



INTERNAL SECURITY IN INDIA: THREAT PERCEPTION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Sushil Kumar Singh

*Research Scholar at University of Allahabad in Department of Defense and Strategic Studies
Pryagraj, India*

ABSTRACT

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the Indian state and its citizens are seriously threatened by internal security challenges. India has had a mixed history handling the myriad internal security concerns it has faced. No other nation has, arguably, ever confronted as many different internal security threats, in different shapes and intensities, as the Indian state. Although the perceived threat from internal security issues has diminished over the past few years, they nonetheless persist. This paper critically engages with the current internal security difficulties that the Indian state faces in light of the urgency of the situation. In doing so, the article illustrates the nature and the degree of danger perception as well as the basic method by which each of these internal security risks operates. The research also assesses the state responses to the internal security challenges by offering a conceptual framework. The study restricts its focus to four primary internal security concerns in India: Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), violent conflicts in the Northeastern states, separatism and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and intergroup conflict and religious radicalization.

KEY WORD: *internal security, militancy, maoist and extremism*

AN INTRODUCTION TO MAPPING INDIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY

It is crucial to set "internal security" apart from the conventional conception through a "law-and-order" framework in order to provide a more comprehensive conceptual context for the term. While academics struggle to agree on a definition, the Commission of Centre-State Relations' report on "Internal Security, Criminal Justice, and Centre-State Co-operation" provided a generally recognised definition of internal security. The significant points of convergence with the "National Security" discourse were underlined by this Commission as it discussed many aspects of internal security. This paper presents the argument for both national and internal security to be addressed from a common platform, departing from the conventional thinking that restricts the scope of national security to deal with the external threat and economic development. Internal security in India is described in this report as:

"security against threats faced by a country within its national borders, either caused by internal political turmoil, or provoked, prompted or proxied by an enemy country, perpetrated even by such groups that use a failed, failing or weak state, causing insurgency, terrorism or any other subversive acts that target innocent citizens, cause animosity between and among groups of citizens and communities in that country."

A thorough discussion of this definition is warranted. This definition's discussion of the broader meaning of internal security is crucial. It engages with both external and internal issues and stakeholders in comprehending the internal security

discourse, in contrast to the binary we frequently find. In a similar vein, it doesn't restrict the risks to the state alone. Instead, there is a great deal of accommodation made for how the residents and communities perceive the threat. This term goes on to differentiate between terrorism and insurgency. The majority of Western academia approaches terrorism and insurgency from a shared vantage point. One of the numerous similarities between the two is the deployment of a "irregular army" to carry out terrorist acts. Insurgencies and terrorist acts, which are sometimes used synonymously, have various meanings. Insurgencies are purposefully organised violent political movements in which the opposition attempts to overthrow the established order through violent means.

The Maoist war in India can be referred to as an insurgency based on this idea. Similar to this, a small number of militant groups active in the Northeastern states can also be referred to as insurgents. On the other side, terrorism has always been viewed through the lens of external actors or countries, at least in the Indian context. When analysing and discussing the problem of terrorism, it is difficult to overlook Pakistan's role in assisting and maintaining the terrorist actions in India. More importantly, rebels, militants, and terrorists all engage in the same acts while using terror tactics. Despite having some things in common, these groups differ from one another in terms of ideology, goals, and the types of stakeholders they involve. The irregular army's role as a link between terrorism and insurgency does not fit well in the Indian setting. The Maoists and other insurgent organisations continue to conduct their violent activities with a regular (if not conventional) army. Working



through an irregular army may be a given for terrorist organisations.

The subversive actions carried out by the community and criminal groups pose substantial challenges to internal security in addition to insurgency and terrorism. It would be challenging to separate internal security risks in this situation from either criminal activity or from the typical law-and-order issue. For instance, it is impossible to downplay the potential contributions of minor bank robberies or domestic disputes between people of different religions in financing terrorism and riots in communities. When discussing the problems with internal security in the context of India, we frequently have a tendency to neglect converge these difficulties. Therefore, a coherent discourse on internal security would address dangers as affecting the entire country, threats to the state as well as to the people, and should also take into consideration both internal and external causes in handling the threat. The following four significant internal security concerns in India are examined in this study through the lens of this cogent internal security discourse.

