INDIA´S SECURITY APPROACH AND ITS SPACE IN GLOBAL POLITICS

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Abstract:

As India positions itself as a rising regional decolonial power by promoting its socio-cultural norms and carving out a new place for itself in the changing landscape of global politics, its internal landscape and security policy continue to exhibit processes and practices that hark back to colonial times. This article highlights these internal contradictions by examining India's approach to addressing armed violence in the context of the Maoist conflict, as well as the racialising logic applied to its Adivasi population. It also links this approach to the homogenising and Hindu civilisation approach that has gained primacy in India's foreign policy since the BJP came into power fifteen years ago. It concludes with the suggestion that, if India is to establish itself as a leading voice in the shift towards decoloniality in international politics, it must address its internal contradictions in matters of internal security. The securitisation of these issues has severely undermined the political agency of India's marginalised population, thus undermining India's claim to decoloniality.

Keywords: India, decolonial, conflict, Maoist, internal security, Adivasi, Hindutva, racialisation, foreign policy.

Titulo en Español*: *El enfoque de seguridad de la India y su lugar en la política mundial.

Resumen:

Mientras la India se situa como una potencia regional descolonial en ascenso, promoviendo sus normas socioculturales y labrándose un nuevo lugar en el cambiante panorama de la política mundial, su panorama interno y su política de seguridad siguen mostrando procesos y prácticas que se remontan a la época colonial. Este artículo pone de relieve estas contradicciones internas, examinando su enfoque para abordar la violencia armada en el contexto del conflicto maoísta, así como la lógica racial aplicada a su población Adivasi. También vincula este enfoque con el enfoque homogeneizador y de civilización hindú que ha ganado primacía en la política exterior de la India desde que el BJP llegó al poder hace quince años. Concluye con la sugerencia de que, si la India quiere consolidarse como una voz líder en el cambio hacia la descolonización en la política internacional, debe abordar sus contradicciones internas en materia de seguridad interna. La securitización de estas cuestiones ha socavado gravemente la capacidad de acción política de la población marginada de la India, lo que a su vez ha minado su reivindicación de la descolonización.

***Palabras Clave**: India, descolonización, conflicto, maoísta, seguridad interna, Adivasi, Hindutva, racialización, política exterior.*

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1. The background

The Modi era (since 2014) and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led government in India has seen the increasing prominence of foregrounding India's rise in international and regional politics. Milan Vaishnav[3] argues that India plays a balancing role and is considered a key swing state in the global arena. The noticeable promotion of the country's contemporary leadership as a 'global power' seeks to contribute to a new imagery of India beyond a subcontinental and regional power through the promotion of socio-cultural norms through the use of a language of decolonisation.

While India has expanded significant resources in promoting itself as a cultural power and cultural educator, through construction of the image of a 'vishwaguru' (the proposition for celebrating international millet day[4], international yoga day[5]), but it has also extended traditional channels of cooperation. The most prominent of these in the security arena is India's participation in the Quad— the diplomatic partnership between Australia, India, Japan and the United States—looking at bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation on strengthening maritime and transnational security, emerging technologies and respond to regional emergencies[6]. The recent change in global spaces of traditional international alliances, and the Trump administration's increased tariffs on Indian exports to the USA, has however also compelled India to 'act east' and seek to rebuild ties with China. These alternative pressures – to build ties with the USA, and also to hedge against it, have in many ways reinforced India's traditional policy of balancing between East and West.

Indo-Chinese relationships have been fraught with territorial claims and counterclaims especially on the shared borders between the two countries. However, the recent October 2024 border agreement[7] has provided potential terms of engagement for resolving the border insecurities and India has assured China that the development of infrastructure on border areas is not an extension of the US presence or the US strategy propounded by India. Overall, India's approach towards international cooperation, seeks to renew alliance with China while maintaining its previous alliances with other global western powers.

However, when we look inwards, India's security approach internally requires a new vision. The Modi era, has incorporated a very hardened approach to India's internal issues related to insurgency and movements of self-determination. There is some continuity from the previous governments of Manmohan Singh, Vajpayee and Narsimha Rao's, on matters of internal security, and India's approach, regardless of the ideological dispensation of the political party in power, is informed by a homogenising project, hinting at a social project in accordance with the Hindutva ideals. While acknowledging continuity, the abrogation of Article 370 to alter the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, the responses to the self-determination movement in Nagaland, Manipur (including the 2023 breakout of sectarian violence between the Meitei and Kukis) and the approach towards the Adivasis associated with the Maoist movement all show an increasingly racialised response from the centre.

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[3] Vaishnav, Milan (ed) (2024): *Institutional Roots of India's Security Policy*, 1st ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press.

[4] Seventy-Fifth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, at https://press.un.org/en/2021/ga12315.doc.htm

[5] *Sixty-Ninth Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, at https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/69/131

[6] Australian Government (2025): *The Quad*, at https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad

[7] Dutta, Amrita Nayak and Tiwary, Deeptiman. "India China border agreement: Patrol rights in Depsang Plains, Demchok to be restored, will be closely coordinated", *Indian Express*, 22 October 2024, at https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-china-border-agreement-patrol-rights-in-depsang-plains-demchok-to-be-restored-will-be-closely-coordinated-9632146/

We can see this from the way historically the construction of the Kashmiri identity was marked as 'Muslim' rather than viewing the spatio-cultural ties of the Kashmiri people to their land. Similarly, the approach towards the Naga, Kuki and Meitei movements of self-determination, utilised a 'real politik' approach grounded in prioritising one movement over the other. The overall racial and homogenising logic of this security approach has seen the use of military power across India's northeast, emphasising the security associated with the international border and ignoring its ramifications on communities divided by the historic drawing of the border. Raw military power is complemented by a development policy aimed at drawing the 'periphery' closer to the Indian centre, such as the re-introduction of the 'Act east policy'[8] and key infrastructure projects such as the $500 million Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (connecting rivers in Myanmar to Mizoram border in India and Rakhine state in Myanmar to Kolkata in India) and the 1360km India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.

