This paper explores the Naxalite insurgency in India in terms of causal mechanisms that lead to the intensification of rural civil conflict by focusing specifically on grievance, mobilisation and government responses to rebellion. Realist theory is inadequate when analysing the causal factors of complex insurgencies and the mechanisms leading to their continuation. This case illustrates some aspects of intra-state conflict in a very large country, in terms of geography and population, and how the rebels have mobilised grievances at local level. New Delhi has addressed the conflict as both a development and a security challenge, and consequently has oscillated between repression and concession in its responses. This approach has resulted neither in reduction of grievances through adequate rural development, nor in consistent armed response to the Naxalite threat. Without a comprehensive and clear set of state responses, the violence is likely to continue.

**Key words:** Naxalite, Maoist, India, insurgency, Grievance, Mobilisation, State response.
Introduction

In the decades following the end of the Cold War, civil and ethnic wars have become more prevalent than traditional inter-state war.¹ The motivations for and the methods used to engage in civil conflict have altered. Scholars across different disciplines have not yet reached a comprehensive definition of civil war, nor come to a formal agreement on the total number of civil wars, due to lack of universally accepted characteristics.² Civil warfare is generally funded through different mechanisms from inter-state war; unless there is third party interference or diaspora support, rebels must fund their own war efforts using methods such as capture of natural resource rents, support from local populations or extortion of businesses and other criminal activities.

A long-standing left wing extremist (LWE) insurgency across India has led to the deaths, injuries or displacement of thousands of people, whilst being mostly overlooked by Western theorists.³ Many academic analyses dealing with revolutions, insurgencies, and civil war do not mention the Naxalites whatsoever.⁴ The Naxalite conflict would likely be more well-known if global attention were less focused on events across the border in Pakistan and Afghanistan, or if a number of foreigners had been killed. The insurgency started in the town of Naxalbari in West Bengal state, and thus the rebels are often known as ‘Naxalites’ (interchangeably with ‘Maoists’, ‘extremists’, ‘rebels’, or ‘insurgents’). While all figures of the total number of combatants must be regarded as approximations, the BBC⁵ claims there are between 10,000 and 20,000 armed Naxalite cadres.

India has struggled with violent separatism in Kashmir and the North-East states, Islamic terrorist groups and communalist Hindu-Moslem conflicts, all of which have made the international headlines and received much more scholarly and media attention⁶ but the Maoist Naxalites have engaged in a civil conflict with severe impacts since 1967. What started as a localised uprising in a single town has now spread to influence or affect twenty states in India, covering two hundred and twenty-three districts.⁷ The exact number of affected areas is contentious, given that LWE-hit districts receive central funds for Security Related Expenditure. In 2011,
the Government of India’s own figures were revised down to 83 affected districts from a high of 180 in 2009. Ajit Doval, the former director of the Intelligence Bureau, estimates Naxalite activity has affected 40 per cent of India’s territory and 35 per cent of its population (thus more than 420 million people). An insurgency on this huge scale deserves more rigorous analysis.

Economic costs are high; from 1980 to 2000, LWE-affected states lost an average of 12.48 per cent of per capita net state domestic product. There is a serious paucity of research and empirical data on specific elements of the Naxalite conflict. Research that focuses specifically on the Naxalite insurgency tends to be analytically restricted to issues of domestic politics and inequality, but a purely economic examination of conflict causation may be too narrow. Grievances, inequalities and drivers for conflict vary hugely over a country as big and heterogeneous as India. Successive Indian governments have resisted calling the Naxalite insurgency a ‘civil war’ and term it a law and order problem due to political and policy implications. All this takes place in a complex environment of multiple and conflicting stakeholders, reducing the validity of purely quantitative analyses of conflict causation.

In a startlingly frank admission from a head of state, the Indian Prime Minister stated in September 2009 that the country is losing the battle against the Naxalites. The Naxalite insurgency deserves wider international scholarly attention; India is the world’s largest democracy and its second most populous country. There has been a movement towards mergers and consolidation of various LWE groups under the Naxalite banner. The largest merger was in 2004 when the People’s War (PW) and Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) merged to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist), also known as ‘CPI (M)’, but this pattern of mergers and splits has occurred numerous times since 1967. The Maoist insurgency is unusual for its long duration and the low intensity mortality rate. This however has reached cumulatively high numbers of deaths over the last decade, and become more indiscriminate.

Given India’s enormous regional role, its increasing global economic influence and rising GDP, the Naxalites pose a real and insidious threat to the nation’s security that has implications for its position as a twenty-first century world power. India’s recent successes as an economic colossus, as strategic partner for Western interests and as a balance to Chinese and Pakistani regional and global influence depends upon adequate internal security and continued economic growth, both of which are threatened by the insurgency and the potential for further escalation. The Naxalite rebellion is indicative of complex social dynamics in a very large and diverse country and illustrates the challenge of applying conflict causation models from a realist perspective. There are many implications for other countries facing grassroots insurgencies. For example, across the northern Himalayan border, the Maoists in Nepal conducted a much shorter campaign of violence (1996 to 2006) and after a Comprehensive Peace Accord, succeeded in taking control of the state in an unstable coalition government. This has resulted in severe

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9. Agrawal, ‘Naxalism: Causes and Cure’
11. Suykens, ‘Naxalite and State Governance’
14. Ramana, ‘Maoist Movement in India’
15. Small Arms Survey, ‘India’s States of Armed Violence’, p.6
obstacles for Nepali development and political stability (along with the so far unrealised potential for social service benefits).

