Mantraya Annual Report 2019
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Nagaland: Conflict Fragility, Intractability, and Resolution

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

More than four years after it signed the framework agreement with the NSCN-IM in 2015, New Delhi appears distant from signing a final peace deal in the restive state of Nagaland. Conducted under the close of watch of the Prime Minister’s Office, the inability to reach a final solution underlines a number of unique challenges: some historic and some which have roots in the government’s new-found template for ending conflicts.

(Photo Courtesy: The Hindu)
Introduction

Setting up of unrealistic deadlines, subtle threats to its adversaries, over ambitious communication exercises, and hopes against heavy odds have not worked for New Delhi to bring a meaningful end to the Naga insurgency. The NSCN-IM continues to insist on a separate flag and a constitution. To be able to sign an agreement, New Delhi may have to accede to some of these demands. Recent developments in Kashmir have raised concerns that the government prefers opting for radical measures to resolve long-standing conflicts. However, the NSCN-IM is proving to be different. It is certain that to end the Naga conflict, a solution will have to be evolved from within, not externally imposed.

Array of Tactics

Ancient Indian writings on strategy refer to a range of means to overpower the adversary. A look at the Indian government’s approach towards the Naga conflict includes them all: cajoling, enticing, punishing, and splitting the enemy. In the last couple of years, processes that have run parallel to the peace efforts have been able to split the Khaplang faction of the NSCN (NSCN-K), create pro-India factions among the insurgencies, and unify a number of otherwise warring factions among the armed outfits. Enormous pressure has also been mounted on the NSCN-IM making it agree to remain engaged with a peace process with the government.

Till the 1990s, support for the Indian state within Nagaland was limited to few politicians, security force personnel, and bureaucrats. However, over the years and coinciding with the opening of the Indian economy that created a range of opportunities for the Naga youth in many Indian cities, support for insurgency has been on the wane. With regard to the peace negotiations, today the government has a section within the Naga civil society whose views are similar to that of New Delhi. Position of the seven-member Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) on a range of issues such as integration of the Naga inhabited areas, on a separate Naga flag and constitution are closer to that propounded by New Delhi. This has raised hopes of a solution to the conflict even if the NSCN-IM is not on board. The government’s negotiator has even suggested that the Government of India (GoI) will go ahead with signing the agreement with or without the NSCN-IM.[1] That, however, is easier said than done.

A formidable adversary

Authors have referred to the 7000 cadres of the NSCN-IM to underline its undecimated fighting potential. Since 1997, when the NSCN-IM agreed to a suspension of operations agreement with a cadre strength of 2500-3000, the group has steadily increased its members. New recruits as well as cadres from other insurgencies have flocked the group, which is largely considered to be the upholder of the dream for an independent Nagaland or Nagalim. As a result, the group’s influence stretches over much of Nagaland and the Naga inhabited areas of neighbouring states. As pointed out by an earlier Mantraya publication[2], the group’s access to financial resources vide it’s wide ‘tax collection’ activities remain formidable. As a keen Naga watcher opines, “In a conflict mode, the NSCN(I-M) is capable of stretching the Indian security apparatus to its limits.”[3]
The NSCN-IM has lost some of its cadres to other groups in the recent past. For instance, in the last week of October, 22 of its cadres joined the NSCN-U.[4] The latter had been formed in 2007 as a result of a truce between factions of the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K. Such setbacks notwithstanding, the IM faction is considered to be the foremost organisation capable of negotiating on behalf of the Naga population. It continues to receive the backing of the Naga Hoho, the apex tribal body within Nagaland. The NSCN-IM terms the NNFGs as “Opportunists, deserters, opponents and detractors who have never fought for the cause”[5]. Given the wide mandate the NSCN-IM enjoys all across the state, restarting a war with the Indian state, in the event of being left out of an agreement with the GoI, could be the last of the outfit’s options. A sulking NSCN-IM outside the ambit of the agreement presents a much larger headache to the government machinery than a fighting one. New Delhi would risk such an outcome at its own peril.

Idea of Nagalim

A sneeze in Nagaland produces a cold in Manipur. The NSCN-IM’s demand for ‘nagalim’ or ‘greater Nagaland’- an administrative arrangement to unite 1.2 million Nagas- has been a constant source of anxiety among Nagaland’s neighbouring states. These states, especially Manipur, fear dismemberment, given a number of its districts have sizeable Naga population. The government’s chief negotiator and Nagaland governor R N Ravi incidentally told a parliamentary panel in July 2018 that the NSCN-IM has agreed to a formula which will make special arrangement for the Nagas living in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, without ‘touching the boundaries of these states’[6]. Several assurances by the Union Home Ministry, however, has had minimal impact on these states. On 6 November, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu said his government will not part with any territory of his state as demanded by the NSCN-IM.[7] One reason for the continuing insecurity is the non-representation of these states in the ongoing negotiations with the NNPGs. It is difficult to see how a solution to the Naga conflict can be found without a transparent process that not only respects the territorial integrity of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam; but where representatives of these states are involved.

Shifting Goalposts

Negotiations are being carried out in secrecy. Even the ‘framework agreement’ signed in 2015 is not in public domain. No one except the government and the parties in negotiation have an inkling to the intricacies of demands and tradeoffs. However, what is believed to have halted the progress is the NSCN-IM’s demand for a separate flag and a constitution. Conceptually, fulfillment of these demands would recognize the unique history of the Nagas and grant them a special place within the Indian federation.

Bringing peace and stability to Nagaland being the end goal, fulfilling these symbolic demands should not have been a problem for New Delhi. After all, the framework agreement had been reached after the NSCN-IM had reportedly agreed to a settlement within the Indian federation with a ‘special status’ for Nagaland.[8] However, a lot has changed since then. The current government with its emphasis on nationalism and steadfast conformity to a template that de-incentivizes according special status to any state, especially in the light of the developments in Kashmir, will find it hard to sell such tradeoffs to its constituency. For the NSCN-IM, which seems to have given up on a large number of its demands including the unification of the Naga-inhabited areas, forsaking the remaining demands would mean a complete surrender and not a honourable agreement that it seeks to extract.
Sustainable and meaningful closure

Success in peace negotiations is never derived by vanquishing and humiliating one’s opponent, but by according it a degree of honour and inclusiveness. Mutually beneficial tradeoffs rather than forceful extraction of submission can go a long way to make the deal permanent. The successful Mizo accord, which has led to the establishment of permanent peace in Mizoram since 1986 is instructive. The protracted Naga conflict stands at the important crossroads. An imaginative leadership on part of New Delhi taking cognizance of the local sensitivities can bring it to a permanent closure. The NSCN-IM not only must be a part of any final peace agreement, but its demand for a flag and constitution should be favourably considered, to bring peace to Nagaland.

End Notes


[8] Ibid.

(Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray is a Director of Mantraya. This policy brief is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Fragility, Conflict, and Peace Building” and “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Network” projects. All Mantraya publications are peer reviewed.)
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Death of Baghdadi: Specter of Radicalization & Violent Extremism

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

The killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has been hailed as a success in dealing a death blow to the Islamic state leadership and organization. Despite such claims of early success of counter terrorism (CT) operations, some fundamental questions remain unanswered. Will the setback of losing its top leader induce a phase of operational paralysis in the Islamic State (IS) or will it turn out to be only temporary, without much impact on the activity of the affiliates and individuals who kill in the name of the organization? What are the factors which will continue to aid the agencies of terror and radicalization? How will incidents of radicalization and violent extremism fan out, following the death of Baghdadi? And what impact will this episode have on India’s CT and counter-violent extremism efforts? This brief provides answers to these questions.

Introduction

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the supreme leader of the Islamic State (IS), was killed during a secret operation by US special forces in Syria on 26 October in northern Syria. Another terrorist named Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, described by US President Donald Trump as Baghdadi’s potential successor too was killed in a strike the following day. These two incidents will further weaken the organization which is aiming to adopt new strategies to stay afloat and relevant after the decimation of its empire nearly two years back. However, whether the damage would be
permanent and may liquidate the organization would depend upon an array of factors like the intent of future operations against the outfit, the adaptability of the organisation to the new realities, and the ability of a new terrorist leader to provide meaning and direction to the ‘industry of terror’. In any event, the real fight against the IS or its successor would have to be fought over great swathes of various continents, against established ‘terror provinces’, regional affiliates, and Do-it-Yourself (DIY) cadres of the group. Terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism would continue to pose as serious threats to a large number of states.

Leadership and Ideology

Strikes that annihilate the top leadership of terror outfits do leave them paralyzed. The longevity of such debilitation, however, may depend on the extent to which the leaders have prepared the organization to withstand losses and recover from them. In simple words, the terror outfit with a pre-decided succession hierarchy is much likely to bounce back than one which does not have one. In the case of the latter, the death of the supreme leader may lead to a succession struggle. While al Qaeda is still in the process of recovering from the death of Osama bin Laden and may actually never be able to do so, the case with the IS could be different. However, in actuality the process is much more complex. Ideology plays a much greater part than leadership. The IS could emerge as a much more lethal terror organization as its success was based on its ability to take the anti-west and anti-Shia outlook to a new level. As is apparent, each passing day, terror organizations must delve lower into the abyss of violence and hatred to remain relevant. Or else those will be replaced by new groups which have the ability to do so.

A Successor

The IS has reportedly appointed Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi as the new leader of the group. Little is known about him. However, it is irrelevant who becomes the top leader of the group where decentralization and operating through franchises are the norms. In spite of its weakness, the IS has quietly transformed into its 2.0 version, where the aspirations and not actual linkages with the parent organization drives the agenda of the affiliates. The violence potential of the IS would depend upon the terror-prevention potential of the respective countries where the affiliates or the lone wolves are based. With time, terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization continue to enter much more complex phases.

New Theatres and Expansion

What is being projected as a paralysis for the IS, may turn out to be only ‘hemiplegia’, a medical condition that affects only one part of the body. In the coming months, parts of West Asia, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Afghanistan look imminent to remain the focus of the violence of groups that the IS has either established itself and has formed alliance with. Lone wolves or former IS cadres who have fled captivity or have evaded arrest are bound to continue with their activities in countries that are difficult to shortlist. The death of Baghdadi may impede the group’s ability to expand further, but will do little to checkmate the activities of the affiliates and aspirational terrorists. Depending upon the theatre where such activities are being/ will be planned, both terrorism by IS affiliates or lone wolf/ DIY brand of terrorism would remain an unmitigated threat. Possibility of spectacular retaliatory attacks to avenge the death of the death of Baghdadi would remain real.

Following the Turkish raids in Syria, reports on how probable prison breaks in Iraq and Syria could help the IS build its cadre strength had appeared in the media. The spectacular achievement of neutralising the IS top leader, however, do not address the underlying conditions that contribute to keeping the violence potential of IS and affiliates intact. In addition to the waiting-to-explode prisons teeming with Jihadists in Iraq and Syria that may quickly allow the IS to rebuild its lost strength, radicalization continues to remain a key driver of terrorism and violent extremism. Countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts have at best achieved moderate success in some
countries. Across the vast expanse of the playing grounds of the global jihadists, resources and lack of inter-state collaboration remain primary challenges. Global jihadists have excelled in making the threat they pose appear local and hence, of less interest to the major powers. This will continue to aid their expansion plan in theatres where state control is lax and ability of law enforcement agencies are much to be desired.

Implications for India

For the security establishment, the influence of global jihad on India appears to be insignificant. Baghdadi’s death in all likelihood will further weaken the ability of the global jihadists to find root in India. While the al Qaeda attempted to set up a branch in Kashmir, the IS succeeded in attracting few men and women from various states of the country. However, considering India’s huge Muslim population, the impact is seen as minimal and not so worrisome. Jihad in India espoused mostly local issues. Ability of the security forces to frequently eliminate the terrorists affiliated with either the al Qaeda or the IS has ensured that nascent efforts of providing a global fervor to Kashmir’s militancy are unsuccessful. On 24 October, three terrorists belonging to the al Qaeda affiliate Ansar Ghazwat-ul Hind (AGH) including its chief Hamid Lelhari were killed in Pulwama district of south Kashmir. The police chief has declared that the ‘AGH group has been wiped out for now’. [3] It is a matter of time that another set of youth seeks to step into the shoes of Lehari and associates.

Absence of terrorism/ violent extremism with external linkages, however, cannot be a source of much comfort. Such successes in counter-terrorism will, however, have to be expanded to the realm of preventing radicalization and dealing with the specter of violent extremism. Especially in Kashmir, where the decision of the government to abrogate article 370 of the Indian constitution has fanned dissent, dangers of violent extremism becoming a perennial national security threat in the medium and long term is real. Experiences of other nations bear testimony to the reality of unceasing and complex challenges posed by these two phenomena. Countries claiming to have excellent CT records have discovered the limitations of applying the same formula to CVE. The emphasis needs to be on prevention of violent extremism (PVE) which needs a ‘whole of society and government’ approach. While Baghdadi’s death may not have direct repercussions on India’s security scene, local dissent and online radicalization would continue to shape extremism in India. Moreover, incidents of extremism and radicalization in Southeast, Central Asia, and Afghanistan too may remain the source of inspiration for the potential extremists as the IS finds new theatre of operations in the region.

End Notes


(Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray is a Director of Mantraya. This Policy Brief is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Islamic State in South Asia” & “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Networks” project. Mantraya Briefs are peer reviewed publications. He can be contacted at bibhuruotray@gmail.com)
In the Naxal heartland: A ‘turnaround’ in sight?

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

Since 2018 (till August 2019), over 350 cadres of the Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist) have been killed in various states of India. Rapid cadre depletion and continuous security force operations have dented the group’s ability to organize violence. This success is largely due to a systematic strategy adopted by the security planners since 2014 to penetrate deep into the core areas of the group and establish permanent camps. If persisted, even in the face of kinetic losses to the security forces, this strategy would be able to weaken the group considerably and may even compel the group to opt for negotiations with the government.

(Representational Image, Courtesy: LiveMint)

Shadow boxing in the ‘Unknown Territory’

In August 2019, a team of the District Reserve Group (DRG) of the Chhattisgarh police consisting exclusively of tribal young men conducted a deep-penetrating operation [1] into Abujhmaad, the infamous core area of the CPI-Maoist. The target was an ongoing training camp of the extremist group. Five cadres were killed in the ensuing encounter. It was a significant operation considering the fact that, for decades, this core area of the extremist organization has remained more or less free from security force action.

Abujhmaad, in Gondi language, translates into ‘the unknown territory’. However, the level of nescience with the forested region, spread over 4000 square kilometres, is mostly with the security forces. Inhabited by about 40,000
people[2], it includes most of Narayanpur district as well as parts of Dantewada and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. It is ‘possibly the only piece of land in the country where there is no revenue map as yet; villagers have no title deeds (patta) to the land they live in or cultivate’[3].

Maoists (interchangeably referred to as ‘Naxals’), on the other hand, since the 1990s, have turned interior parts of Abujhmaal into a safe area. This is where the outfit’s top leadership is based; training camps are organized; and the arms repairing and explosives assembly units are located. In the absence of any worthwhile operation in the area, fables and hearsay have dominated the imagination of security forces. For instance, during a previous attempt to move inside Abujhmaal, some uninitiated personnel spoke to the media of possible encounters with hydra-headed monsters. The August 2019 operation, therefore, was sort of an eye opener and busted several myths. The Chhattisgarh police chief, in an interview, said that the camp under attack had a four-tier security system[4], which possibly allowed several extremists minimize losses and flee during the operation.

**Widening the Net**

The August 2019 operation inside Abujhmaal was an attempt by the security forces (both the police and central forces) to end the sense of safety enjoyed by the CPI-Maoist and target its core strength. At the same time, such an operation is a critical part of the state’s offensive strategy that seeks to establish presence and dominance of security forces in extremist stronghold areas. Such deep penetrating operations appear to have started sometime in 2014 and 2015, with security force camps being set up in interior areas of Naxal strong holds. Unlike previous occasions when security forces operated from their camps in district or sub-divisional headquarters, which limited their ability to penetrate deeper into the core areas, the newly set up camps have become the starting point for operations. These camps have also provided security to the infrastructure building projects in the remote areas.

*Abujhmaal, the core area of the CPI-Maoist, Photo Courtesy: Times of India*
Each camp housed about 200 to 250 security force personnel and came with elaborate security arrangements to prevent being attacked and run over by the extremists.

Maoist Strategy

Initially the extremists desisted from attacking these camps. However, attacks started in May 2015 and have since continued intermittently.

- In May 2015, four personnel were injured when a group of suspected Naxals attacked the Basing police camp under Kurusnar police station limits in Narayanpur district in the wee hours. Armed Naxals hurled crude bombs shortly after midnight following which a gun-battle broke out and lasted for two hours.[5]

- In May 2016, Maoists launched a major pre-dawn attack on a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) camp in the forested Rangareddy region in Gangloor of Bijapur district. A CRPF jawan was killed by a sniper shot as all entry points to the camp were ambushed by the Maoists.[6]

- In June, about 15 to 20 Naxals, fired rockets and opened heavy gunfire at an Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) camp situated at Ranapal, on the border of Kondagon and Narayanpur district of Chhattisgarh in the wee hours. The attack, however, did not result in casualty.[7]

- In July 2018, about 100 Naxals surrounded the same ITBP camp in Ranapal area at midnight, fired four rockets, and fled after the forces retaliated.[8]

Clearly, such attacks neither have been effective nor have they deterred the security forces in these ‘forward’ camps from carrying out their operations.

As a backup counter strategy to slow down the pace and frequency of operations, extremists since 2017, have started increasingly relying on Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to ambush the forces. Since the forces lack ‘gadgets or equipment to detect a hidden IEDs’[9], this mode of attack has taken a heavy toll on the forces. According to the MHA, between 2017 and August 2019, 73 troops have killed and another 179 have been injured in IED explosions in various states. Maximum number of such casualties have been reported in Chhattisgarh. A total of 43 such incidents took place in 2017, rose to 79 in 2018, and over 51 have been recorded till August 2019. This necessitated launch of an operation, using small teams of trained canines and personnel, to detect and diffuse the IEDs in September 2019.[10] Over 1500 IEDs have been recovered between 2017 and August 2019.

Impact Assessment

Notwithstanding the losses suffered by the forces, the forward moving strategy has started paying off in two significant ways. Firstly, some of the key development cum strategic projects such as building of roads, installation of mobile towers, construction or renovation of bridges and schools have either been completed or have been progressing well in the erstwhile extremist strongholds. A revenue survey was initiated in Abujhumaad in 2015 by the Chhattisgarh Revenue Department which conducted aerial survey of total 237 villages with the help of the Hyderabad-based National Remote Sensing Agency.[11] In April 2017, a revenue survey was conducted mostly in areas around the security camps. with the help of a team from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Roorkee, but the process did not make headway because of lack of infrastructure and security concerns. A fresh attempt was initiated in August 2019 by the revenue department of the state of Chhattisgarh.

Secondly, encounters initiated by the security forces have been able to neutralize extremists in the areas abutting the core zones quite regularly. Although the August 2019 operation into Abujhumaad has not yet been repeated, ample evidence is available to indicate that the extremists are being squeezed into a much narrower patch of
territory. This is evident from the steep decline in the violence orchestrated by the extremists, and also an internal assessment by the CPI-Maoist leadership. The group’s former general secretary Ganapathy admitted in an interview in early 2019 that “…counter-revolutionary offensives and our subjective mistakes and weaknesses are the main reasons for the weakening of the revolutionary movement for the past eight years.”[12]

How far from finish?

Around 18,000 security force personnel and drones were deployed around 273 police stations for the by-poll of a lone assembly seat in Chhattisgarh’s Dantewada on 23 September.[13] Close to 56 percent of the 188263 eligible voters cast their ballot.[14] The seat had fallen vacant due to the killing of the member of the legislative assembly (MLA) Bhima Mandavi in April 2019 in an ambush by the security forces in at the Shyamagiri hills. The killing as well as the security ‘bandobast’ for the polls are indicative of the persisting threat of the extremists, even in areas beyond the Abujhmad core. A large number of voters from remote areas in the 23 September poll had to be ferried on boats and vehicles by the security forces to the polling booths. According to an estimate of the Chhattisgarh police, the CPI-Maoist, in spite of its weakness, still has a cadre strength of 6000, which includes 1000 armed cadres[15]. The rest are supporters.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has declared its intention of ‘uprooting the problem’ quickly. That is not likely to happen, in spite of the additional deployment of forces and a series of steps which have been taken to boost their morale. A victory, however, is still possible in the medium term of three to five years. The key is to persist with the strategies adopted thus far and to supplement them with governance and inclusive development measures that seek the assure the affected people in the region of the good intentions of the government. Accountable bureaucracy, highly motivated and trained security forces, and committed politicians would have to remain three integral pillars for the counter-insurgency operations to succeed.

End Notes


[10] The CRPF has tasked its Pune based specialized institute the Indian Institute of IED Management, to analyze the technology of these IEDs in circulation, create awareness material for forces and also study new prototypes being developed. Ibid.


[15] “There is only one way of solving Naxalism and that is ethical security and ethical governance”, op.cit.

*(Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray is Director of Mantraya. This analysis is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Network” and “Fragility, Conflict & Peace Building” projects. Mantraya analyses are peer reviewed publications. The author can be contacted atbibhuroutray@gmail.com.)*
Peace Making in Afghanistan: Future Pathways

Shanthie Mariet D’Souza

Abstract

The much-awaited peace deal with the Taliban by the U.S. collapsed before its final approval by President Trump. This was hardly surprising given the roadblocks that existed to such deal making. This calls for the rationale behind the now-derailed peace talks, which had overlooked the fact of centrality of Afghans in an externally mediated peace deal, to be reviewed. A series of necessary conditions need to be met before another attempt is made to make peace with the Taliban. Till such conditions are met, hasty attempts at negotiations will only lead to increase in violence, insecurity, and chaos in the conflict-ridden country.

(Qatari, U.S. and Taliban officials conferring in an undisclosed place in Doha, 25 February 2019, Photo Courtesy: VOA News)

Deal Breakers

Peace talks with the Taliban ‘as far as I am concerned are dead’, declared U.S. President Trump on 9 September. Two days earlier, he had called off the plan to host the Taliban representatives and the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani at Camp David for signing the peace deal. Just a few days before the commemoration of 9/11 attacks and the election campaign of 2020, Trump ostensibly didn’t think a peace deal would go down well with the voters. The
Taliban, in response, promised more bloodshed in the days to come. The U.S. reciprocated by unveiling plans to hit the insurgents harder. Afghanistan has witnessed bloodshed for the past decade and the future, sans settlement, will remain equally violent. This paper takes stock of how the ‘post-no deal’ scenario may unveil in Afghanistan and the conditions which must be fulfilled before another effort at arriving at a peace settlement is made with the Taliban-led insurgency[1].

The Divisions: Lack of ‘unity of effort’

The reason cited by President Trump for his abrupt decision to cancel the deal, which had generated much speculation regarding the future of the war-ravaged country, is the death of an American soldier in a Taliban attack on Kabul’s Green Village on 5 September.[2] However, the real reasons could be a plethora of new and persisting differences over the ‘end game’ in Afghanistan among the many stakeholders inside and outside of Afghanistan.

Within the Trump administration, divisions and opposition had mounted to the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad-negotiated deal that hinged mostly on a promise made by the Talban that it will deny space to international terrorists on Afghan soil. According to various sources in the U.S., the National Security Advisor (NSA) John R. Bolton, before his unceremonious sacking by President Trump, had refused to sign off the deal. The Taliban too had refused to be a part of the secret meeting at Camp David before a deal has been signed. “We accepted the invitation but said we would come soon after the signing ceremony of the agreement,” a Taliban official told.[3] The venue and the timing led to considerable consternation in the U.S. The President ‘faced a backlash from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle — as well as from some members of his administration’[4].

Inside Afghanistan, exclusion of the National Unity Government (NUG) was problematic. An ‘externally mediated deal’ had brought to the fore issues of legitimacy of the incumbent government and challenges of implementation. The Afghan government was opposed to the deal that had not taken it on board. Till the finalization of the deal was announced by Khalilzad, the Ashraf Ghani administration had not even been given a copy.[5] After Trump’s announcement, Ghani’s office asserted that peace in Afghanistan will prevail only after Talban enter direct negotiations with the Afghan government, announce a ceasefire and end to violence.

Further, the ‘deal’ had remained mostly ambiguous (lexicon varied from road map, peace agreement, peace settlement) as it had not addressed contentious issues like the number and timeline for U.S. troop withdrawal, counter-terrorism guarantees that the Taliban was supposed to have provided about keeping Afghanistan free from the presence of groups like al Qaeda, formation of an interim government in the face of a delayed presidential elections (now scheduled to be held on 28 September), power-sharing arrangement with the Talban, constitutional and political reform; and the type of state that Afghanistan would emerge as— Islamic Republic or Islamic Emirate — after the deal.

Internal and External Realignments: Shifting sands

The net outcome of Trump’s decision is a mixture of the obvious and also, internal realignment and geopolitical reconfiguration. That the Taliban would continue with its campaign of indiscriminate violence was on expected lines.[6] The U.S. and the Taliban held nine rounds of talks in the past ten months before the finalization of the draft deal. This, however, did not deter the insurgents from carrying out incessant violence. The US had lost 17 soldiers since the commencement of peace negotiations in Doha in 2018. In 2018 and 2019, there has been a spate of major attacks in Kabul and other places against public targets and events including attack on an ambulance (January 2018), voter registration centres (April 2018), two back-to-back suicide attacks (April 2018) that killed 11 journalists, Nowroz festivities (March 2019), and on humanitarian NGOs (May 2019). In 2018, civilian deaths jumped to 3804 people killed, an 11 percent increase compared to the year before. On 4 September 2019,
Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission confirmed that its acting leader in Ghor province, Abdul Samad Amiri, had been kidnapped by the Taliban while traveling and shot dead.

In addition, continuing its strategy of delivering intense violence along with a proclaimed commitment to negotiation, the group is likely to explore possibilities of seeking favours from countries that are not in tandem with the U.S. goals in Afghanistan. These could include Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan. On 14 September, after the collapse of the deal, a negotiating team of the group visited Moscow and held consultations with President Vladimir Putin’s envoy for Afghanistan.[7] Russia has made outreach and held such dialogues with the Taliban which have gained momentum last year. The Talban also wants to explain its position on the peace process to countries around the world in “face-to-face meetings”. Great power competition as well as rivalry is a reality in Afghanistan and such outreach moves by the Taliban may add pressure on the Trump administration to restart a fresh process of dialogue.

Renewed Attempts at Peace

Continuing violence and the Taliban reaching out to other countries, would make the U.S. goal of exiting Afghanistan almost impossible to accomplish in near term. That could possibly push the Trump administration to increasing military pressure on the insurgents or to make another try at reviving peace talks with the Taliban.[8] Since 14000 remaining US forces and 17000 NATO forces on non-combat roles are unlikely to swing the directions of the war with the Talban decisively in America’s favour, another attempt at a peace deal is more likely. Unverified reports have indicated that the U.S. officials are still preparing for the next round of negotiations with the insurgents.

The Talban have also indicated that they are still amenable to peace talks with the U.S.. Given President Trump’s past failed negotiations with North Korea, he might want to extract a better deal with the Talban before the election campaign of 2020. However, it is entirely possible that any renewed attempt by the U.S. will merely be a replica of its past efforts and will continue to face the grim reality of a fractured political opinion in Afghanistan and increased external interference.

Political Stalemate: Elections vs ‘Peace deal’

More challenging than the security situation, the delay in the conduct of the presidential elections and political challenges that the NUG is facing, is a cause of concern. The delay in holding presidential elections (originally scheduled to be held in April 2019) in pursuit of a peace deal has led to opposition groups reaching out to the Talban as part of bargaining strategy. Powerful ethnic leaders like Vice President Dostum and the governor of Balkh province, Atta Mohammad Noor are in open revolt with the Ghani administration. Moreover, the delay in elections and anxieties around the peace deal has also caused polarisation along ethnic lines and fraying of the post-Bonn consensus.

Internal power reconfigurations in Afghanistan are further compounded by political ambitions and political outlooks of elites. Notwithstanding the fact that Presidential elections scheduled for 28 September would be held amidst intense violence and irregularities, politicking has brought out fissures and competitions among the political heavy weights. Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah and foreign minister Salauddin Rabbani are now in President Ghani’s opposition camp. Amrullah Saleh (Green Trend Movement), a firm opponent to the Talban, is the first vice presidential running mate with Ghani. Former President Hamid Karzai, who has turned a firm votary of a peace process with the Talban, is bound to pose challenges to scenarios that reaffirm the position of Ghani and his cohorts.[9]
Lessons Learnt

In the long run, insurgencies predominantly have ended through negotiated settlements. According to a study by RAND, “Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups and nearly half of the terror groups analyzed ended as a result of a transition into the political process.”[10] Another study that reviewed 80 conflicts in the period 1990 to 2007, concludes that only 7.5 percent of them ended in a military victory.[11] Likewise, the challenge posed by the Taliban-led insurgency will have to culminate through an appropriate use of force and process of negotiations.