Similar racial dynamics have shaped India's response to the Maoist conflict in central India. The response to the Maoist conflict since the merger of the extraparliamentary left parties in 2004, has shifted its rhetoric and logic from one viewed as a law-and-order problem linked to 'underdevelopment', and an absence of 'modernisation', to a policy based on an enhanced securitised response, where development prioritises the perceived needs for mining, roads and dams to support a central industrial strategy. While the language of 'winning hearts and mind' is still used, it is a security-led version of that approach and has seen the deployment of Indian paramilitary forces including the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) which is fundamentally a border policing force. The underlying rationale of the security response to counter the Maoist violence is all together rooted in a logic of civilising the 'Adivasi' whose forest dwelling lifeworld is viewed as pre-modern and hence their recourse to joining armed violence as their naivety which is exploited by the radical Maoist leadership.

India on the global realm, positions itself as a decolonial power, which is fundamentally aiming to reorient the existing power blocks and, India asserts itself as a balancing power between its East and West, demanding global alternatives. However, within its own territorial spaces, the response is rooted within a mainland savarna[9] politics of dealing with alterity through the project of homogenising. This project of homogenising is rooted in reimagining or reinstating geographical expanse of 'Akhand Bharat' (Undivided Bharat) which attempts to do away with the present day partitioned sub-continent and claim the entire geography to the sacred Hindu cartographic boundaries evoking a past which predates the Mughal rule in the subcontinent[10].

In internal security India has traditionally emphasised its sovereign rights and the unique characteristics of its internal conflicts. It has strongly rejected any need for international involvement. On the other hand, India also deploys in rhetoric and practice a western military strategy of military-led counter insurgency and increasingly utilises a western language of counter-terrorism. The tensions between these different trends are therefore in need of close analysis. It will be increasingly difficult for India to position itself as a leader and friend of the smaller states of the Global South, utilising the language of decolonisation of global politics and institutions, while simultaneously using the language and practices of (western) powerful

[8] Bajpaee, Chietigi: "Reinvigorating India's 'Act East' Policy in age of renewed power politics", *The Pacific Review,* Vol. 36, nº 3 (August 2022), pp. 631-661.

[9] Savarna, a Sanskrit word, translates to 'those with Varna'. Varna refers to the caste system. The word Savarna signifies members belonging to the caste system, which includes four sub groups of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The varna system, excludes a large group of Dalit and Adivasi population and propounds for a Varna system which preserves these hierarchies on basis of purity and control over knowledge systems.

[10] Chatterjee, Shibashis and Das, Udayan: "India's civilizational arguments in south Asia: from Nehruvianism to Hindutva", *International Affairs,* Vol. 99, nº 2 (March 2023), pp. 475-494.

states. Tensions between foreign and domestic policy also exist in economic and environmental politics. However, this article will focus on security strategy and practice.

This article will therefore first of all looks at the present government security policies and the overall Hindutva ideals translated or showing their roots in some of the key policy decisions vis-à-vis India's internal security. It will also show, how the pre-2014, the Indian National Congress and its coalition governments who used an approach of 'unity-in-diversity' instead of assimilation, used a protectionist approach especially when it concerns issues of internal security. The article in particular adds a new analysis of recent responses to the Maoist insurgency, set inside this wider security policy, and it draws on extended periods of fieldwork conducted in Bastar. Finally, the article will explore the complementary and contradictory dimensions between internal security and foreign policy goals.

2. Situating Hindutva from past to present

The Hindutva project, which finds its roots in the early reformist movement in 1875, charioted by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj movement, was an attempt to respond to the colonial criticisms of the hindu tradition, its superstition and the absence of a coherent textual reference to what was seen as a cultural identity. Through this reform movement, Hinduism was conceptualised according to the Vedas,

> "…which were accorded the status of holy books such as the Bible or Qu'ran. Dayananda's mission was to demystify popular Hinduism completely in favour of a cerebral and formal notion of Vedic religion' which originated in a Golden Age. Saraswati sought to rationalise Hinduism in order to render it intelligible to the coloniser by purging it of 'superstitious practices and rituals which were an integral part of the lived experiences of the Hindu tradition. Consequently, commentaries on the Vedas (puranas), popular myths, legends and idol-worship were delegitimised and considered corruptions of Vedic ideals…"[11]

Carrying this project forward for the development of a Hindu nationalist discourse is the concept of Hindutva, which is associated with the work of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966). Savarkar led the Hindu Mahasabha[12] for seven consecutive years from 1937 to 1944 and used the term Hindutva to refer to a Hindu ethnic as well as religious identity. The Hindus, for Savarkar were an ethnic community possessing a territory and sharing the same racial and cultural characteristics, three attributes which stemmed from the mythical (Orientalist) construction of a Vedic Golden Age[13]. For Savarkar, the Hindus "are not only a nation but a jati (race), a born brotherhood". In his views, all Indians, including those professing other religions are considered a part of the Hindu Jati. However, for Savarkar, Christians and Muslims, were regarded as foreigners, since Hindustan is not to them, a Holyland.