**Conflict Causation**

Collier\(^\text{16}\) suggests that economically undeveloped areas where opportunities for conflict outweigh the (perceived) drawbacks are at higher risk of insurgency, which often means that there is little distinction between rebels and criminals, if they are motivated mainly by financial profit. This argument is known as the ‘rebel greed hypothesis’\(^\text{17}\). Opportunities for direct financial profit may provide stronger motivations for conflict than political and ethnic grievances\(^\text{18}\). Paired with a lack of accountability in state institutions, resource rents\(^\text{19}\) often have the opposite effect (conflict and poverty) to that expected by the population (increased wealth and development)\(^\text{20}\). Other factors such as exclusion of large ethnic groups, their physical distance from a country’s political centre and the presence of rough terrain have been positively correlated with conflict\(^\text{21}\). Given that Adivasis, or scheduled tribes [disadvantaged aboriginal and low-caste groups],\(^\text{22}\) form 8.2 per cent of India’s population and tend to dwell in more remote areas, this may help explain why the Naxalite conflict has mostly been concentrated along the “Red Corridor”, far from New Delhi. However, based on CPI (M) documents\(^\text{23}\), there is evidence the Naxalites are preparing to extend operations to new states including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

**Figure 1 India’s Red Corridor of LWE activity**\(^\text{24}\)

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16. Collier, ‘Rebellion as a Quasi-Criminal Activity’
17. Humphreys, ‘Food Security in Perspective’
18. Skocpol, ‘States and Social Revolutions’
19. ‘Resource rents’ are surplus values, or profits, arising after normal returns and costs have been taken into account for natural recourse extraction
20. Klare, ‘Resource Wars’
22. According to the 2001 Census, scheduled castes form 16.2 per cent of India’s population and scheduled tribes 8.2 per cent. They tend to be poor, marginalised and under educated. [http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/scst.aspx](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/scst.aspx) (accessed 15 February, 2012)
24. Source: Stratfor Global Intelligence, ‘India’s Naxalite Threat’ [http://web.stratfor.com/images/asia/map/7-7-10-India_red_corridor_800.jpg?fn=20rss74](http://web.stratfor.com/images/asia/map/7-7-10-India_red_corridor_800.jpg?fn=20rss74) (9 July 2010)
The five most heavily affected states in this conflict have substantial mineral deposits and huge amounts of energy resources and there are carbon-based fuel supplies in other (non-affected) areas of the country. The government admits that mineral resources are mostly found in tribal areas. Standard analyses of drivers for conflicts frequently examine their causal connections in unitary terms, without scrutinising other related factors. Mineral mining for example, which is expanding rapidly in parts of Eastern India, does not just result in financial profits, but also slag heaps, contamination of ground, water and air, respiratory diseases and increased road accidents. All of these may contribute to local objections, which are normally labelled ‘ethnic grievance’. Mining interests are becoming increasingly salient in the Naxalite conflict and a source of grievance that is exploited by the rebels.

The Naxalite insurgents claim to be fighting for the rights of the Indian aboriginals, or Adivasis, the scheduled castes and ‘other backward classes’. Caste in India is an immensely complex subject and difficult for outsiders to comprehend. Briefly, caste is a complex hierarchical system of social organisation, based on stratified roles determined at birth. It is distinct from social class or race and sometimes leads to caste-based discrimination. The insurgency has spread sporadically out from West Bengal to cover a significant area of India’s most-heavily populated areas, which are predominantly agricultural and chronically impoverished. The inhabitants of these areas do not perceive themselves as benefiting in any significant way from the great economic advances and improvements in standards of living that many urban dwellers are enjoying. These are the exact communities that the Naxalites claim to be ‘liberating’ from oppressive capitalism. They have established a “People’s Government” and “People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army” with people’s militias, some of which are headed by female commanders. In organisational terms, they thus appear to be moving closer to a model such as Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and in behavioural terms too, as cadres often refrain from smoking and drinking. “Revolutionary People’s Committees” provide food and sustenance to cadres, who have succeeded in preparing alternative textbooks for education in different subjects.

The insurgency is not secessionist; there are no claims for an independent homeland or regional autonomy. The Naxalites instead demand a proletarian revolution along orthodox Marxist lines, whereby the suppressed population will throw off the shackles of capitalism and exploitation and naturally establish a people’s system of leadership with benefits for all workers. As long as the LWE conflict stayed localised and confined to the poorest and most economically and socially marginalised areas of the country, New Delhi did little to address the issue.

The Maoist rebellion was initially focused on redistribution of arable land and exclusion from forest produce, but the underlying social reality was one of massive ethnic and caste inequality.
coupled with political grievances. According to Mason, food crop production tends to shift to export crop production as land ownership becomes increasingly controlled by a smaller number of landlords. This in turn leads to landless and hence disenfranchised peasants become susceptible to political mobilisation resulting in violence, a pattern that we observe in India. Interestingly, Mason claims there has been no social revolution in India, even though many other analysts posit the Naxalite insurgency as exactly that. Skocpol distinguishes peasant revolt (short-lived and focused on local grievances) from full revolution, which seeks to depose the government and overturn the social structure. The Naxalite insurgency is then a revolutionary movement, if their stated aims and strategies are genuine and not just a pretext for self-serving violence and criminal activity.

Conflicts also tend to be of long duration when there are struggles over land between ethnic minorities and dominant groups who have government support. Autocratic and democratic styles of government in general have less conflict than semi-democracies, and it is highly debatable how democratic and open India’s political systems truly are. The high level of corruption certainly contributes to the erosion of Indian democracy. Civil violence in a strong state like India does not imply a failed government or even weak institutions but may be actions by rebels as a mechanism for making political demands. India’s impressive civil society plays a key role and deserves separate analysis. Institutionalised social exclusion of particular castes and tribes from economic profits deepens grievances that were already present and there is some reluctance to disclose the enormity of the problem in India, coupled with government secrecy and lack of transparency. In addition, India’s style of party politics encourages vote-seeking behaviour by the elites and a concurrent lack of concerted political will to address improving of security or addressing deep-seated social underdevelopment.

