

A Chance for Peace? : Hurdles on the path to a peaceful solution of India's Maoist Insurgency

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Abstract

Despite nominal engagement in peace efforts, both the state and Maoist leadership treated negotiations as strategic opportunities rather than sincere efforts toward resolution. This dynamic aligns with Walter's theory of the "credible commitment problem," where parties involved in conflict hesitate to uphold agreements, fearing that doing so may weaken their strategic position. Ultimately, these negotiations collapsed because neither party was willing to compromise, as the perceived incentives for meaningful peace talks were deemed unviable, making a peaceful resolution to this insurgency elusive.

Peace negotiations are inherently complex and prolonged, particularly when they are embedded in deep-seated political and ideological conflicts. The Indian government's approach to the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency primarily relies on standardized counter-insurgency measures, emphasizing military suppression over dialogue. This paper argues that a long-term peace process has yet to materialize due to vested political interests and a pervasive sense of insecurity on both sides, that is, the Indian bureaucratic and military agencies and the Maoists. The root of this mistrust lies in the fact that the Communist Party of India (Maoist) perceives Indian democracy as serving bourgeois elites, and is engaging in an armed struggle to establish a "New Democracy". Conversely, the state, viewing the Maoists through a predominantly security-centric lens, treats

it as a strictly “law and order” issue rather than pursuing reconciliation and addressing their socio-economic demands.

Keywords: Peace Process, Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency, Peace Negotiations, Peace Agreement, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

“In India, the choice could never be between chaos and stability, but between manageable and unmanageable chaos, between humane and inhuman anarchy, and between tolerable and intolerable disorder.”

– Ashis Nandy (1990), cited in *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* by Ramachandra Guha

The origins of the Naxalite movement lie in the growing dissatisfaction with mainstream communist parties in India, particularly the Communist Party of India (CPI), which had transitioned to parliamentary politics (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012). The insurgency took root in Naxalbari, West Bengal, on May 25, 1967, triggering decades of political violence and unrest. However, the movement has significantly weakened, with Maoist-related incidents and casualties declining by 77% and 85%, respectively, between 2010 and 2020 (Krishnan, 2023).