In the Afghan context, however, necessary conditions essential for a peace settlement to succeed, are near absent. As a result, the peace process merely tantamount to a process of abject surrender to the violence orchestrating potential of the insurgents. From the Afghan government’s perspective, such negotiations, to succeed, need to occur from the position of strength. Such a condition does not exist on the ground. Suspension of the peace process constitutes a temporary setback to the Taliban. At the same time, reports indicate that 18 years’ since its ouster from the seat of power, it is perceived to be stronger than ever.

Further, calls for negotiations evoke strong cautionary voices, on two counts. First, though negotiation may almost always be appropriate in principle, such talks need to be pursued in situations in which the belligerents have real incentives to consider accommodation and compromise, i.e., the conflict must be ‘ripe’. Second, the need for belligerents to come to the table is provided by military pressure. A call for negotiations is, therefore, said to be incompatible with parallel calls for military withdrawal.[13] The question is, do these two conditions apply to the current situation in Afghanistan? Ripeness for negotiation generally flows from military stalemate – a situation in which neither side is moving towards victory and both sides are suffering from a “hurting stalemate.”[14] In Afghanistan, neither of the parties have reached that hurting stalemate.

Pathways to Peace

For any meaningful peace process, the following conditions need to be met. It must be preceded by conduct of a free and fair elections to elect a legitimate government capable of negotiating and implementing a peace deal/settlement. This needs to be followed by an intra-Afghan consensus on the nuances of the offers and accommodations made available to the insurgents. The gains made in the last 18 years on women’s rights, education, youth empowerment cannot be squandered away. Without Afghan government involvement and broad consensus inside Afghanistan any externally mediated peace process is less likely to succeed. Moreover, the talks should take place inside Afghanistan for building trust and accountability. The indigenous peace-making High Peace Council needs to be strengthened to mediate, reintegrate, and rehabilitate the insurgents. The talks can take place only in an atmosphere of absence of violence. Thus, a ceasefire and end of hostilities are necessary conditions. For these to happen, the issue of sanctuary and external support that the Taliban enjoys must be addressed.

Lessons learned from other conflict theatres throw further light on the essential components of the peace and reconciliation effort.[15] Such efforts do not merely amount to offering amnesty to dissidents or providing opportunities to elites and militia leaders to strike deals for control of territories and resources. It is essentially about engaging all sections of Afghan society to build national institutions that locals trust and respect. Such a process would call for a peace and reconciliation process based on ‘inclusiveness’ involving local stakeholders and regional actors.

Beyond a binary choice of military defeat of the Taliban or peace deal with the insurgents, there are other alternatives. Without a peace deal/agreement, the international community needs to strengthen the Afghan state
and create greater political unity as a means to either get to real reconciliation or achieve success through reintegration. The odds of this are not great but it’s the last best hope to avoid a bloodier civil war.

Any long-term policy of transforming conflict-ridden Afghanistan is not mere a declaration of the end of hostilities, but the presence of national, political and social institutions capable of mediating conflict. The absence of credible institutions to mediate in various social, political and economic conflicts is a major factor providing impetus to the ongoing armed conflict. Establishing long-lasting and participatory institutions that involve a wide range of governance, security sector reform, anti-corruption measures, representational, and reconciliation imperatives, need to be the focus of the international community. In additional to institution building and forging an intra-Afghan consensus, a regional and international consensus is essential to bring in peace and stability. The UN with its good offices needs to play a proactive role in consensus building and peacemaking in Afghanistan. And lastly, Afghan people, government and security forces must be strengthened to negotiate peace on their own terms.

End Notes

[1] The Taliban-led insurgency is not a monolithic organization of the pre-2001 era. It is presently a conglomeration of of Taliban guerrillas, followers of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s radical group Hizb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, Al Qaida and its affiliates, religious clerics, narcotic traffickers, anti-government elements and tribal fighters in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region. While most of these groups may not share the political goals of the Taliban, they do share a common agenda in preventing or limiting the writ of state authority. This inference was derived from interviews, briefings, and discussions with the locals, government officials, academics, media persons, aid workers in various Afghan provinces in May 2007-May 2017. For further details on the insurgency, see Seth Jones, Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, (RAND Counterinsurgency Study 4, Arlington, 2008); Antonio Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2008); Ahmed Rashid, Descent into Chaos: How the war Against Islamic Extremism is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia, (Penguin, London, 2008), pp. 240-261; and Ron Synovitz, “Afghan Insurgency Diversifies As Taliban Forges Alliances With Other Factions”, RFERL, 29 August 2008, at http://www.rferl.org/Content/Insurgency_Diversifies_As_Taliban_Forges_Alliances_With_Other_Factions/1194808.html. Accessed on 20 September 2019.


[5] According to the Associated Press, the Afghan president was shown the deal but not allowed to keep a copy.

[6] Few days after the announcement the insurgents have indeed carried out a series of attacks.


[9] According to the Afghanistan Analysts Network, out of 16 presidential contenders, President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Dr Abdullah, are the main contenders in the race. Only three have officially organised public campaign events. These included Ghani, Dr. Abdullah, and also Enayatullah Hafiz, a fringe candidate. Apart from technicalities and security threats, the campaign has been so slow for a much larger reason: it was simply not clear to the candidates and their political allies whether the election would go ahead. Ali Yawar Adili and Thomas Ruttig, “Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (7): Dithering over peace amid a lacklustre campaign”, Afghan Analysts Network, 16 September 2019, https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistsans-2019-election-7-dithering-over-peace-amid-a-lacklustre-campaign/. Accessed on 20 September 2019.


[11] Roughly a third ended through negotiation and another 20 per cent were on their way to being resolved through a negotiation process. The remaining 40 per cent were still unresolved. See Vicenç Fisas, Peace Process Yearbook, (School for a Culture of Peace, University of Barcelona, 2008).

[12] A note of caution is required to avoid confusion that may arise from the fact that not all ‘negotiations’ appear to be the result of a ripe moment. Negotiation may be a tactical interlude, a breather for rest and re-armament, a sop to external pressure, without any intent of opening a sincere search for a joint outcome. It is difficult at the outset to determine whether negotiations are indeed serious or sincere, as motives may be indistinguishably mixed in the minds of the actors themselves at the beginning. Moreover, Ripeness is only a necessary but not sufficient condition, for the initiation of negotiations. It is not self-fulfilling or self-implementing. Not all ripe moments are so seized and turned into negotiations, hence the importance of specifying the meaning and evidence of ripeness so as to indicate when conflicting or third parties can fruitfully initiate negotiations. Discussions with Prof. William Zartman, Washington DC, November 2005. See William I. Zartman, “The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments”, The Global Review of Ethnopolitics, vol.1, no.1, September 2001, pp. 8-18; Fen Osler Hampson, “Don’t rush to the negotiating table,” The Globe and Mail, 18 September 2007.


[14] The concept of a ripe moment centres on the parties’ perception of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), optimally associated with an impending, past or recently avoided catastrophe. When the parties find themselves locked in a conflict from which they cannot escalate to victory and this deadlock is painful to both of them (although not necessarily in equal degree or for the same reasons), they seek an alternative policy or way out. William I. Zartman, ‘Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond’, in P. Stern and D. Druckman, (eds.), International Conflict Resolution after the Cold War, (National Academy Press, Washington, 2000) and William I. Zartman, Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars, (Brookings, Washington, 1995).
Background

When did you first visit Nepal?

I first visited Nepal during the Vietnam War, so it was perhaps late 1974 or early 1975. I was studying Buddhism as one of the sub-areas in my doctoral work, and at that time Nepal was a source of knowledge and publications, especially on Tibetan Buddhism. Added to this was a longtime study of the Gurkhas, which ultimately led to my spending periods of time with all (then) five battalions as a journalist. I published a number of academic works on the Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism, a number of media works on the Gurkhas. Being engrossed in the study of Nepali society, examining political aspects, such as the quest for democracy, came naturally.
What was your impression of Nepal?

What struck me immediately was how very different Nepal was from Southeast Asia, where I had already done a good bit of fieldwork. In my doctoral work, I focused upon the Theravada Buddhist countries, especially Thailand (the others being Cambodia, Laos, and Burma). They had undergone profound change as a result of the Vietnam War, yet they had never been as isolated as Nepal has been until relatively recent times. Hence all socio-economic and political facets of life were very conservative. Things were changing, but even the international linkages engendered by religion, cross-border trade, and the Gurkha phenomenon had not impacted the population at large.

How many times have you returned to Nepal?

Since that first trip, I have been here more times than I can recall. My primary doctoral focus, though, once I transferred from History to the Political Science Department at the University of Hawaii, was political violence. That is the area where you will find most of publications focused – a natural consequence of being in the army during the Vietnam era. My dissertation dealt with Maoist insurgency, which is what led to my dramatically upping the tempo of my visits to Nepal throughout the past nearly two decades.

How do you describe changing dynamics of Nepal, socially, economically, and politically? Can you elaborate on the changes you have just mentioned?

The greatest changes stem from Nepal's engagement with the outside world. It is now thoroughly intertwined in global forces, regardless of the still existing, widespread nature of traditional forms. This has led to a remarkable synthesis of fluidity and conservatism.

Can you relate any particularly memorable experience?

Several such incidents, since that is the nature of Nepal. Simply being a haole(as we call white people in Hawaii) seeking to get clean in a river is enough to send tremors of mirth and merriment throughout a district (in the case I have in mind, it was Rolpa as I returned from Maoist-held areas). There is a research aspect here, which appears in any number of scholarly works. At times, it is difficult to move beyond Nepal, the warmth and genuinely likable nature of its people, to assessment of the sheer horror any number of us have encountered over the past several decades. As was the case in Cambodia, one is left to puzzle just what drives certain crimes. In my scholarship, you will find the balance between structure and agency invariably examined, but I do not accept that individual misdeeds are a necessary consequence of Nepali societal structure. It thus pains me deeply to see Nepalis inflict harm on each other to the extent they have in recent history.

As context has changed, have your interests and purpose also changed with respect to Nepal?

Ironically, I am more engaged in studying Nepali society than I have ever been, especially the historical Buddhist links that at one point saw the Kathmandu Valley central to the exchange of ideas and ritual which extended, in the north, to Tibet (and even China), in the west, to Kashmir, in the east to Sikkim and beyond, and in the south, back into India. Simultaneously, as my scholarship on Maoist people’s war matured, I went ever deeper into that phenomenon in Nepal. This is, in many ways, an entirely logical consequence of it being one of the more recent conflicts I have studied and done fieldwork on, as well as the simple reality that in this conflict, foreigners were not overtly attacked. In contrast, in the likes of, say, Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge saw themselves as Maoists on steroids, every foreigner they captured, save one, if memory serves, met a horrible end.

Maoist Research
Why did you become interested in studying Nepali Maoism and Nepalese politics in general?

Beyond what I have already noted, what attracted me to Nepali Maoism was the deep thought that the would-be revolutionaries put into examining both theory and practice, particularly into what had caused groups that seemed on the verge of success, such as Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) in Peru, to fail. If you examine my larger body of work on Maoism, you will find extensive conversations with the insurgents themselves, and this is what I eventually was able to do here. Their thinking was the essence of politics, whether violent or otherwise: how do we shape the world to address the challenges that society faces? I do not agree with the course of action chosen by the Maoists, but it is necessary to understand their beliefs and programmes.

![Security forces disarming IED found in front of Nepali Congress Party office, Liwang, Rolpa, 7 March 2019. Photo Courtesy: Marks collection](image)

You have seen the Maoists in the war period, during the peace process, and in the post-conflict years – and now in the mainstream. How do you analyze their journey? Is it a failure or a transformation?

What is most impressive about Nepali Maoism as a political body is its keen understanding that violence is but a way to get to the objective, which is political power to carry out societal transformation. The fierce debates that have gone on throughout not only the Maoist movement but the larger Nepali communist movement all revolve around this point. The debate has not concluded, as illustrated by the Biplav phenomenon. This much is well known. What is less understood is that there was never a strategic decision to integrate into normal politics. Rather, at the September 2005 Chunwang meeting, there was a decision – some eleven high-placed individuals were present – to embrace the peace process tactically for the strategic purpose of gaining access to the remaining areas of government strength and then seizing power from within. That this was agreed is stated in the formal documents (in Nepali) that emerged from that meeting – and vociferously in the critique of the Dahal mainstream by the radical elements of the party. The result was the bombing campaigns by, first, Baidya aka Kiran, connected with the Second Constitutional Assembly (CAII) elections, later by Chand aka Biplav, pursuant to the effort to block the local and federal elections. Their point, made myriad times, was that a strategy had been agreed upon at Chunwang but had been betrayed by the Dahal aka Prachanda faction (with Dr. Bhattarai invariably also mentioned by the critics). This position, of course, is correct. In this regard, it is important to establish the historical
I maintain that what has happened in recent Nepali politics is a result largely of contingency, together with a good dose of strategic flexibility upon the part of the Dahal faction. It is not, however, what was intended. Indeed, it is not difficult to find, in both Nepali or English, what was intended – and it was not reintegration into the parliamentary system.

Can you speculate then on why they have come into mainstream politics?

What I have just noted leads to this question. Participation in the peace process was understood by all major Maoist players to be a tactic, not a fundamental strategic shift. The widespread use of violence to ensure electoral results speaks to this. I label this terrorism in my own work, because it fits the definition (instrumental use of symbolic violence by sub-state actors to attack the innocent to further political ends). Military action was placed on hold, but aggressive use of violence continued, with victims numbering in the thousands if not the tens of thousands (even murders, assaults, torture-rape). This is a point conveniently overlooked in recent scholarship, which has been teleological in the extreme, projecting backwards from where we have ended up and misstating the historical record. A large portion of the weapons, for instance, were not surrendered. Nepal, in other words, has been as lucky as it has been committed to a “Nepali solution” in what has resulted.

How do you see two big communist parties’ unification? Is it natural or a more contrived process? Some analysts have speculated that there is a China factor behind this unification.

Unification followed, on the one hand, from the weak structural position of the Maoists. They needed unification, or they simply were not going to any longer be a major factor in the restructuring of Nepali society. On the other hand, the Maoists and the UML indeed are both communists and believe in Marxist-Leninist dogma. This is a factor which has long been overlooked simply because the precise nature of Nepali communism is specific to its national setting. There is a regular tendency to claim they are “not real communists.” This is not correct. They are simply constrained in what they can go by Nepal's societal and geostrategic realities. They do actually believe the more egregious things they say, whether backing Cuba, Venezuela, China, and North Korea, or claiming that rape stems from capitalism (and presumably vanishes under communism).

If this unification continues, what do you see is the future of NCP?

There will continue to be extreme factionalism, because the beliefs of the Maoist faction are not entirely compatible with those of the UML faction. One readily sees this in Dahal's insistence upon embracing publicly some of the most egregious regimes in the world, those I have just mentioned. This itself, ideology aside, should puzzle Nepalis. That list is not exactly one of democratic, representative societies. This leads to a conundrum: how is it that ostensible Nepali democracy keeps turning to odious regimes for ideological sustenance?

The Communist Party has considerable support in Nepal. Why has the communist government been unable to deliver on its promises despite having a two-thirds majority?

Nepal is dominated by the market on the vocabulary of social justice having been adroitly conflated with that of Marxism by Nepali communists. What emerges from numerous interviews with Nepali communists is more akin to what one finds in European social democracy than hard-core Marxism. Voters, thus, opt for the organization which best conveys a message of equality and justice even as they are mobilized by solid organizational mechanisms. Therein lies precisely the danger. Leaders are not followers; politicians are not voters. And too many of the communist leaders are currently in thrall to the nonsense that “authentic” national communism really can deliver on the promises of Marx and Lenin. As neither of those figures had much realistic to offer, the results can only be muddled if not tragic.
How do you see Biplav position in Nepalese politics?

Biplav, ironically, has a fairly astute assessment of the present ills of Nepali society, whether incompetence or corruption or desire to sell out the country to the highest bidder (presently China). Where he comes up short is in failing to offer a viable way forward. Ironically, this is precisely the critique the Biplav group advanced for splitting with the Baidya faction. Beyond such generalities, though, there is the fundamental matter that violence is not the way to gain progress.

What is their future?

The Biplav group is presently using violence as messaging. Its actions have produced some casualties, but these were perhaps not intended by the leadership. Unfortunately, the party lacks discipline, and what occurs at the local level is another matter altogether, a very violent matter. Violence, in fact, remains widespread and is an integral part of the Biplav group’s fundraising and the establishment of local political domination in the areas where it is seeking to reconstruct the apparatus of the previous people’s war. It is this violence which has ceded the battle of dueling narratives to the government. Whatever the government’s flaws, to include its own widespread use of violence in local space (I am thinking of the YCL and ANNISU-R, in particular, but there are many other candidates), it holds the high ground in at least outwardly appearing to address the deep-felt desire of the Nepali people for democracy, consultation, and advancement. Where the government comes up short is well known. If it does not correct its authoritarian tendencies, it will fail. In the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) rankings, Nepal is not even classified now as a full democracy, rather in the third tier of four, as a “hybrid regime”, 97 of 167 in the global ranking. It is to this reality that Biplav claims to speak. Unfortunately, his group has not come up with a realistic way forward.

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The Afghanistan-India Drug Trail

Bibhu Prasad Routray & Shanthie Mariet D'Souza

Abstract

Proximity to the Golden Crescent, steady rise in domestic demand, and the thriving illicit networks’ ability to exploit the ungoverned spaces and porous borders are among the factors that are making India a new destination of drugs from Afghanistan. The contraband is entering India both through land as well as the maritime route. In this ‘nexus’ that has led to the growth of the drug trade, organized criminal networks, smugglers, local policemen, and politicians are tied in a symbiotic relationship. The situation may have improved marginally, according to the claims of the Indian authorities. However, to curb the growing trade and to break the ‘unholy nexus’ that sustains it, a
regional counter-narcotics strategy combined with beefing up domestic laws and law enforcement capacities would be necessary.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

(Photo Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

Introduction

India’s geographical proximity with the ‘Golden Crescent’- the area comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, which is infamous for illicit production as well as transnational smuggling of drugs, is often cited as the reason for the rise in the drug trade that uses India as both a destination of narcotics as well as a transit point. According to the 2018 annual report of the International Narcotics Control board (INCB), India is rising as one of the major hubs for illicit drug trade.[1] The Trump administration has put India along with its other South Asian neighbours among the list of 21 countries that are major drug producing or transit nations.[2] However, over the years, even as the Afghan drug production has shown a marginal decrease, the drug cartels, organized criminals, smugglers, and peddlers across several countries have innovated in several ways to increase the consumer base in India. The ‘nexus’ with the law enforcement agencies and politicians has facilitated the trade, whereas lax counter-narcotics strategies have thwarted state efforts to curb it.

The ‘Narco Economy’ of Afghanistan

In November 2018, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported a 20 percent decrease in the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan compared to 2017. The potential production of opium decreased by 29 percent in 2018 compared to 2017, while farm-gate prices hit an all-time low.[3]
The decreases, in the northern and western regions of the country, were mostly attributed to the severe drought that affected Afghanistan. The intensity of the problem, however, continues to be grave, due to the sheer expanse of the land in which such cultivation is still carried out. The area under opium poppy cultivation in 2018 was 263,000 hectares compared to 328,000 hectares in 2017. The drug economy in 2018 is estimated to be US$60 million[4], which feeds generously the ongoing Taliban-led insurgency and a host of other players, including organized criminals, smugglers and terrorist groups.

The Land Route: Pakistan
On 28 July 2019, Indian Customs department seized 532 kilograms of heroin at the Attari Integrated Check Post on the Indo-Pakistan border. The heroin was concealed in 15 gunny bags of a rock salt consignment that was coming from Pakistan. The authorities described the seizure as “the biggest achievement in the annals of the Indian Customs history”\[5\]. Pakistan acts as an important trans-shipment point in the illicit drug trade from Afghanistan into India. Whereas several entry points exist on the Pakistan and Afghanistan border depending largely upon the source of narcotics within Afghanistan, most of the illicit heroin and opium enter India through the 550-kilometre Pakistan-Punjab border. Opium and poppy husk enter Punjab through Rajasthan. Rivers and streams along the Indo-Pakistan border are popular routes for smuggling drugs into the villages located along the border. Other modes of smuggling include sliding in drugs in plastic pipes through the barbed wire at the international border. Cross-border smuggling of drugs involves three kinds of players: (i) Drug dealers in the border region who provide the drugs, (ii) Agents like poor farmers, labourers, addicts etc. who transport the drug in small quantities and (iii) Mafia bosses in various parts of the country who distribute and sell them further within the country and outside. The drug packets from the Pakistani side are picked up by the couriers on the Indian side who work in close coordination with their Pakistani counterparts.\[6\] Once the package is received on the Indian side, the courier waits for further instructions from the Indian handler before moving the contraband. The handler is in charge of ensuring that the drugs, now packed in small packets of one gram each does not run into a check-post. In Punjab, the drug peddlers have developed ‘Chitta’, a cocktail of heroin and other chemicals, which has become enormously popular with the addicts, for its low cost and effect. A pack of ‘Chitta’ weighing less than a gram costs Rupees 500. The smugglers use poor farmers, migrant labourers, drug addicts, and unemployed youth to transport drugs from border areas to cities and villages. On occasions, even policemen and local politicians were found to be part of this distribution network. More than a hundred Punjab police personnel have been arrested for smuggling or helping to smuggle drugs from border regions between 2014 and 2018.\[7\] Those arrested included two Deputy Superintendents of Police indicating the extent of the nexus between the smugglers and the law enforcement agencies.
Following the ‘Drug trail’

From Punjab, drugs flow seamlessly into other states, taking advantage of the almost non-existent inspection mechanism on the inter-state borders. According to a media report, youths in Kashmir are getting hooked on to drugs from Afghanistan that flow into the state from Pakistan. On 26 November 2018, heroin worth Rupees 40 crore was recovered from Rajouri. The consignment bore Afghan labels which indicated that the drugs were smuggled into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) from Pakistan before it crossed borders and entered J&K.

Whereas the earlier smuggling route was through Punjab, since early 2018, the source of 80 percent of drugs seized in the state are from Pakistan. According to officials, the Ramban-Banihal National Highway, one of the two road links between Kashmir and mainland India, has turned into a major route for the drug mafia that has connections to Pakistan-based smugglers. Here too, incidents of policemen facilitating the drug trade have started to emerge. In July 2019, four policemen were arrested from Jammu and Kupwara and heroin packets were seized from their possession.

The problem has assumed serious proportions in the state of Himachal Pradesh where 1622 cases of drug smuggling were registered in the first 6 months of 2019 and 789 people were arrested. In Himachal Pradesh, one of the few Indian states where poppy is grown locally and legally, drug peddlers have specifically targeted school and college students with ‘Chitta’ packets. According to an estimate by a drug rehab and counselling centre in the state capital Shimla, 55-60 percent of youths of that city are addicted to drugs.

Since 2015, Rann of Kutch in Gujarat too has emerged as a route for drug smuggling from Pakistan. On 21 May 2019, six Pakistani nationals were arrested and around 200 packets of heroin were seized in an operation by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence off Jakhau port in Kutch. Investigation revealed that the accused were carrying 336 packets of heroin and had dumped around 100 in the sea. On 28 July, a team of Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested two persons for allegedly carrying one kilogram of brown sugar, near Mandvi Koday of Kutch. Police said the duo received the contraband from a fisherman in Kutch who found it on the shore. The fisherman handed over the contraband to his nephew who then tried to sell it in the black market. Although few details are available regarding the modus operandi of smugglers in the area, a 2015 report had referred to the active role of Thai-Pakistan drug syndicates in narcotics smuggling off Gujarat coast. In April that year, Indian Coast Guard and Indian Navy personnel had seized 230 kilograms of heroin from a boat and arrested eight Pakistani nationals. Previously on 31 December 2014, smugglers believed to belong to the same syndicate had set their own boat carrying drug afire resulting in the death of four crew Pakistani members, 365 kilometres off Porbandar. The boat was initially suspected to be carrying terrorists on board.

The Maritime Route: Iran & Africa

Due to government regulation along the Indo-Pakistan border, especially the effort of the Border Security Force (BSF) and the local police that claimed to have choked the heroin supply lines into Punjab, drug dealers have been using alternate routes that pass-through Iran and Africa before finding their way to Punjab and Delhi. In July 2017, India’s National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO) spotted a suspect vessel 380 kilometres off the coast of Gujarat and alerted the Coast Guard which pressed its ships and aircraft to intercept the Panama registered merchant ship, the Prince. When the vessel was brought to the port of Porbandar, sleuths recovered 1500 kilograms of heroin on board. Eight Indian crew members were arrested. The last port of call for Prince was Chabahar in Iran from where it had picked up the contraband of Afghan heroin meant for an Indian cartel. This, till date, remains the biggest single haul of narcotics in India.

According to new modus operandi, drug cartels are increasingly using the maritime route to bring heroin from Afghanistan to the Makran coast, where the coastlines of Pakistan and Iran meet. From there, the consignments
are taken across the Indian Ocean to western markets via east Africa, where the coastline is inadequately policed. As the drugs head towards India from Africa, the African smugglers who have their bases in cities like Delhi become involved. Bulk consignments arrive in Delhi either by air or even postal services before being distributed further to other cities like Mumbai. While small quantities are usually transported by postal services, large quantities are transported by using a variety of illegal means like concealing drugs inside vehicles, furniture, bags or specially designed luggage to be aired to other countries. Smugglers also swallow drug capsules or specially designed packets or insert them into their body cavities surgically or otherwise to be transported via air. Drugs are also routed through Sri Lanka. In December 2018, Sri Lankan authorities seized 800 kilograms of cocaine worth Rupees 4,000 crore from an India-bound ship docked at the Colombo port. The ship had sailed from Ecuador.

Even as the consumer market in India is on a rise, a portion of drugs transiting India appear to be mainly bound for European countries, US, Canada, and West Africa. Fishing vessels are being used as mode of transport of drugs largely from India to Sri Lanka and its other neighbours.

Growing ‘Nexus’

The huge narco-economy with enormous potential to bring about financial windfall explains the involvement of a range of agents including unemployed youths, law enforcement personnel and politicians in the trade, particularly given the high corruption levels that permeates the state structures. As previously mentioned, the Afghan narco-economy in 2018 is estimated to be US$60 million. It increases by leaps and bounds as the contraband leaves the soil of Afghanistan and travels the distance. There is no estimate of drugs that enter the Indian market. However, according to a report in 2018, one gram of heroin costs more than Rupees 2500 in international border areas in India. As the drug reaches districts like Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Fazilka, the price is doubled. A gram of heroin costs Rupees 8000 in cities such as Ludhiana and Chandigarh. Reduced supply further leads to skyrocketing of prices. For instance, the cost of heroin in Mumbai went up from Rupees 2.9 million in 2016 to Rupees 9.8 million in 2017. This translates to Rupees 9800 per gram. By 2019, however, in national capital Delhi, the asking price for a kilogram of heroin (from either Afghanistan or Myanmar) had reached Rupees 40 million, i.e. a staggering Rupees 40,000 per gram. Not surprisingly, improvised drugs like ‘Chitta’ are becoming more popular and play a key part of the burgeoning narco-economy.

Fighting the Menace: Coordination deficit

According to India’s Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), 27231, 31535 and 46959 cases were registered by various drug law enforcement agencies in the country during 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. Frequent arrests of Afghan and African nationals with drugs in various Indian cities often creates the impression of their large-scale involvement in the trade. However, according to the Indian Home Ministry, “99 percent of the 127180 persons arrested in these three years, are Indian nationals. It is safe to conclude that Indian mafia, smugglers, and agents dominate the trade within the country with only a minor participation of foreign nationals.

The NCB claims that steps taken by it has led to a reduction in the quantity smuggled Afghan drugs in India. However, the ground situation portrays a different picture. The fact that both central and state level efforts have remained uncoordinated and dissipated has aided the smugglers.

The state government in Punjab has struggled to deal with the drug problem in spite of its promise to wipe it out in few months. It is hard pressed for resources and the nexus of smugglers with the police and politicians are creating problems. However, the realization that the problem needs to be dealt with by inter-state cooperation has led Punjab and Himachal Pradesh to form a joint force to tackle the interstate network of drugs smugglers. Such mechanism, however, does not include the government of J&K, where efforts to tackle the menace remain minimal. According to a media report, the state-level de-addiction panel constituted by the Governor in March 2019 had not
met even for a single occasion till July. Both Haryana and Himachal Pradesh are moving towards strengthening legal mechanisms to arrest the chaos. Both are reportedly considering a legislation on the lines of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) to tackle the drug menace in their states.