Indian academics tend to fall into one of two main viewpoints regarding the Naxalites’ motivations. The insurgency is either a national security issue that needs to be suppressed with force, or a development issue that requires improvements in governance, equality and economic growth in rural areas. Naxalism has been much weaker in those states where the economic conditions are stronger, such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra or Haryana in Western India. Academics that support the development thesis view military action by the state as one of the contributing factors to the insurgency. These scholars are themselves subject to criticism that they are closet Maoist sympathisers. Those who support the security viewpoint may be accused of not understanding reality on the ground or merely seeking to further their political careers.

Indian academics tend not to have the pleasure of working in an environment of full transparency, as the Naxalite issue is so highly politicised. Little analytical research has been done on

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35. Guha, ‘India After Gandhi’
36. Mason, ‘Caught in the Crossfire’
37. Ibid.
38. Skocpol, ‘States and Social Revolutions’
39. Fearon, ‘Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer’
40. Hegre et al, ‘Towards a Democratic Civil Peace’
41. Chakravarti, ‘Travels in Naxalite Country’
42. Mahadevan, ‘Counterterrorism in India’
43. Personal communication, London 2010
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
specific LWE ideology and causation and the extant Indian literature generally concentrates on other related factors such as social exclusion, politics, caste and poverty. Political analysis of the Naxalite rebellion in India suffers from a variety of shortcomings, despite the massive potential threat that LWE poses. There is a lack of reasoned and informed theoretical debate on the issue, academic work tends to be highly politicised in India, foreign theorists mostly overlook the insurgency and it does not fit into a realist framework of analysis.

The lack of written documents means that the Adivasis experience difficulties keeping their own land. Police collaboration with wealthy landlords and government support for timber industries on land where the tribal groups are forbidden from felling trees have also increased grievances. This has lead to a pattern where Adivasis lose their original land, have to buy more from markets, are forced into debt, borrow money and become landless labourers working on the land they once owned. Naxalites have been replacing the police and judiciary in ensuring law and order for the oppressed, and they are proving themselves better at land redistribution than many state governments. They have also had success in the ‘perception management’ of the low castes and Adivasis, through manipulation of a mostly uneducated populace. These factors help explain local levels of support for LWE ideology and activities.

Levels of Naxalite brutality have been increasing, and there has been a move towards peasants being mobilised to assault army and police posts in ‘swarming attacks’, targeted abductions, assassinations and classical guerrilla warfare tactics. They have precise knowledge of the hostile terrain of hills and forests and areas without roads, frequently unfamiliar to security forces. They have significant experience of planned ambushes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), hiding among villagers, and ammunition depletion of security forces. Employing such tactical flexibility alongside the frequently weak intelligence of their state enemies, has resulted in many deaths of police and army personnel in addition to villagers and Naxalite cadres themselves.

**India’s Structural Inequalities**

There is widespread agreement among scholars that exploitation, unequal distribution of land, expulsion from forested areas, corruption and multiple failures of government to translate development policy and legislation into actual changes in rural areas have all contributed to grievances, particular among Adivasis and low castes in agricultural areas. For example, Adivasis form the majority of people displaced to build large development projects such as dams or mines despite forming only 8.2 per cent of the total population. The unequal allocation of public goods and resources reflect wider social injustices.

46. Mishra, ‘Maoist Challenge and Indian Democracy’
47. Rupavath, ‘Tribal Land Alienation’
48. Ibid.
49. ‘Perception management’, originally a US military term, refers to the control and influencing of reasoning, intelligence and information in audiences to alter their perception of events in the subject’s favour.
50. Ramana, ‘Maoist Movement in India’
52. Ahuja & Ganguly, ‘Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India’
54. Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
The central government and the Naxalites claim to share some of the same objectives, such as equitable land distribution. Agrawal argues this is due to huge discrepancies in land reform legislation and actual events on the ground. For example, a report from a key Indian Government expert panel highlights that between 1950 and 1980, China redistributed 90 per cent of its arable lands, and more than 90 per cent of landless households in China have received land. By contrast, in India these figures are 5 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. These bleak statistics indicate that very little land redistribution has actually occurred since Independence in 1947, whatever the Government claims its policies are.

Rural poverty, exploitation and unequal access to natural resources all existed in India long before Independence, but with little or no overt political agenda. Not until the 1960s was an organised rural rebel movement established, and even then only very small-scale and with a very simplistic mandate. The inequality represented by exclusion from economic growth and lack of access to public goods illustrates the stratifications and divisions within Indian society as a whole. In the case of India, the rapid economic growth rate has been very high for several years, but the areas of the country most affected by Naxalite violence have had much lower growth rates, as a result of not sharing in national economic growth patterns.

In all the states affected by LWE, except Andhra Pradesh, the percentage of rural inhabitants under the poverty line is higher than the average for the entire country. The Indian government itself has come to the conclusion that one of the main reasons for the re-emergence of Naxalite activity in the 1980s, after a lull in the 1970s, was that poor rural areas did not receive any developmental or administrative attention to reduce their legitimate discontent and grievances. The country’s rural poor are being systematically deprived of their basic rights to freshwater, pastureland and forests, and that LWE is the direct result of this dissatisfaction. In this regard, the 2004 plans of the CPI (M) to expand into urban and industrial areas would be a move away from their traditional rural bases and take the insurgency into a new dimension. The Naxalite leadership issued a long document in 2004 detailing the oppressed people’s specific grievances, couched in the standard Maoist phrases, which may serve to reinforce their ideological base and deflect accusations that they exploit tribals for their own ends.