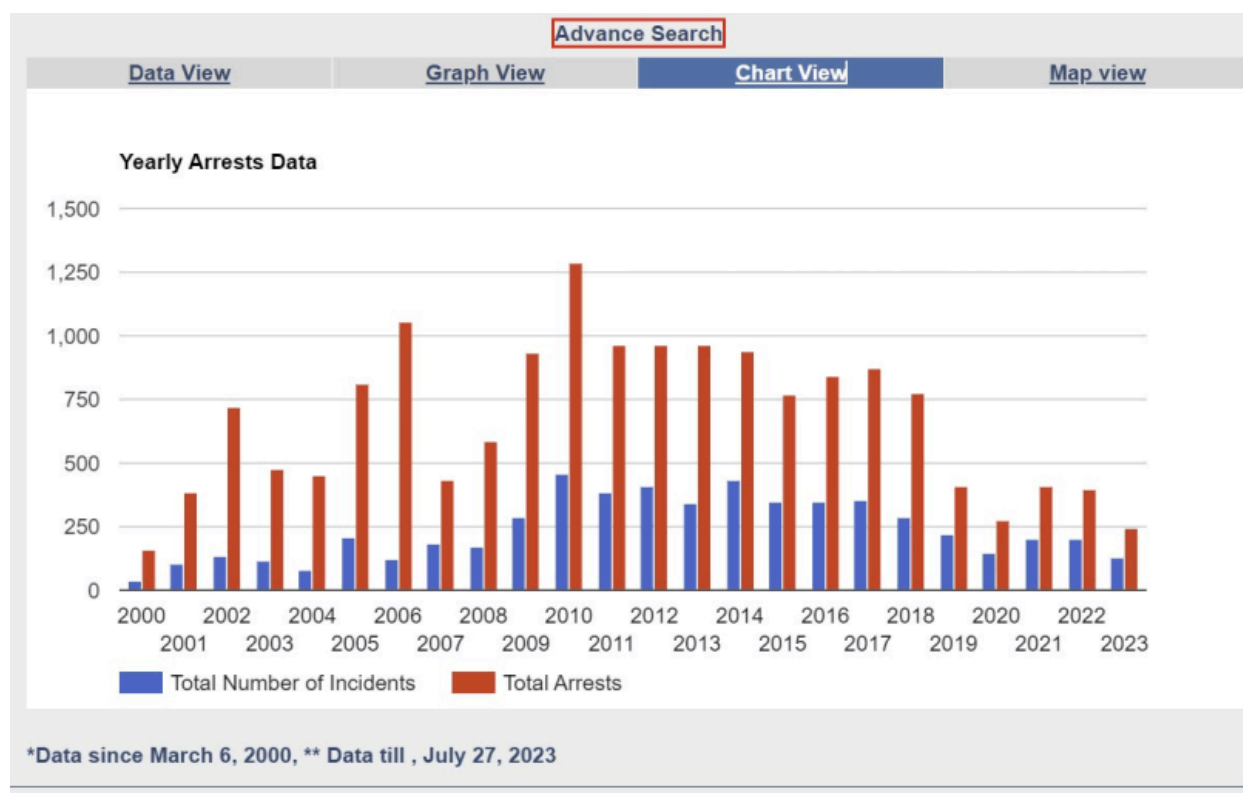


Figure: Gradual decline in Maoist-related killings and deaths over the years, roughly from 2018 onwards. Graph compiled from the data available on the SATP website (Maoist Insurgency, South Asian Terrorism Portal, Institute for Conflict Management, 2023).

Despite this decline, the CPI (Maoist) attempts to remain resolute, framing its struggle as a prolonged revolutionary process, claiming that the setbacks are part of their trajectory, asserting “The path is zig-zag, there are ups and downs...” (Singh, 2006, pg. 54). While this rhetoric may seem like propaganda, it underscores the enduring nature of the conflict, which has persisted for over six decades without a conclusive resolution (Guha, 2007). This study examines the failure of peace negotiations between the Andhra Pradesh state government and CPI (Maoist) (1989–2004). The People’s War Group (PWG), which later merged with CPI (Maoist), was the primary insurgent faction involved in these negotiations (Balagopal, 2005).

Certain issues of contention created an ethos of mutual distrust, which made substantive dialogue difficult, most notably the Maoists’ insistence on armed resistance and the state’s reluctance to accommodate their demands (Haragopal, 2012). The Maoists feared that peace talks might weaken their internal unity and erode the territorial influence they had gained over decades (Maringati, 2010).

Conversely, no elected government can realistically accept peace proposals from an armed insurgent group unless the group is willing to disarm or has gained sufficient strength to render normal governance infeasible (Vij, 2022). However, the Naxalites neither disarmed nor reached a point where they could disrupt state governance to such an extent that the government was forced to negotiate with them (Haragopal, 2012).

Although scholarly debates exist on the factors influencing successful peace negotiations, there is a broad consensus that a peace agreement can only be effective when confidence-building measures ensure adherence to its provisions (Braithwaite & Butcher, 2023). However, in this case, mechanisms to prevent ceasefire violations were absent, as neither side can be genuinely seen to be committed to the peace process without reaping strategic benefits (Badran, 2014).

Peace processes are intended to facilitate long-term societal transformation by integrating conflicting ideologies into governance structures (Höglund, 2008). However, as seen in many intra-state conflicts, the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency is shaped by ideological rifts, political interests, and socio-economic disparities (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). These factors perpetuate cycles of violence, mistrust, and insecurity, which are difficult to overcome when conflict resolution efforts rely on the state's lopsided, security-driven approach and prevailing technocratic governance norms (Govinda et al., 2021).

While identifying the obstacles to a sustained commitment to peace is elementary to this research, it is only essential to consider the broader structural and political contexts of these failed negotiations, if fits within the research scope.

Research Question

Why has the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and the Government of India failed to reach a peace agreement, or even initiate a long-term peace process?

Methodology

This paper aims to establish whether (and how) the state's developmental agenda and policies of armed suppression and reinforcement of top-down governance, alongside the Maoists' rhetoric of armed revolution, have prevented peace initiatives from growing (Banerjee, 2008). This article attempts to correlate the theoretical frameworks surrounding peace negotiations and peace processes to the case-sensitive details of the Maoist insurgency, by focusing on the insights gained from the failed peace talks between the Andhra Pradesh (AP) government and Maoists (1989-2004).

