



Proceedings of International Conference on Strategies in
Volatile and Uncertain Environment for Emerging Markets
July 14-15, 2017
Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, New Delhi
pp.411-417

Why are Dark Networks Resilient and What Can the Police Forces Learn from Them? A Study of Strategies, Military Tactics and Organizational Structure of CPI (MAOIST)

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Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the reasons that the terror organizations, also called as dark networks, are able to defy police forces that are much stronger than them. For this purpose, we use the extended case methodology within Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) environmental framework to draw empirical conclusions from one of the oldest and most successful dark networks in India - Communist Party of India (Maoists) [CPI (Maoists)]. We find that the CPI (Maoists) have structured their organization to resolve the problems primarily arising out of Volatility, followed by Uncertainty, Complexity and finally, Ambiguity. This provides them asymmetric strengths against the police forces that are still structured on a pre-VUCA era organizational design. We also find that the dark networks also invest in 'VUCAising' the environment to improve its ability to thrive amidst the much stronger police forces. This analysis clarifies that police forces need to adopt substantial organizational changes if they have to defeat dark networks and a direct confrontations is not an efficient answer. Rather, the solution lies resolving the most mitigating risk to the risk present in the environment down to the least.

Keywords: Dark networks; Internal security; Organization design; Police studies VUCA.

1. Introduction

The scourge of terrorism, has forced a huge performance-related challenge on the police organizations as terror acts draw considerable attention from the media, general public and politicians with the expectation of immediate justice. Under such performance related pressure, where the police organizations need to evolve to outsmart the terrorists, they also need to adhere to the principles of criminal and administrative laws (Kingshott, 2006) and inadequate finances (VOA News, 2009).

On the other hand, the terror organizations, also called figuratively as 'dark networks' by Milward and Raab (2006), thrive in an environment with much fewer resources. In this paper, we concentrate on how do these dark networks achieve this and what the police organizations can learn from them to thrive in the current scenario. To start with, we propose the use of the framework of

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Volatility (a dynamically changing social context), Uncertainty (missing information), Complexity (multiple potentially relevant dimensions) and Ambiguity (multiple possible interpretations of available information) found in the work environment, popularly known as VUCA environment, to analyze the structural and organizational adjustments that the terrorist organizations have adopted to understand what makes them successful in this environment (Bodenhausen and Peery, 2009). Further, we also believe that as a part of strategy it is also involved in 'VUCAisation' (for want of a better term) of the environment for the police forces. For instance, Gupta (2011) highlighted that by wasting the government's resources dark networks adds to their own efficiency.

This study contributes to the literature on 'dark networks' and organizational design and strategies in multiple ways. First, by highlighting the relationship between the dark networks and their environment, the study aims to highlight the steps that a dark network undertakes to minimize the impact of VUCA elements within its environment while simultaneously VUCAising the environment for the police forces. Second, based on this study, we provide precise suggestions to the police organizations regarding organizational design and tactics to cope with this environment despite financial crunch. In summary, the research questions (RQs) for this study can be stated as follows:

RQ1: To identify the structural changes made by the CPI (Maoists) in their organization that makes them resilient to action by police forces in a VUCA environment.

RQ2: To identify the factors used by the CPI (Maoists) for increasing VUCAisation of the environment for the police forces.

RQ3: To identify the lessons that the police organizations can learn from the CPI (Maoists) to minimize the impact of VUCA elements in the environment and increase their operational efficiency.

2. Literature Review

One of the major strengths of the police forces is their deeply enmeshed organizational structure that eases communication and flow of information, essential to meet the organizational goals. Yet, the academic research has rarely emphasized this interconnectedness between the different organizational components that may be a limiting factor in the adoption of a novelty, however useful may it individually be. For example, Ransley and Mazerolle (2009) suggest a third party model to deal with uncertainty but do not describe how it can help mitigate complexity, volatility and ambiguity in the environment. Similarly, Steinheider and Wuestewald (2008) only suggests a bottom-up model of leadership to reap positive benefits of decentralization of discretion in police but it does not emphasize on its impact on the pace of technological adoption etc. One reason for these part analyses is the lack of an overarching theoretical approach to systematize police studies.