Government policies that ignore Adivasis’ needs and lifestyles are key to understanding LWE violence and how state-led development efforts, land alienation and promotion of cash crops have been unsuitable for the tribal groups. Other causal factors alone cannot account for the Naxalite movement, without examining the government policies of exploitation, exclusion and agricultural development. The Naxalites demand equitable land distribution and this is apparently a stated policy of the central government as well. The conflict here is due to new legislation and laws in India not resulting in proper land reforms or changes on the ground.

55. Agrawal, ‘Naxalism: Causes and Cure’
56. Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
57. Ahuja & Ganguly, ‘Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India’
58. Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
59. Ahuja & Ganguly, ‘Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India’
60. Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
61. Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
64. Rupavath, ‘Tribal Land Alienation’
65. Ibid.
66. Agrawal, ‘Naxalism: Causes and Cure’
India’s LWE movement is the result of grievances caused by modernisation coupled with raised political consciousness.\(^67\) Rural India’s inequality, especially the unequal distribution of land and the economic insecurity of agriculturalists, thus emerges as the main cause of Naxalism.\(^68\) Corruption, nepotism and caste rivalries have all played a large role too.\(^69\) There is in particular widespread corruption and bribery in the timber and logging industries, which amounts to an “institutionalised system” in India.\(^70\) The Indian state suffers from gross mismanagement and a total failure to understand its marginalised communities,\(^71\) leading to exclusion, grievance and inequalities which are the primary drivers of ideological conflict. The central government itself has identified and published the specific conditions that have led to the LWE insurgency\(^72\) but has failed to develop any comprehensive and coherent policies to act on them.

**Self-serving Rebellion?**

Naxalites routinely disrupt or destroy state-led efforts to develop economically weak areas and it is thus an over-simplification to view the conflict as rural peasants taking on the state to fight for their rights; in many areas, villagers are most at danger from the Naxalites themselves. The movement often appears to perceive road building and other rural development initiatives as challenges to their ideology and control. Addressing the issue through land reforms and development will not necessarily result in peace as the insurgents disrupt and oppose such activities, and call instead for a full revolution. According to CPI (M) publications, the Naxalites oppose all property, land owning, the Green Revolution, pro-Hindu discrimination and any development efforts that rely on “semi-colonial, semi-feudal rule of the big landlord-comprador bureaucratic bourgeois classes” [sic].\(^73\)

The Naxalites are in opposition to infrastructure and road building as this often leads to greater satisfaction among rural populations with the government. Consequently they can appear more as a self-serving political and predatory movement, indistinguishable from bandits, with a pretend claim to support Adivasis.\(^74\) The insurgents highlight state failures to develop India’s rural areas, but simultaneously prevent state-led development activities and have a vested interest in keeping the population in some degree of poverty if this benefits their own political agenda.

Naxalites not only seek land redistribution, but desire war that leads to a new socio-political and economic order.\(^75\) They coerce uneducated Adivasis through propaganda into their extreme Maoist ideologies as very few tribal people have enough education to properly comprehend Maoist doctrine. Viewed through this lens, Naxalism is not primarily ideological and those who can understand their ideas tend to be from urban areas (students, intelligentsia or journalists) and may not perceive ‘on the ground’ reality in rural areas. The Naxalite leadership

\(^67\) Rupavath, ‘Tribal Land Alienation’
\(^68\) Agrawal, ‘Naxalism: Causes and Cure’
\(^70\) Robbins, ‘The Rotten Institution’, p.423
\(^71\) Jha, ‘Food Security in Perspective’
\(^72\) Government of India, ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’
\(^74\) Mishra, ‘Maoist Challenge and Indian Democracy’
\(^75\) Ibid.
may thus be little more than rural terrorism without clear and defined goals except that of self-serving profit generation.\textsuperscript{76}

In 2004, the Naxalite leadership claimed their goal to be a ‘New Democratic Revolution’, which involves a ‘protracted people’s war’.\textsuperscript{77} In 2006, some translated Naxalite documents were published online, demanding equality for the proletariat and warning of dire consequences if this did not take place.\textsuperscript{78} There are numerous documents threatening revolution if redistribution along very left-wing lines does not occur in India.\textsuperscript{79} The reasons for conflict causation may not be the same as those driving its continuation. The original demands for equitable land distribution and access have developed to become more about mineral mining access, extortion and ownership of forest cover.\textsuperscript{80}

**Actions by the Rebels**

The Naxalites are not a cohesive and stable organisation such as the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Rather they are a collection of LWE operating under different directives, leadership and in different geographical areas but without an overall and clearly defined management structure. Full revolution may be a stated goal of the leadership, but is unlikely to be widely shared among the cadres, who tend to aspire to shorter-term meaningful change or personal benefit in their lives.\textsuperscript{81} As of 2007, there are at least twelve separate groups calling themselves ‘Naxalites’.\textsuperscript{82} In terms of organisational structure, this makes them more similar to a terrorist organisation than a unified group of rebels fighting the government under a clearly operationalised mandate. However, the preponderance of Maoist manifestoes indicates some type of centralised command structure, under which they release the party documents for dissemination.\textsuperscript{83}

In addition, widespread and diffused LWE violent incidents have been carried out by different groups and for different motives since 1967, all of which are categorised together under the ‘Naxalite’ heading, even when the LWE groups involved have little in common with each other. There has not been one single continuous Naxalite group operating since 1967,\textsuperscript{84} and in any case several parts of India have a long history of tribal uprisings. Therefore, when examining the Naxalite conflict, it is important to bear in mind that we are not dealing with a unitary actor operating under a shared agenda.\textsuperscript{85}

In defence of the development thesis, there are many non-violent Naxalite activities such as bandhs (strikes), marches, boycotts and lockdowns, suggesting that the struggle is socio-economic, rather than separatist.\textsuperscript{86} However, the Maoists routinely kill tribal and rural villagers, and conduct a campaign of destruction regarding the development and infrastructure initia-
tives by government and firmly reject parliamentary politics and democratic procedures. Their stated aim is revolution, but it is not at all clear how much this is limited to the leadership or whether it is fully shared by rural villagers, who are unlikely to understand what revolution really means.