Therefore, the methodological premise of this research is to analyze the failed AP negotiations (1989-2004) and correlate a few selected observations with insights gained from the current discourse on peace negotiations and favorable circumstances surrounding successful peace processes. This has been selected as the crux of this research as it will unambiguously highlight how vested political/strategic considerations and mutual insecurities hinder peace processes and the paramountcy of depoliticized, case-sensitive models.

Moreover, to stress the acute insecurities that prevent both sides from engaging in meaningful peace negotiations, it is necessary to conduct a limited inquest into the academic discourse surrounding peace processes, specifically transitional justice and governance, to link them with India's policies on counterinsurgency, rehabilitation of ex-combatants, and addressing post-conflict grievances or popular socio-economic demands. It draws upon the secondary literature on peace negotiations and factors affecting the success of a peace process to assess whether these theoretical insights can be linked to explain the circumstances behind the breakdown of past peace efforts and the continued absence of such initiatives afterwards. A qualitative, desk-based approach was employed to conduct this multimodal discourse analysis, which relied on secondary sources that were critically evaluated for reliability and relevance.

Literature Review

Some view the insurgency as a hegemonic power struggle between two parties attempting to dominate each other over issues of sovereignty and governance, with the Maoists' insistence on armed revolution and the state's counterinsurgency policies treating it as simple "lawlessness" (Dixit, 2010, pg. 4). However, contemporary research on civil wars and peace processes demonstrates the limitations of security-centric and technocratic approaches, which often covertly undermine peace initiatives.

The literature analyzing the Maoist question, most notably the prominent authors Prakash Singh and Rajat Kujur, highlights how existing socio-economic disparities and covert political interests exacerbate the endless cycle of violence and mistrust in Chhattisgarh. Their analyses provide a historical context for understanding political failures and systemic bureaucratic high-handedness, aligning with the broader themes of mutual distrust and conflicting strategic interests (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). Meanwhile prominent historians, such as Ramachandra Guha frequently propagate that the Maoists gained traction among Adivasis tribals primarily due to the government's infringement upon tribal rights in the name of development (Guha, 2007). Therefore, dominant scholastic viewpoint critiques the state's reliance on security-centric policies, market-driven development programmes, and prevailing bureaucratic inefficiencies in insurgency-affected regions (Bhambhri, 2015).

The failed peace talks between the Andhra Pradesh government and the People's War Group, later CPI (Maoist), from 1997 to 2004 will be predominantly studied from the foundational research conducted by scholars like G. Haragopal and A. Maringati. Not only does these research articles provide detailed analyses of the 1989-2004 negotiations and the preceding political and strategic considerations but also highlight how mutual insecurities and clandestine political incentives led to growing preference for military solutions over genuine peace efforts (Balagopal, 2005).

Statistical data and logistical information were primarily sourced from the South Asian Terrorism Portal¹, which compiles official records, government websites, and news reports. Additionally, Maoist press statements and propaganda materials, primarily obtained through the Banned Thought² website, have been examined to avoid having one-sided accounts of events and opinions, and to avail all relevant information necessary to illustrate how the obstacles to bilateral negotiations are mutual and stems from insecurities. To ensure impartiality, newspaper articles and opinion pieces from Dainik Bhaskar, The Hindu, and Deccan Herald have only been referred to, when they are relevant to the research question and have undergone credibility checks.

This paper's modus operandi will primarily involve examination of the theoretical frameworks dictating peace negotiations and post-conflict reconciliation to incorporate certain relevant insights into the discussions on case-specific literature. However, only the theories deemed critical for corroborating the research hypothesis will be assessed for relevant applicability. Through formulating a research hypothesis that seeks to explain why a peace agreement in the Maoist insurgency remains elusive, a bold attempt will be made to bridge the gaps between theoretical models and empirical evidence.

Peace processes typically emphasize technocratic measures, including security-related tactical reforms, post-conflict governance development, the mitigation of popular grievances (or ethno-political reconciliation), and transitional justice. However, scholars such as Jasmine Kim-Westendorf, argue that the prevailing discourse around standardised approaches overlook socio-political conflict dynamics, prioritising international peacebuilding norms over subjective epistemologies and local realities (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). Similarly, the Indian government's reliance on technocratic policies limits local receptiveness, making compromise difficult and

¹ It is published by the Institute of Conflict Management, founded by K.P.S Gill. K.P.S. Gill was a veteran police officer, awarded the Padma Shri in 1991 for suppressing the Khalistani terrorists in Punjab. But allegations of gross human rights violations, have been levied against him and he has been convicted (Bhatt, 2017).