THE LARGEST INTERNAL SECURITY THREAT: LEFT WING EXTREMISM

According to the former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Left-wing Extremist movement or the Maoist insurgency led by the Communist Party of India-Maoist

(CPI-Maoist) is the country's greatest internal security threat. The Maoist insurgency began in 1967 in the Naxalbari regions of West Bengal state and has since taken on numerous shapes and colours. The two main stances that are used to fight the Maoist insurgency are those that support the so-called revolutionary violence and refer to the militants who engage in it as fighting for the rights and entitlements of the oppressed and underprivileged, respectively. While the Maoists receive a lot of sympathy from the first group, the Indian government disapproves of the violent activity. The Maoists assert that they are influenced by the political ideologies of Karl Marx, Lenin, and Mao and that their goal is to gain political power and usher in a "New Democracy" through a protracted military conflict. By doing this, the Maoists reject and disparage India's democratic and parliamentary systems of government. These ideological orientations and the romanticization of "revolutionary violence" have allowed the Maoist movement to establish itself over 180 districts in ten states over the past five decades. However, it's now believed that the Maoist movement has only extended to a small number of districts. The Maoist insurgency has existed for more than 50 years, causing widespread violence in the regions where they are present, posing a direct threat to the Indian state, and instilling terror in the minds of the general populace. The table that follows attests to this.

Table 1 (Fatality in Naxal Affected Area)

Year	Civilians	SF's	Maoists	Not Specified	Total
2005	259	147	282	24	712
2006	249	128	343	14	734
2007	218	234	195	25	672
2008	183	214	228	19	644
2009	368	334	299	12	1013
2010	628	267	264	20	1179
2011	259	137	210	0	606
2012	156	96	125	1	378
2013	165	103	151	0	418
2014	127	98	121	4	350
2015	90	56	110	0	256
2016	122	60	250	0	432
2017	109	76	150	0	335
2018	108	73	231	0	412
2019	99	49	154	0	302
2020	61	44	134	0	239
2021	41	48	126	0	164
2022*	21	30	110	0	161
Total	3262	2194	3432	119	9007

Source: SATP(2022*)

In addition to its violent actions, the Maoist insurgency threatens both the government and the populace. Whereby the Maoists questioned the sovereignty of the Indian state by

rejecting democracy and the parliamentary system of government. This part of the security danger is highlighted by the Maoists' murders of citizens, public servants, and members



of the security services. It becomes sense in this situation to refer to it as India's single biggest domestic security danger. The general populace is likewise threatened by the Maoist insurgency. In the many Maoist-affected areas, the Maoists' very presence fosters a climate of terror. The Maoists have taken advantage of the tribal and other marginalised communities' predominance in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, where the state apparatus is only marginally present, by engaging in acts of violence to sow fear among the populace and win their support. Another significant threat that the Maoists and their over-the-ground followers represent to Indian society and polity is legitimising violence by non-state actors. While the state and the Maoists seem to be the most significant stakeholders, it is vital to remember that a particular segment of the intelligentsia also plays a significant role in legitimising the Maoists.

The Indian government has taken a number of actions in response to the challenges posed by the Maoist insurgency. The twin-track strategy of growth and security has been the most popular solution. Because the Maoists are considered an armed group by the Indian government, a counter-insurgency strategy has been implemented to reduce the likelihood of violence and the perception of a danger. The Central Armed Police Personnel (CAPF), which the individual states deployed alongside security forces in Maoist-affected areas, were successful in reducing Maoist activity. Similar to this, the Indian government's development strategy primarily aims to dissuade the local population from supporting the Maoists. A possible reference point for the Indian government's development attempts is the study on "Development Challenges in the Extremist Affected Areas" from the country's former Planning Commission. In order to develop the areas and, secondly, to address the grievances of the local people in order to woo them away from the Maoists, initiatives such as the Integrated Action Plan (now Central Assistance Scheme) in the worst affected districts, Security Related Expenditure, and Road Construction Initiatives have been launched. As a response to combating the Maoists, the current regime has also implemented a strategy of "ensuring the rights and entitlements of the local communities" in addition to security and development measures. The long-standing demands for land and forest rights that have been made by the local community are met.

The aforementioned approaches have allowed succeeding administrations to significantly contain the Maoists. The Maoists currently only control a small portion of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra. Numerous Maoist leaders have either been neutralised or detained, as evidenced by the sharp decline in violent Maoist-related incidents. Although the threat posed by the Maoist insurgency is now perceived as being significantly reduced, it nonetheless persists despite being on a much lower scale. Although there have been less violent occurrences by the Maoists, the banned organisation has been targeting the security forces with surprise attacks under the new leadership of Namballa Keshava Rao, alias Basavaraj, as their general secretary, and Madvi Hidma, as their chief of military affairs. In the past two years, the Maoists have launched four

