

By Ben West

Indian Maoist militants, known as Naxalites, have been meeting with members of the outlawed Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), according to the director-general of police for India's Chhattisgarh state. Based on information from a police source, state police chief Vishwa Ranjan said Nov. 11 that two LeT operatives attended a Naxalite meeting in April or May. While their presence at the meeting still needs to be corroborated, the chief said, it appears very likely that the Naxalites held the meeting to adopt a new policy and plans for increasing "armed resistance" in order to seize political power in India.

Indian authorities are using the alleged meeting between LeT operatives and Naxalites as evidence that Pakistan is trying to forge relationships with the Naxalites, which India has long suspected. India blamed the LeT for the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2001 parliament attack. For the Indian public, LeT also has become synonymous with Pakistani intelligence operations. The group that Indian officials refer to as "LeT," however, is no longer an ally of Pakistan and has changed so much in recent years that we have started to refer to it and similar groups as "neo-LeT".

Before this latest accusation, Indian officials implicated at least six other militant groups in Naxalite activities (with varying degrees of Pakistani support). Linking the estimated 10,000-strong Naxalites to militant groups backed by Pakistan, India's main geopolitical rival and primary source of external security threats, creates a "nightmare" scenario for India. Indeed, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has labeled the Naxalites "the biggest internal security challenge" to India. Taken at face value, reports of such an alliance lead to visions of well-trained, well-disciplined Naxal militants expanding their near-daily attacks on low-level rural targets in eastern India (known as the "Red Corridor") to political and high-tech targets in Calcutta, Hyderabad or even New Delhi. But such visions are alarmist and do not reflect the true nature of the very limited Pakistani-Naxalite relationship.

STRATFOR has watched Indian officials link Pakistan to the Naxalites before, but we have yet to see significant changes on the ground that would give any credence to the scenario outlined above. Many Indian officials are equally insistent that no connections exist between Naxalites and Pakistan. Although the Naxalites have provided rhetorical support for Kashmiri (and other anti-Indian groups') opposition to New Delhi over the past year, there has been little action to back up the rhetoric. The Indians have long feared that outside powers would manipulate grassroots groups in India and further destabilize an already regionalized country. When the Naxalite movement began in the 1960s, New Delhi feared Beijing was trying to get a foothold in India, and for the past 50 years India has demonized Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI) for allegedly supporting militant operations in India.

To better understand the allegation that Pakistan is supporting the Naxalites, we have decided

to investigate the sources of Naxalite weapons and training to get an idea of how much outside help the Naxalites rely on in the first place, since this is one way to measure the level of outside assistance. The study below focuses on what types of arms Naxalites have access to, how they got them and who they got them from. While we did find evidence of some Pakistani involvement in supplying the weapons through third parties, the Naxalites appear to remain a very self-reliant group that has not established a strong partnership with Pakistan when it comes to weapons and training.

Weapons

Local Indian media sources report that Naxalite forces have an arsenal of approximately 20,000 weapons — an average of two weapons per soldier. The Naxalites have obtained this arsenal from four different sources:

1. From Indian security forces, either by Naxalite raids on their outposts in Naxalite-controlled areas or bribing or coercing members of the security forces to sell or give them firearms and ammunition, along with ballistic vests and tactical gear, including night-vision optics. This is the source of most Naxalite weapons, which include Indian-made assault rifles, light machine guns and carbines that fire 5.62mm NATO ammunition; variants of the AK-47 that fire 7.62mm rounds; and locally made shotguns of various gauges. Israeli-made sniper rifles have also been found in Naxalite caches on a few occasions, likely the Galil 7.62mm rifles that India acquired from Israel in efforts to target Naxalite leaders in the first place.

2. Theft from businesses operating in the Naxalite-controlled areas, including fertilizer distributors and mining companies that maintain stocks of explosives, blasting caps and detonators.