One of the main concerns of post-independence India, has been the defence of its borders and its nation-state. For much of the western world, the Indian subcontinent and the newly independent south Asian nations, where an experiment waiting to fail. For many, the vast diversity, the presence of ethno-linguistic distinct identities and the project of collectivising them into a cohesive nation-state was unlikely to succeed, at least not in a democratic model. Partition in 1947 emphasised the risk of further disintegration. This project, especially under

[11] Shani, Giorgio: "Towards a Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva, religion, and nationalism in India". *Religion, State & Society,* Vol 49, nº 3 (June 2021), pp. 264-280.
[12] Hindu Mahasabha were assemblies that were formed with the aim of organizing themselves into sabhas. The hindu sabhas were established in early nineteenth century Punjab to counter the perceived influence which the minority religious groups, particularly, Muslims and Sikhs, influenced over the British.
[13] Jafferlot, Christophe: "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 28, nº 12/13 (March1993), pp. 517-524.

the leadership of India's first PM, Nehru, prioritised political integration, while also carving out strong sovereign boundaries against the backdrop of wars with Pakistan (1947 & 1962) and China (1965). For this purpose, then then Minister of Home Affairs, Saradar Vallabh Bhai Patel, known as the 'iron man' of India—was suspicious of the loyalties of the indigenous communities/people residing in present day state of Arunachal Pradesh (pre-independence known as the North East Frontier Agency-NEFA). To Patel the state of Assam and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura along with NEFA were of primacy to be incorporated within independent union of India, due to the shared borders with China (primarily) and the perceived cultural influence of China over this geography, led him to take a 'carrot and stick' approach for assimilation of these regions within the Indian national cartographic boundaries[14].

The absence of a dialogue and a use of force and coercion (in the fear of losing territory to China), unintentionally led to assertion of centralised and mainland ideas of nationhood, which further increased the discontentment among the indigenous people of the region, who saw Indian nationhood as homogenising and a hegemonical project with fear of erasure of their cultural, social and political practices. This appropriation of everyday myth-making, is reflective of the BJP's approach towards iconic celebration of Adivasi icons such as Birsa Munda, the appointment of an Adivasi female President. The same is said about the mobilisation of the Dalit population and the changing nature of domestic alliance building for electoral wins.

There was some tension between these internal practices and India's foreign policy rhetoric. Nehru was a strong supporter of anti-colonial independence movements globally, while rejecting the parallels with India's self-determination movements. India was one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions over many decades but rejected any UN involvement – either in peacekeeping or in mediation in Kashmir. However, during the Cold War global norms and processes were weak and undeveloped and these tensions between domestic practice and foreign policy were kept to a manageable level.

Over the course of the last seventy years since India's independence, if we look at India's involvement and role within the United Nations, we are confronted with India's duplicitous silence on international conventions such as the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention or the UN conventions on Statelessness. India is not a signatory to either of these conventions vis-à-vis management of movement of population seeking refuge from political persecution. For example, the hugely contested Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAA) 2019, which provides citizenship to people of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jains, Parsis and Christians descent from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. In contrast, India is in a 25 yearlong contention with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICRED) on recognition of caste-based discrimination and violence[15]. So while on one side, India projects itself as a magnanimous protector of minority rights in the subcontinent, India is cautious of recognising international measures of accountability in recognising caste or racial based discrimination against its own citizens. This selective choice of discrediting universal principles and international norms of equality and equity, reflects in India's concerns on internal security, which we will discuss in the section below.

3. India's response and recourse to internal conflicts

India's experience with counterinsurgency coincided with the country's independence and nation-building project. Beginning in the mid-1950s, India responded to growing voices for

[14] Raghavan, Srinath (2010): *War and Peace in Modern India,* 1st ed., New York, Palgrave MacMillian.
[15] Keane, David: "India, the UN and Caste as a form of Racial Discrimination: Resolving the Dispute", in Davy, Ulrike and Flüchter, Antje (ed.) (2022): *Imagining Unequals, Imagining Equals: Concepts of Equality in History and Law,* 1st ed., Bielefeld, Bielefeld University Press, pp. 201-230.

secession and movements of self-determination in the provinces of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura in the Northeast of India. Similar movements gained prominence in Kashmir and Punjab in the North and the Maoist or the Naxalite movement in East and Central India (initially in West Bengal and later extending to undivided[16] Bihar, undivided Madhya Pradesh, undivided Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Orissa).

Barring the Maoists, who are ideologically motivated to establish a communist state and overthrow the present capitalist regime, most of these movements had a common thread of resisting mainland India and its political leadership on grounds of ethnicity or similar articulations concerning their socio-cultural identities. Demands for separate states, greater political representation, assertion of cultural identity and lack of effective governance[17] were some of the key concerns which allowed these movements to gather impetus and which in some cases later transitioned into armed resistance.

Most prominent in garnering international attention, the Kashmiri movement for self-determination, shaped the security and geopolitical strategy for postcolonial South Asia as a whole. Set against the backdrop of the partition of 1947 and the largest population displacement since the Second World War, the Kashmiri movement became a prominent national security issue for the newly formed nations of India and Pakistan. The practice of disallowing or delegitimising local Kashmiri voices and their constitutional rights to choose appropriate political representation through militaristic means became the predominant template for the Indian government to implement across (armed) social movements. For Indian security and military experts, Kashmir is considered a sovereign matter and the approach towards conflict resolution is an internal matter.

A similar practice of treating armed movements as 'internal matters' is observed in other instances of armed conflicts in India. Noticeably, India's ambiguity (at best) regarding its willingness to adhere to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) especially the statues applicable to non-international armed conflict is indicative of the State's hesitancy to opening its own conduct to international systems of accountability and critical scrutiny which hints at India's colonial past and domestic constraints, driven by larger domestic political issues linked to each of these conflicts[18].