significant attacks since Basavaraj assumed control of the organisation. In the Gadchiroli district on May 1, 2019, the Maoists murdered fifteen members of the security forces. Prior to the first round of the general election on April 9, 2019, the Maoists ambushed the convoy of Chhattisgarh BJP MLA Bhima Mandavi, killing the MLA and two others. The new leadership is attempting to quash the increasing perception that the Maoist movement is nearing its end by launching these attacks. Given the long-lasting nature of the Maoist insurgency and the lessons learned from history, the government's response to this security danger shouldn't be lawless. Although the state's responses have been successful thus far in combating the Maoists, their sheer existence draws attention to the policy framework's flaws. The government should consider investing in public perception management in addition to the aforementioned answers because it will aid in delegitimizing the movement and those who support it among intellectual circles. The administration ought to consider holding negotiations and peace talks with the Maoists. A discourse between the two groups would aid in reducing the impression of threat because ideological dispute is a significant contributing factor to this violent conflict.

NORTH-EASTERN ETHNIC CONFLICT AND MILITANCY

An important internal security worry for the Indian state has been the persistent militancy and violent ethnic conflicts in certain of the Northeastern states. Contrary to the popular perspective, which views violence and conflicts as a "freedom struggle" against a "homogenising state," the majority of these confrontations are frequently driven by mistaken emotions that cast a shadow over the true problems. These conflicts are correctly categorised by the Standing Committee of the MHA into three main classes: separatist insurgencies that desire independence; autonomous insurgencies that declare sub-regional aspirations; and intra-ethnic conflicts between larger and smaller tribal groups. Long-standing militancy in some Northeastern states has been attributed, among other things, to aggressive identity assertion and a sense of alienation among dominant and minority ethnic groups in different states. The historical causes of alienation stem from colonial rule's failure to unite these states with "mainland" India still exist today in one way or another. The political elites of the Northeastern states frequently link this feeling of alienation to both economic sluggishness and inadequate political representation. Additionally, the Indian state is frequently cited as the common adversary and held accountable in the internal conflicts between the dominant and minority communities. In addition to these, the external effects on militancy and internal conflicts in terms of supporting them and giving them safe havens in their territory have been a significant impact. Even though there has been a sharp decline in violence over the past few years, there are still a number of militant organisations (even though they are relatively tiny in number), and interethnic and intraethnic tensions persist. The violent occurrences and fatalities that occurred in the Northeastern states over the past ten years are highlighted in the following table.


Table 2 (Fatality in North East due to Militancy)

Year	Civilians	SF's	Militants	Not Specified	Total
2011	73	31	138	2	244
2012	99	18	216	1	334
2013	95	21	134	2	252
2014	243	22	204	0	469
2015	64	49	163	3	279
2016	63	20	85	0	168
2017	35	13	58	1	107
2018	20	15	38	0	73
2019	18	5	11	0	34
2020	5	5	17	0	27
2021	11	3	32	0	45
2022*	18	3	27	0	48
Total	744	205	1122	9	2080

Source: SATP(2022*)

Security concerns from militancy and ethnic conflict come in many different forms. First, the sovereignty of the Indian state is contested by separatist militant groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in Nagaland, which includes both the Isak Muivah and the Kahplang factions. The Indian state's territorial integrity and sovereignty are also threatened by the United Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur. The sub-regional aspirations that fuel violent ethnic conflicts weaken India's democratic and constitutional values. Furthermore, it is a big source of concern that bordering nations like Myanmar and Bangladesh are harbouring extremist groups. Several Northeastern states have been exposed to drug and human trafficking in addition to violent situations. States like Manipur have been particularly heavily impacted by cross-border trafficking of illegal drugs. Similar to this, there are significant security concerns with the dumping of Chinese commodities into the Northeastern regions via Manipur. The Northeast borders' militancy and ungoverned territories play a significant role in the challenge to the Indian state.

The state has responded to these dangers in four different yet complementary ways. The Sixth Schedule's provisions for guaranteeing local autonomy, the security strategy to combating militancy, peace talks and negotiations with militant organisations, development measures, including special economic packages, are among them. This comprehensive foundation for policy has largely proven to be successful. Some of these answers, nevertheless, have also had unanticipated and negative effects. Security measures taken in reaction to the militancy have significantly reduced violence (refer to Table 2). Similar to this, the ongoing peace negotiations with the vast majority of the well-known militant organisations have produced positive outcomes. For instance, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) signed a deal with the Government in January 2020 and afterwards totally disbanded its armed cadres. In addition, hundreds of armed cadres from eight different militant organisations, including the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I), made their surrender in Assam in January 2020. While the peace