² It provides Maoist literature, banned by the Indian government, but claims to not be Maoist sympathizers but merely an organisation promoting free speech.

rendering previous peace initiatives ineffective in addressing the complexities of this prolonged insurgency (Höglund, 2008; Fortna, 2004).

Pertinent insights from William Zartman's "ripeness" theory, which suggests that conflicts reach a resolution point when they stagnate in a mutually destructive stalemate, will be contextualized, especially as the failed Andhra Pradesh talks began after both sides ended a prolonged period of violence and military operations (Zartman, 2005, pg. 256). Similarly, Barbara Walter's 'credible commitment problem' theory argues that political interests and past violations of negotiated terms generate distrust, preventing lasting agreements (Walter, 1997). This undoubtedly aligns with some of the case-specific observations as, before the failed peace talks between the Maoists and AP government, both sides declared a ceasefire but ultimately deemed the agreement unfavourable, leading to renewed hostilities (Maringati, 2010).

However, only studies that demonstrate how political interests, mutual distrust, and organizational fragmentation have historically undermined ceasefire agreements will be appropriated (Braithwaite and Butcher, 2023).

From Naxalbari to Bastar: Undercurrents in the Maoist Insurgency

The formation of the CPI (M-L) in 1969 failed to achieve its transformative agenda, instead of ushering in a period of violence, ideological dissent, and state crackdowns (Banerjee, 2002). However, the notion of an unfinished revolution persisted and even spread to other regions, primarily because post-independence industrial expansion has displaced mostly Adivasis, often at the behest of political elites and bureaucrats, influenced by corporate interests (Guha, 2007). Approximately 40% of those displaced by government projects belong to tribal communities, and this created an opportunity for Maoists to mobilise support among these Gond tribals (in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh) by promising to address their socio-economic grievances and the state's lacklustre governance (Banerjee, 2008; South et al., 2009).

However, the Maoist insurgency has not improved Adivasi livelihoods and despite ideological rhetoric, the insurgents have struggled to implement substantive socio-economic reforms (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012). The militarisation of the central India's tribal regions has led to these rebels criminalising and suppressing non-Maoist political resistances (Kennedy & King, 2013).

Moreover, since its inception, the Maoist movement has faced internal contradictions and ideological rifts, leading to growing anxieties within far-left parties about internal dissent and loss of mass support (Mohanty, 2006). For example, in Bihar, Vinod Mishra steered the CPI

(M-L) Liberation towards electoral participation, arguing that engagement in parliamentary politics could help expose its institutional flaws from within (Singh, 2006). Despite these ideological shifts, the Maoist insurgency persists due to entrenched socio-economic inequalities, continued repercussions of counterinsurgency policies, and political incentives that obstruct meaningful negotiations (Singh, 2006).

War and Peace: Insights from Previous Failed Negotiations

The central and state governments in affected regions, such as Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh, claim that they are open to peace talks, with the Maoists often reciprocating this feeling (Shukla, 2022). However, when the Chhattisgarh Committee of Concerned Citizens (4Cs) was formed in 2021 to initiate dialogue between the aggrieved parties, concrete measures from both sides remained absent despite contradictory, flimsy assurances (Veeresha, 2022).

Credible commitment theory can certainly be applied here, as uncertainty about the opponent's intentions, strategic military incentives, and vested political interests, such as election-period promises or Maoist efforts to gain public support, make sustained peace talks elusive (Walter, 1997; Fortna, 2004). This section will try to substantiate the research hypotheses by discussing why (and how) the 1989-2004 Andhra Pradesh peace talks failed, and the role of deep-seating mutual insecurities in preventing successful negotiations.

The growing activism of Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) exasperated popular demands for peace talks and catalysed civil rights movements in response to rising insurgency-driven violence (Judge, 2015). Existing discourse on peace processes underscores the role of third-party mediators; however, their limited authority has historically hampered their ability to enforce agreements, as was the case here (Govinda et al., 2021).