India's response to these internal armed conflicts is embedded in a practice of conflict management with solutions focussing on the appeasement of the powerful dominant political elites. In post-partition Punjab, the demand for a similar state on the lines of religion, as Pakistan, led to the rise of the Khalistan movement which gained significant momentum in the 1950s. The Indian state, in the aftermath of the partition of India and Pakistan and the partition of Punjab, was reluctant to accede to this demand. However, in 1966, India conceded and

[16] Usage of the word 'undivided' in reference to the states of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh refer to a time before the states the federal State of India delimited them for electoral purposes. This led to subsequent formation of states of Jharkhand (Northern Bihar), Telangana (from Andhra Pradesh) and Chhattisgarh (from Madhya Pradesh). The state of Punjab was the first to undergo delimitation in independent India, carving out the state of Haryana in 1966. Later as is discussed in chapter three, the state of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were delimited to form Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh in 2000. Later after a long-standing movement for demand for Telangana, the state of Andhra Pradesh was delimited in 2014, after the new alliance of BJP led NDA came into power.

[17] Goswami, Namrata: "Insurgencies in India", in Rich, Paul B. and Duyvesteyn, Isabelle (ed.) (2012): *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency,* 1st ed., London, Routledge, pp. 208-217.

[18] Burra, Srinivas: "Collective Engagement and Selective Endorsement: India's Ambivalent Attitude Towards Laws of Armed Conflict", in Burra, Srinivas and Babu, R. Rajesh (ed.) (2018): *Locating India in the Contemporary International Legal Order*, 1st ed., New Delhi, Springer, pp. 51-65.

created two separate states of Punjab and Haryana on linguistic lines[19]. This step in providing more decentralised autonomy, while it provided some interim respite, did not calm the sparks for a demand of a separate state. The Khalistan movement, subsequently, became the first instance in independent India, where the use of paramilitary and increased policing with arrests and attacks, became a tool for responding to dissent and in conflict management.

Butler[20] identifies conflict management as an "…effort to control or contain an ongoing conflict between politically motivated actors operating at the state or sub-state level, typically through the involvement of a third party… conflict management is centrally concerned with making an ongoing conflict less damaging to the parties directly engaged in it." He further cautions the reader against conceptually conflating conflict management and conflict resolution as the same. At a conceptual level, conflict resolution seeks to promote reconciliation by addressing the underlying grievances to the conflict, whereas conflict management "…remains closer to the surface,"[21]. India however rejected the need for third party involvement in conflict management, even in Kashmir where the international dimension was undeniable, and even when offers of third-party engagement might have helped India in de-escalation without conceding sovereign power.

The policy of carving new sub-national boundaries as a tool in conflict management persists with the formation of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana. Doyle[22] posits that this form of power-sharing has helped in addressing some of the demands of self-rule, autonomy, or greater representation without them turning into armed conflict, but only in cases without a significant international dimension. Swenden[23] indicating these territorial accommodations as a bargaining capacity between the 'centre and the state' is challenged when it concerns "…small but significant border states of the North East,"[24]

From 2014 onwards, with the victory of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) led coalition of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the nature of power-sharing between state and the centre has taken a more centralised turn, with an increasing acceptance of ethnic majoritarianism[25]. This was confirmed with the Abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 which concerned the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The constitutional special powers provided under Article 370 in case of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, gave legal power to the state to conduct a plebiscite on its constitutional future, while also providing a degree of autonomy to the state, by according the state a constitution and legislative authority with the exception of foreign affairs, defence, and communication. In an unprecedented amendment to the Indian constitution, the abrogation of Article 370, led to the restructuring of territorial boundaries by splitting Jammu and Kashmir from Ladakh and restricting their powers by making them Union Territories, with direct rule from the centre[26].

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[19] Jetly, Rajashree: "The Khalistan Movement in India: The Interplay of Politics and State Power", *International Review of Modern Sociology*, Vol. 34, nº 1 (2008), pp. 61-75.
[20] Butler, Michael J. (2009): *International Conflict Management,* 1st ed., Abingdon, Routledge.
[21] *Ibid.* pp. 3.
[22] Doyle, John: "Indian Approaches to Security and Conflict Resolution", *UNISCI Journal*, nº 49 (January 2019), pp. 43-62.
[23] Swenden, Wilfred: "Centre-State Bargaining and Territorial Accommodation: Evidence from India", *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 22, nº 4 (December, 2016), pp. 491-515.
[24] Swenden, *op. cit.* pp. 491.
[25] Adeney, Katherine and Swenden, Wilfred: "Power-sharing in the world's largest democracy: informal consociationalism in India (and its decline?)", *Swiss Political Science Review,* Vol. 25, nº 4 (July 2019), pp. 341-574.
[26] Lalwani, Sameer and Gayner, Gillian: "India's Kashmir Conundrum: Before and After the Abrogation of Article 370", United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, nº 473, August 2020, at https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25405.pdf

The practice of containment of violence or conflict management, in the Indian context is grounded in an implicit understanding that dissent, while it is an essential characteristic of a democracy, requires timely, and typically securitised, interjection to avoid escalation. Historically, India has employed legal measures such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958, UAPA [Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act], and related legislation which prioritised and perpetuated the colonial strategy of 'use of force', and is almost a patterned response.[27] [28] By declaring dissent to be a "law and order problem", India's security praxis translates to an implementation approach that involves policing measures including but not restricted to, curfews, barricading/security checkpoints, surveillance, village domination exercises, arrests, and overall dense deployment of the army (at the border) or the paramilitary forces (within mainland India).

The fear or insecurity of losing its territorial control especially in the Northeast and in Kashmir, has seen India's conflict response embedded in a "security first" approach justified through the Hobbesian rationale which legitimises state violence or state's monopoly over violence. This translates to actions by the military or the security architecture where retaliation with equal or (dis) proportionate use of force seeks to maintain the status quo wherein the territorial sovereignty of India remains uncompromised.