Realization that efforts of individual states will always be limited and affected by politics has led to calls for the establishment of a national agency to deal with the problem. In July 2019, for instance, state governments of Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh asked New Delhi to set up a specialised agency on the lines of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to against the drug mafia who run high profile rackets. The meeting which was also attended by official representatives from Delhi, J&K, and the union territory of Chandigarh also agreed to initiate a series of measures including joint operations at the inter-state borders, information sharing and implementation of the best practices of the participating States. The states also appeared to move towards strengthening the information sharing mechanism on drugs and drug dealers-smugglers, for a more effective crackdown against them. The implementation of all these measures would be crucial in controlling the menace.

Need for a Regional Counter-Narcotics Strategy

The decrease in opium cultivation in Afghanistan, mainly due to drought unfolds a false sense of promise. Both the area under cultivation and amount of production remains large enough to meet the demands of the increasing clientele. Worse still, shortage of supply merely leads to a rise in prices and not necessarily a dip in demand. Increase in the ability of the respective governments to act against the smugglers notwithstanding, the problem requires a bilateral /and regional collaboration to supplement the efforts of domestic agencies. This aspect is either absent or nascent. In April 2018, for instance, Indian and Afghan officials met in New Delhi for a day long bilateral meet to discuss issues related to drug trafficking and narcotics abuse. According to an issued press note, “the meeting discussed exchange of ideas, sharing of best practices and furthering areas of cooperation in the drug crime domain”. No further meeting has taken place since then. The Indo-Pakistan counter-narcotics cooperation mechanism is largely non-functional due to the difficulty in the bilateral relationship. There is a need to reactivate such cooperation between countries on the smuggling routes. This is particularly important given the impact that this epidemic has on the youth of all three counties which are witnessing rising numbers of drug addiction. The drug trade continues to fuel the conflict in Afghanistan and facilitates linkages between organized crime and terrorist groups. Sharing of real time information as well as sharing of best practices are the need of the hour. In addition to interdiction and sharing information, a trilateral mechanism between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India can help curb the growing menace.

End Notes


[4] The potential opium production was at around 6,400 tons in 2018 and the farm-gate prices of dry opium, is an average of US$ 94 per kilogram. Ibid.


MANTRAYA SPECIAL REPORT#19: 27 AUGUST 2019

Afghan Drug Trail & the Indian Drug Syndicates

Bibhu Prasad Routray & Shanthie Mariet D’Souza

Abstract

Recurrent arrests of Indian drug smugglers and Afghan nationals have brought renewed focus on the increase in smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan into India. The nefarious trade has not only grown in sophistication, but could be paving way for direct linkages between India’s own drug lords and compatriots in Afghanistan. Orders placed from India are getting delivered through a variety of means using sea, air, and land routes that crisscross different continents. Efforts of Indian law enforcement agencies need to be innovative and more importantly, supplemented by a regional cooperative mechanism to control this illegal trade.

(Afghan Heroin seized by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police, Photo Courtesy: News 18)
On 25 July, a special cell of Delhi Police arrested 35-year-old Tifal Nau Khez, an alleged drug lord along with an Afghan national Ahmad Shah Alokozai with 130 kilograms of heroin from Navi Mumbai[1] in Maharashtra state. The drug, soaked and dried on 260 jute bags, originated from Herat in Afghanistan, travelled in a container to Bandar Abbas in Iran, before taking the sea route to Mumbai. In addition to the drug seizure, arrest of Tifal Nau Khez, described by the police as the kingpin of the drug network in the national capital, brought to light the relatively little-known world of drug smuggling and organized crime in Indian urban centres. This special report, based on monitoring of incidents of drug seizures in India over the past one year, attempts to unravel the modus operandi of some of these Indian drug syndicates and their links with Afghanistan.

Three models of nexus between the Indian and Afghan drug syndicates have emerged in recent times. The first model consists of Afghan drug lords and smugglers operating through their Indian contacts. Drugs reach India through Pakistan or travel the longer route through Iran or Africa before reaching India. The second model consists of Afghan drug lords using multiple Afghan carriers to smuggle drugs to their Indian counterparts. Unlike the first model, here Afghans as well as African carriers are involved. And in the third model, the Indian syndicates reach out to their Afghan contacts to import drugs. The latter use a variety of means and routes to deliver the consignments.

Afghan Drug Lords and Smugglers

In spite of years of international counter-narcotics efforts, the smuggling networks in Afghanistan remain functional and complex. Deeply rooted in the nation’s tribal societaly structure, drug lords and smugglers in Afghanistan have operated through contacts which include Afghan expats in various countries. For instance, deals are struck during Haj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. The smuggling network manages to seamlessly export tonnes of opium across the national borders ‘plugging into the Turkish, Iranian, Pakistani and Russian gangs that refine the drug into heroin for sale in Europe’[2].

Media reports in the past have pointed at some of the techniques that the drug lords employ to move narcotics. From the southern province of Helmand, for instance, ‘at night high-speed convoys laden with narcotics move across the desert towards the border with Pakistan. The frontier is effectively controlled by the Baloch tribe which has long experience of smuggling. From the unmanned border, a part of the contraband is moved to Karachi or Makran, a coastal strip along Balochistan’s Arabian seacoast. Another part moves west by road into Iran.[3]

Drug lords of Afghanistan are known to maintain distribution offices within Pakistan, run by cartel bosses. The latter, in symbiotic relations with the law enforcement agencies, could have been responsible for smuggling of 150 tonnes of Afghan drug, according to an estimate in 2015. From Karachi and Makran, drugs were boarded on boats and shipping vessels and sent to the high seas, where it was picked up by the syndicates of different countries. The cartels in Pakistan, according to the UN, made a whooping US$1.2 billion by simply transshipping the contraband to different parts of the world.[4] Among the recipient countries of these narcotics, mostly consisting of heroin, is India.

In the recent years, as India’s ability to disrupt largescale smuggling has improved. Several seizures have taken place either on the high seas or when drug carrying vessels enter the Indian waters. To counter this, smugglers have attempted to tap into the hundreds of Afghans who travel by air to India on a daily basis. The strategy is shifting from attempting to smuggle huge consignments at one go, to transporting relatively small quantities on a recurrent basis. The quantum of loss, in case of an arrest, is minimal.

Afghan Carriers and Indian Distributors
A modified version of the earlier strategy is to use of Afghan nationals coming to India on medial visa or those with residence permit in India by the Afghan drug lords. These men, usually from poor families, are lured by a promise of money and are asked to swallow pills containing fine quality heroin of 15 to 20 grams each. They are asked not to eat or drink anything till they reach India. Once they pass through the security check and reach their destination, they excrete these pills and hand them over to designated persons who could be Indians or even African nationals. In March 2019, three Afghans were arrested for being part of such a network. Each of them had swallowed about 15 to 20 capsules.[5] In the same month, four more Afghans were arrested after their arrival from Kabul at Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. They had swallowed capsules containing a net weight of 920 grams of heroin which were extracted in a hospital.[6] On 2 August, another Afghan, 30-year-old Mohammadi Roohullah, was arrested from the Lajpat Nagar area of New Delhi with 2.97 kilograms of heroin. Roohullah revealed that few months back in Afghanistan he had met two smugglers who promised him US$2000 to smuggle heroin to India by swallowing them. Roohullah had been instructed to wait for unknown persons to collect these capsules from his residence in Delhi.[7]

People like Roohullah are also coerced to peddle the capsules to meet their medical expenses. On 24 July 2018, a 36-year-old Afghan national Mohammad Nadir Khadim was arrested in New Delhi with two kilograms of heroin.[8] Khadim was on his third visit to India for Hepatitis B treatment. He told his investigators that he was lured into a trade by a fellow Afghan named Mustafa, who is a resident of New Delhi’s Lajpat Nagar area.

In addition to Afghans, other arrests in New Delhi have indicated that Afghanistan-based Nigerians and their South African connections could be involved in bringing heroin capsules into India. While small quantities are mostly swallowed by these carriers, bigger quantities are often carried in concealed packets or camouflaged baggage. On 17 August 2019, a South African woman was arrested at the Indira Gandhi International Airport with nearly five kilograms of heroin. She had reached New Delhi from South Africa via Qatar.[9]

Indian Drug Lords & Organized Crime Groups

Although drug smuggling from Afghanistan and Southeast Asia has a long history in India, involving several Mumbai-based organized crime groups, the epicenter of such operations appears to be shifting gradually towards the national capital. In this context, arrest of Tifal Nau Khez represents a relatively new phenomenon of an Indian national attempting to run a narcotic empire by establishing contacts with the Afghan drug syndicates. Khez hails from Bulandshahr in the state of Uttar Pradesh. He lacks formal education. Working as an auto driver, in 2013, he was arrested in Punjab for possessing 250 grams of heroin and served a prison term in Amritsar. During his stay in jail, he not only established contacts with other criminals, but seems to have picked up the finer points of smuggling drugs. After his release, Khez got in touch with Afghan nationals staying in Delhi asking for heroin capsules. An Afghan reportedly offered him few capsules to sell. The small business grew phenomenally over time leading to his direct contact with an Afghan drug lord, identified by his pseudo name Haji.

Afghan national Ahmad Shah Alokozai, who was arrested along with Khez is a wholesale dry fruit importer, who has been living in Delhi for the past few years. The dry fruit consignments he received from Afghanistan, through Iran, contained heroin. He, the police believe, has also used his business to set up a network of dry fruit dealers in the city, who were involved in the distribution of drugs. Under Khez’s directions, reconstituted heroin was being delivered to distributors in Punjab.

Khez’s arrest may have provided a setback to similar aspirations of individuals involved in the trade. But the trend of consolidation of a smuggling network that has connections across several countries is apparent. Unless controlled, from here it can only grow in sophistication.

Afghan Dry Fruits, Spices, and Jute Bags
On 23 July, two Afghan nationals were arrested in New Delhi and 50 kilograms of heroin was recovered from them. Hailing from Kandahar and Helmand provinces in Afghanistan, they had smuggled drugs into the country via the Attari-Wagah border between India and Pakistan. Drugs were concealed inside dry fruit cartons which had been imported.[10]

The difficulty in bringing in processed heroin into the country has constrained the smugglers to attempt setting up chemical reconstitution factories in India in recent times. The term ‘factory’, however, is a bit of a misnomer. These units are meant to be non-descript small facilities, operating out of apartments in busy residential areas. Khez had bought an apartment in New Delhi’s Zakir Nagar area where he had set up a similar ‘factory’.

The modus operandi of smuggling heroin in this manner is complex. In Afghanistan, jute bags, used to export dry fruits and spices like cumin to India, are soaked in liquid heroin and dried. After the consignment reaches India, the imported products are removed and the jute bags are kept aside. Subsequently, these bags are collected by a group of men from various traders, who bring them to these ‘factories’ for processing. Each processed bag can yield approximately a kilogram of high-quality heroin.

Since Indians are yet to master the trade of reconstituting heroin from jute bags, they are seeking the help of Afghan nationals with experience to teach them the technique. In July, five members of an international drug cartel including two Afghans were arrested along with 150 kilograms of heroin in Delhi. The arrested Afghans—30-year-old Shinwari Rehmat Gul and 31-year-old Akhtar Mohammad Shinwari—tuned out to be chemical experts who were attempting to set up a reconstitution ‘factory’ in Delhi.[11] Gul had experience of working in a drug processing unit in Afghanistan and had been sent to India by the Afghan syndicate to handle operations of this newly-established unit. The Indian partners were in charge of the distribution network.

**Breaking the Nexus**

While the involvement of Afghan nationals in the drug smuggling especially heroin into India remains small[12], the new trends are worrisome. According to a Statement of Hansraj Gangaram Ahir, Minister of State for Home Affairs in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament) on 28 March 2018, “99 percent of the 127180 persons arrested” in drug related cases between 2015-2017 are Indian nationals. This, however, points at the consolidation of the drug syndicates in India, with Indian mafia, smugglers, and agents seeking to find ways to smuggle narcotics. Arrests and busts do provide a setback, but do not deter the people in the trade from innovating and expanding their trade to cater to the growing demand. Police and drug enforcement agencies, who struggle to control the trade that is growing in sophistication exploiting the anonymity provided by India’s burgeoning metropolises, underline the importance of better human intelligence (HUMINT) and other counter narcotic mechanisms. Since the menace involves and affects other countries in the region, a regional mechanism for cooperation through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) could be useful to supplement efforts in breaking the growing nexus.

**End Notes**


[3] Ibid.


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Left-wing Extremism in India: Revisiting the ‘new’ Strategy

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi, in its second term, is making renewed attempts to end left-wing extremism (LWE). The broad parameters of the new strategy consist of plans to target the extremists by deploying more forces in the affected states and also to pursue the over-ground sympathizers of the movement in urban areas. The strategy does not vary qualitatively much from the one pursued by the previous Home Ministry under Rajnath Singh and even his predecessor P Chidambaram. Unless the governance deficit is addressed and a comprehensive national strategy on LWE is initiated, mere force-centric methods cannot bring a permanent solution to the problem.

Ground Situation

According to assessments of India’s Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), the LWE (also interchangeably referred to as Naxals or Maoists) outfit, Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist) has weakened significantly. Its ability to orchestrate violence has reduced and its influence has been restricted to 15 percent of the country[1] comprising few pockets of states like Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand. On 10 July 2019, the Union
Minister of State for Home Affairs, G. Kishan Reddy said in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of India’s Parliament) that violent incidents perpetrated by the LWE cadres declined from 2258 in 2009 to 833 in 2018. The resultant fatalities declined from 1005 in 2010 to 240 in 2018. He also stated that the geographical spread of LWE has declined from 223 Maoist affected districts in 2008 to a mere 60 in 2018.

And yet the outfit retains significant influence in inter-state areas, which constitute its base areas for carrying out attacks against high value targets. The government also assesses that a part of the CPI-Maoist’s remaining military strength is rooted in the support it generates in the urban areas of the country. A sizeable body consisting of intellectuals, university professors and students, activists, lawyers, writers, poets etc. are part of this group, broadly referred to as ‘urban naxals’ in the BJP’s lexicon.

Two-pronged Strategy

The first component of the MHA’s strategy is to increase the footprints of the security forces in the LWE affected areas, especially Chhattisgarh and launch pro-active operations. One of the persistent challenges faced by the security forces, especially when operating in the inter-state border areas, is the ability of the extremists to slip into the territory of a state when operations take place in another. On many occasions different state forces don’t operate in tandem. The ungoverned spaces in different states which form the core areas of the Maoists pose the second challenge. The security as well as governance deficit, for instance in the Abujhmad area of southern Chhattisgarh, add to the survival potential, if not strength, of the extremists. Even after seven decades of the country’s independence, Abujhmad, where the central leadership of the CPI-Maoist is believed to be located, is not on the revenue map.

The MHA reportedly wishes to plug these two loopholes by increasing the number of security forces on the ground. A media report quoting an unnamed senior government official says that seven battalions of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel will be deployed ‘in the inaccessible areas of Abujhmad in south Chhattisgarh to fill the “security vacuum” and plug the gaps through which Maoists escape when operations are launched’. These seven battalions to be deployed in the interior of Bijapur and Sukma districts will add to the 44 battalions of central forces who are already operating in the state.

The second strategy of the MHA is to pursue the overground support base of the extremists. According to an internal note of the Ministry, which has been distributed among various states, control has been sought on the “urban activities of the CPI-Maoist and its front organisations”. While the extremists mostly operate in the forested interior areas of various states and have hardly targeted the urban areas of any states, the MHA believes that urban centres have been used by the pro-Maoist overground organisations and intellectuals who gather support for the extremists and create conditions that are hospitable for the growth of extremism.

Old Wine, New Bottle

Increasing the number of security forces on the ground and targeting the over-ground supporters of LWE is not a new official strategy. In late 2009, then home minister P Chidambaram hoped to decimate the CPI-Maoist by amassing a large number of central forces and initiating a multi-state synchronized operation. Such strategies since then have been adopted with varying degrees of success. The CPI-Maoist, the media, and even some state police establishments referred to Mr. Chidambaram’s effort as Operation Green Hunt (OGH), which, however, had to be wound up within a few months, after extremists struck and killed an entire company of security forces in Chhattisgarh. Since then, although the number of battalions of security forces deployed in LWE affected states has continued to increase, any maneuver of OGH’s scale has not been attempted.
Intelligence agencies and police establishments, starting from the days of the birth of the CPI-Maoist in September 2004, have kept a close watch on its overground supporters, activists and writers considered to be sympathetic towards the extremist cause. However, neither during UPA-I nor during the UPA-II governments, activists were specifically targeted in the scale in which the NDA-I started targeting them. For instance, in 2010, in response to why Delhi Police had not filed a case against writer Arundhati Roy for her alleged seditious speech, Mr. Chidambaram told the media, “Not taking action is also an action”[5]. A large degree of independence existed to voice dissent and criticize official policies. This policy has largely changed since 2014. Critiques of government’s LWE policies have been referred to as ‘urban naxals’ not just by the BJP’s lower rung cadres, but also by the top leaders including Home Minister Mr. Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.[6] In 2018, 10 persons, including human rights lawyer Sudha Bhardwaj, were arrested by the Maharashtra police for allegedly being associated with Maoists, a charge denied by them.

Implementation Gap

Nine years have passed since the abandonment of OGH. There are reasons to believe that the cadre strength, military capacities, and area domination abilities of the CPI-Maoist have declined. Security forces deployed in the LWE-affected areas are now better trained, have more experience, and better logistical support. This, however, has not stopped the CPI-Maoist in carrying out periodic IED strikes that kill a number of forces. In this context, the leap from 44 battalions to 51 battalions of security may place additional manpower at the disposal of the authorities to plug the loopholes in strategy.

However, as things stand today, one of the problems of implementation of the two-pronged strategy may emerge a lack of consensus that exists between New Delhi and the states affected by LWE. For instance, there is a difference in the approach followed by the BJP government at the centre and the Chhattisgarh state government led by the Congress party. Mr. Shah has previously accused the Congress party of being the reason for the rise of LWE in India. “When Naxalism took birth in West Bengal, Congress was in power there. Similarly, when Naxalism flourished in Andhra Pradesh, Congress was in power and the same party was ruling, when the menace entered Chhattisgarh”[7], he said in March 2019. Shah has also credited the BJP government with making Chhattisgarh ‘almost Naxal-free’[8].

Since coming to power in 2017, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has signaled the initiation of a different approach towards LWE. Not only has he asked his police officials to be sensitive towards human rights issues and to be media friendly, but also has gone to cancel mining rights to private companies in tribal inhabited areas. Operations have continued against the LWE and this year, 60 operations have been conducted, in which 34 Maoists and 17 security personnel were killed in Chhattisgarh. Yet the security forces have been instructed to be extra-cautious in distinguishing between civilians and armed extremists. Unlike the previous BJP government in the state, the Baghel government's approach towards the so called 'urban naxals' does not display a sense of vindictiveness. Reconciling his hard anti-LWE approach with a moderate and humane approach of the Chhattisgarh state government could pose challenge for Mr. Shah.

Revising the ‘new’ strategy

The new anti-LWE strategy needs to be understood within the broad context of the government’s goal of ‘finishing terrorism’[9]. Be it the LWE affected theatres or Kashmir, annihilating terrorists/ extremists appears to be a key counter-terrorism strategy to fight terrorism of the NDA-II government. While such a method has its utility in terms of forcing extremists to retreat and may even lead to a temporary dip in violence, experiences of many other countries and even the previous Indian governments in various conflict theatres of the country suggest the limitations of such a strategy unless supplemented by measures to improve governance and access to justice.
Additionally, insurgencies, as opposed to foreign-sponsored or religion-inspired terrorism, have deep roots in society. These armed movements sustain themselves not just through illegal means of acquiring money and weapons, but also through voluntary support of tribal population who consider them as justice-disseminating entities. This must be factored into the government’s policies towards the ‘urban naxals’. A country-wide public discourse can possibly have more utility rather than singling out people with alternate viewpoints. The inability of successive governments to bring order to the LWE-affected states in last 15 years necessitates a new strategy, rather than implementing the old with minor modifications.

End Notes


[4] Ibid.


(Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray is a Director of Mantraya. This Policy Brief is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Network” project. Mantraya Briefs are peer reviewed publications. He can be contacted at bibhurotray@gmail.com)
‘Negative Peace’: Conflict Economy of Naga Insurgency

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

How does an insurgency movement engaged in peace talks with the government generate its finances? Should the government attempt to curb its extortion activities that retains not only its structural violence instrumentalities, but also the options of indefinitely prolonging the negotiations? Should the peace negotiations strictly enforce a no-extortion clause to succeed? This article delves into the economics of the NSCN-IM’s commitment behind negotiations with the government.

Introduction

They are two sides locked in a ceasefire agreement since 1997 and a framework agreement since 2015. And yet, not just is there any final solution in sight, the views propagated by them remain sharply contrasting. From time to time, Government of India has tried to project a picture of optimism in Nagaland indicating that a final peace agreement with the ‘mother of all insurgencies’ in its northeastern region, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) could be round the corner. Such statements have invariably been refuted by the group’s leadership who assert that “Nagas will never surrender their rights and the Naga national movement spearheaded by NSCN is a people’s movement.”[1] A probe into this persistence is key to understanding why insurgencies involved in prolonged negotiations with the government continue to resist a final solution. While
several factors such as hard bargaining account for the state of affairs, a key reason is the group’s elaborate and dynamic model of levy collection, which generates enough finances.

**Influence of the NSCN-IM**

The NSCN-IM, founded in 1980 and signatory to a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India since 1997, signed a framework agreement with New Delhi in August 2015. Although the agreement contained only a pathway to future negotiations, the government projected it as a major breakthrough towards peace in the region. Since then, negotiations have continued accompanied by recurrent media reports of a soon-to-be-signed deal.

Chairman of the group Isak Chisi Swu passed away in June 2016. Since then, the group is being solely led by Thuingaleng Muivah, the 85-year-old founding leader of the group with an avowed commitment to an independent Nagaland. Hopes that either the framework agreement would force a final deal down the throat of the group or the demise of Isak Swu would push Muivah to seal a deal within his own lifetime has been belied.

Not many encounters take place in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. However, facts on the ground indicate prevalence of what can be defined as uninhibited structural violence perpetrated by the insurgents against the civilian population. These include coercion, abductions, extortion, recruitment of cadres and silencing of the opposition by rival groups. Odd acts of violence like the killing of a member of the legislative assembly in Arunachal Pradesh in May 2019[2] are extensions of the group’s undiminished violence potential. To that extent, unauthorized hideouts of the group, set up in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh project its strength and maintains its influence. According to terms of the ceasefire agreement, the NSCN-IM cadres are supposed to stay in the designated camps of the outfit. Any movement with arms outside the camp areas are prohibited. While these terms have been violated with impunity since the 1997 ceasefire agreement, the framework agreement of 2015 does not seem to have made any difference to the state of affairs.

Another factor which could have added to the group’s potency is the weakening of most of its rival groups like the NSCN-K within the state. The latter, after the death of its patriarch S S Khaplang in June 2017, has become a poor replica of itself. It has undergone several splits and has been battered regularly by security force operations within Myanmar. Its ‘Indian Naga’ leadership, who are now based in Nagaland, is more interested in being roped into a ceasefire agreement like the IM group than continuing an insurgency movement. As a result, the NSCN-IM remains the only group in Nagaland that stands tall with an agenda for independence.

**Conflict Economy**

On 18 and 19 March 2019, the NSCN-IM held its budget session for 2019-20 at its headquarters at Camp Hebron. It was attended by most of its senior functionaries from all over the state.[3] Although the net amount of the budget remains a tightly held secret, it is believed to be substantially more than its 2016-17 budget of Rupees 170 crore.[4]

In its hey days of active insurgency as well as in the years since the 1997 ceasefire agreement, the NSCN-IM, like all other armed organisations in the region, has relied on an elaborate levy collecting infrastructure to manage its day to day running costs as well as maintaining an expanded cadre base who are battle ready. Most government departments, politicians, contractors, civilians, and business establishments in Nagaland and inter-state border regions of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh paid a part of their salary to the group as protection money. Transport and private vehicles passing through Nagaland and Manipur paid a fee at specially set up check points. The NSCN-IM defended its right to collect ‘taxes’ from the population in areas under its control. Media reports even indicated that to keep the ceasefire agreement on track, the Government of India periodically passed on some amount of money to the organization. Whether a similar arrangement since the 2015 framework agreement is in vogue is not known.
In any event, such sum would hardly be sufficient to maintain the group’s elaborate administrative structure spread over four states, its headquarter at Camp Hebron, and also to pay for its 5000 cadres[5]. It is, hence, unimaginable that the outfit would have dismantled its tax collection infrastructure even as it negotiates its future. Several incidents in recent past have revealed details of the elaborate levy collection network of the group in four states: Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh.

On 29 June, an NSCN-IM ‘tax collector’, identified as Khemphai Wangsu, was arrested by police in Dibrugarh in eastern Assam along with another cadre, Md Kazimuddin, who worked as a driver. Further investigations led to arrest four more persons from Arunachal Pradesh from whom currency notes worth Rupees 1.5 million were recovered. These included two junior engineers, one assistant engineer, and another a lower division clerk of the Rural Works Department of Arunachal Pradesh government. Wangshu worked as the overall in charge of the outfit tasked with collecting money from ground level operatives in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.[6] The instance of government employees collecting money on behalf of the outfit from officials from various government departments and passing on to the outfit is not new.

Setting up of unauthorized camps in remote areas where the group’s armed cadres collect money from the civilian population and business establishments is another mode of levy collection. On 6 July, Indian Army personnel dismantled such a hideout of NSCN-IM in Manipur’s Kakru Naga village. An M16 assault rifle with 125 rounds, one self-loading rifle with 26 rounds and unspecified number of AK series assault rifles were recovered. A lone cadre of the group, in civvies, was arrested.

On highways running through Nagaland and Manipur, and in commercial townships such as Dimapur, NSCN-IM’s collection units, consisting of both Nagas and non-Naga people, target trucks and business establishments. Even the auto-drivers and vegetable and fish vendors are not spared. On 15 March, two members of such a unit were arrested for extortion from truck drivers. Cash receipts and a sum of Rupees 4,300 were recovered from them. Another member was arrested at Rail Bazar in Dimapur district with Rupees 1920 on the same day. A week later, yet another member was arrested a country-made pistol and Rupees 8650 from Dimapur. While the recovered sum in these instances are small, the geographical spread of the extortion network in four states of the region could indeed be generating a substantial amount.

Intelligence-led operations by security forces have put a strain on such facilities and arrangements. In the first six months of 2019, for instance, 24 cases of arrests of extortionists belonging to various insurgencies in Nagaland were reported from the state. But the long-term impact of such actions is unclear. To maintain deniability and also to prevent losing cadres directly affiliated to the group to arrests by the security forces, the NSCN-IM appears to have outsourced such levy collection to civilians in townships like Dimapur, who often work on a fixed salary or are allowed to keep a certain percentage of the collected sum. Some of the arrested extortionists in recent past have belonged to the Bengali, Nepali, and even Muslim community.

Move Forward

It is important to understand whether the government’s intentions to achieve peace in Nagaland restricts its actions to disrupt the business model of the NSCN-IM. Has the objective of bringing peace to the northeast region ignored the rampant structural violence that the group continues to indulge in? To an extent, the apprehension that the group might return to the path of active violence in the event of a failure of negotiations could be determining the government’s actions. At the same time, permitting such rampant extortion and other allied activities might be indefinitely extending the timeline for arriving at a final peace deal. Peace in the northeast region in general and the states affected by the NSCN-IM’s extortion activities in particular are crucial for New Delhi’s Act East policy. An unending negotiation process that permeates wide spread extortion and potentially builds the NSCN-IM’s military strength does not help achieving the objective.
End Notes


(“Dr. Bibhu Prasad Routray is a Director of Mantraya. This analysis is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Network” and “Organized Crime and Illicit Trafficking” projects. All Mantraya publications are peer reviewed.”)

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Islamic State Returnees: India’s Counter-Radicalization vs Deradicalization Approach

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

Punitive measures have been integral to the Indian approach towards people who have joined the Islamic State. The security establishment, however, adopts a much softer approach towards potential sympathizers and even towards those who have been prevented from leaving for Iraq and Syria. Counter-radicalization dominates government action. In view of the recent developments including the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, should this policy be broadened in scope to embrace the benefits of de-radicalization? Should there be a scope for the de-radicalized individuals to be successfully reintegrated into the society? More importantly, can the de-radicalized
Home Coming?

