing aversion to continued violence, and deep-rooted democratic values create vulnerabilities for the Indian Government and private companies to exploit. Understanding the diverse culture, caste and class biases among Bastar's diverse communities uncovers the challenges and opportunities that exist within the Red Corridor.

Waning Ideology

Maoist ideology calls for political change through armed agrarian revolution—a “people's war” to establish a classless society. The movement found appeal throughout sections of Indian society, with little coaxing needed from Maoist leadership because being oppressed is the single binding force in post-colonial Indian society. Today, Maoist ideology is entrenched in millions of peasant farmers and tribal communities in eastern India's Red Corridor and finds broad appeal among people suffering from under-development and exploitation. However, its influence and narratives are losing their relevance with local leaders who now mobilize communities on the basis of caste and religious divisions and it's unclear whether the young fighters, deep in the jungles of Chattisgarh even know what it means to be a Maoist. The Maoist insurgency is unlikely to survive in India's vibrant democracy however, with weapons from China and a desire to destabilize India's political and security structures, the insurgency will continue to create significant challenges in the Red Corridor and the entire country.



“The movement thrives on the dissatisfaction of the marginalized sections of the tribal communities of the Red Corridor.”

Land Reform

Following India's independence, land distribution was limited to individuals with prior ownership or sway within the caste system. Higher caste owners—despite being the minority—ended up owning large tracts of land in eastern India, which were inhabited predominately by lower caste farmers and peasant workers. Over several decades, the Indian government has implemented various land reform initiatives to transform Indian society from the feudal caste system that dominates underdeveloped regions. Unfortunately, land reforms have been ineffectual, continue to be one of the primary divers of instability, and impede social, political, and economic reform.

Land issues are the driving force behind Maoist ideology and a powerful slogan used to influence the population. The Naxal movement finds its origins from radical communists who fought against the exploitation of landlords. The movement expanded with a broader objective of ushering in a democratic revolution directed against imperialism, feudalism, and collusive bureaucratic capitalism. Today's Maoists take advantage of issues pertaining to industrial and mining displacement to garner significant support among the tribal communities in the Red Corridor.

Resettlement

For tribes, resettlement does not only mean loss of land but it's something deep rooted with their survival and the survival of their culture, tradition and livelihood. In Bastar, most of the mineral deposits are found in agriculturally rich lands. Over the past 12 years, more than 26,000 acres of agricultural lands—the staple for Bastar's rural population—have been converted to coal and mining plants. This has forced communities to resettle to less fertile areas, created massive rural gentrification, and generated uprisings among peasant farmers. In Orissa, communities relocated 56 years ago to make way for the Rourkela Steel Plant are still languishing in terrible accommodations that were meant to be temporary. Therefore, it is necessary that the government insist industrial houses (both public and private sector) make the tribes the permanent beneficiaries of the development projects.





Social Inequality and Exploitation

Since India won its freedom, caste wars have destabilized India's poorest regions where millions of landless poor live in servitude. Today, social inequality is very much a fact of life and used to formalize discrimination in India society. Tribal peoples, women, and untouchables are considered the lowest levels within the caste system and comprise large segments of the population. The oppressed classes are not only exploited as sharecroppers and landless laborers by landlords (Zamindars), they also fall prey to extortion by Maoist insurgents and money lenders. High rates of interest demanded by rural moneylenders and taxes extorted by insurgents create a cycle of poverty, subjugation and debt that continues to reinforce the worst excesses of the caste system. India's restless rural poor and tribal communities have few alternatives and there are reports in the media about farmers committing suicide or selling their wives to pay mounting debts. This inequality is a result of deep-rooted social and economic structures that perpetuate privilege and limit opportunities for the poor and has a direct correlation with identity, social locations and historical marginalization, is a recipe for discontent.

OUTLIERS

The inability of the Indian government and its security forces to forge a political solution for the caste, ethnic and religious divisions in the Red Corridor fuels Maoist insurgent support among Bastar's communities. Popular support for insurgents can be eroded by disseminating positive narratives that reinforce local, regional, and national level development and security activities that focus on the following:

Democracy

A strong belief in democracy exists within Indian society. Narratives focused on democracy should be designed around the needs and aspirations of individuals and communities that recognizes the rights of the original inhabitants of the land and their role in charting their own future—rural and urban alike.