While the Naxalites have had some successes in empowering oppressed villagers and redistributing land, other development activities have become more difficult. The Maoist leadership believes that revolution is more likely in the most undeveloped areas and the bigger the gap between the ideals of the leaders and the expectations of the populace, the less likely it is that the ‘revolution’ will occur. This then would represent a major failure on the part of the Maoist elites to mobilise ‘their’ people. But when Adivasis join the insurgents, they tend to do so en masse, representing their tradition of collective activity rather than decisions at individual level that Maoist membership best represents their own interests.

The Naxalites are not fighting purely for control of land, as they would be for control of revenue sources such as oil, which only becomes accessible through secession or high levels of negotiating power. This generally requires higher levels of violence than that needed for resource looting. People’s militias have lead to ordinary people attacking police and army posts and the Maoists have started abductions, with attendant increased planning and coordination of attacks. In common with many insurgent groups like the LTTE, the concepts of ‘sacrifice’ and ‘martyrs’ provide impetus for new recruits to become radicalised.

The main set of actions by the rebels this millennium have been a steadily rising levels of violence against security forces, militias and individuals they consider to be against them even as the killing of Adivasis and low-castes appears to be contrary to their stated aims. They have also employed child soldiers. They are increasing their use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), coordinating attacks and improving their intelligence networks, planning raids with more care, attacking a wide range of targets and also making use of more opportunities for violence. The rebels have so far avoided attacking urban areas but have reached city peripheries in some areas. They concentrate on attacks which yield arms and in many locations weak defence of the weapons of security personnel has allowed the Naxalites to steal them.

**Responses by the Indian State**

There are many endogenous factors that influence the responses of a government towards rebellion, such as how autocratic it is, whether it is looking to be voted for another term in office, and the cultural norms of the country. A government needs to consider its international reputation and credibility, style of governance, influence on other insurgent groups, and potential expenditure. According to the Polity IV rankings, India scores very high on indicators for democracy: a polity score of 9 in 1999 (the latest available figure), showing it to be a mature democracy with elective recruitment of its executives, constraints on its political elites and un-

87. Kujur, ‘Naxal Movement in India’
88. Bhatia, ‘Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar’
89. Navlakha, ‘Days and Nights in the Maoist Heartland’
90. Lujala, ‘Deadly Combat over Natural Resources’
91. Srivastava, ‘On Maoist Killings’
92. Project Ploughshares, ‘India- Maoist Insurgency’
93. Stratfor, ‘A Close Look at India’s Naxalite Threat’
94. Navlakha, ‘Days and Nights in the Maoist Heartland’
restricted political participation. A score of 10 would be a fully consolidated democracy. India, an electoral democracy, is now the only state in South Asia ranked as ‘free’ by Freedom House in terms of political freedom, and ‘partly free’ for press freedom, despite paradoxically being currently ranked as ‘seriously’ at risk of state failure.

In terms of predicting incidence of political instability and civil war, Goldstone et al. argue that regime type and political institutions are more precise indicators than unequal distribution of natural resource rents or any other variables. What they label ‘partial democracy with factionalism’ is the regime type most at risk from instability. Indian democracy is a huge and intensely complex style of governance with many unique features among state governments, and it experiences a lot of communalism, factionalism, enormous corruption and erosion of certain democratic freedoms.

The extent of government mismanagement and corruption regarding Naxalite policy, expenditure and strategy is reasonably well-documented and makes for depressing reading. India’s Supreme Court has blamed uneven development and institutional exclusion for increasing insurgency and political extremism. The government has so far insisted that the Naxalites are a ‘law and order’ problem, and responsibility rests with individual states, meaning that the country’s military has not been deployed, only Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and militias. The government’s use of the terms ‘extremist’ and ‘terrorist’ to describe Naxalites, while simultaneously conceding to the legitimacy of their demands, is another example of India’s lack of cohesive approach to the problem. For many years, the problem was underestimated by the government (as admitted recently by the Union Home Minister), which allowed the rebels to consolidate their power.

The Maoist increase in armed attacks over the last few years, and the spread of the LWE across a wider territory, have forced the government to address the problem more comprehensively. Naxalites, like Al Qaeda, do not have a centralised and hierarchical command structure, and this unorganised approach is one of their salient features. This fragmented feature may prevent the movement from taking unified decisions, but may have also contributed to the state and central governments’ lack of uniform strategy to dealing with them. Even after government decisions, the legislation may be ineffective: since 2006, when the Ministry of Home Affairs embarked on its most recent anti-Naxalite policy, the number of affected districts has increased considerably. There are many simultaneous streams of LWE operating under the banner of Naxalism, which poses a further challenge to the government, for example when trying to organise peace talks without uniform agreement on who can represent whom. In June 2009, New Delhi banned the Communist Party of India (Maoist) as a terrorist organi-

95. Centre for Systemic Peace, ‘Polity IVd Polity-Case Format 1800-2009’
99. See Ramana, ‘Government’s Response to the Maoist Challenge’
100. The Hindu, ‘Supreme Court Voices Concern’
101. Stratfor, ‘A Close Look at India’s Naxalite Threat’
102. Tharu, ‘Insurgency and the State in India’
103. Singh, ‘Naxal Challenge to the Indian State’
104. Kujur, ‘Naxal Movement in India’
105. Ramana, ‘Government’s Response to the Maoist Challenge’
sation, and individual states have done the same for other LWE groups, but not in a consistent manner.