3. Local arms factories run directly by Naxalites or other criminal groups. These operations demonstrate a wide range of craftsmanship, from assembling makeshift weapons from discarded parts to more advanced forging processes. These factories also produce homemade mortar rounds and components for improvised explosive devices.

4. Procuring foreign weapons, ammunition and explosives from external militant and criminal groups operating within and outside of India. Details on the types of weapons procured this way are available from seizures of weapons shipments into India that have included rifles in the .315- to .30-06-caliber range. Such shipments are traded for smuggling services or purchased with funds from banditry, extortion or revolutionary taxes. Purchasing weapons from the outside

is very expensive. According to a 2009 India Daily News article, Naxalite expenditure reports seized by police showed that, over a six-month period, one zone command spent more than three-quarters of the unit's budget on weapons (\$70,214), with the rest (\$20,604) spent on supplies. Such evidence suggests that Naxalite weapon procurements from the outside have their limitations; obtaining them locally is far cheaper and can be done by virtually any Naxalite fighter.

The Naxalite arsenal is vast and diverse, consisting of weapons manufactured in China, Russia, the United States, Pakistan and India. Photographs of Naxalite units in training or on patrols show fighters wielding a variety of rifles in different calibers and conditions, indicating a lack of weapons uniformity across Naxalite units. While this does suggest a certain level of resourcefulness among the Naxalites, it also means that parts and ammunition are not interchangeable, which is an important tactical limitation. If one rifle breaks, its parts cannot be easily replaced. If one militant runs out of ammunition, he cannot turn to his neighbor for more rounds. Standardized weapons are a key advantage for organized militias (the Taliban, for example, virtually all use a variant of the AK-47), an advantage the Naxalites appear to be lacking. The lack of weapons uniformity among Naxalite groups indicates that they do not have a benefactor that has bestowed on them a reliable, standardized arsenal and have had to build up their own from scratch.

Outside Suppliers

There are numerous reports in open-source media in India and elsewhere that link Naxalites to a number of militant and criminal groups throughout South Asia. These groups interact with Maoists from Nepal, secessionists in India's restive northeast, ISI-backed Islamists from Bangladesh, criminals from Myanmar and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Weapons flow among these groups in a region that has historically been a rich environment for secessionist movements.

The British originally encouraged strong regional identities throughout the Indian subcontinent to prevent the various ethnic groups from uniting in opposition to British colonial rule. The Pakistanis continued that strategy in order to maintain leverage over India, supporting anti-Indian groups primarily in the contested Kashmir region and later in Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), which they used as bases for extending their activities into India. India also supported anti-Pakistani groups in Bangladesh in an attempt to offset this Pakistani pressure. The Naxalites have benefited from this arrangement, directly from foreign powers like Pakistan and, for the most part, through indirect relationships with other regional secessionist movements that also oppose New Delhi.

STRATFOR sources in India claim that Pakistani intelligence has established business relationships with Naxalites to sell arms and ammunition and lately has tried to use Naxal bases for anti-Indian activities. There is evidence that the ISI is providing weapons and ammunition to the Naxalites in exchange for money or services, mostly through third parties like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) or the ostensible Bangladeshi militant leader Shailen Sarkar (both are described in more detail below). Naxalite leaders in India deny cooperating with Pakistan but have very publicly pledged their support for separatist movements in India.

STRATFOR sources in the Indian army say they are investigating but still lack the evidence to prove a direct link between the Naxalites and the ISI, since the Pakistanis continue to play a peripheral role.

The groups below are reported to have had contact with the Naxalites and to have provided various levels of support. Some of these groups have established links to the ISI, which makes them possible conduits of contact and support between Pakistan and the Naxalites.

* ULFA, one of the largest, most violent secessionist movements in India's northeast, is accused of working with ISI Islamist assets along the Indian-Bangladeshi border, where it controls smuggling routes through the Siliguri corridor. The Indian government accuses the Naxalites of working with ULFA to smuggle drugs and counterfeit money through Siliguri on behalf of the ISI in exchange for weapons and explosives.