Violence

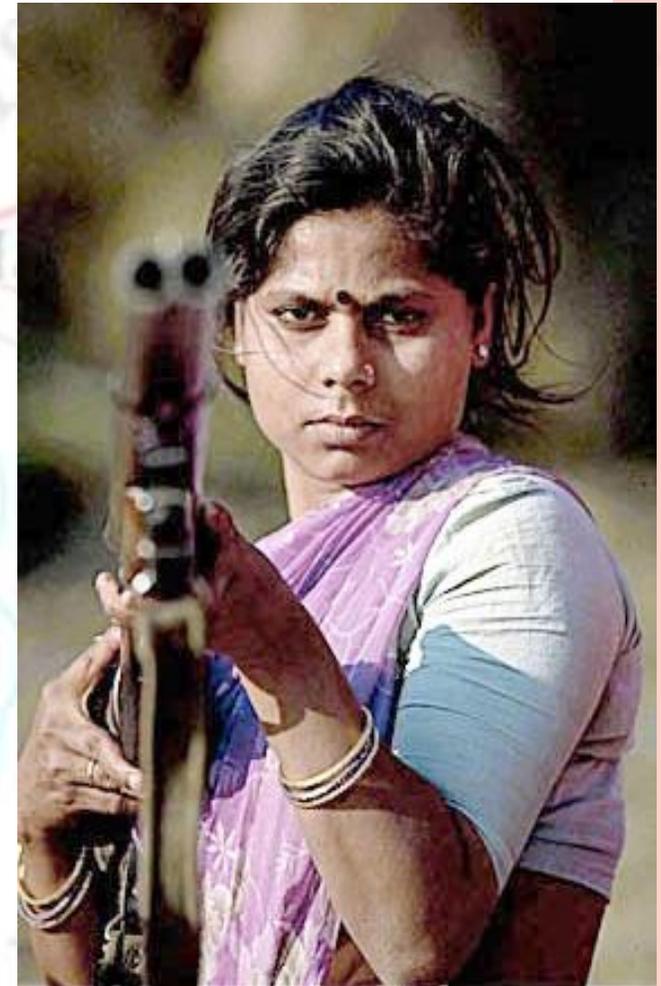
Innocent people are being caught in the crossfire and are increasingly critical of the continual violence. Popular support for the insurgents will be lost when the narratives illustrate how the population is being subjected to violence perpetrated by the insurgents.

Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation (S&R)

Lower-cadre insurgents must be persuaded to surrender their weapons and cooperate with security forces through state-sponsored activities. S&R narratives should focus on the youth within Indian society to prevent them from becoming hardcore Naxalites.

Women's role

Many women use Maoism to counter gender violence in a region that is characterized by some of the worst gender inequalities. Women's narratives should illustrate how Maoist exploit women and introduce alternatives that are culturally attuned and provide economic opportunity.



CONCLUSION

The ongoing conflict between the Indian Government and Maoist insurgents has the potential to dismantle India's economic and political stability. A showdown is imminent and if not addressed, the conflict will eventually accelerate internal fracturing of India's states and increase the insurgency to other regions of India. The government's confrontational and defiant strategy to defeat the Maoist insurgents will not succeed and will only increase existing fear narratives and social tensions.

An effective strategy tackles the root-causes of the insurgency, builds relationships and aligns objectives between local communities and external agencies. When combined, government and private sector sponsored development, education, and security initiatives undermine Maoist ideology and set conditions for enduring stability. The mistrust that exists between lower class peasant farmers, tribal members and the government can be repaired. Building relationships from ground-up is the key. Connecting Bastar's local leaders, non-profit organizations based in Chattisgarh's largest city of Raipur and management of Tata and Essar will build confidence within tribal communities. Constructive engagements reinforced with positive narratives—through an aggressive social media campaign—delivers the comprehensive strategy required to counter Maoist ideology, propaganda and narratives and erode popular support for the insurgency.

“The people will rise up like a tornado under our party's leadership to wipe out the reactionary blood-sucking vampires ruling our country.”

Ganapathi, Maoist leader





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