The conflict is not fought by unitary actors. India’s government is factionalised, prone to corruption and vacillates between different approaches to dealing with LWE. The ‘Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas’ report of the Expert Group identifies multiple dimensions of failure of governance, such as upper-caste dominance, key decision makers being from landowning classes, cultural superiority and lack of transparency that lead to leadership failures and increases the likelihood of subversion and violent responses.

One of the main issues from the side of the Indian government is the lack of a clear coordinated strategy for dealing with LWE violence. As mentioned, successive governments have been unable to agree on whether to approach the problem from a development angle or a security threat. This has lead to disagreements about the most effective responses to Naxalism: repression, dialogue, offensive action or a combination of the above. In March 2010 the Government of India launched “Operation Green Hunt”, a multi-faceted counter-terrorism offensive that makes use of joint operations by security forces and has had significant impact in numbers of Naxalites killed. However, weak inter-state and inter-agency coordination has reduced the efficacy of security forces’ operations. There is considerable rivalry between security agencies, and the lack of a centralised bureaucracy for analysis hinders the effective sharing of intelligence.

In addition to the current overall lack of clear strategy, there is tension between central and state governments. Most analysis of state response and governance often suffers from simplistic dichotomies, for example stating that a given area is controlled either by the rebels or by the state when the ground reality is far more complex, with multiple layers of control and conflict. Such simplification can result in the use of draconian legislation, like the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), to deal with armed villagers agitating for forest access. The Indian state has not adopted a formal definition of Naxalism, perhaps because it gives the state more freedom in its responses to LWE. Some Indian states label the Naxalites ‘terrorists’ under POTA, while others do not; some groups within LWE are labelled ‘terrorists’ while others are not.

There have been early attempts by the state to address the issue of rural inequality and violence, such as the Policy Planning Division of the MHA in late 1960s, the formation of the Manmohan Singh Committee examining rural unrest in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar in the mid-1980s and the committee on Naxalite violence later that decade. But until 2008, there was no serious attempt from the government to comprehensively analyse the conflict by which time LWE violence was already a very serious threat. India is blessed with a surfeit of government committees and policy groups (many of which deal with issues affected by Naxalism,
such as the 2007 National Mineral Policy Committee). The central government has taken various steps to placate populations in Maoist areas and show that they are committed to rural development and equality. These include the Backwards Districts Initiative, Backwards Regions Grant Fund and Pradhan Mantri Grameen Yojana, as well as various separate schemes implemented by different Ministries. This lack of coordination and cohesion in policy and research on the subject, coupled with multiple (and sometimes conflicting) sources of information, renders decision making difficult and unsystematic. It would furthermore be incorrect to suggest that these state-led measures have all been implemented solely as a response to LWE.

Table 1
(Examples of Government of India legislation addressing terrorism)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DAA- Disturbed Areas Act</td>
<td>Gives provincial governments total impunity when engaged in anti-rebel operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TADA – Terrorism &amp; Detention Act</td>
<td>Allows unlawful detention for suspected terrorists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTO- Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance</td>
<td>Controversial act giving extra powers to government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POTADA – Prevention of Terrorism Act</td>
<td>Replaced POTO in 2002. Grants special powers to authorities, such as holding suspects for 180 days without charge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2006, the government implemented the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), which guarantees 100 days of work to each household in rural areas, mostly cash-for-work building infrastructure projects. NREGA is widely seen as a response to Naxalite violence, whereby the state seeks to reduce rural grievances and turn popular opinion against the Naxalites. NREGA has been implemented in the areas most affected by LWE, which tend to be the rural areas most neglected till now by the government. But the local sentiment is that this employment programme is caused by the government reacting to the Naxalites demands and violence, and is therefore a reactive policy whose primary goal is to contain LWE, instead of developing rural areas. It is therefore possible that if the rural populations increasingly believe that NREGA and other state responses to LWE are beneficial for them, then this could be a further motivation for Naxalites to spread violence if villagers believe this brings development in the longer term.

The Government of India has a policy of buying back weapons from LWE fighters, even if they were originally looted from police and army posts in raids, and has also begun giving salaries or stipends to fighters who have renounced Naxalism and want to be rehabilitated into society. The state government of Karnataka has announced a generous financial package for Maoists who surrender, which could result in many non-Naxalites also ‘surrendering’ to re-

115. Personal communication, London 2010
117. Ibid.
119. Express News Service, ‘Government Offers Carrot to Naxals’
ceive the money. In any case, other states have not passed the same incentives to rehabilitate fighters, so this could result in fighters crossing state borders merely to receive financial handouts.

**Escalation of conflict**

The Maoists have increased their levels of violence in recent years and numbers of dead per incident have risen. The government knows that further collateral damage inflicted on villagers in the battle against the insurgents would lead to further alienation, anger and disappointment with the central government, if for example the Indian Air Force carries out air strikes. But the government currently views the use of armed forces (the Indian Army rather than CRPF) as a last resort, indicating that they perceive the issue, even now, more as a development than an internal security challenge.