Sometime in May 2019, a 25-year-old man from Kerala, Firoz Khan, who had left his home in Kerala state in June 2016 to join the Islamic State, called up his mother to express his desire to return. He reportedly spoke about his miserable condition in Syria where the Caliphate is now in ruins and also, his every day struggle for food and other basic necessities. He also inquired whether he will be charged with crime upon return. Firoz’s desperation to return, however, has met with a lukewarm response from the police. It is almost certain that he will be arrested upon return and put behind bars. This remains a part of the policy India has adopted to send a strong message to the rather small number of men and women who embraced the Islamic State after it established its caliphate in 2015. Is such a policy adequate to prevent the vulnerable from joining violent radical Islamist groups remains a key question.

Influence of Islamic State

Not many Indians have joined the Islamic State. The official count is a little over 100. Mantraya’s own assessment, informed by a variety of sources including a careful monitoring of reported incidents is over 200. Nevertheless, instead of being a country-wide phenomenon, people from few states, mostly concentrated in pockets in southern India, have travelled or attempted to travel to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State. A large group of men and women from Kerala, of which Firoz was a part, had even travelled to Afghanistan to be a part of the Wilayat
Khorasan that the Islamic State set up in 2015. Reports indicate that some have died either fighting on behalf of the outfit. Few others have perished in bombings carried out by the coalition forces.

Countries like Indonesia, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia have experimented with deradicalizing the Islamic State returnees or the outfit’s sympathizers with varying degrees of success. India’s response has been rather straightforward. The Islamic State is a proscribed organization in the country since 2015 and anybody who have joined it are liable for punitive action.

The following instances are instructive in this regard.

**Dealing with Returnees**

In July 2018, a 32-year-old man Shajahan Valluvakandy of Koodali in Kerala’s Kannur district was deported from Turkey while trying to enter Syria. Shahjahan was an activist of the Kerala-based radical Muslim outfit Popular Front of India (PFI)[2]. He used a fake passport under a false name to travel to Turkey along with his wife. The Turkish authorities were alerted by their Indian counterparts. Shajahan was arrested upon return and continues to be in prison.[3] Similar has been case of three other persons- KC Mithilaj, Abdul Razzak and AV Rashid- all from Kerala, who were reportedly trained by Islamic State in Istanbul. They were stopped by Turkish police while trying to enter Syria. In March 2018, they were deported to India[4] and have been imprisoned since then.

While the above four persons had been forcefully deported, the case of Areeb Majeed, the 23-year-old is different. Majeed was among the four youths from Kalyan in Maharashtra’s Thane district who joined the Islamic State in May 2014. He, along with Aman Tandel, Fahad Shaikh, and Faheem Tanki boarded an Etihad Airways flight for Abu Dhabi and travelled to Baghdad for a pilgrimage and thereafter separated from the travel group to join the Islamic State. While three of his compatriots are believed to have died while fighting on behalf of the Islamic State, Majeed got in touch with the Indian authorities expressing his willingness to return. According to him, he was provided with travel documents, with assurances that he would not be arrested. However, as soon as he landed in India on 28 November 2014, he was picked up by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

At that time, an official of the Home Ministry told the media that the ministry wishes to take a ‘lenient view’ and ‘make sure that he is booked for slightly softer charges’. “We don’t want to put sections that attract only life imprisonment and death sentence” he said. He added that “A soft approach needs to be taken in this case to ensure that others don’t hesitate to come back. On their return, they should be rehabilitated.”[5] However, things took a different turn as the NIA charged him with being a member of a terrorist outfit and returning with a purpose of ‘spreading jihad in India’[6]. In February 2017, a trial court dropped the charge against Areeb of being a member of a terrorist organization[7], while directing that he should face trial under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Section 125 of the Indian Penal Code for ‘waging war against any Asiatic power in alliance with the government of India’.[8] Majeed continues to fight the legal battle as the NIA has produced evidence quoting the Iraqi authorities that he was indeed a member of the Islamic State and had fought in the war waged by the outfit.[9]

**Hard vs Soft approach**

The government’s preference for locking up the Islamic State returnees has its rationale and is based upon the premise that there is little evidence of remorse or repentance behind the decision of these individuals to return. For instance, Firoz Khan would not have expressed his desire to return had the Caliphate not disintegrated. Police records show that even after leaving India, he continued to exhort his relatives and friends to join the Islamic State. Similarly, KC Mithilaj, Abdul Razzak and AV Rashid would not have voluntarily returned to India. And Areeb Majeed’s aversion to violence, the NIA believes, came after a stint as a fighter of the Islamic State. The fact that these men have neither renounced terrorism nor have repented their decision of attempting to join the Islamic
State, makes them active terrorists with a proclivity to indulge in violence in future. Moreover, punishment to them would deter others who may make a similar decision to be a part of global jihad.

The government, however, adopts a softer approach towards those who have merely aspired to join and have been ‘brainwashed’ to become a part of the terror outfit, especially those who were prevented from leaving the country to go to Syria. It is unclear, however, how such distinctions between someone who has been ‘radicalized’ and another who has been ‘misled’ is arrived at. Few states of the country such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Uttar Pradesh are reported to have experimented with de-radicalization as well as counter-radicalization programmes. In Kerala, senior police officials claimed in June 2019, 3000 people have been deradicalized in 21 government centres and are being monitored.[10] According to a report in 2017, “about 15-20 youths are being deradicalized by the UP anti-terror squad (ATS)”[11]. In September 2017, the Maharashtra police too claimed to have deradicalized 70 people “who were trapped in extremist literature online and were on the verge on being recruited”[12]. Some of these deradicalized men were provided with vocational training[13] in order to give them a secure future and wean them away from the path of radicalization. This is based on the conventional belief that poverty and unemployment are among the reasons for radicalization.

In other states, police officials visit educational institutions to lecture students about the negative aspects of terrorism. In some cases, religious leaders, family members, and community elders have been involved to keep a tab on people on the police’ watch list. Police departments in some states have also made short movies and showed them in theatres to create awareness. However, amid prevailing perceptions that Indian Muslims have largely remained immune to the attractions to of global jihadists, these efforts, which are mostly focused on counter-radicalization, have remained uncoordinated and dissipated.

Revisiting the Policy?

So far, Indian state claims success in warding off the threat posed by the Islamic State. Odd terror plots have been busted and a number of sympathizers of the Islamic State have been arrested. In spite of attempts by both the Islamic State and al Qaeda, their little-known franchises in Kashmir have remained far from potent.

However, this could potentially change, in view of some of the recent developments. These include announcement of a new India-specific province by the Islamic State; installation of a new chief of the Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH), al Qaeda’s affiliate; and the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka. While the first two can be downplayed as rhetoric and of little operational value, the continued discovery of complex networks of Islamic State activists and sympathisers across India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan, need to be taken seriously.

While threat posed by the Islamic State returnees to India’s national security can be dismissed, the gravest of threat, as Sri Lanka discovered, could emerge from people who did not travel to Iraq and Syria to be a part of the Islamic State. It is such silent and subtle mobilisation spanning across the region which could constitute the next source of security challenge for the country. Busting of terror cells and arrests, while being useful, may not be sufficient to keep the danger at bay. Similarly, the process and reasons behind radicalization is too complex to be solved by alleviating poverty and providing employment. In most cases, educated men from well-to-do families with jobs rather than unemployed and uneducated men from poor families have become foot soldiers of global jihadism. The fact that radicalization is some sort of a calling that fulfills the inner desires of a person shaped by an array of factors needs to be factored into official policy. It is not a disease to be cured by punishment, but a malaise that requires a professional and sympathetic handling. The difference in state’s approach after terror attacks in New Zealand where the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was comforting the victims and their relatives and that of the Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena who indulged in alarmist predictions about Muslims and their supposed proclivity to violence is instructive in this regard.
The gap in India’s preparedness can possibly be filled by a robust national counter-radicalization policy that may factor in the need to use the services of those who once were part of terror movements and have renounced the same for a variety of reasons including a successful de-radicalization process. Can the country use the services of someone like Areeb Majeed or even Firoz Khan (if he could be brought back) as part of its counter-messaging to the potential fence sitters? Can their experience narrated in their own words be used to deter people who have false notion of Islam and romantic ideas about global jihad? Can that supplement the efforts of the religious leaders who preach against violence? These are some of the important questions which need to be probed and envisioned in the making of new counter-radicalization and de-radicalization strategies. The emphasis needs to be on prevention rather than dealing with the threat. This would require not only a whole-of-government approach but also a whole-of-society approach.

End Notes


[2] PFI not a proscribed organization in India. It has been banned only in the state of Jharkhand.


Emerging Human Trafficking Networks of Rohingya: A Symbiotic Nexus

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

Over a million Rohingya refugees live in camps located over 6000 acres in Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazaar area. Most of these refugees face a bleak future and have given up hope of ever returning to their homes in Myanmar. Organised trafficking syndicates, worth millions of dollars, have sprung up with networks in Myanmar, Thailand, India, and Malaysia. With the promise of jobs and a better future, these refugees are being trafficked to Malaysia for a hefty amount. Only a section of these refugees, however, reach their final destination. Many others drown to death at sea, are killed, tortured and raped by the traffickers, who have an intimate profit-sharing nexus with the authorities in many of these countries.
A Humanitarian Crisis

Over a million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have been living in the camps in Cox’s bazaar of Bangladesh for close to two years. With no access to jobs, education and health care, these vulnerable refugees are becoming victims of a new wave of human trafficking to Malaysia. In 2015, Malaysian authorities discovered elaborate syndicates specializing in moving refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh through Thailand to Malaysia. A clampdown by Malaysia and Thai authorities followed forcing the syndicates to lie low. Incidents beginning the latter part of 2018, however, suggest that the syndicates are active again. This time, their operation, worth millions of dollars, is much more complex and spans across at least five countries. It will take nothing short of a regional cooperation mechanism to address the issue, and a strong international commitment for early resettlement of the Rohingya.

Clampdown of 2015

In 2015, Thailand found bodies of Rohingya from Myanmar and Bangladeshis at makeshift camps along the border with Malaysia. The Malaysian authorities too discovered over 150 graves and dozens of camps. In one particular camp in the northern state of Perlis, they discovered wooden cages and lookout posts, as well as graves and a stretcher to carry dead bodies.[1] These discoveries brought to light the fact that Rohingya and Bangladeshis were arriving in those camps by sea and were being held in appalling conditions before being released. The discovery prompted the Thai authorities to crack down on traditional sea routes for illegal migrants coming to the country. This triggered a crisis as smugglers dumped hundreds of refugees off the coasts of other countries and fled. Estimates suggest that 25,000 people who attempted to cross the Andaman Sea for Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia on unsafe and overloaded boats had drowned. Nevertheless, the scale of trafficking nosedived. A public inquiry by Malaysia into the findings began only in April 2019.
Pattern-trend Analysis of the Trafficking Syndicates

A new wave of trafficking appears to have begun in late 2018 and peaked by early 2019. In April 2019, 47 Rohingya men ranging from 14 to 30 years landed at Sungai Belati beach in northern Malaysian state of Perlis and were detained by the authorities. Previously in April, 35 migrants had landed in the same location. Malaysian authorities said that boats carrying another 200 are believed to be at sea. Reports of this nature, of these perilous journeys by desperate Rohingya, continue to appear in the media. Many of these reports have quoted men and women who undertook such journeys and survived to reach Malaysia. Monitoring of such reports provides an understanding into working of these syndicates comprising agencies spanning across Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia.

(Trafficking routes of Rohingya refugees, Source: Thomson Reuters)

Traffickers, who promise to take a refugee to Malaysia, are typically paid upfront 4,000 Malaysian ringgit (approximately US$976.80) or equivalent sum per person. There are evidences to suggest that the syndicates that roped in Rohingya men as their ground-level contacts to shortlist vulnerable persons from the camps. Refugees often use all their savings to make such payments. However, for those who cannot pay the total amount and have some contacts or relatives in Malaysia also become a part of the journey by making a part payment. These journeys
typically start in larger boats with hundreds of Rohingya either from Myanmar or Bangladesh and once in Thai waters, they are transferred to smaller and crowded vessels. Those who have made the entire amount are dropped off a kilometre off shore, from where they walk into Malaysia. Those who haven’t made the payment or have paid only a part, are held back in the makeshift camps and lodged in wooden cages to prevent their escape. Telephone calls are made to their relatives in Malaysia to arrange for the payment. Those who have been paid for are allowed to go. Many of those who can’t arrange money are tortured without food. Women are raped. Not many survive such atrocities and end up in the graves dug around the camps. However, given the unwelcome publicity such camps and graves have generated, the traffickers are now focusing on refugees who can pay upfront.

Additionally, traffickers roaming free in the refugee camps in Bangladesh are now trafficking young girls and women, and sending them to Malaysia. Promises are made to find them work in that country. This is an attractive offer for many and opportunity to escape from the wretched conditions in the camps. In mid-May, Bangladeshi authorities prevented 69 people most of whom were women from being sent to Malaysia in boats.[3] In the same month, another group of 23 Rohingya girls, aged between 15 to 19, were rescued from a residence in capital Dhaka. They had been brought from the camps in Cox's Bazar and were to be flown into Malaysia, possibly for prostitution or child marriage.[4] Four traffickers were arrested and the girls were sent back to their camps. Bangladeshi authorities say that they have stopped 300 Rohingya from leaving the camps, in 2019 (till early May) alone. Many others have attempted to procure Bangladeshi passports to fly out to middle-eastern countries.

The fact that these traffickers are no petty criminals, but a part of the organized crime syndicate with access to weapons was revealed from an incident that took place on 15 May. Acting on a tip-off, Bangladesh police clashed with a group of traffickers who opened fire on them near the refugee camps. While some traffickers fled, two traffickers who themselves were Rohingya, were injured and subsequently succumbed to their injuries.[5] The fire and money power of these groups would invariably increase over time, so is the prospect of their nexus with the local authorities, posing an increasing challenge on the capacities of the local law enforcement agencies.

The prospect of making money have also brought in a local group of con-traffickers in Bangladesh into play. They are not part of the trafficking syndicates and are essentially local players. They enter into agreement with the refugees for transporting them to Malaysia for a much cheaper rate, ranging from US$500 to US$600. However, instead of taking them to Malaysia, they use small boats to drop the refugees at Narikel Jinjira or Coconut Island, a remote coral islet of Bangladesh. For these refugees, who have been robbed off all their money, it takes another boat ride, costing US$6, to return to their camps in Cox's bazar. In May, 54 refugees- 32 men and 22 women- were victims of such con-trafficers.[6]

Trafficing route through India

Malaysia is not just becoming the destination choice for Rohingya from Myanmar and Bangladesh, but also, albeit in a trickle, from India. The route through India, which involves air travel, is comparatively expensive and hence, is unattractive for a lot of refugees. In February 2019, seven Rohingya including two women were arrested at Hyderabad airport while attempting to fly out to Malaysia on fake Indian passport. They had reportedly entered India in 2013. A sister of one of the women who is already settled in Malaysia urged her to come over to seek a good life.[7] The group then approached a gang which specializes in making fake voter IDs and other documents. While this group was unfortunate to have come under the scanner, police in Hyderabad did not deny the possibility of Rohingya refugees managing to escape adopting similar modus operandi on previous occasions. Another group of a 12 Rohingya, including eight women aged between 16 and 22 and four boys were detained in Mizoram state in May.[8] They had entered from Bangladesh without any valid travel documents and were probably being trafficked to Malaysia or Taiwan, according to the Mizoram police. Modus operandi of the traffickers was to keep them with a local host- in this case a Mizo woman- before moving them elsewhere.
Life in Malaysia

A working paper[9] by the Humanitarian Policy Group in 2016 said, in Malaysia a Rohingya earned half of what an average Malaysian would earn, had to set aside a significant sum of the salary to pay bribes to police, and constantly faced arrests and deportation. Still, compared to the life in the refugee camps, the quality of life was far better in Malaysia. Jobs in factories, construction sites, restaurants are available. Some set up small stalls and some became garbage collectors. Those who can’t find a job, beg on the streets.

In May 2019, arrest of two Rohingya in Malaysia on terrorism charges is one of the first such incidents to have been reported. Part of a four-member terror cell, a 20-year-old Rohingya man admitted to be a supporter of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) terror group. According to Malaysia police, he had planned to attack the Myanmar Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. No information was provided by the police about the second arrested Rohingya. Both were detained Kuala Lumpur. Other Rohingya community leaders have raised doubts about the authenticity of the report and have even questioned whether the arrested men were Rohingya at all. Even the ARSA has refuted the report. It tweeted that it “only legitimately and objectively” operates as an ethno-nationalist movement within Myanmar and that its activities would not transcend beyond the country.[10] It is difficult to verify whether the arrested were indeed Rohingya and had connections with terrorists. It is also not possible to conclude if it is a strategy by Malaysian authorities to put a halt to the mass migration of the Rohingya.

Conclusion

Reports suggest that the conditions of the camps in Bangladesh have considerably improved. International donors and aid agencies have been generous in providing financial assistance to improve the living standards in the camps. However, it is also true that these camps, bereft of access to livelihood, will never become permanent homes for the refugees, who will continue to make desperate attempts to leave. This chronic desperation will invariably be exploited by the human trafficking syndicates, extremists, and other elements. A regional crackdown involving Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia may halt the trafficking temporarily. But as long as the push factors remain unaddressed, vulnerability of the refugees would continue. The root of the problem invariably lies in Myanmar and its steadfast refusal to ensure repatriation of the Rohingya. Time and again, Myanmar has come up with flimsy excuses to halt any such move. It is important that the international community addresses the problem and devises a framework which ensures that the refugees return home. Anything short of that would amount to treating the symptoms, rather than the source of the problem.

End Notes


MANTRAYA POLICY BRIEF#28: 24 MAY 2019

Zakir Musa: Death of Kashmir’s loneliest Militant

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

Contrary to media headlines, Zakir Musa was not the 'most wanted militant' in Kashmir valley. With an aim to set up a caliphate, Musa led an immensely forgettable militancy, which had no stakeholders. His death, however, is a blow to the attempt by global jihadists to find a base in Kashmir.
Sometime in 2012, a 23-year-old young man from a well-off family in Noorpara village of south Kashmir’s Pulwama district joined in Ram Dev Jindal college in Chandigarh to pursue a degree in civil engineering. Zakir Rashid Bhat alias Zakir Musa’s father Abdul Rashid Bhat is a retired assistant executive engineer. However, within months Zakir Rashid Bhat alias Zakir Musa left the college, went back to Kashmir, and disappeared from home in 2013. He had joined the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM). The exact circumstances that led to his joining militancy are not known. That was, however, a period when relatively calm Kashmir valley was starting to boil. That was also a time in recent history when the local HM group, buoyed by a band of young and daring recruits, was becoming active, posing new challenges to the security forces. As a result, Jammu & Kashmir Home department data shows, 15 security forces were killed in 2012 and by 2013, the numbers had risen to 53.[1]

Musa worked closely with HM commander Burhan Muzaffar Wani, till the latter’s death in July 2016. The HM’s command then passed onto Musa’s shoulders. However, a year later, in the summer of 2017, Musa released a video declaring his intention to establish a caliphate. He was critical of Pakistan as well as the separatists All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC). He threatened the latter of dire consequences who he thought were a hurdle in the establishment of caliphate. The HM leadership in Pakistan did not endorse his views. This paved the way for Musa parting ways with the HM and setting up the Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH), an affiliate of the al Qaeda.

In spite of the tag of global Jihad that the AGH claimed to have, Musa failed to provide it with any direction. Since AGH was opposed to Pakistan as well as the APHC, and had parted ways with the HM, it lacked sponsors, both inside in Kashmir and Pakistan. It was dubbed as an Indian agency by HM. Perhaps to shed that tag, in August 2017, Musa issued a 10-minute audio statement threatening to “liberate” India from the rule of “cow-worshipping” Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Hindus.[2]

The AGH carried out almost no attack targeting the security forces. The ‘official’ sanction of being an affiliate from the al Qaeda came a year after AGH’s formal establishment, in July 2018.[3] But in view of al Qaeda central’s weakened presence in the Af-Pak region and without much of ground level support for the AGH within Kashmir, that did not add any potency to the group. The group’s total membership never crossed ten. All of them were young men from Tral sub-district, personally recruited by Musa. The outfit suffered a huge setback in December 2018, when six of its group members including the group’s deputy chief Soliha alias Rehaan Khan were killed in an operation in Tral.[4]

In spite of odd graffiti painted overnight on the shutters of closed shops of Srinagar espousing the arrival of al Qaeda in Kashmir, the AGH was never considered an outfit to be taken seriously by the security forces. Zakir Musa remained perhaps the loneliest militant in the valley, fighting a directionless battle to set up a caliphate with almost no stakeholders. Perhaps that was the reason why he had a protracted shelf-life, surpassing two years, which is the average active tenure of a militant in the troubled valley.

On 23 May, as results of elections India’s parliamentary elections were declared marking the re-election of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, Musa was cornered by the security forces in Dadsara village of Tral. According to Kashmiri media sources, he was visiting his home when forces cordoned off the area. Appeals for surrender by the security forces went unheeded. AGH supporters took to social media urging locals to mount attacks to aid his escape.[5] Musa, however, was killed in the encounter that lasted for few hours. The Indian Army’s statement summed up the death and Musa's loneliness. The one-line statement read: “Op Dadasur (Pulwama). One terrorist killed. Terrorist identified as Zakir Musa. Weapons and warlike stores recovered. Operation over.”[6]

Musa’s dead body was handed over to his family by the security forces. As rains poured thousands came out to be a part of his last rites. In death, support for him had swelled, far beyond the number of cadres he had ever commanded. But that’s atypical of any militant who gets killed in the valley, and represents the chronic alienation
from India’s mainland, and not so much support for the outfit that they belong to. Kashmir lost yet another young man to a cause that is hopelessly pitted against the strong-arm policies of the state. And with his death, the prospect of global Jihad taking roots in Kashmir had suffered a blow.

End Notes


(Bibhu Prasad Routray is a Director of Mantraya. This Policy Brief is published as part of Mantraya’s ongoing “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Network” project. Mantraya Policy Briefs are peer reviewed publications.)

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Changing India and Iran Relations in the age of US Sanctions

Shanthie Mariet D’Souza

Abstract

The recent Trump administration’s refusal to extend the waiver it had granted to eight countries including India and China from stopping the import of crude oil from Iran, has yet again put New Delhi’s Tehran policy in a serious quandary. India and Iran have shared long historical relations which are now being tested. Given India’s heavy
reliance on fossil fuels, import of oil from Iran has remained the cornerstone of Indo-Iranian relations for past several decades. Moreover, both countries have a lot in common in their outlook towards a range of issues including Afghanistan. In the face of the U.S. sanctions, will New Delhi be able to maintain its long standing relations with Tehran? Or will it look for alternate partners in a delicate regional balancing act?

Introduction

On 22 April, President Donald Trump's administration refused to extend the waiver it had granted to eight countries including India and China from stopping the import of crude oil from Iran.[1] In November 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and re-imposed broad economic sanctions. New Delhi, along with seven other nations had been given a six-month waiver to import 300,000 bpd or nine million barrels of oil a month from Iran until early May. New Delhi has made statements indicating that it will fall in line and has plans in place to diversify its oil imports.[2] Irrespective of whether it succeeds in its endeavor and the impact it can have on its economy, New Delhi's relations with Iran is all set to encounter some serious challenges.

Oil Dependency

According to OPEC’s World Oil Outlook 2040, India’s oil demand is projected to reach 9.9 thousand barrel of oil equivalent per day (mboe/d) in 2040, from 3.9 mboe/d in 2015. The report estimates oil to continue to remain the second largest source of fuel for the country, with its share increasing from 23.2 per cent in 2016 to 25.2 per cent in 2040. Similarly, the BP Energy Outlook 2018, published in March 2018, estimates global oil demand to reach around 109 mb/d by 2040 with India replacing China as the primary source of growth for oil demand. The report estimates India’s crude oil demand to reach 485 million tonne of oil equivalent (mtoe) by 2040 from 212 mtoe in 2016.

Because of India’s heavy reliance on fossil fuels, import of oil from Iran has remained the cornerstone of Indo-Iranian relations for past several decades. India is Iran’s second top oil client after China. Prior to the US sanctions,
New Delhi imported over 600,000 bpd of oil from Iran. Since November only state-run Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum Corp, Hindustan Petroleum and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals have been buying Iranian oil. In April 2019, Indian state refiners lifted 8 million barrels of Iranian oil, a decline of about 12 percent from the previous month. However, Indian refiners held back from ordering Iranian oil for loading in May pending clarity on whether Washington would extend a waiver. New Delhi has been preparing for the worst.

(i) Indian-Iranian agreement of November 2018: It has attempted to bypass the sanctions by entering into a rupee trade agreement with Iran in November 2018. According to the agreement, New Delhi can pay for fifty percent of the import of Iranian oil using a rupee-based payment mechanism. The other fifty percent of those payments will be used for exporting items to Tehran. Two Indian banks- UCO Bank and IDBI Bank- were identified to route the payment as the two have no exposure to the US financial system. However, rupee trade by itself can only be ad hoc and is not a sustainable arrangement. India has a trade deficit with Iran. Bilateral trade between India and Iran increased to US$13.8 billion in 2017-18 from US$12.9 billion in the previous fiscal year even as India’s exports were only worth US$2.5 billion to that country. This means that since Tehran is not buying that much from India, it can hardly use the rupees it is now getting for its crude for anything else than for paying for the products and services of Indian companies.

(ii) Oil Refinery in Tamil Nadu: The US sanctions exposes India’s other vulnerabilities, as well. Naftiran Intertrade, the Swiss subsidiary of National Iranian Oil Company, holds 15.4 percent stake in the Chennai Petroleum Corp. Limited (CPCL), which is one of clients for Iranian crude in India. The CPCL had plans to invest up to US$5.1 billion to replace the 20,000 bpd Nagapattinam refinery in Southern Tamil Nadu state with an 180,000 bpd plant. The refinery is expected to be operational by 2023-24. It is not clear if the investment can go ahead or will have to be put in the cold storage for the time being.

India’s second strategy has been to diversify its sources of crude. In its reactions to the end of the waiver, India’s External Affairs Ministry indicated that it has a ‘robust plan’ in place to ensure continued supply of crude from different parts of the world. Experts, however, have termed this ‘plain sophistry’. Its optimistic tone notwithstanding, no country would provide India oil at the highly concessional terms supplied by Iran. Buying oil from the spot market has always been an option, but this would significantly increase India’s import bill. New Delhi has indeed increased its energy investments in the Arab world. India’s state-owned oil company ONGC Videsh has acquired a 10 percent stake in an offshore oil concession in Abu Dhabi for $600 million. However, such measures would not be adequate to lessen burden on the common man, when the increase in oil prices would eventually be passed on to the customers in India.

Tightrope Walking

One possible reason why New Delhi has decided to abide by the sanctions without a murmur of protest is the US assurance that the Chabahar port project in Iran, which is of importance to India and Afghanistan would not be impacted by the sanctions. India values its relations with the United States and has been assisted in its counter-terrorism goals by Washington. However, in return for the American gestures of acting against the Pakistan-based terrorist leader Masood Azhar at the United Nations despite Chinese objections, New Delhi is expected to comply with the sanctions. Amid such diplomatic tightrope walking, New Delhi can only hope that it can find a way to maintain its political relations with Iran.

Both India and Iran have a lot in common in their outlook towards a range of issues such as Afghanistan. Both are opposed to the return of the Taliban to the seat of power in Kabul. In September 2018, India, Iran, and Afghanistan held the first-ever trilateral meeting in Kabul during which implementation of the Chabahar port project and an array of other issues were discussed, including ways to deepen counter-terror cooperation. In February 2019,
Afghanistan sent its first export shipment to India through the Chabahar Port.[10] In the same month, Iran joined India in criticizing Pakistan for sheltering terrorists being used to carry out attacks on their territories.

Alternate Partners

India’s growing relations with Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Israel have posed challenges to maintaining a steady relation with Iran. Over the past five years, New Delhi has aggressively pushed for investments from and counter-terrorism cooperation with Riyadh and Tel Aviv. India’s relations with UAE too have improved. During his maiden trip to New Delhi in February 2019, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced, without revealing details, the possibility of investment opportunities worth US$100 billion in India over the next two years.[11] Security ranks high in New Delhi’s strategy in the Middle East region. In Israel, India has found a willing partner to supply sophisticated military technology. Between 2012 and 2016, India received over 40 percent of Israeli military exports.

While India may not have ignored Tehran completely, its efforts to solidify political relations with that country have almost been negligible compared to the efforts it has put up into the Arab world. For long, India pursued a balancing approach with Iran and countries like Saudi Arabia and Israel. This policy has undergone significant changes in recent times. This is curious as Iran remains critical not only for India’s policy in Afghanistan, but also for its counter-terrorism efforts. With this backdrop, reducing oil imports from Iran to zero takes away much of the substance from the already withering bilateral relations between the two countries. To expect the Chabahar port project alone to sustain the relations between the two is at best impractical.