To understand these dynamics of the Indian state and its processes involved in an eventual response to internal conflict, the Maoist conflict or Left-Wing Extremism[29], presents a very important case study. It is different from the ethno-political conflicts of the Northeast or the ethno-religious/geopolitical conflict in Kashmir—as the Maoist conflict is fundamentally an ideological struggle and embedded in deeper narratives of social and economic injustices. The Maoist conflict in its modern focus is also not a 'border' conflict, with no suggestion of an attempt to divide the Indian state. The response of the state to the localized Maoist violence has, for long periods, largely been the same as that deployed in Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram—increased policing through arrests, the establishment of police camps and checkpoints, and routinised searching operations in civilian populous and rural areas. The rhetoric of security policy in Kashmir occasionally characterised protestors as 'uneducated youth' – leading to some projects in education and sports, but the dominant narrative has been to define the conflict as a cross-border intervention by Pakistan.[30] In the case of the Maoist challenge, while the practice of security was often similar, the narrative until recent decades gave more space to the interconnections with 'development'. In recent decades however, the emphasis has become even more securitised, and the rhetoric and practice of development policy is increasingly securitised, utilising the international language of the 'war on terror', and later of US-style counter insurgency operations. The domestic context also increasingly emphasised not the, at least theoretically neutral, need for education and state services, but rather the need for 'modernisation; and 'civilisation' of Adivasi populations. As the Indian state increases their securitised measures to respond to the Maoist movement, with the heightened

[27] Kalhan, Anil; Conroy, Gerald; Kaushal, Mamta; Miller, Sam Scott; Rakoff, Jed: "Colonial Continuities: Human Rights, Terrorism, and Security Laws in India", *Columbia Journal of Asian Law,* Vol. 20, nº1 (Fall 2006), pp. 93-234.

[28] Manoharan, N.: "Trojan Horses: Counterterrorism Laws and Security in India", *The Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 44, nº 46 (14 November 2009), pp. 20-24.

[29] The change in the lexicon from Naxalism or Maoist Conflict to Left-Wing Extremism hints at the change in characterisation of the conflict since 2006 when it was viewed as a threat to India's internal security. The change in the terminology reflected in the policy approach which led to the Ministry of Home Affairs introducing a separate division looking at Left-Wing Extremism.

[30] Ganie, Mohd Tahir: "Metaphors in the Political Narratives of Kashmiri Youth", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 42., nº 2 (March 2019), pp. 278-300.

counterinsurgency operations since the beginning of 2024[31], there is a compelling need to critically assess India's counterinsurgency (COIN) approach, and also its inter-connections with foreign policy.

Fidler and Ganguly[32] imply that the Indian military doctrine on COIN whose emergence coincided with the US COIN doctrine (both date to the year 2006) contains many similarities, especially in what is understood as a 'winning hearts and minds' approach to countering violent armed struggle. While it would be expected that the approach on COIN would be context-specific, the doctrine(s) on a close study, follows a general pattern or steps of (para) military deployment where the military is additionally responsible for advising on (or even controlling) the governance of civilian administration specifically in development assistance, and in taking account of the culture and language of the local population. The difference remains in the sphere of implementation—the US doctrine is focused on populations that are beyond the territorial or sovereign control of the US government and caters to international counterinsurgencies, while the Indian doctrine is focused on domestic and internal armed conflicts or conflicts within the country's territories. Nonetheless despite these contextual and national versus extra-territorial differences and despite India's traditional resistance to international engagement in its internal disputes, there is a clear parallel in language and practice between India's counter-insurgency strategy and that of western powers, most notably the USA.

4. Policy of surrender and rehabilitation in India and the civilisation gaze

The policy guidelines on surrender and rehabilitation of the Indian government set out an objective of the disarmament of armed non-state actors with the promise of a rehabilitation package that would create space for the non-state armed actors to move into everyday economic activities and into establishing a relationship with the market or as Samaddar puts it, "marketization of economic relations"[33]. While this policy is not a new addition in the lexicon of policy recommendations of the Indian state, the advantage of implementing this policy in spaces of internal armed conflict, has been rarely questioned or examined. The pattern of the Indian state in using surrender finds a brief mention in Sammadar's critical work on governmentality and peacebuilding, a project which began during the colonial rule and followed a continuum in the post-colonial state. Commenting on the state strategies in the case of India's Northeast Sammadar analyses

> …let us continue taking note of governmental measures with regard to peace-building in the Northeast…in the first phase of the conflict, territorial reorganization, grant of statehood and introduction, and introduction of the model of peace accords resulting in the grant of autonomy were the main features- with military operations, of course, continuing all along. Yet more important was the way in which each major military operation was followed by major administrative measures of territorial reorganization… in the second phase, there was a deliberate policy to introduce *panchayati raj*[34], and more importantly territorial autonomies along ethnic lines were created throughout the last two decades within the states of the region. Likewise, new

[31] Kumar, Raksha: "In Bastar War, Lines between civilians and Maoists blur, as Amit Shah sets March 2026 deadline to end insurgency", Article 14, 12 Feb 2025, at https://tribe.article-14.com/post/in-bastar-war-lines-between-civilians-maoists-blur-as-amit-shah-sets-march-2026-deadline-to-end-insurgency-67abb2b8cf943

[32] Fidler, David P and Ganguly, Sumit: "Counterinsurgency in India", in Rich, Paul B. and Duyvesteyn Isabelle (ed.) (2012): *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* 1st ed., Abingdon, Routledge.

[33] Samaddar, Ranabir: "Government of Peace", in Samaddar, Ranabir (ed.) (2015): *Government of Peace: Social Governance, Security and the Problematic of Peace* 1st ed., Politics and International Relations, Social Science, Abingdon, Routledge.

[34] *Panchyati Raj* is a system of local governance introduced in 1992 with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in the Indian Constitution. It is a devolved system of governance grounded in the philosophy of providing greater autonomy to provincial governments and for communities to have more representation in decision making.