The initial approach to the study of dark networks was on the basis of nodes and the structure of linkages in the networks (e.g., Borgatti, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007). It's focus on morphology and internal dynamics of dark networks came at the expense of studying environmental factors like historical, social, economic, political and cultural milieu within which these networks flourish. This gap was filled by the "descriptive/historical approach", which also traced the evolution of these organizations based on generalization of individual case studies. Prominent examples of the approach include Sageman (2004) that presented common traits of 172 terrorists that was extended to over 500 terrorists in Sageman (2008). Recently, Bakker et al. (2012) provided a theoretical framework for this approach by emphasizing the importance of structural factors like legitimacy, resources, nodes and linkages, and integration versus differentiation. There is, however, a gap regarding how exactly a dark network adjusts to the

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environment it operates to become resilient to police action. Therefore, we use the VUCA environment framework in this paper that was first used by the American Army in 1990s to characterize their work environment (Whiteman, 1998).

3. Method

In this paper, we use the extended case study analysis methodology that broadly fits within the descriptive/historical approach discussed in the previous section. Communist Party of India(Maoists) [CPI(Maoists)] is a particularly attractive organization for an extended case study analysis in a VUCA environment framework because it is one of most lethal dark networks in India that has been able to successfully thrive and expand its base from Assam to Kerala. It has become such a threat that it has been called as the 'single largest internal security threat' to the country.

The first step of our data gathering was to develop a comprehensive collection of literature that was available about the organization. We collected extensive published archival data on CPI (Maoists) over the last five decades. The first author of the paper was a serving officer in the Indian Police Service (IPS), one of the elite Indian civil services. His serving as an IPS officer helped in collection of documents that are limited in access to the general public. Data was also collected from online sources such as magazine articles, and online books and documents. To supplement our detailed archival data, we conducted interviews with members of CPI (Maoists) who had either surrendered to the police forces or had been captured during counter-insurgency operations. Interviews focused on understanding the characteristics of the dark network they belong to and its day-to-day functioning. All the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face meeting and extensive notes were taken. The interviews were also recorded and were later transcribed verbatim. To confirm the accuracy of our transcriptions, we showed the text of the interviews to the interviewees and asked them to let us know in case there were any changes to be made. Further, the information was triangulated by verifying the facts with multiple interviewees and also matching them with facts that have been published in popular press or are present in existing government records. To protect confidentiality, we present interviewee quotes with only their numbers.

4. Findings

Volatility: Minimizing the Impact through Legitimacy and Military consolidation

Looking from a structural perspective, a rebel organization primarily needs human resources to fight the police forces. A richer rebel organizations like Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Columbia (FARC) uses trade in illegal drugs to fund their recruitment for revolutionary activities. However, this strategy might not work in India since the size of the government is much larger than the CPI (Maoists). According to Jain (2008), the Naxalite economy is worth rupees 1000 crores, so they have little chance of recruiting adequate numbers on payment of wages.

Therefore, to obtain recruitment at a cheaper cost, the Naxalites have to associate with or arouse the grievances of the public (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004) that we call as the process of winning legitimacy (discussed in the following paragraph). In Marxist terminology, they aim to become the 'vanguard' of the have-nots (Bakker et al., 2012). This is easier especially in the central and eastern India, which is much poorer and less developed than the west and the south; and with a much lesser presence of government institutions, including police forces. Volatility is further reduced by the military strategy of geographical consolidation, where possible.

Towards the process of gaining internal legitimacy the Maoist vision document 'Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution' identifies peasants as the most exploited class and seeks to

win their legitimacy in a war that is fought on Maoist principles (starting was from rural areas to eventually capture the urban areas). Therefore, the CPI (Maoists) has formed a combine of the frontal organizations and the cultural wing that trains small groups of its existing members of the village defense squads (called as Chetna Natya Mandalis [CNMs]). While the frontal organizations investigate the social faults, CNMs arouse public sentiment against administrative apathy. CNMs depict (by organizing dramas, songs, etc.) issues regarding people’s day-to-day problems such as exploitation at the hands of the moneylenders, forest officials and issues of land and forest rights (as revealed by interviewee number 1). Nearly all of the CPI (Maoists) cadres hailing from rural areas who have been interrogated by the first author have attributed their initial association with the organization to the influence of the CNMs (see Figure 1, for their placement in the organization chart of CPI (Maoists).