An India-China Axis?

While China protested against the end of waiver and vowed to continue importing crude from Iran, India’s silent capitulation to the US sanctions has surprised many analysts. Nevertheless, the possibilities of a Beijing-New Delhi common outlook and possible joint action to resist the American pressure has been talked about. However, that is easier said than done. New Delhi’s economy is yet to reach the kind of inter-dependency that the US and Chinese economy have. At best, New Delhi can hope that the sanctions will be temporary.

Lessons from history point to the fact that the hope for a collapse of the Iranian regime or its capitulation as a result of the sanctions are strategically delusional. Previous sanctions have failed to achieve the desired outcome simply, because the US had neither the capacity nor the requisite backing from the international community. This time, President Trump is trying all means to compel the international community to comply. Till the time he discovers the limits of this move, New Delhi’s ability to maintain its historical ties with Iran will be tested.

End Notes


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MANTRAYA SPECIAL REPORT#16: 11 APRIL 2019
Patron-Client Relationship: Pakistani Deep State and the Jaish-e-Mohammad

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

In the complex jihadi landscape of South Asia, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), since its origin in 2000, has served as an instrument of Pakistani military’s policy vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan. The deep state within Pakistan nurtured it in the initial years and used it as an instrument of foreign policy against the neighbouring countries. Barring few years when President Musharraf tried to curb JeM’s activities, such incessant logistical support contributed to the group’s rising profile. Buried in the debate, however, are two important trends that continue to receive less attention. Firstly, the JeM continues to share a symbiotic relationship with the Taliban and al Qaeda; and secondly, Pakistan military continues to adopt a dual strategy of switching between the JeM and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), to deflect international criticism. A policy to neutralise these groups in Pakistan must factor in ways and means to break this patron-client relationship.

(The hijacked Indian Airlines flight IC814 on the tarmac of Kandahar airport, Afghanistan. Photo Courtesy: The Quint)
Introduction

It was on a cold wintry evening of 31 December 1999, 31-year-old Masood Azhar walked few steps as a free man on the tarmac of Kandahar airport with a cautious glee, before being whisked away in a jeep by the Taliban. He had spent his last five years in the Kot Balwal prison in Kashmir, since his arrest in 1994. His previous attempt to escape the prison had failed. But the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight IC814 by a group of Pakistanis who sought to exchange four prisoners in Indian jails, including Azhar, for 155 passengers in the plane, changed his fate. Indian government decided to give in to the demands of the hijackers and Azhar was now free to return to the mujahideen’s career he had chosen in 1989, after passing out of the Binori mosque in Karachi.[2] In less than a year, Azhar, the secretary general of the terrorist group Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), went on to establish the JeM[3], a formidable terror formation which is believed to share the closest link with the Pakistani military.

Although the JeM, in comparison to other Kashmir-centric and Pakistan based terror formations, is a relatively new outfit, this analysis attempts to provide its contemporary history, focusing on its relations with the Pakistani military establishment. The Pakistani military underplays JeM’s existence and has even denied Masood Azhar’s presence in the country. This paper extrapolates primarily from literature from both Pakistan and India. Indian analysts, over the years, have depended on their unnamed Pakistani sources and inputs by India’s own intelligence agencies to construct their narrative on Indian centric terror formations operating from Pakistan. Very few Pakistanis have been able to visit any of the JeM establishments in the country. So, the dependence of this analysis on unverifiable data and information is higher. This is not an uncommon trend in research on terrorism. Attempt, however, has been made to keep any consequent bias to the minimum by making intelligent choice of sources and cross verification of information derived from them.

Origin, expansion, and network formation

(Masood Azhar arriving at Karachi airport in Pakistan, 2000. Photo Courtesy: BBC)
After being released, Azhar’s connections with the Pakistan military, the Afghan Taliban, & al Qaeda combine ensured that the JeM emerged as one of the important Jihadi outfits in Pakistan in quick time. Azhar toured Kandahar to secure the blessings of the Taliban leadership for launching JeM. The HuM was flabbergasted by the formation of the new group and called Azhar “a greedy Indian agent who is out to damage the Kashmiri Jihad”. Azhar delivered speeches in various Pakistani cities and towns and said that his group would eliminate Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who he termed as Abu Jahal (one of the key enemies of Prophet Mohammad).\[4\] Prior to the 9/11 attacks, the JeM was reckoned as one of the two primary jihadi organisations in the country, the other being the LeT. A number of Pakistani media reports narrated the linkages between the JeM and the talked about the help Azhar got from the establishment. For instance, Amir Mir writes, Azhar’s spymasters in Pakistan managed his career well. On one occasion, “he was allowed to travel to Lahore with scores of Kalashnikov-bearing guards”\[5\].

The outfit set up a training camp in Balakot as well as Bahawalpur sometime in 2000. Initially set up as a facility to churn out Jihadis to fight the United States in Afghanistan, Balakot became a crucial training centre for JeM’s recruits focused on Kashmir. By early 2001, the camp was providing ‘both basic and advanced terrorist training on explosives and artillery’. A secret US Department of Defence cable, released by Wikileaks, mentions a Pakistani national Hafez K Rahman who fought against the US in Afghanistan, had received training from the JeM facility at Balakot. Rahman is a Guntanamo Bay detainee.\[6\] Another Pakistani national and Guantanamo detainee Mohammed Arshad Raza, a member of Tabligh-e-Jamaat, too had trained at Balakot and claimed to have knowledge of the recruitment practices of the JeM.\[7\] Khan had been arrested in December 2001 in Afghanistan and released from Guntanamo in September 2004. Similarly, Rashid Rauf, who attempted to bomb a transatlantic flight, passed out from the Bahawalpur camp of the JeM. In 2006, Rauf confessed to his Pakistani interrogators that he arrived in Bahawalpur in early 2002, got in touch with a senior JeM operative Amjad Hussein Farooqi, trained in the Bahawalpur camp and went Afghanistan with Farooqi in mid-2002, before establishing close connections with the al Qaeda.\[8\] One the perpetrators of the London underground attacks in July 2005, Shehzad Tanweer, had met a JeM leader Osama Nazir during his visit to Pakistan in 2003 and might have undergone training in one of the JeM’s facilities.

Masood Azhar, because of his body weight, was never cut out to be an active fighter. The HuM had used him as a propagandist and fundraiser, and had even sent him to Africa and Europe.\[9\] However, such oratory skills of Masood Azhar and his standing as a religious scholar came handy and was a key factor in attracting and enlisting recruits from Indian Kashmir and the PoK. Ayesha Siddiqa attributes the recruitment successes of the JeM to failing agricultural system, absentee landlords who used to solve he financial problems of the poor, poor education and limited job opportunities in Punjab (Pakistan).\[10\] Siddiqa claimed to have seen open recruitment for JeM during her research visits to Bahawalpur. According to her, the fact that JeM could do so in an area, which also houses the Pakistan Army’s 31st Corps Command, points at an inevitable link between the two.\[11\]

Activities of the JeM were focused not just on Kashmir, but on mainland India. Not surprisingly, within two years of its establishment, it carried out the spectacular attack on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001. Two months before, on 1 October, the JeM had carried out a suicide bombing of the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly building in Srinagar killing more than 30 persons.

**The Assassination Bids**

Azhar was arrested on 29 December 2001. According to Pakistan’s National Counter-Terrorism Authority, the JeM too was proscribed on 14 January 2002. Although the arrest and the ban came after pressure from the international community and India, in the wake of the 13 December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament and the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan insisted that the ban had nothing to do with the Indian demand and was purely related to the sectarian activities of the JeM which included ‘suicide attacks on churches and missionary institutes in Islamabad, Murree
Azhar was released after a three-member Review Board of the Lahore High Court ordered his release on 14 December 2002. The JeM, however, was re-banned in November 2003.

(Pakistani soldiers stand guard near the damaged cars of Gen. Pevaze Musharraf’s motorcade in Rawalpindi in December 2003, Photo Courtesy: The Dawn).

In December 2003, the JeM carried out a two assassination attempts on then President Parvez Musharraf. On the 14th, his car was targeted as it crossed the Jhanda Chichi bridge near the 10 corps headquarters in Rawalpindi. The bridge ‘had been wired with an estimated 250 kilograms of C4 explosives’[13]. On the 25th, ‘two suicide bombers tried to ram cars packed with explosives into the presidential convoy, not far from the venue of the first attack’. The 14December attack killed none, whereas 14 persons including the two suicide bombers were killed in the second attack. The attacks led to a massive overhaul of the President’s security arrangement. Additionally, the intelligence failure that had led to the attack cost director-general of military intelligence Major General Tariq Majeed his position. He was replaced with Musharraf’s military secretary Major General Nadeem Taj.

Suspicion fell on the al Qaeda, since few months back the group’s then deputy chief Ayman al- Zawahiri had called upon the Pakistani security forces to topple General Musharraf for “betraying Islam”. The investigations also pointed at the possible role of the Brigade 313 alliance consisting of five militant organisations including the JeM, Harkatul Jihad al-Islami, LeT, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Harkatul Mujahideen al-Alami. Brigade 313 had come into being shortly after the US started its operations in Afghanistan in October 2001. The militant leaders had pledged to target key Pakistani leaders who, were ‘damaging the cause of jihad’ in order to ‘further the American agenda in Pakistan’. Subsequently, two suicide bombers responsible for the 25 December were identified as Mohammad Jamil, a 23-year-old JeM recruit from Poonch district of Kashmir and Hazir Sultan, a HuJI cadre Afghanistan.

These attacks led to a series of steps by the government against the JeM. On 26 December, Azhar’s younger brother and the JeM deputy chief, Mufti Abdul Rauf, was arrested from Rawalpindi. A manhunt was also launched for Azhar who reportedly had gone into hiding. Azhar was subsequently arrested and lodged in Bahawalpur Central jail, before being put under house arrest. Azhar wrote afterwards, “While I was lodged in Bahawalpur Central jail, the jail administration feared that my friends and companions may attack them. So I was shifted to Dera Gazi Khan.”[14] Subsequently, his own home was declared a sub-jail and he was put under house arrest.
This seemed to have minimal impact on the JeM’s operational ability. Between 2003 and 2008, it not only operated openly in parts of Pakistan, it conducted a series of high-profile attacks. In July 2004, Pakistani authorities arrested a JeM member wanted in connection with the 2002 abduction and murder of US journalist Daniel Pearl. In 2006, JeM claimed responsibility for a number of attacks, including the killing of several Indian police officials in Srinagar. JeM was also involved in the 2007 Red Mosque uprising in Islamabad. Masood Azhar, who had been released from house arrest and was openly preaching in mosques all over the country, went underground that year.

The fact that JeM was involved in the assassination attempts on Musharraf, the attack on the Indian parliament and killing of journalist Daniel Pearl was admitted by former chief of the ISI, Lt. Gen. Qazi, who was a cabinet minister in Musharraf’s government. He said in the Pakistani Senate on 6 March 2004, “We must not be afraid of admitting that the JeM was involved in the deaths of thousands of innocent Kashmiris, bombing the Indian Parliament, Daniel Pearl’s murder and attempts on President Musharraf’s life.”[15] Qazi, however, asserted that ISI had nothing to do with the extremist and sectarian outfits in Pakistan and there was no truth in the allegations that they were patronized by the establishment.

**Remarriage of Convenience**

In 2008, however, the estranged JeM started finding favours with the Pakistan military. In June that year, the outfit’s leadership was reportedly working to resolve its differences with other Pakistani extremist groups and began shifting its focus from Kashmir to Afghanistan in order to step up attacks against US and coalition forces. Over the next few years, the relationship was cemented. In return for the Pakistan military providing the JeM freedom to organise its activities in the country, the JeM begun expunging anti-Pakistani elements from the organisation. The 2008 Mumbai attacks in which the LeT was involved brought in lot of attention on the group and its sponsors within the Pakistan military. Indian intelligence agencies believe that the latter was in lookout for a group that would continue the LeT’s work in Kashmir. The JeM perfectly fitted the role. Ayesha Siddiqa notes, the outfit was “back in full force with offices in every neighborhood”[16].

![Headquarter of the JeM, at Bahawalpur. Photo Courtesy: BTITV](Image)

It is this time that the JeM felt the need to expand its real estate and set up its permanent headquarters. A US Department of Defense document of November 2008 reveals the presence of a newly built madrassa on the outskirts of Bahawalpur city headed by a devotee of Maulana Masood Azhar identified only as Maulana Al-
Hajii.[17] Locals told the US embassy officials that ‘these sites were primarily used for indoctrination and very limited military/terrorist tactic training. They claimed that following several months of indoctrination at these centres youth were generally sent on to more established training camps in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and then on to jihad either in FATA, NWFP, or as suicide bombers in settled areas.’[18] They also said that their repeated complain to the government regarding the rise of extremism in the area through these indoctrination centres have been ignored. Ayesha Siddiqa observes that without the tacit support from the military and the ISI, dismantling such centres would have been a simple police action.[19]

An Indian investigative report made a similar observation. “In 2009, just months after the Mumbai attacks of 26 November, 2008, Rauf arrived at a small government office in Bahawalpur to register the purchase of nine acres and one kanal of farmland off the Bahawalpur-Karachi highway. For a stated value of 1.5 million Pakistani rupees, a local, Ahmad Nayeeem, sold the property to Rauf and his partner, Rashid Ahmed, on 23 March of that year.”[20] The Sunday Telegraph reported in 2009 that the facility even had a ‘fully-tiled swimming pool, stabling for over a dozen horses, an ornamental fountain and even swings and a slide for children’[21]. Both the JeM and the Pakistani officials maintained that the facility is simply a small farm to keep cattle. In the next few years, this property grew into a sprawling JeM facility on the outskirts of the city, which the organisation’s propaganda material says, has space for 12,000 students, sports facilities and prayer areas.

The public activity of the proscribed JeM increased noticeably. With the tacit approval of the military and the ISI, open meetings were organised in Dera Ismail Khan and Muzaffarabad among other places. One such public meeting for militants was organised in mid-January 2010 in Muzaffarabad by the militant alliance, the United Jihad Council (UJC) of which the JeM is a member. The meeting was chaired by, among others, former chief of the ISI, Lt Gen Hamid Gul. It was concluded with a call ‘for a reinvigorated [jihad](holy war) until Kashmir was free of “Indian occupation”.’[22] In January 2014, Masood Azhar addressed supporters gathered in Muzaffarabad from an undisclosed location and said the time had come to resume jihad, or holy war, against India. A journalist from Reuters who attended the gathering reported that a telephone was held next to a microphone which broadcast his comments to loudspeakers. JeM flags, inscribed with the word “jihad”, fluttered in and around the venue.[23] It appeared that while the continuing proscription of JeM and his health issues discouraged its chief from making public appearances, but it had no impact on the groups’ mobilisation activities.

It is also during this period that the JeM successfully sought funds within and abroad to build mosques and madrassas. ‘In 2010, a JeM-affiliated publication said the trust was paying pensions to the families of at least 850 jihadists killed or imprisoned in India, as well as in other countries.’[24] In addition, Pakistan’s government had issued legal permissions for JeM-related publications to print, and to solicit advertisements.

Rising Profile & Growing Clout

By 2016, the JeM was showing signs of growing too big even for its mentors. Following the attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot, Azhar (under the pseudo name Saidi) wrote in the group’s online journal al Qalam warning the Pakistan government against cracking down on the group, as it may become ‘very dangerous’ for the country.[25] Azhar ridiculed Pakistan for being overtly India friendly. “…There is a lot of noise coming from India regarding us — arrest, kill, arrest, kill — and here our rulers are in anguish because, perhaps, we have disturbed their intimacy and friendship (because) they want that on the day of judgment, they should stand as friends of Modi and Vajpayee”[26], he wrote.
Explaining JeM’s stand vis a vis the Pakistani government, he wrote: “Our thinking regarding Pakistan has always been based on wishing it well and peace…not to save our life and skin but for the interests of Muslim Umma(nation) and in the interest of jihad. I am sorry that the rulers here (in Pakistan) have no respect for that. They (have) continued to be guided by those who are not our own — and they (rulers) continue to turn their own country into a heap of explosives and fire. Each one of them comes and puts their own country on fire and then they flee.”

This was a significant indicator of the JeM asserting its utility for the Pakistan state, going even to the extent of warning it against any policy shift. It carefully targeted Pakistan’s (civilian) government’s inclination to start a peace process with India. It is, however, possible that the statement had been issued at the military’s behest, who professes a similar anti-India world view.

The same situation prevails even today. There are reasons to believe that the deep state in Pakistan is unwilling to take steps to curb the activities of the JeM and other terrorist groups. Two recent instances are indicators of this trend. After India carried out air strike on the JeM camp in Balakot on 26 February, Pakistan’s foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi admitted that Azhar is in his country. His statement, however, was quickly dismissed by the military spokesperson who feigned ignorance about Azhar’s whereabouts. “Jaish-e-Muhammed does not exist in Pakistan. It has been proscribed by the United Nations and Pakistan also”, Director General Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Major General Asif Ghafoor told the CNN in an interview.[27] Similarly, following the 14 February 2019 suicide attack in Pulwama, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior announced that the Punjab government has taken control of a campus of the Jama-e-Masjid Subhanallah in Bahawalpur, along with the Madressatul Sabir—both parts of the complex belonging to the JeM.[28] But, just a day later, Bahawalpur deputy commissioner Shahzaib Saeed told a group of visiting journalists it was just a “routine seminary having no links with the Jaish-e-Mohammed… Some 600 students are studying here and none of them is associated with any
banned organisation or involved in any terror activity”. Pakistan’s information and broadcasting minister Fawad Chaudhry joined him in denial. “This is a seminary, and India is doing propaganda that it is the JeM headquarters,” the minister said.[29]

Strategy to neutralize JeM

The suicide attack carried out at Pulwama by a JeM cadre on 14 February 2019 has brought renewed attention on the group and is serving as a raison d’etre for the call for declaring Masood Azhar a global terrorist. The group’s linkages with the Afghan Taliban and the al Qaeda, however, has been less talked about. At a time when Afghanistan is witnessing important developments on peace negotiations with prospects of future power sharing arrangement with the Taliban, such nexus cannot be overlooked. The JeM’s connections with Taliban/ al Qaeda would serve as a much-needed instrument of influence in the near as well as in the long-term for the deep state. Strengthening of the JeM in Kashmir is another wherewithal for calibrating violence that the military in Pakistan would like to exploit.

Some analysts in India believe that generational change within the JeM may bring about significant power equation transformations with its patrons. Such speculations have based themselves on the reports that Masood Azhar has serious health issues and may not survive for very long, giving rise to leadership contestations and even a split within the organization. Such assumptions are not completely unfounded. JeM’s establishment did undermine the HuM and its leadership. However, historically many terror organisations like the JeM have demonstrated a unique vitality that enables them to withstand losses of important leaders which include even their founders. That is the reason why eliminating terrorist leaders is not considered a full proof counter-terrorism strategy. The environment which sustains them must be curated, if not transformed. A strategy that imposes huge costs to the patrons of JeM is more important than neutralizing the outfit alone.

It is in this context that the strategy of the Pakistan military to switch between the two predominant terror groups, the JeM and the LeT, must be taken note of. When international attention focuses on one, usually following a terror attack, that group is kept at a low profile and the other one is propped up. What remains constant, however, is the symbolic official measures against the JeM and the LeT within Pakistan, directed mostly at managing international criticism. Pakistan counts on the support from China to keep the JeM safe and is unlikely to give up on this instrument of choice in near future. The JeM is deeply entrenched within Pakistan. Its primary source of strength is mostly within Pakistan and partly in Kashmir. The skewed civil military relationship and the collapse of the Pakistani state’s ability to effect socio-economic regeneration in Punjab and Sindh accentuates the problem. Thus, India’s actions targeting the JeM within Kashmir or through strikes on Pakistan would have only limited value. Pakistan needs to change its course and there is no other alternative than to building consistent pressure on it through an array of mechanisms.

End Notes


[3] Writers like Ayesha Siddiqa, however, indicate that JeM was established by Masood Azhar in 1994.


[18] Ibid.


“Property records nail Pakistani lie on Jaish-e-Mohammed HQ in Bahawalpur”, op.cit.

*Red on Red in Nepal: Maoist Insurgency Redux*

Thomas A Marks

**Abstract**

Recent political violence in Nepal by the radical Chand aka Biplav faction should not have come as a surprise. Behind the national self-congratulation concerning termination of the insurgency in November 2006, all Maoist factions have ignored the continued use of terrorism by local operatives, both to ensure the outcome of polls and...
to amass the funds needed for political action. In fact, turning a blind-eye to local violence has been a hallmark of the post-conflict order. Now, events have progressed to the point that this is no longer possible, as radical Maoist insurgent actions against a communist government that includes the mainstream Maoists have forced a reaction. The result is a fraught Red on Red confrontation.

Recent political violence in Nepal (see Figure 1)\(^1\) by the radical Chand aka Biplav faction should not have come as a surprise. Behind the national self-congratulation concerning termination of the insurgency in November 2006, all Maoist factions have ignored the continued use of terrorism by local operatives, both to ensure the outcome of polls and to amass the funds needed for political action.\(^2\) In fact, turning a blind-eye to local violence has been a hallmark of the post-conflict order. Now, events have progressed to the point that this is no longer possible, as

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2 My use of the term terrorism accords with that used by most of academia, the various departments of the U.S. government, and both U.S. and international law: violence by non-state actors directed against the innocent for political purposes, often associated with conveying symbolic meaning. Such violence may be either method (used by insurgents) or logic (wherein the violence serves as an end unto itself, frequently having propagandistic value). Despite the by now hackneyed observation that there is no accepted definition of terrorism, in reality there is considerable agreement with the formulation I have just provided, particularly amongst the states of the United Nations. For discussion see esp. Reuven Young, “Defining Terrorism: The Evolution of Terrorism as a Legal Concept in International Law and its Influence on Definitions in Domestic Legislation,” *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 29, no. 1 (1 December 2006), 23-84; available at: [http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=iclrvolume29](http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=iclrvolume29) (accessed 17 March 2019).
radical Maoist insurgent actions against a communist government that includes the mainstream Maoists have forced a reaction. The result is a fraught Red on Red confrontation.

Nevertheless, the government, all political parties, and Nepali society itself are profoundly divided as to how to proceed. That the populace is not interested in a renewal of conflict is clear enough, even as thousands have regularly been made victims of coercion, violence, and illicit fundraising. The ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), which most recently has found itself explaining why it had been maneuvered by its Maoist faction into backing the loathsome Maduro dictatorship in Venezuela, has moved from lackadaisical ignorance to embarrassing bravado. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli most recently is quoted as boasting, “The government will control the criminal and destructive activities [of the Chand outfit] within 15 days. … We will make them join the political mainstream by April 13. The group will be brought to mainstream politics, if possible politically, if not by even putting ‘the pseudo comrades’ behind bars.” Foolish on its merits, the passage does not explain the government’s previous express orders to the security forces to ignore what it claimed were “political acts” by the Chandists. Now, with the March “banning” of the estranged comrades, the NCP finds itself at odds with both the law – the legal framework to support its orders is lacking – and even the very party that led the previous conflict against the Maoists, Nepali Congress (NC).

Figure 1. Current administrative structure. The model borrows from that of India to place states above the district level. Thus far, Provinces 4, 6, and 7 have names; respectively, Gandaki, Karnali, and Sudur Paschim.

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Astonishingly, it has been security figures who have correctly emphasized the political nature of a challenge the government is determined to label criminal. Beyond all else, there is the hollow ring of the label “pseudo comrades” adopted by the NCP. For it has not escaped notice in Nepal and elsewhere that the Chand aka Biplav faction is doing nothing more than carrying Maoist rhetoric and strategy to a logical end. It is the government and the NCP, claim the Chandists, who are not “real communists.” Hence revolt is the only option. When considered within the closed loop of Marxist-Leninist logic, such a stance is not far off. In reality, there is little difference between what is unfolding and what preceded it save the mainstream Maoist claim “now everything is different.” True to a point, this assessment is normally followed with another, that Chand aka Biplav should follow the mainstream example and embrace nonviolence as has the mainstream. The claim that violence has been renounced, though, is inaccurate, and it is to that point that this assessment will speak.

CURRENT STATUS OF NEPALI MAOIST THREAT

Central to our discussion is the reality that the insurgency period featured an overt effort by the Maoists to capture the state using violence, of which terrorism was a central feature, while the post-insurgency period was not an end to the first but its continuation through a covert approach. Terrorism of the post-war period has been by design but a continuation of the insurgency period violence. Debate over how to implement this alternative approach led to splintering of the original Maoist movement. It is disagreement over just how openly and to what extent to take terroristic actions that has been the cause of this division, not, as so often portrayed, a debate over nonviolence versus violence.

Violence remains an integral part of a larger Maoist strategy (conducted over more than two decades) to eliminate rival political party activity and to gain control of local population and resources, ultimately to rule nationally. The result is a distressing situation: The Maoists are now a key component of a communist government that rules the country, and as such they control a number of government positions and ministries, to include the most important as concerns internal security, the Home Ministry. This ministry has charge of both the police (in a national system) and portions of the intelligence apparatus (which is focused internally), with obvious implications for those who have been identified as Maoist enemies. Post-2006 Maoist actions have thus involved many of the same organizations and methodologies as in the 1996-2006 decade.

The original and still largest Maoist group – referred to herein as “the mainstream” and headed throughout by Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda (“Renowned,” though “Fierce One” is most common in Western media) – has remained dominant and continues to use terrorism opportunistically despite having opted to give primacy to political action. Known for much of its history as the Communist Party of Nepal or CPN(M) – the precise manner in which the acronym is rendered was that of the group – it changed its name to the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) after the end of the overt conflict. Post-insurgency splintering saw at one point as many as ten Maoist parties in existence. When perhaps half of them returned to the fold, the mainstream altered its name yet

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4 See e.g. discussion in “Why did Former Army General and Former Army Chief Side With Biplav? Polarization is Being Created,” Medianp.com, 28 March 2019; available in Nepali at: http://medianp.com/2019/03/270696.html?fbclid=IwAR2tEg6PGtlhcKvpluSie1C1qOQyF8cPKb88OXdPwskE45qIMz2HSSx-Mz0 (accessed 2 April 2019).


6 Though a decision to transfer the National Intelligence Department (NID) from the Home Ministry to the Prime Minister’s Office, it is unclear to what extent this has been realized. Regardless, some intelligence functions remain within Home.
again, becoming Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). Subsequently, on 17 May 2018, it was announced that the party’s alliance with the communists (but not Maoists) of the Unified Marxist-Leninists or UML, led by Mr. Oli, had resulted in their amalgamation into a single, restored NCP. This body now has complete political power at all levels of governance. Dahal and Oli divide NCP leadership. Though a part of the ruling communist government, the mainstream Maoists maintain a paramilitary capability and use it to execute violence, relying especially upon various front organizations such as the Young Communist League (YCL) and the All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Revolutionary) (ANNISU-R). These organizations, as is the case with the Maoist mainstream, have themselves splintered and execute the programs of various Maoist factions, a reality which has the consequence of making the situation much more dangerous for Maoist targets.

The division of the erstwhile comrades stems from the Maoist plan to continue their struggle covertly using terrorism while placing guerrilla and military action on hold. A strategy session was held in September 2005 in Chunwang VDC, Rukum, at which the course of action was outlined and agreed upon. As understood by all participants at the meeting, the embrace of parliamentary democracy was to be a tactic that would enable Maoist organizing in government strongholds (essentially, district capitals and Kathmandu) for ultimate seizure of power through violent mass action linked to then-existing rural domination. The subsequent splits resulted from radical claims of the plan’s betrayal by the mainstream. The debate was not one of violence versus nonviolence but over just how aggressively to proceed. All Maoist groups after November 2006 supported the continued use of terrorism.

The Maoists and their splinters have been covered in-depth elsewhere. Here, it is simply necessary to highlight that within the original party, a faction, headed by one of the senior figures of the movement, Mohan Baidya aka Kiran (“Ray of Light”), became increasingly alienated from the mainstream over issues of strategy and finally broke away formally in late June 2012 under the original party name, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, but using CPN-M as its acronym. It took with it perhaps one-third of the entire party. It included at that time an even more

7 For history of the movement from which the Maoists split and which they now claim to have rejoined, see Bhim Rawal, *The Communist Movement in Nepal: Origin and Development* (Kathmandu: UML, December 2007).

8 Front organizations are ostensibly independent organizations which in reality serve to support the party and its armed effort. Fronts may be controlled either directly or indirectly; YCL and ANNISU-R are controlled directly. Nepali terminology calls these “sister organizations,” but this wording does not reflect that in terms of command and control, they take orders from the party. They maintain their own chains of commands, with leaders ostensibly selected by the membership. In reality, the party itself determines candidates and winners.

