

Red Revolution 2020 and Beyond: Strategic Challenges to Resolve Naxalism, by V.K. Ahluwalia, New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt Ltd, 2013, pp. 298, INR 795

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Literature on the Maoist movement continues to pour in. The government too has officially described it as the biggest threat to the internal security of the country. No wonder that scholars of different hues are making their contribution.

The author, Lieutenant General Vijay Kumar Ahluwalia (Retd.), was Army Commander of the Central Command from 2010 to 2012. During this period, he got the opportunity to study the Naxal problem, particularly in the four states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha. The book is a digest of his experiences. The subject has been comprehensively dealt with in chapters ranging from genesis of the Naxalite movement, a discussion of its ideology and external linkages, comparison with other insurgencies of the past, the strategic options before the Naxalites, and suggestions for conflict resolution. The author's analysis of the root causes, where he has dwelt on social inequalities, displacement of population as a result of development programmes, the persistence of poverty, the poor implementation of land reforms, the neglect of health and education and poor governance in the interior areas, is impressive.

The plethora of challenges which the country faces, according to the author, is due to 'its geo-strategic location, size, population, demographic profile, and the prevalent politico-socio-economic conditions in the country'. He could have added political myopia and administrative

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inefficiency to the causes. It is one of the ironies of modern India that instead of rounding off the edges and consolidating our gains, we have been creating major problems in almost every decade. The 1970s saw the beginning of Naxalbari. The 1980s saw Punjab going up in flames. The 1990s witnessed militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. The political class of the country has no strategic vision and has not shown any capacity to think beyond the immediate survival and victory at the next election to perpetuate itself in power. We have, according to surveys, the worst bureaucracy in Asia and our law enforcement apparatus is in a shambles. No wonder that there are a thousand mutinies across the country.

The author is right in saying that there is no concrete evidence of direct involvement of any external power. The government is also on record as having admitted that while some Chinese weapons have found their way into the Maoists' arsenal, there is no direct evidence of China's involvement. However, in the same breath, the author goes on to quote a RAND Corporation study that no insurgency can thrive over a period of 10 years without external support. RAND is a think tank of great repute, but we do not have to swallow everything that they write. We have to filter that in the light of our own experience. The fact of the matter is that the Maoist insurgency is essentially an indigenous movement with linkages to separatist elements within and with inimical countries beyond the frontiers. They have established a nexus with the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Assam, People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Manipur, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isac–Muivah) (NSCN (IM)) in Nagaland and are active even in areas of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam. According to Yasin Bhatkal, the Indian Mujahideen was also in the process of getting explosives and ammunition from the Maoists to carry out terror attacks within the country. If the Maoists have survived and even grown in strength over the years, it is to be attributed primarily to the incompetence of the government, its inability to improve governance in the far-flung areas and evolve a coherent national policy to deal with them.

On Salwa Judum, the author seems to have been carried away by the human rights groups' propaganda. The Salwa Judum movement has been misrepresented and criticized through a well-orchestrated campaign. The human rights groups demonized it and were able to convince even the Supreme Court that it was a vigilante group. The fact of the matter is that it was a popular movement against the aggression of the Naxalites. The villagers were happy with the Naxals until they started interfering

with their social customs and cultural practices. The proverbial last straw was when Naxals prevented the tribals from their annual tendu leaf collections. Enough was enough, said the people, and rebelled against the excesses of the Naxals. Popular anger was channelized by Mahendra Karma. The National Human Rights Commission recognized Salwa Judum as a spontaneous popular uprising against the Naxals.

The pages dealing with strategic options before the Naxalites make for interesting reading, though it is unlikely that the Naxalites (or the Maoists, to be more precise) would be thinking in terms of these options. They are quite focused in their approach: that they have to capture state power through protracted armed struggle; establish base areas; broaden the mass base; organize militant mass movements against the policy of globalization and liberalization; and strengthen the People's Army with a view to ultimately bringing about what they call 'the new democratic revolution'. The guerrilla warfare has to be raised gradually to the stage of mobile warfare, and finally positional warfare. It is acknowledged by no less a person than the home minister of India that Maoists have the capacity to stage 'spectacular attacks'. It is true that the Maoists have suffered reverses in the recent past, that several members of the politburo and the central committee have either been arrested or killed in encounters with the police, but the fact remains—and this is again admitted by the government—that the 'core strength' of the Maoists is very much intact. The Maoist ideologues would hate to talk in terms of options. For them, the objective is clear and the pursuit has to be relentless.

The author's suggestion to create a Central Counter Insurgency Force (CCIF) is innovative. However, it is easier said than done. The chief ministers guard their turf very zealously and are chary of any suggestion which would, as they allege, disturb the federal structure. Actually, Soli Sorabji, in the Model Police Act which was drafted in 2006, suggested the creation of Special Security Zones. The idea was that 'if and when the security of State in an area is threatened by insurgency, any terrorist or militant activity, or activities of any organized crime group, the Union Government may, with the concurrence of the State Government, declare such area as a Special Security Zone'. The idea, however, proved to be a non-starter.

There are some minor discrepancies in the book. The author has rightly said that Naxalism is a generic word but at another place he says that it refers to the activities of the Communist Party of India (CPI Maoist). It would have been more appropriate to say that CPI (Maoist) is the most

visible and most violent manifestation of the Naxalite movement in the country today. Besides, the CPI (Maoist) was formed on 21 September 2004, following a merger of the People's War and the Maoist Communist Centre of India; there was no tripartite merger, as mentioned by the author. It is also surprising to read Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and Chhattisgarh Special Public Securities Act being mentioned under 'socio-economic legislations'.

The last chapter, 'Way Ahead', has several useful suggestions, even though these are patchy at places. The real problem is that there is no unanimity at the top level on the policy to be adopted to tackle the Maoist problem. Shivraj Patil was confused and referred to Maoists as 'brothers and sisters' who needed to be brought into the mainstream. P. Chidambaram started with a simplistic but effective 'clear, hold and develop' approach, but he was hamstrung by the Congress high command, which emphasized the development model. The security forces were, as a consequence, restrained and limited their operations to area domination exercises. To add to the confusion, the chief ministers of affected states have their own perception of the problem and they refuse to be guided by the centre. It is a great pity that even though we have been facing this problem for more than 45 years, we have yet to evolve a strategic plan to deal with the Maoist problem.

The author has given a projection of rural and urban Naxalism in the year 2020. Actually, much will depend upon the complexion of the government which is voted to power in 2014. If there is strong political will and determination to tackle the problem, and the same is accompanied by effective steps to contain corruption and improve governance, the scenario would be very different.

Maps, tabulated statements, graphs and diagrams add to the value of the book, which is, on the whole, a valuable addition to the literature on the subject.