Although the AP High Court advocated civil society intervention, which led to the formation of the Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) in 1997, the government was initially skeptical (Bhattacharya, 2021). Despite Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu encouraging dialogue, negotiations ultimately collapsed when three rebel leaders were killed in a fake encounter in Bengaluru (Balagopal, 2005; Haragopal, 2012). Nonetheless, the emerging, norm-setting literature on how civil activists and community workers can be instrumental in addressing popular grievances and mitigating insecurities finds resonance here. These civil societies played a crucial role in bringing the Maoists and the Andhra Pradesh government to the negotiating table (Kim-Westendorf, 2015).

Finally, when Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) replaced Naidu's Telegu Desam Party-led government, and Congress initiated political outreach campaigns in conflict zones to promise reforms and solutions (Haragopal, 2012). After months of sustained police action, a ceasefire announced in June 2004 was met with a reciprocal gesture from the Maoists. Although the YSR government was initially open to talks, a comprehensive agreement on police operations and Maoist militancy remained elusive, and political incentives ultimately undermined these negotiations (Balagopal, 2005). Despite Congress earlier refraining from demanding the immediate disarmament of these insurgents, the government changed its tune, and soon disagreements over Clause 7, which prohibits armed displays, led to both sides hurling accusations (Balagopal, 2005). Even though breaking prior agreements often undermines legitimacy, in this case, the government, having met its strategic military objectives, paid no heed to such a possibility (Jarstad, 2008).

Efforts to keep negotiations afloat were further undermined when reports surfaced of armed Maoist squads organizing armed village meetings and occupying land, resulting in significant media outcry and political turmoil (Maringanti, 2010). Consequently, when the ceasefire was due for extension on December 16, 2004, the state cabinet failed to reach a consensus, leading to the inevitable breakdown of these talks (Balagopal, 2005). The Maoists refused to abandon their ideology of armed revolution, and the government could not indefinitely tolerate their violations of sovereignty and other extrajudicial activities (Haragopal, 2012). However, this can be perceived as mainly strategic, as the Maoist insurgents feared the possibility of eroding local support and emboldening their adversaries (Govinda et al., 2021). The fear that one party might exploit a peace agreement to gain a strategic advantage fosters an environment marred with mutual distrust and perpetual conflict (Höglund, 2008).

Although, Zartman's "ripeness for peace" theory which posits that conflicts become negotiable when both sides recognize further violence as futile, can be inferred to be marginally true as when peace negotiations started in 2004, it did so after prolonged violence by both parties (Zartman, 2005, pg. 256). It is elementary to note that analysing the negotiations through this lens does not yield any viable insights as this paper clearly demonstrates that these past negotiations, and in other instances, ceasefires and hostage exchanges, have been shaped more by political incentives than genuine peace efforts (Dash, 2012). Ultimately, the Maoists remained ideologically rigid, while the government continued covert operations against them.

Sustainable peace requires mutual trust and cooperation; without these, violence remains an ever-present possibility (Hampson, 1996).

Afterthoughts and Suggestions: Analysing the Failed Talks

In the realm of practical politics, dialogue can only be based on policies of mutual benefit and compromise (Badran, 2014). One area where there is an incessant need for the Maoists to compromise is their ideological austerity on armed struggle (Ramana, 2006). Moreover, many have accused the Maoists of levying unsubstantiated allegations against so-called ‘anti-people’ elements, such as police informers or exploitative businessmen (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012). However, certain state policies have been accused of being equally ill-informed and rigid, with counterinsurgency operations often failing to uphold legal rights and acknowledge popular grievances (Judge, 2015).

Most prominent among these issues of post-conflict governance development are those related to land disputes with the land seized from landowners (and redistributed to landless farmers) often remaining unproductive due to legal disputes and fear of retribution (Harriss, 2011). Legislative reforms and judicial interventions are necessary to resolve such issues legally, while respecting popular sentiments and addressing socio-economic grievances (Guha, 2007). West Bengal’s Operation Barga and land reforms in the aftermath of the 1970s Naxalite revolution provide a historical precedent for effective state intervention in land reforms and post-conflict governance development (Banerjee, 2008).