negotiations with numerous terrorist organisations are encouraging, such agreements also make the underprivileged and minority groups feel uneasy and encourage them to take up guns. A sign of the increasing fears is the rise of smaller armed organisations in the states of Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam. On the other side, the struggle for domination over resources and territories among the many ethnic groups also fuels ethnic conflicts, raising the stakes for national security. While the succeeding governments have made some progress in addressing these security threats, there are still some shortcomings in their strategies for doing so. These include the ineffective implementation of cease-fire agreements, the involvement of militants in criminal activity, and the protracted nature of peace negotiations. The territory of Myanmar continues to provide some of these extremist groups with safe havens on the outside. A strong bilateral relationship with Myanmar could provide a solution to this issue.

SEPARATISM AND TERRORISM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

The difference between internal and external security concerns is muddled by the separatist and terrorist issues in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In actuality, the internal and external dimensions working together are part of what makes J&K's security concerns so difficult. The external component results from Pakistan's direct involvement in harbouring and supporting terrorist organisations on its soil and financing terrorist actions in J&K. The religious radicalization disguised as Kashmiri nationalism's demand for a separate state can be connected to the internal component of security issues. It is challenging for the Indian state to properly address the security challenges due to the intricate interaction of numerous interconnected issues. According to some academics, the Indian state faces a vicious cycle of security issues due to its geographical defensibility, Pakistan's claim to the same region, and the violent religious nationalism in Kashmir. China may have contributed to the ongoing disputes and violence in addition to Pakistan. The incidents where the Chinese



government issued lenient visas to residents of J&K can be interpreted as measures to weaken Indian sovereignty. According to academics, the Chinese interests are best served by a protracted struggle in Kashmir. To this extent, the Chinese state, together with Pakistan and terrorist organisations funded by Pakistan, has a significant stake in the hostilities in Kashmir.

With Pakistan, China, and terrorist organisations involved, the nature of the security challenges coming from J&K is multifaceted. Direct danger exists to the Indian state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The increasing religious

radicalization of J&K's youth continues to have detrimental effects on India's secular fabric. The enormous departure of Kashmiri Pandits from their own country has been facilitated by claims of Islamic fanaticism. Additionally, the terrorism and militancy that have existed for decades in Kashmir constitute a major threat to public safety. J&K remains to be one of the most volatile states in India, despite the fact that violence-related occurrences and fatalities have been on a downward trend over the past ten years (see the table below).

Table 3 3 (Fatality in Jammu and Kashmir due to Militancy)

Year	Civilians	SF's	Militant	Total
2012	19	18	84	121
2013	19	53	100	172
2014	28	47	114	189
2015	19	41	115	175
2016	14	88	165	267
2017	54	83	220	357
2018	86	95	271	452
2019	42	78	163	283
2020	33	56	232	321
2021	19	26	129	174
2022*	12	22	125	159
Total	345	607	1718	2670

Source: SATP(2022*)

The security situation in J&K has significantly improved during the past five years. The identification and destruction of domestic and international terrorists, the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A, which ended the state's special status and privileges, and the implementation of development initiatives can all be credited with improving the security situation. India has taken stern action against the militancy and the local backing it receives in Kashmir, and the killing of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) leader Burhan Wani on July 8, 2016, is frequently used as a benchmark. Since then, especially after the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A, the security forces in J&K have been effective in neutralising a number of terrorists.

Although the military and police have taken strong measures to combat terrorism in J&K, more must be done to prevent radicalization and anti-Indian sentiment among some segments of the populace. Three themes can be seen as far as the radicalization of Kashmir: pro-Pakistan, pro-Azadi, and pro-Salafist Islam with calls for Nizam-e Mustafa and Khalifat-e Rashida. While terrorist organisations like the HuM, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) are no longer actively involved in carrying out militancy, The Resistance Force (TRF), which is thought to be a LeT offshoot, has been responsible for carrying out the majority of terrorist activities in Kashmir. The Indian state should be ready for all eventualities in the future given the change in guard in the neighbourhood, the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's active participation in the process. The reduction of security threats resulting from militancy and terrorism in J&K would be made possible by the adoption of people-centered development

measures, an ongoing dialogue process with local stakeholders, and a strong security approach.