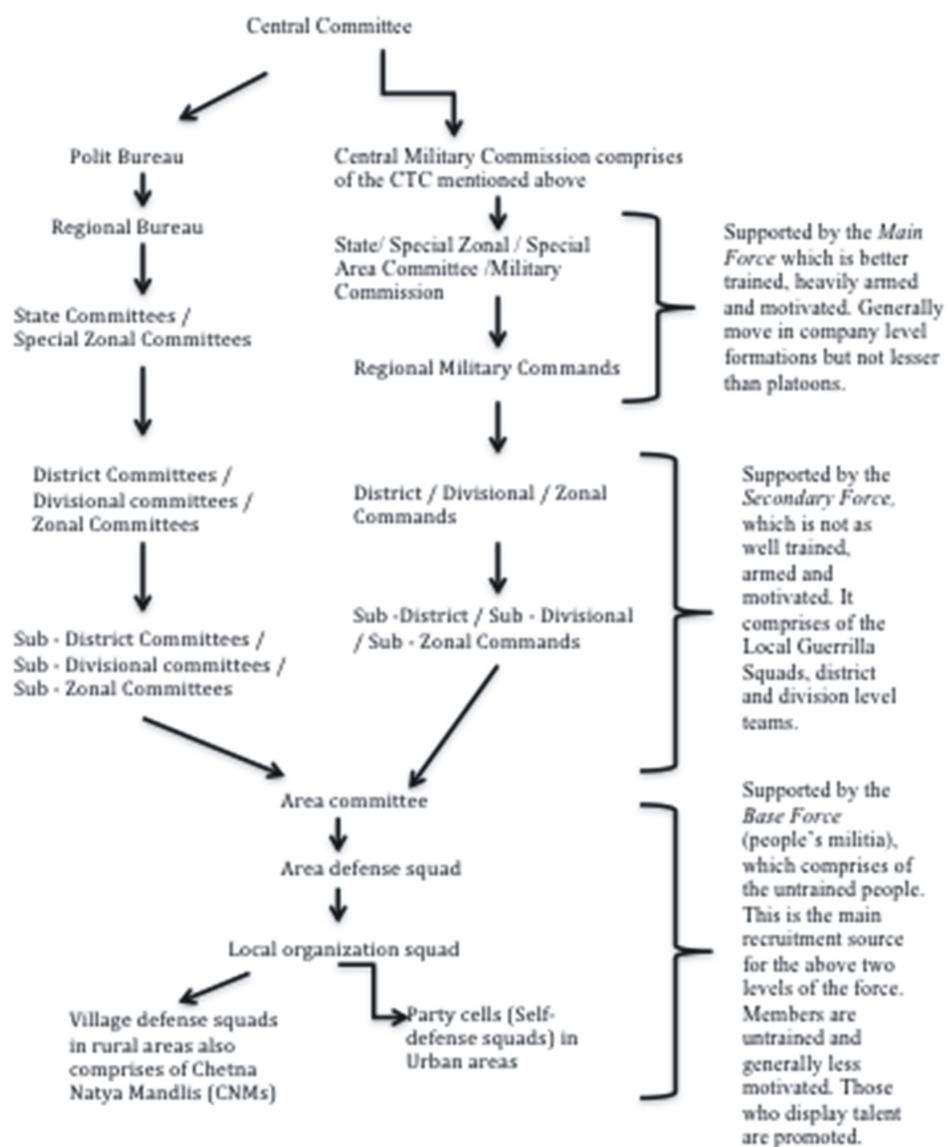


Figure 1: Organization Chart of CPI (Maoists)

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Management and Creation of Uncertainty: Investigation of Drak Network's preparedness for the revolution

Another way to obtain public legitimacy is by creating a 'thick crime habitat', by forcibly recruiting many young men, women and children that forces the families to provide cheap logistics and information support to CPI(Maoists) to protect their wards. The government agencies and the private contractors working in the area are also found hand-in-glove (revealed by interviewee number 2). Thereafter, the objective is to prepare the rural areas for the revolution which is achieved through a two-step procedure: First, CPI (Maoists) identify a geographically disassociated area where they can launch a guerrilla war with reasonable success and convert it into a guerrilla base in future. In a guerrilla war, a large army can be defeated using the principles of divide and conquer (Dietzman, 1962), but only large and deeply forested hilly tracts support such warfare as they provide the advantage of camouflage and concealment to the guerrilla fighters. Further, if the administrative boundary is broken, the benefit is added since the administrative myopia adds to their efficiency. Therefore, Andhra-Orissa border, Chhattisgarh-Orissa border, Jharkhand-Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh-Uttar Pradesh border, Maharashtra-Chhattisgarh-Madhya Pradesh border and even the Bengal-Bangladesh borders are current hotbeds of Naxalite activity. Further, they are targeting the Kerala-Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border and the Uttaranchal-Nepal borders. Incidentally, these areas also face high levels of poverty and alienation, which provides the Naxalites to associate with their grievances. This sets the ground for the next stage of activity.