> forms of local volunteer armies were raised (principally in Assam and Tripura). Policies to encourage and ensure surrender of the armed cadres of the underground became crucial in this stage of peace-making. Surrender schemes were devised in Assam in 1992 and strengthened in 1998. To give some instances, benefits up to Rs. 200,000[35] per surrendered individual were introduced… In other words, in a region where poverty and unemployment were rampant, and resource constraints acute, the government was simply handing out over 90 times and more of the then State annual per capita income to anyone who was a surrendered militant or expressed willingness to surrender[36]

In case of Kashmir the rehabilitated terrorists or radicalised youth were retrained to become a part of the Ikhwan force, a pro-government militia which was later accused of involvement in human rights violations. In the security circles, the Ikhwani network is defined as part of the fault lines among the separatist groups within Kashmir and a response to the direct threat that some of the armed defectors felt from their erstwhile group members[3738]. In case of Assam, those who surrendered are colloquially referred as SULFA (Surrendered United Liberation Front of Assam)[39] and are notorious for their state patronage and their involvement in illicit money-making avenues using "mafia-style mode of operations,"[40].

In Kashmir and the North East therefore although the surrender policy was occasionally compared to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) policies, overseen by western states, the UN and NGOs following post-Cold War peace agreements, in reality the Indian experience more closely resembled US COIN actions in the later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan - in its use of surrendered fighters as combatants, with very limited pathways of civilian economic opportunities.

The policy, in the Maoist areas, was first introduced in Andhra Pradesh in 1989 with amendments to the guidelines in 1993. The Andhra Pradesh experience of surrender and rehabilitation is deemed as a "successful" process since the state saw many surrenders especially throughout the 1990s[41]. Historically, many of the districts (counties) across Andhra Pradesh were actively involved in the Maoist movement and there was a robust presence of both overground and underground members participating. At the same time, because of an active and vibrant civil liberties movement, the state was engaged in a robust public discourse critically assessing both state and non-state violence. It was the presence of people who were a part of this lose coalition of activists from different parts or rural Andhra Pradesh and representation from marginalised groups (especially from Dalit and Adivasi communities) wherein despite repressive policies and state violence, surrendered guerrillas/Maoists were

[35] Rs 200,000 is equivalent to 2500 Euro (approximately).
[36] Samaddar, Ranabir, *op. cit*. p. 36.
[37] Staniland, Paul: "Between a rock and a hard place: insurgent fratricide, ethnic defection, and the rise of pro-state paramilitaries", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 56, nº 1 (February 2012), pp. 16-40.
[38] Mehraj, Irfan and Manecksha, Frenny: "The Life and Death of a Pro-Government Militant in Kashmir", *The Wire*, 5 May 2017, at https://thewire.in/politics/rashid-billa-kashmir-ikhwan
[39] The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed in 1979 with their main demand being the creation of an independent sovereign Assam. ULFA's meteoric rise in popularity and sympathy within the local population emerged because of the historical neglect and the exploitative treatment and colonial treatment of Assam as "unheeded hinterland". The history and evolution of the movement is well documented and it reflects on the nature of armed violence which had popular support from civilian population. The surrender policy, when implemented in Assam, received political patronage from certain parts of the local leadership which led to extrajudicial rights being granted to these surrendered ULFA members.
[40] Nath, Sunil: "The surrendered insurgents of Assam", *Himal South Asian*, 1 December 2001 at https://www.himalmag.com/comment/the-surrendered-insurgents-of-assam
[41] Ramana, Pusarla Venkata: "Taming India's Maoists: Surrender and Rehabilitation", *Strategic Analysis,* Vol. 37, nº 6 (December 2013), pp. 716-728.

provided space for rehabilitation which did not involve re-arming as state-led militia as observed in Kashmir and Assam. However outside of AP with its very strong civil society this civilian programme of surrender is largely absent.

This sense of normalcy in how the issue of surrender is conceptualised and operationalised in India rests on a clear 'civilizational gaze' within the bureaucratic mind and political class towards the 'tribal', and especially an outlawed tribal. The project of surrender, along with the myriads of related security-development schemes within the 'assistance for Left-Wing Extremism' states programme, is based on a logic, that its ultimate purpose is the slow mainstreaming of the tribal into market-driven economics and livelihoods. This mainstreaming project, especially in case of the ex-Maoists, is however restricted to the security architecture and continued militarisation. There is no significant focus on offering education or assistance which would permit a surrender guerrilla to make a living in the civilian or even 'marketised' world, much less a living compatible with their own communities' world views. In May 2018, for example, the Central Reserved Police Force (CRPF) the main paramilitary organisation involved in the anti-naxal operations, commissioned 'Bastariya Battalion'[42] based on two primary objectives: a) providing employment to tribal youth; b) of giving the counterinsurgency operations a local face. The Press Information Bureau of India's brief words to mark the commissioning of the battalion were

> "The 'Bastariya Battalion' that came into existence on1st April 2017, has been created to enhance local representation in CRPF's combat lay-out in the Bastar area besides providing the 'Bastriya' youths a full-proof platform for employment. Accordingly, its recruitment process too carried some unique features. While the physical standards of height and weight were relaxed to give a fair chance to the local aspirants, CRPF also walked yet another extra mile to provide pre-educational and physical training to the local youths through Civic Action Programmes so as to maximize their ability and eligibility for induction into the special formation. Armed with about a year's rigorous training and so many years of geo-spatial experience of their own soil, these combat-ready jawans of CRPF are all poised to switch from their training ground to the battle ground in Bastar."[43]