9 Of course, none concerned use the term. The final way forward discussed at Chunwang was agreed upon by the eleven individuals of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, the Maoist inner circle. A summary document was then discussed and passed by the larger membership of the Politburo and Central Committee. Significantly, my research has found no disagreement between sources, regardless of faction – to include individuals who were among the eleven – as to what was decided. Rather, intense disagreement broke out concerning implementation, especially what was claimed by radicals to be the unilateral decisionmaking by Dahal in consultation with Dr. Baburam Bhattarai (at the time the number-two figure in the movement).


11 If one uses post-war vote tallies as a rough guide, total adult strength of the Maoists was perhaps 1.5 million. The movement, though, actively recruited and incorporated youths and children, which would increase the figure substantially. Nepal’s population for the 1996-2006 period was estimated at 24 million; it is presently ~28 million (with some tallies using 30 million). As early as 2002, more than half the population was 19 years of age or less. This percentage may have fallen slightly according to recent figures but clouds any efforts to estimate precise Maoist strength, since the party has consistently appealed directly to underage youth.
radical faction led by firebrand Netra Bikram Chand aka Biplav (also rendered as Biplab; “Revolt” or “Rebel“). This Chand aka Biplav group bolted in November 2014 to form its own party, which designated itself as the CPN(M), using the original acronym of the Maoist movement. Most of the Baidya manpower departed with Chand aka Biplav. The group subsequently recruited actively and grew substantially. It is now second in (Maoist) strength only to the mainstream party. It is this group that presently carries out the most public terroristic acts (e.g., bombings) even as all Maoist factions continue to engage in terroristic actions. On 12 March 2019, under ambiguous circumstances, the government announced that it had proscribed the Chand group for its violent criminal actions. This action came only two months after a government panel, appointed by the Maoist-led Home Ministry, announced that “no more conflict exists in the country.”

Ironically, the Chand aka Biplav group is challenging the communist government that includes the mainstream Maoists, with the Home Minister, Ram Bahadur Thapa, not only a former Chand Maoist but also close friends with Chand aka Biplav himself. Thapa is a man who has regularly been connected with acts of terrorism over the past two decades. Thus the perpetrators of terrorism have hitherto not been aggressively pursued, despite continued bombings and other terroristic acts. The police, both by orders and by individual posture adopted to ensure survival in a communist-controlled system, have avoided involving themselves in episodes that are “political.” Orders to shift gears have not changed this. Breathless media coverage notwithstanding, arrests have been relatively few, and most of those initially detained are reported as subsequently having been released. Charges actually filed are for collateral actions (e.g., disrupting elections). This is because, as the relevant 2016 annual State Department report correctly notes: “Nepal lacks a law specifically criminalizing terrorism or the provision of material support to terrorist networks. If an act of terrorism were to take place, Nepali courts would likely prosecute the perpetrators on the basis of laws pertaining to its constituent crimes, e.g. murder, arson, etc. Most Nepali officials view Nepal as at low-risk for an international terrorist incident. Accordingly, there is little impetus to introduce new laws.” What this discussion does not make clear is that in their own treatments, such as that just cited, U.S. and Western sources in general speak only to international terrorism and do not include the domestic variety except as it impacts their citizens. This has caused the ongoing bombings in Nepal and attacks against Nepali individuals to remain largely unpublicized.

Meantime, the communist government has pardoned previously convicted Maoist figures (further discussion below), creating an atmosphere and reality of impunity. Only when actual murder is prominently committed (e.g., in Kathmandu) have the police gone through the motions of responding. It was just such a series of terroristic actions in late February and early March 2019, which created casualties in the heart of Kathmandu, that forced the current move against the Chand aka Biplav group. Yet the verbiage has not been matched by systematic response, and strategic planning remains crippled by the continued embrace of the Chand group by the Maoist mainstream. Actions such as using terrorism to ensure a monopoly of political organizing in local space – by the Chand group and others (e.g., ethnic separatists) – are not contested, as illustrated by Figure 2 (below), which is a Chand aka Biplav agitprop session held 12 December 2018 in Doti district (see Figure 1, Far-Western region). Such sessions are common, with songs and skits in local language and forced attendance of students and villagers. Those who attempt to challenge the coercion are met with violence. There are no known instances of the police intervening in such sessions. As popular mobilization goes on, a slice of the recruits is trained, armed, and becomes the “muscle”

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12 Excellent discussion of this personal dynamic may be found in Nabin Bibilas, “Comrades at War,” The Record, 3 May 2018; available at: https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/comrades-at-war/ (accessed 17 March 2019).


14 Photo from Chand aka Biplav social media distribution, provided by Nepali source.
which eliminates opposition to the Maoist political effort. Figure 3 (below) illustrates this well, as it displays weapons and material captured by the police in a Chand combatant camp on 16 March 2019. That such preparations have reached the point illustrated highlights that hitherto the communist government has done little to deal with the threat. It has been oblivious to the needs of popular security even as its own paramilitary capability engages in actions not unlike those of breakaway radical groups.

15 Photo from Nepali source.

Figure 2. Chand *aka* Biplav group agitprop being performed before forced audience in Doti district, 12 December 2018.
Popular security thus remains a pressing concern. Regardless of faction, the Maoists continue to target individuals whom they have identified as enemies and sources of support (especially, money). Fleeing or moving elsewhere does not alter the Maoist efforts, with their attendant threats and actions. Attempts to return to normal life are accompanied by Maoist menace and attacks. Pursuit of targeted individuals has been a central feature of the operations of all Maoist factions and remains unchecked by government action. It is especially dangerous now, because it occurs within the context of the intra-Maoist conflict noted above, which concerns how aggressive and ruthless to be in the utilization of terrorism. The precise nature of Maoist terrorist acts has varied considerably, depending upon the faction and the specific campaign intent. This is especially true in dealing with past enemies, but kidnapping, torture (to include rape), and assault have been and remain common, as does the widespread use of bombs. The Chand aka Biplav group presently dominates in the use of explosives. Judging by explanations of targeting protocol provided by senior figures in interviews, the group is oriented towards destruction for the purpose of messaging, even as constant local violence, completely lacking in the glamor of sensational acts such as

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16 As concerns funding, each insurgent group has its own profile driven by the context at hand. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for instance, while initially emphasizing the same funding activities as the Nepali Maoists during the insurgency (e.g., kidnap-for-ransom, extortion, bank robbery), was increasingly able to exploit the lucrative opportunities that came with participation in the drug trade. In Nepal, there are no such windfall sources. The Nepali Maoists hence have historically relied overwhelmingly upon extortion, as illustrated well by present Chand aka Biplav group activities. See e.g. News Reporter, “Biplav Maoist’s Spokesman Announced to Add ‘Revolutionary Tax’ on Public Representatives,” Thaha Khabar, 14 December 2018; available in Nepali at: http://thahakhabar.com/news/56147?fbclid=IwAR2gIff0XN9wHeuwstd7qULfOratsdSMgr0wqFl6ifH3Hi5Uqi0UCXPMrEH Bk (accessed 22 March 2019). For Colombia, see e.g. my chapter, “FARC, 1982-2002: Criminal Foundation for Insurgent Defeat,” in Thomas A. Marks and Paul B. Rich, People’s War: Variants and Responses (London: Routledge, 2018), 80-115.
bombings, are executed to establish local control, recruit, and raise funds through criminality. Significantly, it is normally only the most prominent incidents of any sort that are publicized much less recorded.

The state, as noted above, has demonstrated both a lack of will and capacity to respond, much less to protect individuals. Even if they are so inclined, the police can provide no security to citizens. The other armed government forces, the Nepal Army (NA) and the paramilitary Armed Police Force (APF), play no significant role in internal security. The former is primarily devoted to United Nations peacekeeping, the latter primarily to border control. Further, individual and situational cases aside, the performance protocol noted previously, whereby the police are directed not to become involved in “political matters,” is nearly universally interpreted by even the most professional officers to dictate non-intervention in any violent activity carried out by a political party or its organs, which in practice refers to the Maoists. The practical effect is that refusal of mediation or intervention is the norm. Thus, terrorism effectively has been relegated to a position as “background noise” and allowed to continue. Such actions, with their fusion of terroristic verbal and physical acts, go on nationwide.

At this point, it is appropriate to illustrate the more obvious manner in which terrorism continues to intrude into public life, despite the formal end of the conflict more than a decade ago. This can be done by detailing prominent attacks that were connected (in time and space) to my recent work in Nepal. It should be noted that the incidents related occurred in the glare of publicity even as widespread attacks on individuals received little or no publicity. Briefly, then: In June 2016, shortly before I arrived in the country for research, the Chand aka Biplav group destroyed ten cell-phone towers; in September 2016, just after I departed, a similar set of attacks targeted private schools within Kathmandu with bombs, alleging crimes against the people (see Figure 4).17 Shortly thereafter, on 6 December 2016, four members of the Chand aka Biplav group were apprehended moving a substantial lot of semiautomatic rifle ammunition and magazines.18 In February 2017, as I was on the verge of returning to Nepal, the Chand aka Biplav group held a national conclave at which its semi-underground status and active formation of paramilitary units were discussed,19 as well as the precise manner in which to use terrorism to further the continued revolutionary effort. During my visit, I encountered discussions of arms caches that remain active and evidence that demonstrates mainstream Maoists remain in touch with their former organizational comrades, now in the underground status and active formation of violent splinters, the Baidya and Chand aka Biplav groups. One significant assassination of a rival party personality

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18 See “Chand Maoist Cadres Held With Huge Cache of Ammunition,” The Kathmandu Post, 7 December 2016; available at: http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-12-07/chand-maoist-cadres-held-with-huge-cache-of-ammunition.html (accessed 17 March 2019). Media cited government sources in identifying the detained individuals as belonging to the Chand aka Biplav group. They were in possession of 205 5.56mm rounds and 9 loaded magazines for the Indian-made INSAS 5.56mm semiautomatic rifle, a weapon which had been used by the government during the period of overt hostilities. A number that had been captured do not appear to have been turned in during demobilization.

occurred in Jajarkot district, close to my work in Rukum; and in the months after I departed Nepal, violence continued. In fact, on 9 May 2017, in an area where I conducted work during my 2016 visit (Chitwan district), two leadership cadre of the Chand aka Biplav group were apprehended with explosives they were distributing for use against candidates in the effort to conduct the first local elections in two decades.\(^{20}\) Only a month later, on 7 June 2017 in another area where I had worked during my 2016 stay (Rautahat district), a further two Chand aka Biplav cadre were arrested with an even larger batch of explosives (see Figure 5 below).\(^{21}\) In Nepal’s capital itself, on 25 September 2017, the prominent Shangri-la Hotel was targeted by the Chand aka Biplav group in a thwarted bombing attempt (see Figure 6 below).\(^{22}\) In November 2017, again in Rukum. These 2017 incidents were but the most prominent of a string of explosives-related attacks and attempted attacks that culminated in well over a hundred bombings (without assaults being counted) in late November–early December 2017. These were followed by regular bombings, to include in the capital, Kathmandu; see e.g. Figure 7 below for 5 May 2018 incident.\(^{23}\) In August 2018, I returned to Nepal. That visit was again punctuated by bombings. Among the targets, on 12 August 2018, was the office of one of the more effective and best-known local government figures of Nepali Congress, Mayor Bhim Parajuli of Biratnagar in eastern Nepal (see Figure 8\(^{24}\)). Two days later, on 14 August 2018, the Chand aka Biplav group declared a nationwide armed strike. It was marked by bombs and widespread threats against schools and other facilities, forcing their closure. Though the strike was of minimal impact in the capital, it was much more successful in other areas of the country, bringing life to a nearly complete halt in as many as fourteen districts.


Figure 4. Nepali bomb squad members inspect a pressure cooker bomb before detonating it; recovered at Kathmandu school, 20 September 2016.

Figure 5 (source at n.21). Indian-manufactured explosives seized from Chand aka Biplav cadre in Rautahat on 7 June 2017.
Figure 6. Bombing attempt in major Kathmandu hotel, the Shangri-la, 25 September 2017.
Figure 7. Defusing the most common IED (improvised explosive device) in use in Nepal, a pressure cooker packed with explosives and (as necessary) shrapnel. Incident, one in an ongoing, extensive campaign of Maoist violence, occurred 5 May 2018 in Dhurabazaar [market area] of Kamalamai Municipality-6, Sindhuli district.

Figure 8. Vehicle belonging to Mayor Bhim Parajuli of Biratnagar metropolis stands damaged after a bomb exploded at the metropolitan office, in Morang, on Sunday, 12 August 2018.

Such incidents should not surprise. Recapitulating: The mainstream Maoists themselves committed unspeakable crimes both during a decade of overt effort to seize political power and in a subsequent covert effort that now has
lasted more than a decade. When the Maoist mainstream finally decided to move to opportunistic versus systematic use of terrorism against its opponents, an expected outbidding situation was created, whereby the groups still favoring systematic violence as a strategy doubled down on their terroristic actions in an effort to emerge as the legitimate standard-bearers of revolution.25 We now turn in the following section to the immediate events (2015-present) that created this context.

BACKGROUND TO CURRENT MAOIST THREAT (2015-PRESENT)

When the destructive April 2015 earthquake hit parts of Nepal, the country was locked in the contentious debates of the Second Constitutional Assembly process and thus, nearly a decade after the formal end of hostilities, was still without a constitution. The Chand aka Biplav group (with full knowledge of the mainstream group) was deep into a campaign of aggressively seizing land and dwellings from ostensible enemies for redistribution to Maoist followers and was establishing parallel governance structures in areas it had selected as best suited for rebuilding the Maoist local domination it saw the mainstream as having abandoned (see Figure 9 for illustrative activity).26 Reports stated that the Chand aka Biplav group was also collecting weapons, even as it located and moved against those who had previously resisted the Maoists, whether these individuals had been targeted by the unified movement or its splinters. Terrorism continued. As events unfolded nationwide, state response was characterized by distraction and denial. Within this context, the mainstream Maoists grappled with restless manpower and renewed factionalism; they were under intense pressure from within to do something. That something was a decision to move deeper into the system – maintaining the opportunistic position on terrorism while agreeing to let the constitution become a reality27 – simultaneously maneuvering to enter into united fronts as possible in order to strengthen the Maoist position.28 This, though, served to split the mainstream yet again.

25 As a definitional matter: the overturning of the economic, social, and political systems of social stratification. Revolution is thus an end-state, while the process of “making a revolution” is engaging in revolutionary war. Maoists use the word, though, as both ends and ways; e.g., “I was in the revolution” (which would be the revolutionary war); but, “We have not yet achieved the revolution” (which would be a complete overturning of what was in favor of what is to be).


28 This strategic approach builds upon the front action discussed earlier in n.8. “United front” is a Leninist tactic whereby a communist party joins a more dominant rival ostensibly to face a common foe or pressing issue. In reality, by allowing the communists into its processes and giving them access to its manpower, the rival places itself into a position for being subverted from within. The subject is extensively treated in my Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang (London: Frank Cass, 1998), passim; also Thomas A. Marks, “The History of Our Sewage Disposal System”: Solzhenitsyn’s Conception of Stalinism as a Necessary Product of Lenin’s Thinking,” Issues & Studies 14, no. 5 (May 1978), 65-89.
Figure 9. At the inauguration of the Chand aka Biplav party district committee in Bajhang, YCL/combatants performed martial skits using dummy weapons but accompanied by martial agitprop promising to oust class enemies and carry the revolution through to success. Violent agitprop is integral to all Chand aka Biplav faction gatherings.

Throughout the history of the movement, there had been a marriage of convenience and much jostling between the two senior figures, Dahal (a former school teacher with an MA; born 1954) and Baburam Bhattarai (also a former teacher but with a PhD; also apparently born in 1954). Both were active in the second constitutional assembly (CAII), because – though relegated to a distant minority position in popular voting – their mainstream Maoist faction remained important, particularly because it was invariably ready to turn to terrorism even as it maneuvered constantly to reunite its estranged, radical factions. Anxious to keep this reunification from happening, CAII leaders (from the traditional majority parties) kept both Dahal and Bhattarai in gateway positions in the drafting process (i.e., committees through which constitutional drafts flowed) disproportionate to the actual Maoist mainstream party count of delegates. This facilitated the completion of the constitution-writing process and the promulgation of the new constitution on 18 September 2015. Yet faced with the task of selecting – from within the already seated CAII membership – the first officials to govern under the new constitution pending its gradual implementation, the communists of the UML – who were a slight second in CAII votes to Nepali Congress – cut a deal on 11 October 2015 with the mainstream Maoists (and several smaller parties) to provide their crucial swing votes to create a UML majority government. In return for their support, the Maoists were given a number of key Cabinet positions, but these went to supporters of Dahal’s faction within the mainstream party to the exclusion of Bhattarai and his followers. As a result, Bhattarai resigned from the party to form a “New Force.”

This left Dahal the undisputed leader of the mainstream Maoists.

29 Bhattarai’s New Force Party, *Naya Shakti Nepal*, was formally launched on 12 June 2016. It presently holds a single seat in the parliament, that of Dr. Bhattarai himself.
The Cabinet positions given to Dahal’s Maoists by their UML partners included the all-important Home Affairs Ministry with its control of the police and intelligence. The individual named to the position, Shakti Basnet, was the longtime personal secretary to Dahal to include during the latter’s initial term as prime minister. That term and its chaotic end had been characterized by extensive use of terrorism. Also rewarded in the new Cabinet distribution of power was Ganesh Man Pun, the head of the YCL, which had played such a prominent role in the post-November 2006 terroristic violence. He was named by the Maoists to head the Commerce and Supplies Ministry. Altogether, eight ministries were “gifted” (the Nepali terminology) to the Maoists. The apex post, though, was the reward bestowed on the former head of the Maoist armed forces, Nanda Kishor Pun aka Pasang (also known Nanda Bahadur Pun), who became Vice President.30 His first recorded act was to call on Dahal to thank him for naming him as the party’s candidate in the pre-arranged vote. Pun’s role in the violence of the past several decades (both during and after the insurgency), as well as his ambiguous attitude towards democratic process, is troubling. In particular, it was during Pun’s post-conflict command of the PLA that the force drew attention to itself through its terroristic actions staged from Shakti Khor camp.

If this was the foreground, the background was violence that threatened to engulf the country in communal strife. For the constitution was a series of tortuous compromises between traditional and radical positions, with the clear loser being minority populations that had been mobilized by the Maoists with the promise that benefits would flow from seizure of power. The party front organizations defined by ethnicity, for instance, had been promised autonomous zones. The most salient such minority was the dominant Madhesi population of Nepal’s terai (also rendered as tarai), the narrow flatlands bordering India, which felt they were underrepresented politically and looked down upon socially by the dominant hill population. When the promised benefits did not materialize and grievances were further exacerbated by a decade of “more of the same,” an explosion of discontent erupted that has only recently died down.31 In this violence, members of the radical Maoists, of both Baidya and Chand aka Biplav groups, were identified and sought to exploit the situation.

Matters at the time were made substantially worse for Nepal due to an unofficial blockade of the country instituted by India pursuant to its own geopolitical concerns.32 By the time the blockade ended and the protests diminished in early 2016, the UML coalition was on such shaky ground that the mainstream Maoists saw an unparalleled opportunity to regain power through advocating a unity government – which they would head, though the distant third party in seats, by holding the irreplaceable balance between the Nepali Congress and UML. The result was that on 3 August 2016, as a result of a united front arrangement with their arch-enemies, Nepali Congress, the Maoists took power. Dahal began his second term as prime minister. Needless to say, he received no support from the breakaway radical Maoists, who continued to demand that the revolution go violently forward. So did Dahal – he simply objected to provocation when subtlety was moving the party steadily forward to its objective, power.33

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30 Pun succeeded Thapa (discussed previously) when the latter was made Defence Minister in August 2008 in the first Dahal government. There followed a crisis of governance, which was provoked by the Maoist effort to take over the military from within.


32 When UML appeared to be embracing Nepali nationalism, India worked to undermine its administration by the unofficial blockade (the third such instance of that tactic by independent India).

33 Douglas Pike, premier analyst of terrorist methodology during the Vietnam War, when explaining the workings then of an insurgent approach not unlike that used later by the Nepali Maoists, put the matter thus: “This does not mean a system in which terror is dominant, all pervasive and always at the forefront. Quite the contrary. What is vital to the
Such maneuvering is far from unusual in violent radical politics. It is the very essence of the revolutionary approach set forth by Lenin and expanded upon by Mao.\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps the most relevant case for our discussion is provided by Hezbollah in Lebanon, a violent radical Islamist group on the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). It is decidedly non-Maoist, yet a practitioner of many of the approaches discussed in this declaration. Though ostensibly but one of Lebanon’s political parties, it in reality controls a counter-state within the official state, engages globally in extensive terrorism and criminal fundraising, and has demonstrated a willingness to use violence internally to whatever extent necessary to pursue its own policies while covertly maintaining a veto on government policies. Its terrorism has included assassinating state officials, such as the prime minister (14 February 2005),\textsuperscript{35} in order to ensure a conducive political environment, as well as engaging in military combat on behalf of its patron, Iran, throughout the Middle East and beyond.\textsuperscript{36} Such a situation, as might be expected, poses policy dilemmas for the United States and its allies.\textsuperscript{37} This highlights exactly why insurgent groups increasingly adopt approaches such as that illustrated by the Nepali Maoists. Infiltrating the old-order keeps intact a veneer of legitimacy which makes response difficult if not impossible for both the democratic state and its external supporters.\textsuperscript{38} Mao Tse-tung used the united front approach most prominently twice: first, in working with the much more powerful revolutionary system is not terror which has been employed. Terror employed, at that point and in that particular case, must be put down as a program failure. What is vital is the underpinning of terror, the ominous spectre [sic] always hovering in the background; ideally, threatening but never emerging. Of course credibility demands periodic demonstrations that one still is able and willing to use terror.” Douglas Pike, \textit{The Viet Cong Strategy of Terror}, typescript monograph (Saigon: February 1970), 19; available at: \url{https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/star/images/212/2121506008a.pdf} (accessed 17 March 2019).

\textsuperscript{34} The subject is extensively treated in my \textit{Counterrevolution in China} (see n.27); also Thomas A. Marks, “The Maoist Conception of the United Front, With Special Reference to the United Front in Thailand Since October 1976,” \textit{Issues & Studies} 16, no. 3 (March 1980), 46-69.


Kuomintang (the acronym is KMT in *Wade-Giles* but GMD in *pinyin*) to reunify China under the republic; second, to face the Japanese in World War II at the side of the then-ruling KMT. It was the latter front which allowed the communists to largely sit out the war while the bulk of the casualties and resource destruction was born by the KMT. The Maoist bid for power came even as the Japanese invaders began to depart. The Nepali case may appear unusual but is not unique.

In Nepal, beyond mutual opportunism and Maoist strategic calculation, the willingness of past mortal enemies Nepali Congress and the Maoists to enter into a united front stemmed in large part from the shared imperative to neutralize the increasingly pressing issue of transitional justice. It was especially important for the Maoists to avoid a true airing of the crimes of the 1996-2006 period, because this would open the door to what had been going on during the 2006-present period. Popular demands for a settling of legal accounts had quite naturally looked in the first instance at indiscipline by the security forces, which for much of the in 1996-2006 period had answered to a Nepali Congress government. This made Nepali Congress ultimately responsible for the transgressions committed by the police and the military, which had rarely if ever been investigated during the conflict years. It did not take long, though, for inspection to be directed towards the insurgents. For the Maoists, the possibility that the process would go further was a potential disaster, because their criminal acts were not violations of prevailing norms and laws, as was the case with the government, but pursuant to party policy. Even during the bitter fragmentation of the party, therefore, Maoist splinters periodically came together at public sessions to denounce attempts by victims to pursue justice through the criminal justice system. Such pursuit appeared increasingly likely as a series of Supreme Court decisions provided mechanisms to do so. Gaining control of the government would place the Maoists in the position to deal definitively with the situation through perverted application of the law.

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40 Transitional justice as both a formal category and a human rights challenge refers to the measures to be taken in the post-conflict present to address abuses committed during the conflict past. A constant tension is present between reconciliation and punishment, particularly where crimes involve actions of no, little, or indeterminate military utility (e.g., in the case of the first of this list, rape). As related in detail in the preceding text, the Maoist strategic approach necessarily involved the instrumental use of terrorism against civilians and officials who stood in the way of insurgent popular mobilization, with the actual choice of targets and techniques largely decentralized. This resulted in serious abuses. For their part, though not acting pursuant to policy as was the case with individual insurgents, government security forces also committed widespread legal and human rights abuses. Useful works discussing the issues with specific reference to Nepal are: Tazreena Sajjad, *Transitional Justice in South Asia: A Study of Afghanistan and Nepal* (NY: Routledge, 2013); and Indu Nepal, “Nepal’s Botched Truth and Reconciliation Program,” *The Record*, 29 July 2016; available at: [http://www.recordnepal.com/wire/nepals-botched-truth-and-reconciliation-program/](http://www.recordnepal.com/wire/nepals-botched-truth-and-reconciliation-program/) (accessed 17 March 2019).


Once the mainstream Maoist faction again was in power in the post-CAII united front, with its attendant ability to distribute positions and resources, some of the leading estranged radical leaders returned to the fold. Still, most radical leadership and much of the manpower involved did not; and a burning question amongst Nepalis during my 2016-17 fieldwork was whether the violent splinters actually intended to move forward with their plans for renewed assault upon the system. Based upon my interviews with well-informed Chand aka Biplav faction members, it was clear they did. What followed should not have been the strategic surprise that it apparently was for the state. Even as I conducted work in Rukum, for instance, in the incident mentioned briefly above, Chand aka Biplav personnel assassinated the Nepali Congress district head of neighboring Jajarkot. He had interfered with the Chand aka Biplav fundraising effort and was killed on 28 March 2017 in the Nalsing Gad area to the close west from where I was working in Magma and Duli VDCs. The purpose of these and other acts of terrorism, as has been noted a number of times above, was to re-establish local political domination; that is, to regain the overwhelming position which the Maoists held in November 2006.

As a Chand aka Biplav group leadership figure stated flatly (in translation) in September 2016: “At this point in time, we need to focus our attention on the reality that we [the party] did not say [in opting for “peace”] that the people’s war was unnecessary or wrong. Rather, we were opting [through the united front] for people’s revolt [seizure of power through largely urban uprising]. If that failed, then we would continue with the people’s war.”

The point was that the mainstream had deviated from the strategy that had been agreed upon beginning with the September 2005 Chunwang Plenum and subsequently several more times in hard-fought meetings of the party’s central leadership. It may be further clarified that the wording states the Maoists opted for peace in order to gain access to government (largely peri-urban) strongholds, thus to prepare and carry out popular upheaval that would sweep them to power. There was, in fact, an ominous Chand aka Biplav group silence after their February 2017 congress in Rolpa. It now is clear the Chand aka Biplav group was preparing for a significant assault on the system prompted by the mainstream Maoists’ continued insistence upon pursuing what the Chand aka Biplav group claimed was a betrayal of the strategy agreed upon at Chunwang. What this strategy meant on the ground was that violence in the form of terrorism was to continue as the driver for the Maoist effort.

As was the case during the overt 1996-2006 phase of hostilities, there was little the state could do to counter it and provide security for ordinary citizens, even assuming it was willing. This was driven home in a typical but noteworthy incident that occurred on 27 April 2017, when – unable to lay hands on a rival party activist many times attacked and long sought by the Maoists – they kidnapped the victim’s father in Dang district and assaulted his mother. In the attack, at least some of the Maoists were armed, a reality which has surfaced in similar incidents. Though the subject of major coverage in the vernacular press, nothing resulted. The father, who had refused to give his son’s location, remains missing, and the perpetrators were never apprehended. Evidence, though, strongly

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44 Nalsing Gad is the site of a massive Asian Development Bank (ADB)-funded (approximately USD 10 million) hydroelectric project which is a source of illicit funds for both mainstream and radical/ultra-radical Maoist groups. The crime itself entered the netherworld that characterizes all such episodes, with most of those arrested just as quickly released, a very low-level operative detained, and the actual political issues ignored. For discussion, see Dinesh Kumar Shrestha, “Vengeance, Money Matter Behind NC Jajarkot Leader’s Murder,” The Himalayan Times, 4 April 2017; available at: https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/vengeance-money-matters-behind-nc-jajarkot-leaders-murder-police/ (accessed 17 March 2019).
45 Interview, 4 September 2016.
46 This divergence emerged again quite clearly in my August 2018 interviews in Nepal with leading figures of both the mainstream and Chand aka Biplav factions. These included discussions with key figures at the Standing Committee (of the Politburo) level, the highest rung of leadership in the Maoist hierarchy.
suggests they were originally with the Baidya group (which, of course, had once been with the Dahal group), though it is likely they are now with the Chand aka Biplav group.\footnote{47} The targeting protocol used against such an identified enemy, moving directly and through his family, as well as the fluidity with which the perpetrators moved between Maoist factions, remains a hallmark feature of the present security context.