Maoists now refuse outright to enter into any peace talks with the government, but India’s leaders have also taken the decision not to have any dialogue with the Maoists till they disarm, thus creating the conditions from both sides for continued violence through political intransigence. The government claims to have a general policy of not engaging in peace talks whatsoever with any rebel groups until they have disarmed, but this policy has not been adhered to in other Indian conflicts, such as the Nagaland insurgency. Furthermore, in 2004 the State Government of Andhra Pradesh held peace talks with the Naxalites, and in 2005 the Home Minister stated that talks could still take place even if the rebels still bear arms. This inconsistency represents another vacillation of the Indian government’s stated policies.

The government’s latest anti-Maoist offensive has involved almost 50,000 paramilitary soldiers and tens of thousands of policemen. The Naxalites in turn have declared that the levels of violence will keep rising unless the government halts offensives against them, and the government likewise has issued an ultimatum that if the rebels do not begin peace talks, the state will intensify its crackdown. Such reciprocal violence reduces the opportunities for peace talks and negotiations. The government approaches are routinely criticised by civil society organisations and NGOs for human rights violations, by the judiciary for illegal procedures, by the political executive for not controlling the security threat and by the army and police who lose colleagues in poorly-planned manoeuvres. In just one of many examples, unarmed Adivasis protesting against a hydro-electric power project were shot and killed by police.

The government established a unified joint command to deal with Naxalism in 2006 and embarked on a programme of promoting recruitment among tribal groups themselves to fight the Maoists. In a further complication of the issue, there are private and caste militias operating

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120. British Broadcasting Corporation, “India is losing Maoist battle” http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8256692.stm (8 August 2010)
121. Ramana, ‘Maoist Movement in India’
122. Rao, ‘New front in the war against Naxalites’
123. Singh, ‘Naxal Challenge to the Indian State’
124. Ramana, ‘Government’s Response to the Maoist Challenge’
127. Ahuja & Ganguly, ‘Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India’
128. Economic and Political Weekly, ‘Massacres of Adivasis’
129. Navlakha, ‘Maoists in India’
in Naxalite areas, in clear contradiction to the Indian Constitution. These have been established to protect wealthy landowners, upper castes and other groups with opposing interests to the Maoists. These militias employ violent methods and carry out actions against scheduled castes, Dalits and Naxalites. Such vigilante groups operate along caste divisions, as Adivasis are often treated as a caste. Some of these militias have been established and funded for self-protection by private groups, such as the Ranvir Sena, which was also banned as a terrorist organisation in 1995. Another example of such groups is the Salwa Judum militia. The promotion of such militias, both tribal and non-tribal, has had negative effects in terms of the government’s anti-LWE campaigns, particularly as Salwa Judum has been accused of grave human rights abuses. Some militias are supported by the government, either openly (the Greyhounds) or clandestinely (Salwa Judum). State security forces emphasise eliminating the rebels in staged ‘encounters’, and once militias and special units have been trained and deployed, there is a lack of political will to remove or modify them and change security strategy. The motivations for such militias may ostensibly be to fight the Naxalites and protect the population, but they are routinely accused of mass murder, human rights violations, rape, abductions and criminality themselves. Very few cases go to court.

The use of Salwa Judum pitted armed tribals against Naxalites, and it has frequently been the Adivasis who suffered most as they are caught in the middle between these two armed groups. This represented clear abdication of the government’s responsibility to deal with the issue itself rather than by employing proxies. As happened in Peru under the Shining Path, the use of state-sponsored vigilante groups to combat LWE in India has increased the numbers of civilian deaths. The demarcation between the military, armed militias and civilian protection groups is increasingly indistinct and highly complex; the system is prone to abuse. In July 2011, Salwa Judum was declared illegal (and against the Constitution) by the Supreme Court of India and the authorities have been ordered to reclaim firearms and investigate its criminal activities. The group has been criticised for employing uneducated youth, child soldiers and infringements of human rights. Overall, India’s use of militias and proxies to combat the Naxalite insurgents represents a failure to take responsibility for the security of the state and has contributed to an increased number of casualties.

The relationship between state and rebel is not at all clear-cut, and in fact represents some elements of symbiosis. One complexity in certain areas is the shady history of political agreements between Naxalites and political parties, whereby information and assistance are offered in return for the LWE to remove political rivals and settle deals. These arrangements benefit both corrupt local politicians and the LWE combatants and are more pronounced around election time. If the Naxalites target opposition candidates, the winning party will ensure that the local security forces subsequently “go slow” on the rebels. On a more mercenary level, the Maoists will take cash payments for targeted assassinations. Some politicians come to rely on Maoists for their personal security and professional careers.

130. Borooah, ‘Deprivation, Violence and Conflict’
131. Ahuja & Ganguly, ‘Naxalite Insurgency Violence in India’
132. Misra, ‘Left-wing Insurgency in South Asia’
133. Navlakha, ‘Maoists in India’
134. Tharu, ‘Insurgency and the State in India’
135. Tharu, ‘Insurgency and the State in India’, p.94
136. Tharu, ‘Insurgency and the State in India’
Table 2

Some other examples of Indian counter-insurgency militias working with police support. Some of their leaders are also in the lower house of Parliament in New Delhi.\textsuperscript{137}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Tigers</td>
<td>Vigilante</td>
<td>Upper Caste + State</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranvir Sena</td>
<td>Vigilante</td>
<td>Upper Caste</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunlight Sena</td>
<td>Vigilante</td>
<td>Upper Caste</td>
<td>Bihar, Jharkhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhumi Sena</td>
<td>Vigilante</td>
<td>Upper Caste + State</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram Raksha Dal</td>
<td>Vigilante Task Force</td>
<td>Secular/Rural</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such phenomena are only possible in an environment with little political accountability or security, and poor channels of communication between the individual states and New Delhi. The Advocates’ Committee on Naxalite Terrorism\textsuperscript{138} contends that the power-hungry activities and avarice of politicians, and the benefits for them of staying in political office, have contributed to the continuation of the Naxalite conflict. In addition to this corruption, there is the lack of cohesive and united Government policy against the Naxalites. If the government cannot decide if the LWE is a security or a development issue, how can they formulate consistent strategy and state responses? Decisions by the central government in New Delhi have often not been followed by individual states and there is a lack of communication and coordination between the army, police and separate security agencies. The Naxalites and the security forces are furthermore using increasingly powerful weapons against each other.