The raising of such a battalion is reminiscent of commissioning of Rashtriya Rifles- a wing of the central paramilitary forces to counter the conflict in Kashmir in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir[44]. Considered as an solution since such initiatives create job creation especially from youth that belong to inaccessible villages in remote areas of Bastar recruiting 800 people including men and women…

> "…unlike the SPOs (Special Police Officers) in Chhattisgarh, after an initial period of deployment in Bastar, eventually these recruits (and the battalion) will be transferred to other places. After they serve their term. Based on this success of the battalion, in order to create more jobs, maybe in future we can think of raising another such force. To assess success would be about the kind of job satisfaction the recruits derive. These tribals", (not in a derogatory way) are slightly casual about government jobs, slightly undisciplined, slightly more home-sick (than normal people) and not they think for the day and not long-term. Keeping them with the forces and if they don't desert their jobs and believe in the constitution, and wiling move to other postings, then we have managed to recruit a successful cadet. We have done similar

[42] Passing out Parade of CRPF's Bastariya Battalion Tomorrow, at https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=179423&reg=3&lang=2

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] In August 2019, the current Indian government abrogated the Article 370 of the Indian constitution to amend the status of Jammu and Kashmir as a federal state.

> thing in Kashmir and recruited ex-militants and something similar was done in the North-East and it is considered to be a good decision. If these boys and girls are satisfied, then they become our brand ambassadors. When they go home on leave, there would be a talk in the village and this would help in erasing the misgivings about the CRPF and how it is perceived deep down in the villages of Bastar as an enemy force. And maybe clear some doubts. Something on those lines, lets' see how it happens."[45]

The reality of how the policy of surrender and rehabilitation was described and institutionalised was explored during extensive periods of fieldwork in Bastar, conducting in different phases from 2015 to 2021. That field work included interviews with security actors, and interviews and more informal conversations with community activists and with some surrendered guerrillas, along with observation of local events, protests and community life.

Throughout the discussions during fieldwork on the policy and its real-life implementation, the questions of loyalty, civilising and mainstreaming echo through the narratives. While the officers and actors from civil society are cognisant of incentivising violence, they find it difficult to seek viable alternatives in a context of conflict that has become normal for everyone. The idea of loyalty itself, within the project of nation building, takes primacy, and in this context the onus of proving their loyalty is entirely on the surrendered individual, regardless of their circumstances or motivations to opt for retirement out of a guerrilla life.

The observation of everyday public interactions in areas adjacent to conflict zones show the normalcy of militarisation and policing. The process of rehabilitation is considered in isolation from the larger issues of socio-political assertion of Adivasi youth and Adivasi polity itself. Hebbar[46] in her thoughtful essay on tribal politics and contemporaneity, enunciates the fact that the tribal/Adivasi in this counterinsurgency/insurgency axis has become a "casualty of what Giroux (2009) calls the politics of disposability"[47]. She further points out that the disposability is rendered in two interconnected ways - through 'denial of coevalness'[48] and Adivasi as victims of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Adivasis' engagement in the discourse is that of a non-participant. A passive recipient whose engagement with contemporary is considered to be an anomaly, and hence needs to be mainstreamed through the homogenising effects of economic growth.

The idea of rehabilitation signifies a pre-conceived understanding of 'reform' and 'correction'. The mechanisms of the policy, are enshrined in the larger ambit of constructing a citizen- who is loyal to the objectives of the State. And loyalty is co-constituted through modernizing the Adivasi. In the same collection of essays, Prof. Savyasaachi in his introduction unpacks the history of rehabilitation in India. Encountered first during the early post-Independent India's development vision of making dams - rehabilitation and resettlement was a promise. A promise of resettlement, a promise of a non-violent life, a promise with ambiguity of what and how, and a promise that is continuously/habitually deferred. It is an intractable promise. And the tangible form of this promise exists in the shape of a monetised economy- a

[45] Interview with Suleiman* ex CRPF IG-Bastar who was serving in Kashmir at the time of the interview (Feb 2019).

[46] Hebbar, Ritambhara: "Reframing the debate: tribal question and contemporaneity", in Sayvasaachi (ed.) (2018): *Intractable Conflicts in Contemporary India: Narratives and Social Movements,* 1st ed., New Delhi, Routledge, pp. 61-81.

[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 79.

[48] Fabian, Johannes (1983): *Time and its Other: How Anthropology Makes its Objects*, 1sted., New York, Columbia University Press.

promise made through a currency note/money. Savyasachi considers this promise in the shape of a currency note as de-politicised,

> "…. This generates a disjunction between the word and the thing and creates conditions for the proliferation of lies, perjury, suspicion, distrust, and deceit. These words circulate in this network and gradually are internalised in the collective conscience and consciousness of society to become integrated with the language of the everyday life."[49].

This promise, in the context of Narayanpur and the surrendered, is a promise of a non-violent mainstream life. The contradiction is apparent for everyone to see. It is an unnuanced practice through which, a new citizen is cultivated, who is subservient and it is only through denial of criticality, that the individual be provided with a stamp of approval. Good behaviour requires homogenising with the mainstream and in this mainstreaming, the process involves erasing of experiences, of lives led and erasure of people as agents for transformatory politics.