Initially, it appeared the Maoist-NC united front would continue for some time; but with local elections completed, Dahal spotted an extraordinary opportunity to take his gambit to a further level. When tallied, the election results revealed a combined UML and Maoist Mayor/Chairman strength versus Nepali Congress of 400 to 266, with the Deputy Mayor/Chairman figure, 442 to 223. By mapping these local figures over the provincial and federal electoral districts that would select their representatives in staggered voting on 26 November and 7 December 2017, Dahal discerned the possibility of a communist landslide — if only left-wing unity could be achieved.\footnote{48} By pivoting again to the Marxist UML led by Oli, but this time offering a classic “Left Alliance,” Dahal engineered a situation whereby the two often bitter rivals would not merely cooperate but would field a unified slate of candidates, divided 60-40 percent in favor of UML. After their expected victory, they would unify and rule as a reconstituted Nepal Communist Party (NCP).\footnote{49} The deal was sealed in early October 2017, despite much (and continuing) resistance from the membership of the UML. To the latter, the Maoists were a group which had not only embraced terrorism and vociferously denounced parliamentary democracy but appeared insincere in its claim to have opted for another direction. To the UML leadership, however, the bottom line was simple: absent the union, there could be no communist seizure of power in Nepal — of any variety — rather a series of continuing efforts at cobbling together coalitions. Agreeing to Maoist terms, which included stymying transitional justice and a formal rotation of power, was seen as a small price to pay to eliminate Nepali Congress from its historically ascendant position.

For victory indeed came to pass. In the two-phased election — marked by a level of Maoist-executed violence which apparently exceeded that of the 2013 CAII election — the combined UML/mainstream Maoist slate dominated. With the true contests being overwhelmingly UML versus Nepali Congress, the Maoists were able to emerge as the second strongest party in first-past-the-post (FPTP) seats. This was because the Maoists locked these up in virtually impregnable areas electorally; that is, in those areas in which they had systematically used terrorism over the previous two decades to eliminate the opposition. Party list seats (i.e., those selected by proportional representation) altered the final toll to make NC the second largest party overall but did not affect the lopsided representative margin. In the combined tally, UML had 121 seats and the mainstream Maoists 53, while NC had just 63 seats. The remaining seats were filled by two Madhesi parties in the tarai (RJPN, 17 and FSFN, 16) and independents (5 seats for 5 parties that did not make the 3 percent threshold for party list representation). To make matters worse, the much smaller upper house — 59 seats selected from the seven provinces — was completely Left Alliance (six provinces) and Madhesi (one province). Considerable irony attends these stark figures. In contrast to the seat totals was the popular vote, which saw the UML and NC run neck-and-neck, 3,173,494 to 3,128,389, respectively (of a registered total of 15,427,731, with 68.63 percent turnout). The Maoists were a distant third at 1,303,721 votes, but they were the decisive tie-breakers. Electorally, then, NC was consigned to irrelevance, thus

\footnote{47} The incident, with particulars identifying the Maoists as the perpetrators, is discussed in-depth, together with consideration of the background, at “Abduction by Maoist [sic] Before Local Election,” Goraksha National Daily, 29 April 2017 (read in translation); available in Nepali at: http://gorakashadaily.com/ (accessed 27 October 2017, retained in hard copy; domain name expired 10 December 2017).

\footnote{48} For mapping, see Nepali Times, 6 October 2017; available at: https://twitter.com/kundadixit/status/916135113401835520 (accessed 17 March 2019).

validating Dahal’s strategy. Once backroom deals were brokered, the Left Alliance had the unassailable two-thirds that allowed it to do anything, to include amend the constitution.

Accompanying these stunning political developments was again significant Maoist terrorism. Though no overall figures were released, it is known that the three weeks alone leading up to 7 December 2017 saw more than a hundred bombs exploded or neutralized-prior-to-detonation as the Chand aka Biplav faction sought to stymie the elections. Explosives themselves were overwhelmingly from mining stocks in India; delivery mechanisms were the same IEDs that were ubiquitous during the 1996-2006 period (and since); e.g., wired pressure cookers packed with explosives and shrapnel (see Figure 1050). The substantial damage yet relatively low loss of life and wounded was a result of Chand aka Biplav instructions that terrorizing through property damage was in this instance to take precedence over creating human casualties in order to avoid a popular backlash. The instructions issued by the Chand aka Biplav group stated, though:

To render the elections a failure, the party will not adopt violent measures but will mainly focus on propaganda and promotional measures. No individuals will be harmed. However, it is the responsibility of all the party cadres to carry out small- to medium-scale sabotage operations after careful assessment of the target and the situation. All District-in-Charges and Secretaries are required to prepare a plan for their respective districts and send it to the Central HQ at the earliest. Our party will take full responsibility for all the actions undertaken.51

A more disingenuous set of orders would be hard to imagine. Numerous Nepali Congress figures were in fact targeted, to include Prime Minister Deuba and the most prominent representative of the younger forces in the party, Gagan Thapa (see Figure 1152). Local NC candidates were attacked nationwide (see e.g. Figure 1253), and many injuries were suffered (see e.g. Figure 1354). So numerous were bombings and attacks upon individuals that in a sense they were relegated to background noise (a phrase this declaration has had cause to use previously). No source reported on them systematically.55 More than a thousand Chand aka Biplav cadre were arrested (and most just as quickly set free). The latest available State Department annual report on the subject, Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 (issued September 2018, nearly one year after its 2017 subject date), in the section on Nepal (pp. 182-84) frames its presentation within terrorism directed at U.S. or Western targets.56 Westerners are rarely


51 In Nepali as translated; original is a two-sided intra-party circular that was distributed under Chand aka Biplav’s authority and signature; dated 5 November 2017.


54 The single attempt of which I am aware, by The Record (Kathmandu), has a well-done interactive feature that attempts to detail the most significant IED attacks nationwide. The display, with photos, is but a fraction of the actual IED total; available at: https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/bomb-blasts-leading-up-to-the-polls/ (accessed 17 March 2019).

targeted even for crime in Nepal, and the report duly notes no acts of (international) terrorism directed at Americans or Westerners. It does speak to “an increase in terrorist attacks during the year [2017]” aimed at “domestic targets” and even notes the hundred bombs figure, but it fails to grapple in substantive fashion with events in the country as discussed here, especially the terror-crime nexus.

Figure 10. A pressure cooker bomb found on 30 November 2017 at the house of the Nepali Congress parliamentary candidate for Mugu constituency-1, in the Mid-Western region.
Figure 11. Nepali Congress candidate, Gagan Thapa, who was running (and won election) in Kathmandu, returns home after suffering injuries in a bombing on 4 December 2017 that targeted an election rally he was holding. Two of his supporters who were accompanying him were critically injured, another two less seriously injured.

Figure 12. Critically injured NC candidate for Udaypur constituency-2, Narayan Karki, evacuated on 29 November (2017) after his vehicle was bombed. Half a dozen others were injured in the assault.
Figure 13. While IED victim Narayan Karki, 68, a school principal, had his left leg broken in five places and his right in three in the blast, Mira Katwal, 24, a student leader, suffered amputation of her right leg.

This period of extensive terrorism serves to illustrate the intense debate that continues within the Maoists: how aggressively and in what form to use violence in the post-2006 (i.e., post-war) period. Dahal has claimed all along that the use of opportunistic, covert terrorism was producing results, while Baidya and Chand aka Biplav see an actual revolution nowhere in sight and thus favor systematic, overt terrorism such as marked the election cycle (see e.g. Figure 14). Ultimately, in the strategy advocated by the latter, terrorism would be accompanied by the use of urban mobilization and guerrilla warfare linked to action in the countryside along the lines pursued in 1996-2006. From Dahal’s perspective, this Chand aka Biplav position not only is incorrect but misses the dramatic strategic shift that has occurred. The mainstream Maoists, he claims, have won – and won using terrorism not provocatively so as to provoke response but subtly in order to be effective. A combination of violence and deft political action has resulted in communist rule. The Maoists hold key positions and ministries; they control the police, as well as elements of the intelligence apparatus; they also have complete control over two of the seven provinces (Provinces 6 and 7 in Figure 1), which include many of their legacy areas of domination occasioned by


58 The Nepali Communist Party (NCP) apex leadership body, the Standing Committee, consists of 45 members, of whom 26 are from the former UML, 19 from the mainstream Maoists. The ruling hand, the General Secretariat (included in the 45 total), is divided 6 to 3 in favor of the UML. In an organizational word game of sorts, the nominally senior Politburo is now a directly subordinate body of 135. The nominally supreme body, the Central Committee, is a very large 441 (with 241 being former UML). These inflated figures reflect the difficulties in bringing diverse factions under one umbrella, thus to need to allocate prestige and resources as necessary to secure support for the actual leadership. A more normal Marxist-Leninist arrangement would be that of FARC in Colombia, which throughout its four decades of conflict had a 7-man Secretariat and a 25-person General Staff (or Central Committee).
their wartime and post-war use of terrorism. Finally, in a formal undertaking, the UML has agreed in three years’ time to move Dahal to the prime ministership for the final two years of the present government’s five-year term. For now, the two men engage in joint decision-making, with Oli heading the government and Dahal taking the lead in party matters (see Figure 15).\footnote{Precise nature of the relationship at any point in time remains captive to the personalities involved. Excellent discussion may be found in P. Kharel, “Conflict Between Two Chiefs,” Republica, 2 October 2018; available at: https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/conflict-between-two-chiefs/ (accessed 17 March 2019).}

![Figure 14. Result of a “nonlethal” IED attack on the vehicle carrying important NC politician, Ram Sharan Mahat, and members of his party, 17 November 2017 in Nuwakot district, north of Kathmandu. Though six people were injured, they could just as easily have been killed.](image-url)
Regardless of such outcome, what is occurring – in the analysis of the Maoist radical splinters – is disaster for Maoist revolution. The result has been that the Chand aka Biplav group, in particular, has continued to attack the state and traditional rivals, such as Nepali Congress, while carefully avoiding actual injury to mainstream Maoists. Entire districts have had their elected officials receive radical Maoist letters demanding that they resign or face attack. Increased pressure has been placed upon families and acquaintances in efforts to locate previous Maoist targets who have fled. Such activity has been met with inaction. More than that, government in the two provinces controlled by the mainstream Maoists has moved to retroactively legalize land seizures and other gains achieved through terrorism by Maoist supporters. At the national level, Left Alliance behavior in its year in office has supported concerns as to what communist domination would mean. In particular, there have been efforts to neutralize key civil society and external oversight mechanisms, to include the media. The highly regarded Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) annual democracy ratings, released January 2019, place Nepal at 5.18 (of 10) for 2018 and categorize it as a “hybrid regime,” occupying the third tier of four, between “flawed democracy” and “authoritarian” on the scale, 97th of 167 in the tables. This positions it between Uganda (5.20) and Kenya (5.11), neither at present lauded in terms of political freedom or public probity. Dahal and the mainstream Maoists, as noted, openly support dictatorial states such as Venezuela, North Korea, and China and denounce American imperialism for “challenging democracy, sovereignty and peace.”

No transitional justice cases have moved forward of the 63,000 case files created, with the government focusing instead upon arresting important Nepali leaders.

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Congress activists and charging (and holding) them on spurious grounds. These included the head of the Nepal Student Union [sic] or NSU, the major NC youth organization.  

Indeed, in the run-up to the current turn of events, the security situation was fraught. A warrant for Chand aka Biplav's arrest that was registered 28 February 2018 in the district court of Bhojpur district was struck down for lack of evidence, indicating the astonishingly indifferent manner in which security had been pursued. Indeed, at a massive Chand aka Biplav group rally held in central Kathmandu on 24 November 2018 – at which police were present but inactive – the group’s leadership appeared openly, with Biplav himself attending in disguise (see composite displayed as Figure 16).  

Faced with such a situation, the government claimed that it would provide security; but it had never done this for the general public. It had neither the capability for such action nor, it appeared, the will, given that the objects of such action were their estranged but still close comrades. As if to illustrate the point, it has been noted previously that a Home Ministry-appointed commission, charged with engaging in talks with estranged political forces, announced in late December 2018 that “no more conflict exists in the country,” even while admitting it had not actually met with the major armed groups in the country, such as the Chand Maoists, only with less than two dozen minor groups. In such context, observed a Nepali contact at the time, “The Biplav [Chand] faction has been able to spread fear among the masses.”

Figure 16. Chand aka Biplav group rally held in downtown Kathmandu on 24 November 2018. Senior members appear on stage (above), while Chand aka Biplav (insert) – who was publically reported as not attending – does so in disguise. Police remain on the margins.

Consequences of the lack of government commitment and focus were thus on full display when, on 22 February 2019, the Chand aka Biplav Maoists attacked cell phone towers nationwide in some fifteen simultaneous bombings,

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62 Reproduced clipping (Kantipur’s Nepali language daily, 26 November 2018), provided by security forces source; insert (as marked) sent contemporaneously by Nepali researcher.

63 Private communication from Nepal dated 25 November 2018.
which included striking the cellular firm’s Lalitpur (Kathmandu) office, killing one and wounding several (see Figure 17). It is this event which appears to have driven commentators to slip their government-imposed shackles of silence. A veritable explosion of frustrated public discussion followed. Nepali-language newspaper Nagarik, for example, editorialized, speaking directly to unstated realities, "Netra Bikram Chand was close to the current Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa who may still have a soft spot for him. It remains to be seen if the Home Ministry will prosecute this case strongly. So far, the government seems to be hurt more by a few bitter words in social media than by such heinous acts." The barbed reference was to the communist government’s continued efforts to stifle critique of its poor performance and indifferent approach to security. As if on cue to put the lie to the government’s repeated claims that “nothing was happening,” February ended with the apprehension of the Chand aka Biplav group’s commander for Dhankuta and Morang districts (see Figure 1 for locations) as he traveled with a concealed light machinegun and an M16A2, both apparently from captured wartime government stocks. There followed a renewed Chand bombing campaign, with the most significant attack that upon the residence of the head of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA) in Kathmandu (see Figure 18). It was at this point that the government finally declared the Chand aka Biplav group to be proscribed. To what extent remains a mystery, as the bellicose verbiage of the government is matched by neither the laws available nor the deployment of forces necessary to provide popular security and to staunch radical publicity, recruiting, and fundraising.


Figure 17. Crowd gathers at the scene of the 22 February 2019 bombing of the offices of Nepal’s largest cell phone provider, Ncell.

Figure 18. Bombing of NAFEA director’s residence in Basundhara neighborhood of Kathmandu on 8 March 2019.
In fact, all sources, both public and private, appear aware of the extent to which the government itself remains divided as to its approach, with the mainstream Maoists opposed to moving against the Chand aka Biplav group (with whom they have maintained direct and indirect contact). It would appear that only the resurrection of an 8 February 2019 police “special bureau” report highlighting the extent to which the situation had deteriorated provoked action by key government figures to the exclusion of consultation with other factions within both the former UML and mainstream Maoist wings of the NCP. The report, in addition to highlighting the extent of weapons stockpiling and combatant training, extortion of funds nationwide (to include apparently seeking to buy arms externally; e.g., in India), and plans to attack isolated police posts in the classic arms-gathering tactic of any insurgency, also was said to have a targeting list that moved beyond the acceptable (to the communists) Nepali Congress victims to the communists (and mainstream Maoists) themselves. It was this final element which provoked the 12 March 2019 “banning,” though the analysis that read “hit list” into what was more likely a naming of those to be opposed emerged from a misreading of Maoist terminology – supreme irony given that the key debate as to interpretation occurred within the mainstream Maoist faction of the communist government.\(^67\) Not to be dissuaded, the Chand group responded with a nationwide armed strike that shut down many parts of the country (see Figure 19).\(^68\)

Figure 19. Police seal off area in order to defuse a bomb in Pokhara, the nation’s second largest peri-urban center, 14 March 2019.


Still, nothing could better illustrate the mainstream Maoist position with respect to violence than another episode. On 13 April 2017, as I returned from a period of fieldwork, the Supreme Court ordered the police, who were under the Dahal government at the time, to execute a longstanding arrest warrant for Bal Krishna Dhungel, a mainstream Maoist Central Committee member, who had been convicted of murder in 2004. Dhungel operated in the open, and on 12 March 2017, he was filmed giving a speech threatening the judge who had sentenced him to life imprisonment, as well as others. Notwithstanding such actions, he remained untouched, because the police would not act due to “political circumstances.” While it is significant that a Maoist figure such as Dahal has consistently refused to condemn political violence, the terms are Maoist labels for those who favor parliamentary democracy and the market. Ironically, the same vocabulary and approach inspire the Chand aka Biplav group. The latter, for instance, honored Karl Marx’s birthday, 5 May 2018, by bringing Nepal to a standstill through an armed strike. Any who sought to resist were attacked (see Figure 21 below for example). Yet the communist/Maoist government stood by and labelled the assault upon the populace as but “political action.”

Rather than a direct quote, the reporting used “has said.” There is little doubt, though, that the words were uttered. See “Fundamentals of Marxism Cannot be Ignored: Dahal,” The Kathmandu Post, 27 December 2016; available at: http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-12-27/fundamentals-of-marxism-cannot-be-ignored-dahal.html (accessed 17 March 2019).


caused Dhungel to be detained (on 31 October 2017). That he was unlikely to remain so-detained was obvious to all. Indeed, after a short detention, he was released in honor of the 29 May 2018 celebration of Republic Day as part of a staged presidential pardon for a larger group deemed to have exhibited “good behavior” while imprisoned (see Figure 20\textsuperscript{74}). He was welcomed back into the mainstream faction. He promptly renewed his threats against those who had seen him convicted. Nothing was done. For their part, the radicals have been just as provocative. On 24 November 2018, Chand aka Biplav supporters – in a show of force arranged by the faction (as noted above) – paraded through Kathmandu (see Figure 21).\textsuperscript{75} It is just such situations – involving as they do the unfettered movement and public appearances by ruthless Maoist figures, to include those who have been convicted of murder – that remain normal and go to the heart in discussing personal security.

![Maoist leadership figure, Bal Krishna Dhungel, freed in late May 2018 despite conviction for murder and a Supreme Court order directing his imprisonment.](http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Bal+Krishna++dhungel&view=detail&mid=1F2CC3BF7EB1B03458891F2CC3BF7EB1B03458899&FORM=VIRE (accessed 26 June 2018; video subsequently removed; notification obtained at 3 August 2018 access attempt; related videos still loaded when accessed 17 March 2019).


Flight provides no safety once the Maoist targeting network is activated, a reality that has begun to approach certainty as the Maoists have exploited the particulars of cellular communications and social media. Newcomers to any locale, even the largest, such as Kathmandu, invariably can be identified and located. A Maoist network of informants—which is substantial (and now enabled by technology)—has demonstrated little difficulty locating targeted individuals, regardless of where they have sought to hide in the country. This reality may be further illustrated by examining Figure 22, a recent, typical Chand aka Biplav front group poster displayed in Kathmandu.

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77 Throughout the conflict, Maoist intelligence was far superior to that of the government, a reality occasioned by the local origins and presence of the Maoist structure and manpower.

78 Obtained during April 2017 work in Nepal.
Translation:

Let the laborers of the world unite.

Marxism-Leninism-Maoism – Hail.

Unified People’s Revolution* – Hail.

Let’s not fall into the trap of delusion set by the reactionary, corrupt parliamentary system.

Let’s march forward to achieve scientific socialism through unified people’s revolution.*

Nepal Communist Party welcomes you.

Courtesy: AKHIL (Revolutionary)

Kathmandu University Area Coordination Committee

To clarify: AKHIL (Nepali for “all”) is the Chand aka Biplav version of the mainstream Maoist student front organization, ANNISU-R; and “unified people’s revolution” (at the two points where I have inserted *) is the use of urban uprising (involving mass uprising and terrorism) combined with rural action to seize power. Such posters are numerous, not only in the capital but throughout the country. In my recent work in Nepal, they were displayed in even the most obscure spots. It is the disseminators of such sentiments – the work force, if you will – who were

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79 Strikingly similar plans and procedures were used by the drug-funded left to seize control in Bolivia. See David Spencer and Hugo Acha Melgar, “Bolivia, a New Model Insurgency for the 21st Century: From Mao Back to Lenin,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 28, no. 3 (2017), 629-60; available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592318.2017.1307617 (accessed 17 March 2019).
the eyes and ears of the Maoist intelligence and assassination network during the overt conflict and remain as such during this, the covert conflict. The evidence is extensive that they have continued to function now in the same manner they did during outright warfare. Nepal has neither declared the present situation as one of emergency nor passed the necessary laws for dealing with terrorism. It moved against the Chand group using the provisions appropriate to dealing with organized crime, which quite misses the point as to what has been happening. The result, for an outsider, is a startling level of open insurgent propaganda under the guise of normal political speech. The arrest, on 8 August 2018 in Kathmandu, of Chand faction spokesperson, Khadga Bahadur Bishwakarma aka Prakanda (“Profound,” as in intelligent), was on the grounds of extensive acts of party fund-raising by coercion not on charges related to subversion or terrorism. His arrest prompted both demonstrations from supporters and a legal challenge for alleged “fascist suppression.”80 Ultimately, Bishwakarma was freed and was the keynote speaker at the 24 November 2018 Chand aka Biplav group rally in Kathmandu discussed above (see Figure 2581).

Examining the realities of the discussion in the previous pages, it can be discerned that a target is dealt with as time and revolutionary circumstances dictate, especially, opportunity. Analytically, this does not surprise. All violent clandestine organizations, whether political or criminal, are driven by the realities of manpower and resources matched against the tasks to be accomplished. They must prioritize the use of available resources. Yet a defining feature of this conflict has been the consistency with which previously targeted individuals have been pursued, regardless of where they have sought safety. During the overt period of conflict, a parallel system of revolutionary justice operated openly. Now, its legacy “arrest warrants” and court sentences (complete with fines) live on, executed by not only the splinters but local organs of the mainstream party as it is decided such actions fit their tactical and even strategic needs. New cases are added. In the absence of either protection or legal intervention from the state, impunity creates uncertainty and fear.

Figure 25. Khadga Bahadur Bishwakarma, a member of the Chand aka Biplav group Politburo, or ruling body, denounces the government at a rally held in downtown Kathmandu on 24 November 2018.


A permeable membrane divides mainstream Maoists and their radical splinters. The contending factions, whatever their differences and now the criminal ban on the Chand aka Biplav group, continue to interact, particularly at the local level.\textsuperscript{82} The mainstream Maoists, as stated above, have not renounced terrorism. Rather, they feel that in its present form, it has achieved and sustains their objectives. Notwithstanding their estranged comrades’ critique, the mainstream Maoists point out that they are in a position of power. To this end, they have been willing to tolerate more aggressive radical terrorist actions as long as they do not target the mainstream Maoists themselves and are not seen to be endangering their position in the open political spectrum. The radicals, however, do not accept this state of affairs and are determined to push violently forward. The criminal proroguing of the Chand group notwithstanding, widespread terrorism to achieve local domination and to produce funds through extortion continues, as does regular bombing.\textsuperscript{83}

Especially revealing as to the Chand aka Biplav group’s position on violence is a video displaying the normal agitprop used at their rallies to energize party followers. The featured dances include the use of weapons – prominently, \textit{kukris}, the ubiquitous agricultural tool and oft-used weapon of the Nepali hills – in performances that include aggressive pantomime slitting throats and slashing limbs of opponents (see Figure 26 below).\textsuperscript{84} The accompanying lyrics (in Nepali) are unabashed in their violence and are repeated numerous times as the dance is executed by the performers, actual Chand aka Biplav faction members. In translation:

\begin{quote}
Enemies!

Your death approaches!

Left, right! Left, right!

We will fight to this beat,

with our \textit{kukris},

if we must.

We will use guns,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} For instance, following the arrest discussed above of Chand aka Biplav spokesperson, Bishwakarma, he was visited by a number of mainstream Maoist figures.


\textsuperscript{84} Screen-grab from complete video, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9VBN3661EE (accessed 18 March 2019).
We will no longer tolerate oppression!

Figure 26. In this screen-grab (at 6:33 of 17:30) is displayed the agitprop dance at the 13 February 2017 celebration of the launching of the people’s war in 1996. *Kukris* (highlighted by yellow arrows) are enthusiastically used to simulate slicing throats and slashing the limbs of the enemy – those who oppose the Chand aka Biplav group.

This is the norm that challenges victims. On the one hand, the communist government has been focused upon ideological positioning to an extent that has caused it to ignoreterroristic violence by one of its key constituent elements, the mainstream Maoists. On the other hand, for the dozen years since the formal end of hostilities, it has been deemed by the same actors as more than acceptable that terrorism be used – by both splinters and the mainstream through its paramilitary capacity – to attack those determined to be enemies. Neither time nor space has altered the nationwide targeting by Maoist local operatives, regardless of faction, of those they feel it necessary to remove from the political playing field and to generate the means for the revolution to continue (e.g., through extortion). It is this refusal to move beyond a worldview that posits a constant struggle with enemies – even to let past victims go about their lives in the new era of “peace” – which remains the Maoist norm. In a sense, for the Maoists, this must be so, because neutralizing rival political opposition and tapping their resources remain imperative. In biting commentary, one of Nepal’s most prominent commentators, CK Lal, put the reality thus: “Comparable to the concept of a vegetarian fox, a non-violent Maoist isn’t just an oxymoron but a ruse intended to fool its victim. In its ideology, peace is possible only by waging a ‘People’s War’. Thus, a non-violent Maoist is at best a utopian, often a charlatan, and mostly a cunning carnivore claiming to be a vegan.”

Full Text of the Monograph available at:

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Cattle Smuggling from India to Bangladesh: Scale, Nexus & Prevention Attempts

Pallavi Banerjee

Abstract

According to a 2016 estimate, 3000 cows are smuggled across the Indo-Bangladesh border each day. It is a trade that is estimated to be worth US$500 million. Since the BJP government came to power in New Delhi, it has taken steps to stop the trade and has claimed to have reduced it by 99 percent. However, a look at the cattle markets in Bangladesh indicates that innovative efforts by organized criminal grows keep the trade going. Is legalizing the trade a solution?

(Representational Picture, Source: India Today)
The US$500 million worth cattle trade between India and Bangladesh is mostly illegal. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in New Delhi has declared its intention to stop it. However, the demand for meat in Bangladesh and the hide for the country’s leather industries keeps the trade running. Moreover, the unofficial ban on cow slaughter in many Indian states could be adding to availability of cattle for smuggling into Bangladesh. Notwithstanding the efforts of the border guarding forces, the trade goes on almost in full public spectacle and knowledge.

The Nexus

Cattle traverse hundreds of kilometres from states like Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand to reach the Bangladeshi cattle markets, called the ‘khattals’. They are transported in trucks to their border destinations in West Bengal and Assam. Chillies are stuffed into the eyes of the animals to keep them standing and save space on the trucks in which they are transported. From these border points, smugglers use either the porous land route or the water ways through the rivers Kalindi, Ichhamati, Raimangal and Hariabhanga of Bangladesh to finally enter the country. In the remote villages, the cattle are bound to one another by iron chains and at night young ‘Rakhals’ or local swimmers, herd the cattle in the water. The remuneration received by the ‘Rakhals’ is close to three thousand Indian rupees for every journey made.[1]

There have also been instances of secret tunnels dug up, by the miscreants, between Bangladesh and India. Such an event came to light upon interrogating two cattle thieves, Samsul Islam and Atabur Rahman, who had been caught while attacking the police force on the Indian side of the border. They confessed that the route taken by them to enter India was through a secret tunnel with one end located at Karimganj, India. The man-made tunnel uses fitted drain pipes and to stay hidden, the cover of the dense forest.[2] Apart from these innovative ways of trafficking the animal, may smugglers also attach heavy wood logs to the animal’s legs and raft them across the river to reach the shore of the neighbouring country. This leads to several cows arriving dead on the spot.[3]

Official Strategy

Stopping the illegal trade became a priority under the BJP-led government which came to power in May 2014. The Border Security Force (BSF) was instructed to bring the trade to a halt. In December 2014, Home Minister Rajnath Singh openly expressed his gratitude to BSF for mitigating, if not compete eradicating, cattle smuggling along the Indo-Bangladesh border.[4] In April 2015, few days after advocating a nationwide ban on cow slaughter, Singh asked BSF jawans deployed along the Indo-Bangladesh border to ‘put a complete halt to smuggling of cattle so that people there give up eating beef’. The BSF’s attempt to implement the Home Ministry’s decision has been a mixed bag.