As previously seen while discussing the failed peace negotiations of 1989-2004, vested political interests and military strategies have frequently led to deceptive peace overtures, with both sides using negotiations as tactical manoeuvres (Mac Ginty, 2010). A genuine commitment to attain peace seems lacking in both parties, as the state prioritizes short-term political gains, while Maoists seek to consolidate regional influence and mass support (Fazal, 2015).

Now, as we progress unto the next section, every attempt will be made to analyse how institutional mistrust and never-ending violence results from certain state policies on counterinsurgency, as well as from the continued armed opposition by the Maoists. However, these enquiries into the lopsided, technocratic institutional policies and prevailing academic norms on counterinsurgency, post-conflict reconciliation and transitional justice, will need to be strictly conducted within the research scope (Hampson, 1996). And keeping in line with this logical trajectory, it is equally essential to have a limited discourse analysis on how the Maoists’ insistence on armed tactics and the growing nexus between these Maoists and other insurgent groups especially, those in Northeast India and Pakistan) causes widespread mistrust among government circles.

Security Sector Reforms and Political Changes

Analysing Current Security Sector Policies

Even though certain statistical records indicate that Maoist influence and military strength have declined significantly, the popular notion that they do not pose any immediate threat can be disputed, despite ministerial records claiming otherwise, with the latest having a deadline of 2026 to vanquish the Maoists. (Reddy, 2025). Although a quick reminder of the research objectives will not allow us to probe this matter any further, or to corroborate (or reject) these contentious assessments. It is noteworthy to this research as this standardized underestimation of the Maoists often leads to lopsided state policies and technocratic solutions by a few bureaucrats or academics (Mahajan, 2008).

It is self-evident that there is widespread preference for a standardized approach in prevailing academic discourse, with the UN Security Council (2001) recommending transparent governance, democracy promotion, and development initiatives for peace processes (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). Similarly, these academic norms deeply affect the response of India's government towards the Maoist insurgency as it propagates its wish to address the threat holistically by enhancing governance, promoting development, and safeguarding local community rights (MHA, LWE, 2006). However, scholarly critiques of these technocratic, one-size-fits-all approaches are dominating the evolving discourse, mainly as they reinforce neo-liberal ideas in post-conflict economic development and top-down governance reforms, often neglecting localised, flexible solutions (Kim-Westendorf, 2015).

Reflecting upon these aforementioned observations, it will be remiss to mention that the government has escalated its deployment paramilitary forces such as CoBRA, the District Reserve Guard, and the Central Reserve Police Force, and the state is often criticized for its (allegedly) liberal use of anti-terror legislation like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (Bhambri, 2015). However, Maoists, in response to this approach of implementing area domination strategies, are engaging in "mobile warfare," conducting raids in different locations simultaneously (Dixit, 2010, pg. 26; Ramana, 2006). The "walking on two legs" policy of combining military action with development is often criticised (by academics and reporters) as a means to reshape tribal and regional ways of life (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012, pg. 358).

To play the devil's advocate, it is pertinent to note that despite their declaration of war against the Indian state, the Maoists lack the institutional structures and logistical capabilities to match a professional army, and therefore, do not pose a legitimate threat to India's territorial sovereignty (Kujur, 2013). However, intensified counter-insurgency operations under the Modi government have opened a floodgate of Maoist propaganda, and lead many to express concern and mistrust as it frames the government as an "RSS-BJP Brahmanical Hindutva force" (CPI (Maoist) Central Committee, 2023, pg. 1). Although, often blown out of proportion by negative speculations, such propaganda merely serves strategic objectives, including morale boosting, alliance formation,

and opponent delegitimization (Mac Ginty, 2010). This clearly demonstrates how the perpetual cycle of mistrust and insecurity continues as a result of vested political interests, the state's technocratic peacebuilding and counterinsurgency policies, and the Maoists' insistence on armed revolution (Jarstad, 2008).

Effects of State Policies: Growing Insecurity in Maoist Camps

CPI (Maoist) has suffered leadership losses due to enhanced counter-insurgency efforts, with the death of the general secretary, Basavaraju, in May 2025 leading many to speculate that the Maoists will not be able to recuperate from this blow (Armstrong, 2025). Of its original 16 Politburo members, seven are imprisoned, while founder Muppala Lakshmana Rao (Ganapathy) is reportedly in the Philippines, and this has created a leadership vacuum (Press Trust of India, 2023). There is widespread consensus on how this leadership crisis (primarily due to enhanced counterinsurgency operations) has undermined the party's structural integrity, thereby enhancing operational insecurities and making negotiations or disarmament improbable (Govinda et al., 2021).