* The People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLAM) is a secessionist group in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur. According to Indian security officials, the respective political wings of the PLAM and the Naxalites signed a document in October 2010 pledging to "overthrow the ... Indian reactionary and oppressive regime." However, there are no documented instances of PLAM providing material support to the Naxalites. Indian intelligence agencies report that a militant from Manipur who was arrested in 2007 revealed that the PLAM leadership was in frequent contact with the LeT leadership in 2006 as directed by the ISI.

* The National Social Council of Nagaland-Issac Muviah branch (NSCN-IM) is a secessionist movement in the northeast Indian state of Nagaland. Indian Home Secretary G.K. Pillai said in June that the leader of NSCN-IM helped members of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-M) smuggle weapons through Myanmar and Bangladesh. Indian officials in the state of Tripura accused the NSCN-IM of working jointly with the ISI in assisting militant cadres.

* The People's War Group (PWG) was a militant faction of the Communist Party of India-Marxist/Leninist until 2004, when it left and helped form the CPI-M, which is the political arm of the Naxalite movement. In 2004, the PWG received bomb-making materials and training from groups like ULFA and NSCN-IM in Bangladesh in exchange for smuggling drugs into India, an effort organized by the ISI between 2000 and 2004, when the PWG was not under the Naxalite umbrella.

* LTTE is an ethnic secessionist movement in northern Sri Lanka that was defeated by Sri Lanka's military in 2009 after 26 years of fighting. According to a surrendering Naxalite commander, LTTE militants taught Naxalites how to handle mines and grenades at a camp in Bastar, Chhattisgarh state. LTTE fighters have fled Sri Lanka since their 2009 defeat, and Indian authorities suspect that Tamil fighters are providing training for Naxalites in exchange for safe haven.

* Nepalese Maoists comprise the militant wing of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal. They have exchanged training and weapons with Indian Naxalites, and there are also reports of Nepalese Maoists receiving medical care at Naxalite camps in India.

* Shailen Sarkar is a member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh. The Indian Home Ministry accuses Sarkar's group of training Naxalites at ISI-funded camps in Bangladesh. The ministry also claims that Sarkar has met with Naxal leaders in India.

Evidence of direct links between the ISI and the Naxalites is hard to come by. The connections above show only links between Naxalites and Pakistan via third parties, which makes it hard to measure the influence that Pakistan has over Naxalite militants. Pakistan likely wants to keep its activities in India covert so as not to exacerbate an already tense diplomatic situation. Murky, circuitous relationships are most likely preferred in this kind of environment.

Indeed, Pakistan does not necessarily need much more than murky, circuitous relationships in order to keep pressure on New Delhi. The Naxalites are a low-maintenance, self-sustaining movement that will continue to undermine Indian rule in the country's east — Pakistan does not need to expend more resources to sustain this, and the Naxalites are likely wary of undermining their own local legitimacy by accepting too much assistance from an outside government. While something like a standardized arsenal compliments of the ISI would benefit the Naxalites operationally, such a move would be a high-risk, low-reward effort for Islamabad, which seeks to operate very subtly in India for the time being while tensions over the 2008 Mumbai attacks continue to cool off.

The lack of evidence of an institutional relationship between Naxalites and Pakistan does not mean that personal relationships between ISI assets and Naxalite cadres could not develop through the limited interaction now taking place. A combination of more aggressive people from both sides could certainly lead to a more concerted attacks in India, reminiscent of the 2008 serial bombings in cities throughout India.

Such attacks, however, would likely be more of a one-off exception. For the time being, reports of Pakistani-Naxalite cooperation will continue to surface, though this cooperation will probably involve third-party groups that give both Pakistan and the Naxalites plausible deniability. Until

we see indications from either the Naxalites or Pakistan that they are willing to establish more robust connections and become more aggressive toward India, a coordinated militant campaign remains unlikely.

Read more: [Pakistan and the Naxalite Movement in India | STRATFOR](#)

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