Between the first field trip to Bastar in 2015 and a longer period of ethnographic research in 2019 the expanse and strength of District Reserve Guards (DRG)[50] across the states had increased. While earlier, they were mostly working as Gopniay Sainiks (informers) in collaboration with the state police and the deployed paramilitary, later they are carving out a separate force within the police- and the DRG is a testimony to this. In the eyes of the state, the DRG serves a tactical and strategic purpose, of impacting the Maoist movement and their support base. The surrendered guerrillas who are confirmed within the DRG are the ones who have proved their merit by providing relevant intelligence, aiding the security forces in making incursions into the forested and interior villages. Their wherewithal in charting routes through villages where they once travelled as Maoists, as guerrillas or as area commander(s)— managing everyday village development activities— was the biggest advantage, and which has been gainfully used by the security forces. Keshav* and his friends, who surrendered around the same time as him, mentioned that during their initial days, there were conversations regarding the motivations that led to villagers joining the movement,

> "… the earlier SP, the one from Maharashtra, he was very kind. He gave us a lot of space to talk. He was curious to understand from our point of view, to what measures the prashsan (administration or government) could take to deter people from joining the movement. We told him, that we need 'vikas' (development). In these areas, there is no exposure to the outside world. People didn't have mobile connections, no television, nobody has any idea about what goes around in the outside world. It is important, I feel, these things would help in knowing about where the world has

[49]Sayvasaachi: "Introduction: Transformative action, the promise and intractable conflicts", in Sayvasaachi (ed.) (2018): *Intractable Conflicts in Contemporary India: Narratives and Social Movements* 1st ed. New Delhi, Routledge, pp. 1-19.

[50] The District Reserve Guards are a parallel policing force within the state of Chhattisgarh which is responsible for spearheading the counterinsurgency operations against the Maoist guerrillas. As was observed during the fieldwork, the surrendered guerrillas are often included in the DRG and become a part of these counterinsurgency operations due to their knowledge of the forested terrain and local language. The DRG was formed in 2011 at a time when the Supreme Court of India, had ruled the Salwa Judum as unconstitutional. The Salwa Judum- which translates to purification hunt in local language-Gondi was a village defense force formed with political support from the ruling party in the state of Chhattisgarh. The Salwa Judum, recruited local village youth to fight against the Maoist guerrillas. The excesses of the Judum were document by the civil liberties group in the state which included rape, torture and extra-judicial killings of unarmed or suspected Maoist guerrillas or supporters. In a move to legitimize this defense force, Chhattisgarh government introduced the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Armed Forces Act (CAAF Act, 2011) and instated DRG.

> moved and that we in our villages are stuck in time. There are no jobs, no opportunities…"[51]

Conversations, with the surrendered guerrillas, hint at the intentions of government actors or representatives to bridge and cultivate an understanding of the motivations, hopes and aspirations of the Adivasi villager. However, there is a tension between the clear attempts of a few state officials to understand the Adivasi surrendered, with a much wider sense, among those we spoke to, of intense public grievances about the practical impacts of the policy in intensifying violence in the forests, and in structured poverty in the towns. There is a certain irony that despite a declared intention to understand, most of the civil liberty movements which are representative of evolutionary social movements, are viewed as contentious, or even threatening, in the eyes of the Indian state, as they are critical, contrarian and are contesting dominant social structures and identities. The ubiquitous intermingling of class and caste through institutions of governance, widens the linguistic and cultural gap between communities stratified through caste and its entrenched practices in everyday life. Poyam[52] records both—the clamp down on civil liberties and other social movements within Chhattisgarh and the neighbouring states of Telangana, and the consequences of the militarised or a military-first counterinsurgency program, where the foot soldiers, as paramilitary or as DRG belong to either the Adivasi or lower caste communities/identities.

5. Conclusion

India's response to the Maoist conflict in recent decades has both local and global dimensions. It shares characteristics with other conflicts such as in Kashmir and the North East, in the intensity of securitisation and the rejection of international oversight or engagement. Nonetheless it also shows the inevitable two-way influence of India's desire for 'great power' international status on the global stage. India consciously used the language of counter-terrorism to justify authoritarian actions to domestic audiences, and to stave off any attempts at international engagement, whether on human rights issues or as potential mediators. It also consciously or unintentionally used the language of modern US counter-insurgency practice in its own security doctrines.

If India only wished for Great Power status, these choices, though contestable, would at least be relatively consistent. They would place India's approach within a largely US-dominated security framework, while also being consistent with China's rejection of international oversight on human rights or internal security challenges.

India however has retained a desire to present its foreign policy as reflecting a decolonial perspective, while also seeking to position India as having a leadership role in the Global South. This is somewhat in tension with a positioning of India as a 'Global Power'. In security policy and practice in particular, the rejection of the internal application international human rights norms within India, weakens India's ability to be seen as a honest broker for smaller and medium-sized states in the Global South, who have a greater need for agreed international norms as part of their effort to secure greater autonomy from Great Power pressures.

Likewise, India's 'modernisation', 'civilising' and homogenising attitude to its own Adivasi populations, sits in tension with a decolonial positioning.

While small and medium states can of course be hostile to their own internal minorities, that does not negate their desire to use international agreements and norms to help them resist

[51] Interview with Keshav* (not their real name), surrendered Maoist (October 2019).
[52] Poyam, Akash: "Stepsons of the Soil", *The Caravan*, 14 February 2020, at https://caravanmagazine.in/conflict/in-battles-between-paramilitary-insurgents-victims-from-same-marginalised-group

Great Power dominance. The local and the global are therefore more inter-connected than India's practices allow for. If the current Indian government, notwithstanding its difficult tariff position vis-à-vis the USA, ultimately prioritises a homogenising and securitised internal security practice, it may find that its ability to voice a post-colonial narrative internationally as fatally undermined.

To conclude, India's pursuit as a vishwaguru is incomplete without any normative positioning in its approach to international politics. In a world where ethical considerations lie severely impacted with rise in armed conflict, anxiety over consequences of climate change and militarization—the need is to form a new cooperations across societies/nations for durable and sustainable solutions. For this purpose, India requires to provide space for an ethical and open dialogue across ideological and political lines both within its internal and international arena. As an aspirational leader, India would gain more from upholding and affirming international norms of accountability and transparency, to amplify and find support among smaller/non-western nations for consensus building and impactful change.

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