Moreover, it can also be seen that increasing organizational fragmentation and ideological rifts have led to internal struggles in the past and exacerbated violence in Maoist-affected areas (Kujur, 2013). For instance, tensions between the Odia Maoist leader, Sabyasachi Panda and the Telugu-dominated CPI (Maoist) leadership resulted in the formation of the Odisha Maovadi Party (OMP), which conducted high-profile kidnappings in 2012 to assert dominance (Dash, 2012).

And perhaps, a similar outcome can also be expected now, as conflicting factions or increasing intra-party fragmentation often motivate these rebels to resort to armed resistance to protect their political standing (Fortna, 2004). And while democratization has influenced some Maoist factions, the likelihood of a complete transition remains low, given fears that political engagement would weaken territorial control and legitimacy (Jarstad, 2008)

Have Counter-Insurgency Policies Backfired? Negotiating the State's Insecurities

However, the deep-rooted insecurities on the opposite side will probably not be eradicated anytime soon, as the Maoist insurgency, garnering increasing external support from other rebels, remains a key concern for intelligence agencies and administrators (Ramana, 2006). The CPI (Maoist) continues to have active ties with North-Eastern insurgent groups, and its alleged arms procurement via Manipur's People's Liberation Army and Myanmar has alarmed New Delhi (Kujur, 2013).

Equally, the nexus between Maoists and corporate entities, with reports of Maoists extracting substantial protection money from businesses operating in affected regions, has compelled many to speculate upon their local clout and the resulting socio-political insecurities (Ahir, 2018).

Concerns over CPI (Maoist) links with Pakistan-based terror outfits like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Pakistani intelligence agencies have intensified national security debates and popular distrust of them (Kujur, 2013). Although it is elementary to assume that geopolitical rivals like Pakistan and China occasionally find strategic benefits in aiding these insurgents, long-term collaborations remain unlikely (Dixit, 2010).

Despite revisions in contemporary policy discourse which emphasizes how Maoists' growing external networks have more symbolic value than strategic, namely, to gain international recognition for their cause (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012). The omnipresent possibility of Maoists forming secret alliances with other terrorist organizations and hostile nations cannot be ignored by the military and intelligence agencies, as it seems to pose a challenge to them (MHA, 2006). The Maoists' vehement opposition to the BJP government and support for secessionist movements in Kashmir had raised eyebrows in New Delhi, but recent counterinsurgency operations have somewhat quenched these concerns (CPI (Maoist)-DKSZC, 2023; Armstrong, 2025).

However, such alarmist reports and media speculations framing these limited interactions with pan-Indian insurgent groups as existential threats may inadvertently reinforce existing anxieties rife among the military and bureaucratic circles, making future peace negotiations increasingly improbable (Dixit, 2010).

Seeking Answers: Suggestive Remarks

A predominant viewpoint in contemporary discourse involves a thorough critique of state policies on post-conflict infrastructure development and economic progress, which suggests that some developmental measures have inadvertently enforced a form of disciplinary governance (Guha, 2007). If not carefully implemented, such market-driven developmental projects and top-down socio-political reforms risk perpetrating miscarriages of justice and alienating the very communities they aim to uplift (Ahuja & Ganguly, 2007).

Encouraging democratic participation and facilitating citizen groups to voice grievances through institutional frameworks are instrumental tools in mitigating Maoist influence, as it strives to criticise the limitations of India's democracy and neoliberal development models (Mac Ginty, 2010; Singh, 2006). However, the suppression of legitimate dissent (against the government's

infringement on tribal rights and their land) and the curbing of human rights activism undermine the credibility of counter-insurgency efforts (Mujtaba, 2023).

Transitional Justice and Rehabilitation

Various initiatives for the socio-economic rehabilitation of ex-combatants have been introduced by state and union governments to encourage more disillusioned rebels to surrender and reintegrate into society. (Sharma, 2014). While measures such as stipends, cash rewards for surrendered arms, and access to free housing, healthcare, and education are implemented, structural deficiencies in administrative and judicial institutions continue to impede their execution (Ramana, 2013).