COMMUNALISM AND RELIGIOUS RADICALISATION

Contrary to the aforementioned problems, it might be challenging to pinpoint the perceived threat posed by communalism. As it is commonly understood, communalism is disagreement about nonreligious matters between two or more religious groups. These disputes between the two religious groups are frequently accepted politically and socially. It is safe to say that in the Indian context, communal violence is frequently socially and politically tolerated as long as it doesn't go too far. It is more difficult to articulate communalism within the broader language of internal security due to the socio-political elites' involvement in its inception, pursuit, and determination as well as its contribution to the political goals of the various groupings. The security dangers that communalism poses to the state and the populace have not been sufficiently grasped, despite the fact that the literature currently in circulation examines it through the lenses of elections, religious intolerance, and social division. It is significant to note that the MHA also excludes communalism and communal riots from its list of internal security concerns. However, this study considers communalism and radicalization as an internal security issue in light of the continuous occurrence of communal disturbances and their effects on religious radicalization.

The history of religious strife and unrest in India is a major contributor to the current communal violence and riots.



The diversity of India is directly threatened by the racial unrest. Additionally, racial tensions that feed religious radicalization pose a serious security risk to the Indian state. Extreme religious beliefs that indoctrinate people and lead to radicalization frequently find their justification in racial tension and rioting. Scholars have noted that terrorist organisations have a penchant for using violence against a certain religious community to attract new members and advance their missions. As an illustration, the “Voice of Hind,” propaganda published by the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in 2020, aims to recruit and indoctrinate Indian Muslims by stoking concerns and resentments related to the nation’s racial divisions. Additionally, there are instances of the Indian Mujahideen (IM) acting in India by exploiting racial tensions and rioting. Security services have recently drawn attention to how outside parties stoked and profited from the Delhi unrest and the Anti-CAA protest.

CONCLUSION

The dangers to India’s internal security are intricate in design. Contrary to criticism from some scholars, the Indian state’s response has been remarkably resilient in light of this complexity and the part that some external actors have played in amplifying the threat perception. The reduction of militancy and terrorism in J&K, the containment of Maoist violence to a few pockets of central India, the de-escalation of violent-related activities in the Northeastern states, the active pursuit of peace talks with several militant groups in the Northeast, and these actions all attest to the Indian government’s effective internal security strategy. A strong security approach, development initiatives in the impacted areas, resolving grievances through securing rights and entitlements, and peace negotiations with armed organisations can be summed up as the Indian state’s entire response to internal security challenges. However, the state must work successfully to moderate public opinion and deradicalize brainwashed individuals. To gain the confidence of the populace, it is necessary to move quickly with the peace negotiations currently taking place with various armed organisations in the Northeast. The current governments ought to consider emulating the Northeast’s peace talks in the Maoist-affected regions.

REFERENCES

1. Ajai Shani (2002), “Survey of Conflicts and Resolution in India’s Northeast”
2. Anshuman Behera and Aparupa Bhattacharjee (2021), “Insurgencies and Ungoverned Territories on the India-Myanmar Border: Implications of Bilateral Relations”, in Samatha Mallempati (ed.) *Enhancing India-Myanmar Ties: The Way Ahead*, New Delhi: ICWA & KW Publishers, pp. 22-31.
3. Abdul Hameed Khan (2017), *Changed Security Situation in Jammu and Kashmir: The Road Ahead*, IDSA Monograph Series No. 61, p. 7. Available online at <https://www.idsa.in/system/files/monograph/monograph61.pdf>, accessed on 20 September 2021.
4. Prashant Kumar Singh (2010), “Revisiting China’s Kashmir Policy”, *IDSA Comment*, 1 November 2010. Available online

at https://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/Revisiting_Chinas_KashmirPolicy_pksingh_011110, accessed on 23 September 2021.

5. Commission on Centre-State Relations (2010), “Report of the Commission on Centre-State Relations, Internal Security, Criminal Justice, and Centre-State Cooperation”, Volume V, New Delhi: Government of India, p. 5.
6. Gérard Chaliand (2006), “Insurgency and Terrorism in the 21st Century”, *Global Forces 2006, Proceedings of the ASPI conference*.
7. Anshuman Behera (2018), “From Mao to Maoism: The Indian Path”, in Narendar Pani and Anshuman Behera (eds.) *Reasoning Indian Politics: Philosopher Politicians to Politicians Seeking Philosophy*, London: Routledge, pp. 182-204.
8. Anshuman Behera (2021), “India’s Security Response to the Maoist Insurgency”, *Indian Studies Review*, Vol. 2. No. 1, pp. 1-16.
9. James A. Piazza (2012), “Types of Minority Discrimination and Terrorism”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 521-546.
10. *Internal Security-Annual Report (2019-20)*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. New Delhi, p. 6. Available online at https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Annual_Report_19_20.pdf, accessed on 25 September 2021.