In the next stage, social investigation of the different contradictions in the local society (like exploitation and oppression) is conducted so as to identify the target groups and arouse them for revolutionary politics through propaganda, as mentioned before. Where such conditions are weak, the document advises that secret effort should precede action for a sufficient period of time, mainly through the underground peasant organizations. Besides, through CNMs, they work to deepen the political mobilization against feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucracy. On the other hand, in the areas where the geographical terrain is extremely favorable, armed form of struggle is adopted from the very beginning with the aim of establishing 'Jantana Sarkars', and hence the second stage can be omitted. This instruction in the document is crucial to our thesis as it clarifies that if obtaining legitimacy is not important then military strategy can be adopted immediately. In other words, where volatility and uncertainty are low, Naxalites can move to the stage of offense immediately. Therefore, we find much advancement of the Naxalite insurgency in hilly and mountainous topography covered with forests that makes it difficult for the much stronger police forces to win against their guerrilla tactics.

Complexity: Management and Creation of a Complex Organizational Structure

CPI(Maoists) have adopted a more complex organizational structure (see Figure 1 above) that operates in different geographical areas to benefit from administrative myopia of police forces that work within their administrative boundaries, by attacking in one administrative area and seeking refuge in another. To manage such an organization they have structured their organization into various geographical units starting with regional committees. This helps in VUCAising the environment for the police forces by making it difficult for them to arrest Naxalites.

Further, the heads and commanders of lower-level committees and commands are also the members of such formations one level up. This organizational design is also called as the 'three-in-one principle' and this structure is created to ensure maximum amount of 'democratic centralism' where central leadership openheartedly seeks opinions on various policies and activities from the lower-level functionaries and, then adopts a centralized decision. Such an organizational structure creates a battery of self-motivated leaders who can occupy the positions

of current leaders. Therefore, it reduces uncertainty and ambiguity (dealt in the next subsection) in the organization lest the central command is neutralized.

Managing Ambiguity to Create a Resilient Organization

Ambiguity manifests itself in not knowing what wins the trust of the local people. The CPI (Maoists) deals with ambiguity in two ways. First, where the geographical conditions are not ready for a revolution, their frontal organizations investigate into the local fault lines and use CNMs as discussed before. Secondly, the CPI (Maoists) brand Maoist propaganda through 'Jantana Sarkar' as welfare activities (as revealed by interviewee 3). Similarly, they create a false propaganda against the police forces and file cases for human rights violations in the courts against individual members of police forces to demotivate them. For this purpose they actively engage lawyers, student's bodies, human rights organizations etc. Further, some chief ministers like Madhu Koda and Shibu Soren have been quoted in the print media as supporting the Naxalites (Chakravorty, 2010). These activities must be looked through the prism of an organizational design that has armed itself with cadres, arms and a tactical policy to deal with a VUCA environment, while also adopting strategies to demoralize the police forces as well by VUCAizing the playing field.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we show that the dark network thrives by adopting an organizational design to mitigate the most mitigating risk, volatility, down to the least mitigating risk, emerging in the VUCA environment and VUCAizing the environment when they cannot be mitigated. Further, as they have adjusted to their environment, police organizations face immense casualties in direct confrontation with them. From this analysis, we understand that the police organizations should also be designed to minimize the most mitigating risk to the least, and VUCAizing the environment where they cannot, as CPI(Maoists) do. The study has important implications for Indian security forces. First, the police forces should follow the CPI (Maoists) and empower the lower level leaders with more autonomy regarding ground-level decisions. Second, following CNMs, the police forces should advertise widely their good deeds, policies and the surrender-cum-rehabilitation to attract Naxalites willing to join the mainstream. Third, just like the CPI (Maoists), police should bring in an element of surprise in their operations. Further, police concentration per kilometer should increase to prevent their easy contact with villagers. Fourth, it would be better to target the lower and middle level Naxalite leaders instead of the top leaders because the CPI (Maoists) is structured, as a decentralized organization, to withstand the onslaught of the security forces and targeting the top leaders would not affect its operations. Fifth, interstate coordination under the Union government's leadership is essential to present a unified front. Finally, the government must expose the frontal organizations working for the Naxalites by clamping on their financial resources in line with the UN resolutions against terrorism.

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