

Indian state to intensify counter-insurgency war after Maoist ambush

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Maoist guerrillas ambushed a Congress Party convoy in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh last Saturday evening, dealing a major setback to the Congress-led central government's anti-Maoist counter-insurgency campaign, Operation Green Hunt.

Twenty-seven people, including much of the Congress leadership in Chhattisgarh, were killed in the attack, and another 32 injured. State Congress Party chief Nandakumar Patel, his son, and Mahendra Karma, a former state minister and leader of the official opposition in the Chhattisgarh State Legislature, were all killed. V.C. Shukla, a veteran congressman who has held more than half-a-dozen ministries in the national government, is among the seriously wounded.

The Maoists ambushed the convoy on a jungle road, as it returned from a Congress Party rally in Sukma, in the southern Chhattisgarh region of Bastar. The two dozen security personnel accompanying the convoy were pinned down by more than a hundred guerrillas and eventually ran out of ammunition.

The ambush is the most deadly attack launched by the Maoists in some time. But it is the successful targeting of senior political figures identified with Operation Green Hunt that has most shaken Indian authorities.

The Maoists, also known as Naxalites, clearly knew who was in the convoy and what route it would take.

The *Hindustan Times* reports that "security and intelligence officials" have told it that the ambush "could only have been possible with precise information which only an insider could have provided." Congress Party officials have accused Chhattisgarh's Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) government of abetting the attack by failing to provide proper security for the Congress convoy. Some have even suggested that their BJP opponents leaked crucial information about the convoy to the Maoists.

India's Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is seeking to use Saturday's attack to intensify Operation Green Hunt—the nationally-coordinated, multi-state counter-insurgency war it launched in late 2009. On Monday more than 1,000 troops in the Bastar region were ordered to initiate offensive operations against the Naxalites and the government is planning to send additional Central Reserve

Police Force paramilitaries to join the 30,000 central government security forces already deployed in the state.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has vowed that "firm action (will be taken) against the perpetrators" of Saturday's attack. Speaking yesterday, the UPA's Minister of State for Home, R.P.N. Singh, pledged "more active operations" to suppress the Maoists, whom he claimed "have no respect for human rights." R.P.N. Singh added that the government would not talk with the Maoists "unless they abjure violence." In 2010, security forces assassinated a Communist Party of India (Maoist) "peace envoy" who was charged with exploring the possibility of entering into "peace talks" with New Delhi. (See: Indian state murdered Maoist peace envoy)

India's main Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, has joined the other parties of the political establishment in demanding "firm action ... be taken to stop these Maoists depredations." The CPM Politburo statement urged "all democratic forces to fight the [Maoists'] politics of violence," signalling the Stalinists' readiness to work with the Congress-led government and the state apparatus in suppressing an insurgency that has drawn support from significant sections of India's tribal peoples. Until it fell from office in May 2011, West Bengal's CPM-led Left Front enthusiastically collaborated with the Congress-led central government in the mounting of Operation Green Hunt.

The corporate media is baying for blood. Describing the ambush as "one of the most daring and vicious attacks" ever mounted by the Maoists in India's tribal belt, the *Indian Express* demanded the state "establish its presence in the dense wilds of Bastar and Dantewada, which have been virtually left to the Maoists." The *Hindustan Times*, in an editorial titled "Act tough on red terror," said, "By attacking the political class in this manner the Maoists have made it clear that they will give no quarter and that the war will not stop until they are decimated."

Karma had long been a target of the Maoists because of his role in creating the *Salwa Judum* (Purification hunt), a local anti-Naxalite militia responsible for numerous atrocities against tribal and other rural people suspected of supporting the Maoist insurgency. From an affluent land-owning family in Bastar, Karma started his political career as a student leader and

legislator for the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI). After becoming a prominent Congress politician, he launched the Salwa Judum in 2005 and soon received strong backing from the state BJP government, which provided militia members with a monthly stipend, subsidized rations and other privileges, and made them Special Police Officers (SPOs). The Congress-led central government praised the BJP state government for using the Salwa Judum to counter the Maoists, with Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram advocating that SPOs “should be appointed wherever required.”

The Salwa Judum routinely used torture, rape and murder, acting as a terror squad in joint operations with state security forces. Local and international human rights organisations exposed its responsibility for numerous gross violations of human rights. Recognizing that Salwa Judum’s actions were discrediting the state and feeding the Maoist-led insurgency, India’s Supreme Court felt obliged in 2011 to declare the militia illegal and unconstitutional and to order it disbanded.

Claiming responsibility for Saturday’s ambush, a spokesman for the Communist Party of India (Maoist) said, “Through this attack, we have taken revenge on behalf of people who were made to suffer in the name of Salwa Judum.”

Since 2009 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has repeatedly characterized the Maoist insurgency as India’s “greatest internal security threat.” On occasion Singh has shed light on Operation Green Hunt’s true motivation by directly tying suppression of the Maoists to the Indian elite’s plans for capitalist development. The bourgeoisie covets the land, forest, and mineral wealth of the remote highland, predominantly tribal areas that the Maoists have long made the base for their activities.

While the Maoists offer no progressive alternative to the failure of bourgeois rule, under conditions where the working class has been prevented by the Stalinist parliamentary parties from advancing a socialist program, their insurgency has attracted support from tribal peoples angered at the neglect and abuse to which they have been subjected by the Indian bourgeoisie and its national and state governments.

Saturday’s ambush has given new life to a longstanding debate within the Indian elite over whether the army should be deployed on the frontlines of the anti-Maoist counter-insurgency war. Under Operation Green Hunt, the army’s role in fighting the Maoists has already been greatly expanded. India’s military provides training and logistical support (including extensive use of helicopter transport) to central and state government paramilitaries. It is also reportedly playing a major role in the formulation of their strategy.

However, the military has opposed calls for it to lead the war on the ground. It argues such a role would impede its implementation of modernization plans aimed at giving India’s armed forces the capacity to project power across the region and globally. Also—and this fear is shared by the current government—it believes that the military’s image and public

support for its expansion would be damaged if it is directly involved in a dirty war against tribal and rural youth.

On Monday Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony again ruled out the possibility of tasking the Army with mounting anti-Maoist operations. “There is no proposal like that,” said Antony. “We extend our support without direct involvement. The real answer is to strengthen the local police and paramilitary forces.”

Whatever their claims to be “Marxists” or “Communists,” the Maoists have nothing to do with and are opposed to a genuine revolutionary movement to overthrow capitalism. Like the Stalinist CPI and CPM from which they emerged, they advocate that India’s toilers join the “progressive” and “patriotic” sections of the national bourgeoisie to complete the democratic—that is capitalist—revolution, consigning the struggle for socialism to another historical epoch. While they criticize the CPI and CPM, the Maoists, ever since they emerged as a distinct current in the late 1960s, have refused to challenge the Stalinists parliamentary parties’ and unions’ political control over the working class. Instead they have devoted their energies to fomenting peasant rebellions against local landlords and increasingly focused almost all their activities on mobilizing tribal groups in India’s hinterlands to wage an isolated and politically futile armed rebellion against the Indian state.

Rural guerrilla war goes hand in hand with appeals for negotiations with the Indian state and crass opportunist manoeuvring with the parties of the Indian establishment. In the east Indian state of West Bengal, the Maoists assisted the anti-communist demagogue Mamata Banerjee’s and her Trinamool Congress in seizing the leadership of the peasant movement that erupted in 2007 against the West Bengal Left Front’s pro-big business land expropriation policy. The Maoists continued this collaboration until the very eve of the 2011 state elections, including publicly endorsing Banerjee’s candidacy for Chief Minister in January 2011.



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