**Conclusion and implications for policy**

Government policies, alternating repression and accommodation as responses to popular uprisings, can lead to increased rebellion.\textsuperscript{139} In India, a government strategy of repression increases popular anti-government sentiment, whilst a concessionary approach allows the rebels to consolidate their territory, re-arm, and spread more propaganda among the populace. Furthermore extremely high levels of illiteracy in India’s poorest areas and especially among Adivasis may make them more vulnerable to demagogues, emotionalised pleas and simplistic arguments. A lack of decisive strategy by the state, inability to address the root causes of the grievance, a combination of conciliatory and repressive policies and corruption allow rebels to continue their campaign of violence. New Delhi’s Naxalite policy lacks consistency, being both conciliatory and coercive, which prevents unambiguous responses. The state’s oscillating policies and reactions to the LWE rebellion play a key role in prolonging and intensifying the conflict.

It is the lack of consistency, rather than state policies being too repressive or lenient, that in India has resulted in further rebellion and increased violence. Of course, the actions by the rebels and the state responses condition and affect each other; there are a lot of cyclical and

\textsuperscript{137.} Adapted from Misra, ‘Left-wing Insurgency in South Asia’
\textsuperscript{138.} Advocates’ Committee on Naxalite Terrorism, ‘Report of the Advocates’ Committee on Naxalite Terrorism in Andhra Pradesh’
\textsuperscript{139.} As demonstrated by Rasler, ‘Concessions, Repression and Political Protest’
reactive decisions made by both sides. Such feedback loops result in circular results and causal patterns. If a state chooses only to address the symptoms of a problem and not the root causes, and if sufficient mobilisation occurs among the aggrieved, then organised political violence is a probable result.

Naxalite activity correlates with increases in poverty and decreases in literacy but areas with high Naxalite activity also have reduced levels of violent crime.\textsuperscript{140} New Delhi should therefore address India’s rural poverty and high illiteracy in addition to the widespread inequalities. India’s political system is corrupt and frequently criminal, but it still has democratic legitimacy, and thus has great potential to manipulate the expectations of the country’s rural underclass.\textsuperscript{141} As such, government policies are the key to comprehending the causal mechanisms of the Naxalite rebellion: the exploitation, exclusion and erosion of tribal lifestyles. Unlike many modern civil wars, the Naxalites are not to be blamed for illegally extracting resources such as minerals or diamonds to finance their insurgency. Other causal factors alone cannot account for the insurgency without an examination of the state’s priorities and ‘development’ efforts. If the government continues to employ force while the Naxalites are able to undermine state legitimacy by carrying out development and security activities of their own, and if the grievances of poor rural areas are not comprehensively addressed, then a continuation of violence across India looks probable.

For a comprehensive approach to preventing civil conflict, the conclusions that can be drawn from the Naxalite case are that grievances should be reduced through equitable allocations of public goods and land, and economic opportunities. Any minority group (ethnic or otherwise) that feels excluded is likely to generate resentment that can be manipulated by elites and mobilised into potentially violent insurgency. If violence breaks out, the state should have a consistent response strategy, which is implemented coherently across different sectors, and combines security measures that incorporate an analysis of the underlying causes of the conflict with development activities that reduce grievances.

Policy implications for government are clear. A government that seeks to reduce the likelihood of conflict needs to address the fundamental causes of grievance. All countries however have some levels of grievance among certain sectors of the populace, and a government can guard against political mobilisation in the early stages and improve social cohesion. If political violence does break out, the state should follow a comprehensive, coordinated and unified strategy that incorporates development and security forces, local and national government, and minority group leaders. This strategy should be closely monitored and allowed to develop to adjust to the circumstances in a non-static way. The state cannot oscillate between different types of response to rebellion and expect a positive outcome.

\textsuperscript{140.} Borooah, ‘Deprivation, Violence and Conflict’
\textsuperscript{141.} Banerjee, ‘Maoist Movement in India’
\textsuperscript{142.} Rupavath, ‘Tribal Land Alienation’
Bibliography


List of Terms:

- **Advesi** Historically disadvantaged indigenous aboriginal minority.
- **Bandh** Political protect in the form of a strike
- **CRPF** Central Reserve Police Force
- **CPI (M)** Communist Party of India (Maoist)
- **Dalits/ scheduled castes** Members of India’s lowest castes (untouchables)
- **Greyhounds** Anti-Naxalite elite commando force
- **IED** Improvised explosive device
- **LTTE** Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
- **LWE** Left Wing Insurgency
- **MCCI** Maoist Communist Centre of India
- **NREGA** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- **POTA** Prevention of Terrorism Act
- **PW** People’s War
- **OBC** Other backward class. Social group similar to scheduled castes.
- **Ranvir Sena** Right-wing upper-caste militia of land owners
- **Red Corridor** Area of East India where Naxalite activities are concentrated
- **Salwa Judum** Government-sponsored anti-Naxalite militia
- **States** Known as ‘districts’ or ‘provinces’ in other countries
- **Tribals/Schedules Tribes** Members of India’s historically disadvantaged indigenous populations