Current policy (of almost all the affected states) mandates that after recording the surrender, provisions for vocational training, medical facilities, stipends, and legal assistance are made on a case-by-case basis (Rawat, 2019). But despite such robust policies, the surrender process, for example, in Odisha, had been unable to invoke any response from the rebels and according to a media report:

“More than forty Naxals have surrendered so far in the state. But not a single one of them has got the promised benefits But if the fate of the Naxals who have already surrendered is not very encouraging, the rest might hardly find any motivation to do the same” (Jajati, 2011).

The fact that lapses in rehabilitation provisions and transitional justice can discourage other potential rebels from engaging with the government is especially relevant to this research’s hypothesis on how mutual insecurities had stalled previous peace talks and continue to hamper any possibility of future ones (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). Moreover, without adequate safeguards against bureaucratic delays or other issues in the rehabilitation process, ex-combatants face high risks of recidivism (i.e., going back underground) or exploitation by other extremist groups (Ramana, 2013; Haragopal, 2017)

Additionally, it is pertinent to note that the current discourse critiquing the de-politicized models in rehabilitation governance resonates with the research’s objectives of showing how reducing the Maoist insurgency to a law-and-order problem without addressing policy discrepancies has exacerbated mutual distrust (Kim-Westendorf, 2015).

Conclusion

Similar to Maoist insurgencies in Colombia and the Philippines, the Indian Maoist movement and the government have reached a deadlock where complete military victory is implausible (Singh, 2006). The situation remains one of prolonged, low-intensity warfare, with Maoists struggling with internal defections, declining popular support, and logistical challenges.

This paper has sought to uncover the deep-seated insecurities and mistrust on both sides that obstruct a negotiated peace. Structural weaknesses in state institutions, along with vested political incentives, continue to hinder long-term peace efforts (Bannerjee, 2008). At the same time, Maoists have exploited temporary peace talks to rebuild their military capabilities and consolidate their political influence (Kujur, 2013). The failed Andhra Pradesh peace talks (1997–2004) provide a critical example of how mutual distrust and strategic calculations can derail negotiations.

Conventional peace strategies and current Indian policies emphasize technocratic solutions, prioritizing institutional frameworks while overlooking the critical role played by trust-building measures and collective decision-making in governance development (Kim-Westendorf, 2015). The failed 1989–2004 Andhra Pradesh negotiations highlight the extent to which political incentives and strategic military imperatives can outweigh genuine commitments to peace (Braithwaite & Butcher, 2023).

If the conflict were solely about armed resistance, the Indian state, with its vast security forces, would have likely defeated the Maoists (Ranjan, 2023). However, corporate mining projects and the state's top-down development projects continue to fuel popular resentment and create a fertile ground for Maoist recruitment (Kennedy & King, 2013).

Although popular demands for the government to take proactive steps to restore public trust in legal and political institutions are made from time to time, inefficiencies in implementing existing state policies and political interference have prevented a peaceful end to the insurgency so far (Kennedy & Purushottam, 2012).

Peace negotiations often fail when the parties perceive that adherence to previous agreements and continuation of the peace process contradict their long-term interests (Höglund, 2008). In this case, the state's strategic political objectives and the Maoists' revolutionary stance compromised the peace negotiations, with these talks serving merely as tactical interludes. Both sides prioritised military action over genuine peace efforts, leveraging the talks to bolster legitimacy, replenish resources, and project strength (Fortna, 2004). This argument is substantiated through an analysis of the failed peace negotiations between the Andhra Pradesh

state government and the Maoists (1989–2004), illustrating how state policies (and Maoists’ insistence on armed revolution) have exacerbated existing mutual distrust.

Acronyms

- APCLC – Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee
- AP- Andra Pradesh
- BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party
- CCC – Committee of Concerned Citizens
- CPI (M) – Communist Party of India (Marxist)
- CPI (M-L) – Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
- CPI (Maoist) – Communist Party of India (Maoist)
- DKSZC – Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee
- IED – Improvised Explosive Device
- LeT – Lashkar-e-Taiba
- LWE – Left Wing Extremism
- MHA – Ministry of Home Affairs
- OMP – Committee of Concerned Citizens
- PWG – People’s War Group
- TADA – Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987
- TDP – Telugu Desam Party
- UAPA – Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967
- YSR – Y. S, Rajasekhara Reddy, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh (2004)

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