

## PERSISTENT MINDLESSNESS: ON CHHATTISGARH'S SUKMA DISTRICT ENCOUNTER

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism incl. Naxalism

The [deaths of over 20 paramilitary personnel in an encounter with the Maoists](#) in the Tarrem area near Chhattisgarh's Sukma district once again puts the spotlight on the long-running conflict in this remote tribal region. Reports indicate a Maoist ambush of the [paramilitary personnel](#) from different units – the Special Task Force, the District Reserve Guard of the Chhattisgarh police besides the [Central Reserve Police Force \(CRPF\)'s elite COBRA unit](#) — who had proceeded to perform combing operations in Maoist strongholds. The units had embarked upon their combing exercise at a time when Maoists were trying to disrupt the construction of a road near Silger-Jagargunda. The lack of road and telecommunications infrastructure in these remote areas has been one of the reasons for the Maoists being able to use the terrain to their advantage. Questions will be asked as to how such a large force failed to anticipate the ambush and were attacked by insurgents reportedly belonging to the Maoists' "1st Battalion" led by a tribal, Hidma. The encounter has raised the number of security forces killed in Bastar to more than 175 since the killing of 76 CRPF personnel in the Chintalnar attack in April 2010. It is now quite clear that despite facing losses to its cadre and leadership across central and east India and being hemmed into possibly its only remaining stronghold of south Chhattisgarh, the Maoists are still a formidable military threat.

The Maoist insurrection which began first as the Naxalite movement in the 1970s and then intensified since 2004, following the merger of two prominent insurgent groups, remains a mindless guerrilla-driven militant movement that has failed to gain adherents beyond those living in remote tribal areas either untouched by welfare or are discontents due to state repression. The Maoists are now considerably weaker than a decade ago, with several senior leaders either dead or incarcerated, but their core insurgent force in south Bastar remains intact. The recourse to violence is now little more than a ploy to invite state repression which furthers their aim of gaining new adherents. While the Indian state has long since realised that there cannot only be a military end to the conflict, the Chhattisgarh government's inability to reach out to those living in the Maoist strongholds remains a major hurdle, which has resulted in a protracted but violent stalemate in the area. The Tarrem attacks came in the wake of a recent peace march held by civil society activists who had urged a dialogue between the Maoists and the Chhattisgarh government to end the violence that has claimed more than 10,000 lives since 2000 alone, according to the South Asia Terrorism Portal. While a military response and recriminations will inevitably follow the ambush, the civil society plea must not be ignored if a long-lasting solution to the conflict is to be achieved.

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