The BSF guards the Indo-Bangladesh border. Its 45 battalions have been deployed in 725 BOPs along the border. The task of the BSF along the Indo-Bangladesh border toughens as the density of population rises.[5] The government has adopted the use of non-lethal strategy to deal with the smuggling issue. The troops operate with non-lethal weapons like pump action guns, stun grenades and chili grenades. On at least two occasions, this has resulted in casualties in the BSF. Tushar Kanti Das was killed by the smugglers on 14 September 2017 at Angrail, West Bengal and commandant Dipak Mondal died in similar circumstances on 16 October 2017 in Tripura.[6] There has been casualties amongst the cattle smugglers too.[7] Some have died after allegedly being tortured by BSF personnel. On one occasion, the tormentors shot the incident on their mobile phone and circulated via social media.[8]
It is anybody’s guess that the smugglers on both the sides - India and Bangladesh - are well connected and pass on information on location of the border patrol guards. The BSF who patrol the area in groups of three or four are often outnumbered by hundreds of cattle smugglers who are armed with self-made weapons like a dah, a long thick dagger; crude bombs; and even homemade pistols. Similar scenario plays out at the fenced border where the smugglers cut the fences without much resistance from the outnumbered BSF personnel. [9]

The Impact

The government has sanctioned new attack motorboats and a larger troop strength at the border. This has proved itself useful, at least according to the official figures regarding the number of figures seized. 1,01,751 heads of cattle were seized in 2014, 1,53,602 in the year 215 and 1,68,801 heads during 2016. In the first few months of 2017 around 30,99,744 cattle heads were seized along the border with the number rising to 1.3-1.5 lakh heads towards the end of the year. [10]

The operations carried out by the BSF, have somewhat obviated the cattle smuggling regimes occurring via land routes. This has forced the cattle smugglers to improvise and come up with new routes of smuggling using pipe culverts in the Karimganj district. These pipes facilitate water supply in the region and allows the smugglers to take advantage of the gaps in the riverine regions of the border. The smugglers who have been caught employing this mechanism included Ataur Rahman and Samsul Islam of Bangladesh. They used the villagers on the Indian side of the border to carry out certain parts of the smuggling operations as well. With these ever changing routes taken by the smugglers, the BSF forces were required to put the movements of these miscreants under technical surveillance. [11]

The locals try and employ ‘Ghat Maliks’ who acts as a muscleman and a form of contact with the BSF, trying to bribe the guards. [12] The BSF has also aimed at improving the local community relations in order to aid their vigil and this has proven fruitful.

Preventing cross border smuggling is especially difficult during the winter months along the riverine stretches, where the fog hampers vision of the patrolling guards and the poor infrastructure doesn’t abet any surveillance difficulties. With the withdrawal of the monsoon season, the water level remains low in the rivers, this coupled with the fog allows the most felicitous environment that the smugglers could hope for. Moreover, for the BSF the winter months also mean deserted villages and low temperatures leading to neglectful vigilance on behalf of the villagers too. [13]

The Modi Government’s intentions to stop the trade, instead of curtailing the smuggling, has only raised the price that the smuggled cows fetch in the ‘khattals’. Depending on their health and species, the cattle end up fetching prices anywhere between three thousand to forty-five thousand INR. This price further sky rockets during the holy month of Ramzan. The profit margin of the smuggled cattle reaches as high as ten to fifteen thousand rupees per head. [14]

Bangladeshi Narrative

Bangladesh has traditionally been dependent on supply of cattle from India and other countries. Both the meat and the hide are in great demand. According to an estimate in 2015, Bangladeshi traders associated with cattle auctions, thus providing cattle legally to slaughter houses, bone crushing industries etc. contributed 3 percent to the entire nation’s GDP of US$19 billion. [15] The illegal trade is much larger and unaccounted for.

Unlike the illegal migration of Bangladeshi nationals into India, which Dhaka disputes, Bangladesh appears to have extended its cooperation in stopping the illegal cattle trade. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) guard the Bangladesh
Along with the BSF, the BGB has identified the cattle corridors within the country through the illegal trade happens. These include Khulna, Kustia, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensing, Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong. New routes are constantly added to the list by the enterprising smugglers.

The Bangladeshi government, along with their enhanced security, is also promoting local cattle rearing amongst the residents in order to discourage or dissipate the need for illegal cattle exchange. Bangladeshi animal husbandry lobby has also joined the cause of preventing illegal cattle trade from India. In fact, India’s anti cow smuggling actions have been a boon in disguise for Bangladesh on a macro level, since it has promulgated the development of existing cattle farms and bolstered the emergence of new ones. This had aided employment a great deal, with nearly a quarter share in overall employment. Companies which previously focused only on garment production, has now eased into the cattle industry due to the high surge in cattle price post curbing of cattle trade by India. The best example here would be that of ABA group investing and bringing in two thousand cows from the Netherlands, citing the people’s desire for good quality meat as their motivating reason. Apart from such big companies even medium sized companies are entering the cattle farming industry especially in Sirajganj and Pabna District of Bangladesh. This overall rise in cattle strength directly benefits leather industries.

**Conclusion**

In spite of the BSF’s intervention which has reportedly resulted in the reduction in the scale of the illegal cattle trade, it is a huge challenge to completely halt the cattle smuggling from India into Bangladesh. According to the experts, ban on cow slaughter in many of the India states are making scores of animals available for smuggling. On the other hand, the preventive actions by the BSF could be making the trade more dangerous, apart from increasing the suffering of the smuggled animals. This has led handful of scholars to advocate legalizing the trade. In a way, this may bring an end to the inhumane movement and handling of the animals who are completely at the mercy of those who seek to either make a living or to add to their wealth. However, this is easier said than done, as New Delhi’s policy on the illegal trade is unlikely to change under the current dispensation.

**End Notes**


Shiv Sahay Singh, ‘Cattle smuggling goes on along Indo-Bangla border’, *op.cit.*


N.S. Jamwal, ‘Border Management: Dilemma of Guarding the India-Bangladesh Border’, *op.cit.*
MANTRAYA OCCASIONAL PAPER#07: 14 MARCH 2019

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act

Divya Godbole

Abstract

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) welcomed India and Pakistan into its cohort in 2017, a move that not only revamped the organization, but made it relevant in the South Asian context. This unveils the scenario of friendly relations between India and Russia on the one hand, and Pakistan and China on the other, playing out diplomatically on the SCO stage. However, can the SCO ever become a platform for rapprochement between India and Pakistan? Or will both countries use it as another forum to display their acrimony? The article analyses the myriad permutations and combinations that have been put into motion in the SCO, because of its expansion to include India and Pakistan and what this means to South Asia?
Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), founded in 2001, is considered to be a power bloc parallel to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It covers the largest area of landmass for any regional cooperation organization, includes two permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and two of the top ten economies in the world—China and India. The SCO, hence, has considerable economic, military and territorial power. It often works in collaboration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and has also been consulted on counter-terrorism[1] by the United Nations.[2] The organization also focuses on increasing cultural contact and community building. It participates as an observer at major Asian committees. Besides these Eurasian and global relations, there is ample scope for new diplomatic ties to flourish within the SCO. The SCO has the potential of becoming a pivotal organization in changing the diplomatic dynamic between its old and new members. Russia and China, as well as Central Asia coupled with the developing economies of India and Pakistan can become the part of a new axis of power. Optimistically, the SCO can help transform relationships between India, China, and Pakistan.

The permutations and combinations that abound in the SCO are dominated mostly by the interests of the ‘big-four’ players namely China, Russia, India and Pakistan. According to the World Bank[3], China and India’s hegemonic economic power may reach even greater heights by 2030. Similarly, notwithstanding the recent hiccups, Russia’s indomitable leveraging ability with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and its historical significance as the leader of the Communist Bloc give it much clout. Pakistan, the apparent underdog, has the advantage of holding a tactical position vis-à-vis Afghanistan and its access to the Persian Gulf via the Arabian Sea. India and Pakistan are nuclear weapons states and Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) non-signatories. Not surprisingly, the four central Asian countries that are part of the SCO do not get much attention.
The India-Pakistan Dynamics

The inclusion of Pakistan and India in the organization in 2017 can be considered a watershed moment in the history of the SCO, for it brought three geographical neighbours (India, China and Pakistan)—who have been witness to varying degrees of hostility marking their relations—together. India and Pakistan had previously been observer States at the SCO along with neighbouring Afghanistan. India rallied for entry in 2012 on the grounds of reaching out to its neighbours and extended neighbours.[4] India and Pakistan’s membership status had to be elevated simultaneously. Both Russia and China were pitching India and Pakistan as potential members respectively in order to increase their area of influence in the SCO.

The enmity demonstrated at proceedings of the UN General Assembly and the Hague would hopefully be forgotten at the SCO and its future summits. In 2017, India and Pakistan had a face-off at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the execution of Kulbhushan Jadhav—allegedly a former Indian naval officer, who was arrested in Pakistan and sentenced to death.[5] The ICJ ruled in India’s favour and stayed the execution. Pakistan has also often used the United Nations’ General assembly as a pedestal to accuse India of atrocities committed in the contested state of Jammu and Kashmir.[6] Since India boycotted the 19th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit held at Islamabad in 2016 owing to the Uri attacks,[7], it was at the SCO’s Qingdao Summit in 2018[8] that India and Pakistan received an opportunity to communicate once again at an international level. Although this opportunity was not utilized, Indian and Pakistani troops did participate in a military exercise hosted by the SCO.[9] This may appear to be of little significance, but can still be considered an important step. Given the conditions of political upheaval both in India and Pakistan, the time for rapprochement may not be near but the platform provided by the SCO may suffice to maintain a channel for communication.

Change in leadership in both India and Pakistan keeps the possibility of talks in flux. Analysts opine that the new Pakistani Prime Minister and ex-cricketer Imran Khan a person that ‘India can do business with’[10]. Mr. Khan’s non-military background coupled with cordial ties with the army is a plus for India. Furthermore, with the 2019 General Elections around the corner in India, a shift in power may initiate a new era.
In order to fully understand the multiple streams that diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan would take by virtue of their membership in the SCO, it is imperative to understand the new power nexus that has arisen within the SCO since 2017.

The SCO and Internal Power Dynamics

The web of power housed in the SCO has the ability to both impede and accelerate the workings of the organization. China is a giant that none of the members can afford to slight. The configuration of every member’s dynamic with China can arguably be taken as the foundation of the SCO, but the introduction of India and Pakistan has equalized the balance in Russia’s favour.

All of SCO’s original members, apart from China, have been a part of the former Soviet Union. It can be construed as the Communist bloc coming together to form an organization in the 21st century. The commonality of an ideology is difficult to infiltrate or pry open. The relatively closed-off organization undoubtedly kept its doors shut to outsiders not only because of its historically determined cohesion but also because of the fear of dilution of the Communist spirit. Nevertheless, the addition of two new members bodes a change in policy and appears to be an expression of a desire to expand further into the Asian sphere.

The SCO and its primary objectives of counter-terrorism and economic cooperation can prove to be fertile ground for an intensification of bilateral ties. Unfortunately, India and Pakistan have locked horns in the past with respect to the former and have been suspicious of each other’s activities concerning the latter. China’s explicit support for Pakistan has raised India’s defenses. Previously, China had blocked sanctions against Pakistan for harbouring the terrorist Zakir-ur-Rehman Lakhvi and has also used its clout at the UN to try and stall the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)/Jamaat-ud-Daawa (JuD) from being termed as internationally recognized terrorist organizations.[11] At the same time, it has also strengthened its economic understandings with Pakistan through the initiation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a major bone of contention between India and Pakistan.

The CPEC has far reaching consequences for the future of South Asia. Not only is it a legitimization of the intrusion of an economic giant into the region but also that of an authoritarian Communist State with dubious domestic controls. The China-Pakistan axis, as the alliance is now being called[12], could prove to be a roadblock for India even in SCO proceedings. This is a probability primarily for two reasons. Firstly, China spearheads the SCO (it is named after one Chinese city and another houses its headquarters) and has extended most financial support to the organization. Secondly, India and China have an uneasy relationship as well.

The possibility of the Beijing-Islamabad axis out-weighing the predominance of decisions undertaken by the BRICS appears to be low. This is primarily because of the global privilege associated with the BRICS as opposed to the pan-Asian purview of the SCO. It is also probable that China may prioritize the appeasement of countries that pose a larger military threat to its sovereignty (Russia and India) over a beneficiary State. Optimistically, this can result in an easing of ties between a China-backed Pakistan and India.[13]

Russia and India have historically maintained cordial relations with each other. The last Russia-India Summit, concluded in October 2018, saw Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi signing treaties concerning space research and nuclear energy. The highlight of the meet was the US$5 billion deal for the acquisition of Russian S-400 Triumf missile by India.[14] Moreover, Russian economists and ministers have been pushing for the de-dollarization of the Indian economy in the wake of tariffs and bans imposed on trade by President Trump.[15] Russia also routinely supports India as a contender for membership into the Permanent-Five of the Security Council.[16] Russian Senators visited India in January 2019, and vowed to work through the combined forums of the SCO and BRICS.[17]
Despite some clearly demarcated relations, ties in the political world are never static. The rekindling of a Pakistan-Russia friendship has added a new dimension to India-Pakistan relations as well. Joint military exercises between Russia and Pakistan were conducted in October 2018.[18] Russia has also planned to invest US$14 billion in Pakistan’s energy sector.[19] This may not bode well for India although Russian diplomats have assured the former that increased bilateral relations with Pakistan cannot be equated with Indo-Russian ties[20]. A change in the alignment may be a result of an increasingly US-backed India. In 2017, Trump called on India’s assistance in Afghanistan[21], implicitly bypassing Pakistan-Afghanistan’s neighbour. Simultaneously, Trump has also taken tough stands against terrorism and has deemed Kashmir’s freedom struggle terrorism.[22] These steps have bristled Russia and therefore it is engaging in increasingly aggressive military tactics such as combined drills with Pakistan and the export of military equipment.

The Sino-Soviet split of the 20th century is a bitter memory in the history of China-Russia relations. Even today, the two countries continue to have neutral if not lukewarm ties with each other. According to a report by the New York Times, they have a “quiet rivalry” that can be said to have precipitated from their shared communist past.[23] They supposedly have a “comprehensive strategic partnership” under which Russia provides China with oil and the latter provides Russia with consumer goods. They also have close military ties despite Russia providing armaments to Chinese rivals-India and Vietnam. Albeit, Robert Kaplan says that there’s geopolitical tension under the surface.[24] Within the SCO though China and Russia more or less hold a similar position of esteem. Russian and Chinese were originally the only two official languages of the organization, although now English has been added to the roster. These two nations were instrumental in the very conception of the SCO as well. An analysis by a Chinese news channel shows that Sino-Russian relations have been on the ascendant ever since the inception of the SCO.[25]

On also needs to look from the opposite vantage to get an objective view of the reconfigured SCO. Pakistan appears exalted at its SCO membership. According to media reports in Pakistan, its ministers have often heralded the partnership as a vibrant way to facilitate peace talks and global trade.[26] An analysis by The Herald has delineated how the SCO has widened its ambit beyond Central Asia.[27] The report did not seem very optimistic about the strategic prospects that may fall Pakistan’s way given that India has also joined. Despite these less-than optimum circumstances, Pakistan continues to be optimistic about its membership in the SCO because the organization is a symbol of unity between unequal partners.

**Pulwama Attack: A Game Changer?**

The Pulwama attack on 14 February 2019 though became a major setback in Indo-Pak relations. A vehicle-borne suicide bomber pummeled into a convoy of CRPF personnel in the Avantipora region of Jammu and Kashmir.[28] Forty soldiers were martyred in the attack. Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the attack. On 26 February, India engaged in “non-military pre-emptive” action by bombing an alleged Jaish camp in Balakot in Pakistan.[29] Clearly a retaliation against the Pulwama attack, the Balakot strike brought India and Pakistan the closest to a breakout of war since the Kargil confrontation. A dossier on JeM’s role in the Pulwama attack as well locations of the group within Pakistan’s territory was shared by India with Pakistan[30], which at a first-glance appears to be a justification for the Balakot retaliation.

Although JeM has been blacklisted as a terrorist group by India and the UN, sanctions against Jaish chief Masood Azhar at the UN Security Council are routinely thwarted by China. Masood Azhar has not been labeled as a global terrorist by the UNSC because of China’s lack of support. China’s while standing by the UNSC’s condemnation of the attack, was cryptic about the country’s unwillingness to coin Azhar as a designated terrorist under the 1267 Sanctions Committee.[31] As outlined earlier, China has been uncannily unsupportive of efforts to issue sanctions against terror groups allegedly headquartered in Pakistan. But with the Pulwama attack and its subsequent fallout, China seems to have tempered its position and is now showing restraint in its statements. Initial statements
following the attack saw China urging its neighbours and fellow SCO members to aim for stable bilateral relations.[32] Peace in the region would only be possible if both India and Pakistan say eye-to-eye. Russia too condemned the attack and called for a stricter handling of such “inhuman acts”[33].

China did attempt to dilute the severity of the UNSC’s statement condemning the attack by objecting to the description of JeM’s as being ‘Pakistan-based’ and also wished Jammu and Kashmir to be addressed as ‘Indian administered Kashmir’[34]. On the one hand it is acting as an arbitrator between its warring neighbours by calling for a ‘regional engagement’ to counter terrorism[35], and on the other it is continuing to exhibit its allegiance with Pakistan. The SCO’s aim of countering terror in the narrow scope of Central Asia and the broader region of Eurasia appears to have reached a stalemate in this situation. Not only have the two newly initiated members reached the precipice of war but also the issue of terror came knocking on their doors once again. Notwithstanding its role in the SCO, China holds regional ambitions in Kashmir as well. Aksai Chin is a heavily contested border issue between India and China, the Karakoram Highway or the China-Pakistan Friendship Highways passes through the disputed territory of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, and the developments of CPEC have tied the Pakistan military closely with Chinese workers living in Pakistan. [36] Cumulatively, all three countries have high stakes in the issue, which even the remedying powers of the SCO seem inadequate for.

Conclusion

The Beijing-Islamabad axis and the Moscow-Delhi axis mutually reinforce restraints on each other’s actions in the SCO. There is some semblance of equilibrium since no power coupling is able to gain the upper hand. An alliance amongst the four nations will also be asset since the members of the SCO also hold a greater responsibility of substituting American hegemony in world politics and economy. The BRICS and the SCO are two agencies that have the firepower to take a gamble at contesting Western supremacy in the modern neo-liberal world.

Ultimately the direction that relations between nations at the SCO take will be incumbent on what is most pressing for every player. On the one hand, if regional dominance were a priority then occasional conflicts would not be a surprise. On the other hand, if the aspirations of establishing an alternate world order gains traction, then the changed membership of the SCO would prove to be more successful.

End Notes


[12] Ibid.


Kashmir yet again captured media attention with the suicide attack by a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant on the security forces on 14 February that killed 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force. On 26 February, New Delhi conducted air strikes on the ‘biggest JeM training’ camp in Balakot. This ‘preemptive strike’ was part of the official Indian strategy of blaming Pakistan’s inaction on anti-India terror groups. While the attack indeed had roots in Pakistan, the fact remains that Kashmir’s security situation has worsened in the last five years, owing to an official policy of denial and miscalculations. Projections of optics of a strong state without addressing the basic ground level needs of the people could be driving the state to the brink.
State of Denial

On 12 February 2019 in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament), Minister of State of Home Affairs, Hansram Gangaram Ahir, responded to a question by fellow parliamentarian Prem Singh Chandumajra on ‘whether there is continuous increase in the terrorist activities in the country’. In his reply, which must customarily be addressed to the speaker of the house, the minister ended with the shortest possible answer. “No Madam”, he said.\[1\] Two days later, a suicide bomber drove his explosive laden vehicle in Kashmir’s Pulwama into a convoy of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) killing over 40 personnel, in what has been the worst terror attack in India, since the Mumbai attack of 2008. While the minister can’t be blamed for not foreseeing the attack that was to follow two days later, his statement was in line held by the NDA government in New Delhi that in the past five years, India has become terror free.

Three Voices

Apart from the minister’s denial three important statements were made in Kashmir in the past week. The first one was by 20-year-old Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant Adil Ahmad Dar in a video shot hours before he drove an explosive laden car into a convoy of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) killing over 40 personnel of India’s primary Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) at Pulwama on 14 February. “My name is Adil. …By the time this video reaches you, I will be in heaven… this is my last message for the people of Kashmir.”\[2\]

The second statement was made on 19 February by Lt Gen. J.S. Dhillon, Indian army’s 15 Corps commander. In a baritone the General issued a warning. “Anybody who has picked up the gun in Kashmir will be eliminated unless he surrenders. This is a message and a request to all the mothers that please tell your children to surrender. There is a very good surrender policy being initiated by the government so that they can join the mainstream.”\[3\] The General was reacting to the 14 February suicide attack and the encounter that took place on 18 February in which five army personnel were killed in an encounter with JeM militants.\[4\] While three JeM militants were killed, the army claimed to have suffered losses as it tried to protect civilians.
In the third statement, the commander of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), in an unverified audio message on 18 February, Riyaz Naikoo forewarned how terrorism might evolve in Kashmir in the coming months. Praising Adil Ahmad Dar, Naikoo said that ‘the time is not far away when children in Kashmir will wear suicide vests and target security forces in the Valley’[5].

These messages of a suicide bomber, an active terrorist leader, and the army commander sums up how militancy might evolve in Kashmir in the coming months, despite New Delhi’s attempts of maintaining deniability and also, to corner Pakistan, who it holds solely responsible for terrorism in the state including the Pulwama attack. While Adil’s chilling message and Naikoo prediction of how his outfit might shift its strategy threatens to unveil a new phase of militancy in the state, the Army commander’s statement predicting almost an all-out war on militancy may mark a brand new phase of confrontation in which New Delhi seeks to impose order in the troubled state.

Increasing Fatalities: From 102 to 382
Notwithstanding what the BJP government claims to be a stupendous success of its hardline approach in Kashmir, data reveals that the security situation in the state has been on a steady decline since 2012. In fact, compared to 2012, the incidents of militant violence and resultant fatalities have gone up by 55 and 226 percent respectively. In 2012, 220 incidents were reported. In 2018, the numbers increased to 587. In 2012, 102 civilians, security forces, and militants were killed. In 2018, 382 deaths were reported.

MHA’s annual report 2013-14 noted, “the security situation in J&K has witnessed continuous improvement since 2000, and the years 2012 and 2013 showed a significant decline in all the parameters of violence in the State.”[6] In fact, coinciding with the NDA forming the government in 2014, the security situation in Kashmir deteriorated significantly. The MHA’s annual report referred to a ‘slight increase in the number of terrorist incidents and the casualties of SFs in comparison with 2013’[7], it took credit for the fact that ‘our soldiers were able to neutralize 110 militants in 2014 as against 67 in 2013’. In 2016, the year the NDA India carried out the surgical strikes within Pakistan and termed the event a success, the number of incidents reached an all-time high of 322. “The 2016 strikes were a tactical success but a strategic failure: Pakistan pushed in numbers of fidayeen into Kashmir right after”, experts opine.[9] Not surprisingly, compared to the previous year, security force fatalities went up by 74 percent.

By 2017, the situation had worsened dramatically. MHA’s Annual report noted, “The year 2017 witnessed an increase in incidents of terrorist violence and casualties of civilians as compared to the last year.” It referred to a “6.21 percent increase and 166.66 percent increase in the number of terrorist incidents and fatalities of civilians respectively in comparison to the corresponding period of 2016”, although the casualties of security forces had declined by 2.44 percent over the same period.”[10]

In 2018 (till 2 December), 587 incidents had been reported. 245 militants, 47 civilians and 90 security force personnel were killed. The MHA noted, “The rise in number of civilian deaths in the Valley is due to change in Pakistan’s tactics following a strategy of superimposition of militancy over civil resistance through radicalisation by vested interest group and social media.”[11]

Local versus Pakistan-sponsored Militancy
The BJP government during its tenure has made numerous references to a hardline approach in Kashmir. The policy usually translates to security forces being given a free hand to kill militants- local as well as those who have been trying to infiltrate into the state from across the border militants. MHA’s data shows that from 2014 to December 2018, 826 militants were killed in the state. Interestingly, the ministry’s data on net infiltration, i.e. the actual number of terrorists who are believed to have infiltrated into the state from across the border, indicates that 468 terrorists managed to infiltrate between 2014 and 2018 (upto October).[12] The J&K police assessment shows 116 foreign militants are still operating in the state.[13] If one has to hypothetically assume that rest of the 352 Pakistani and Pakistan trained terrorists have been eliminated by the security forces, the number of Kashmiris who never crossed the border and were locally trained before being killed was 474. In percentage terms, this indicates
that between 2014 and 2018, 57 percent of the killed militants were locals, who did not receive any training in Pakistan.

The number of active militants highlights the role of the local militants even further.

In August 2018, the J&K police estimated the number of active militants in the state to be 327, up from only 78 in 2013.[14] Over 65 percent of these were locals. Data on local recruitments indicate that at least 126 youths joined militancy in 2016 and another 130 had joined in 2018 (till August). Even as the security forces continued to eliminate militants, the flow of local youths into the outfits, continued unabated. This burns a hole in the MHA’s position that “the ongoing militancy in the state of J&K is intrinsically linked with the infiltration of terrorists from across the border both from the “International Border” as well as the “Line of Control” in J&K.[15] Although a part of the militancy, about one third, receives its support from Pakistan, bulk of the violence has clear local roots.

**Pattern of denial and miscalculation**

Within 100 hours of the Pulwama terror attack, the Indian Army claimed to have eliminated the JeM’s leadership in the Kashmir valley. In an encounter in which the Indian army lost five of its personnel including a major, three JeM militants including two Pakistani nationals were killed in Pulwama. These included JeM’s senior commander Kamran, who is a Pakistani national, Hilal Ahmed, a local Kashmiri bomb specialist and Rashid alias Gazi alias Lukaman, also from Pakistan.[16] Kamran was described by the Army as ‘the handler of Pulwama suicide bomber Adil Ahmad Dar and responsible for recruiting, radicalising and training terrorists in the Kashmir Valley.’[17] On 22 February, another two unidentified JeM cadres were killed in an encounter with the security forces at Sopore. A Deputy Superintendent of Police along with an army personnel were killed in an encounter at Kulgam which ended with the killing of three more unidentified Jaish militants on 24 February.

This swift reprisal notwithstanding, it is fair to say that the Pulwama attack had brought back focus on the JeM. Interestingly, months prior to the 14 February attack, assessments of the J&K police and the Union Home Ministry portrayed the JeM as almost an extinct outfit. All of its top leaders within the state had been neutralized and the outfit, in comparison to the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), was considered to be of little significance. Although the outfit’s cadres, both Kashmiris and Pakistani nationals were arrested and killed on a regular basis in the valley, the threat perception from the outfit had remained an all-time low.

Notwithstanding the attention the JeM has attracted since Pulwama, the outfit has actually been responsible for only a fraction of actual violence in the state in the past two years. Two other outfits, the LeT and the HM, have orchestrated majority of the attacks. While both the JeM and LeT have been Pakistan based and consist of primarily Pakistani cadres, the HM, arguably the most potent outfit operating in the state, is indigenous, composed of local cadres. Added to the militancy landscape are two smaller outfits, espousing the causes of global Jihadism. One is linked with the al Qaeda and the other with the Islamic State. In New Delhi’s opinion both these have a handful of followers and neither pose any significant security threat.

This clear pattern of denial and miscalculation could have played a great role in the Pulwama attack, which may have been inspired by the JeM’s ideology, but had been planned within Kashmir. The slow process of RDX accumulation, use of an old stolen vehicle, presence of local handlers and the involvement of a ‘Grade C’ militant who had been let off in the previous years, are now the subjects of a detailed investigation by the National Investigative Agency.[18] Not surprisingly, the J&K governor admitted that the administration had no intelligence of a suicide mission being planned by the outfit. In the name of a hardline policy that is different from the policies of the yesteryears, Kashmir is continuously being driven to brink. A lot has been spoken about how a security force-centric approach would rid Kashmir off militancy. But as a strategic commentator points out, “But truth be told, the Indian defence forces, including the army units manning the Line of Control (LoC) and those internal security components deployed in J&K, are woefully under-equipped and often lack even the most rudimentary technologies now available to combat terrorism.”[19]

**Future trends**
On 26 February, Indian Air force fighter jets conducted preemptive strike on a JeM training camp in Balakot. New Delhi claimed that the ‘biggest training camp’ run by Maulana Yousf Azhar, brother in law of JeM Chief Maulana Masood Azhar was destroyed. “A very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis who were being trained for fidayeen action were eliminated”, India's foreign secretary said.

Pulwama attack may not unveil the specter of large scale VBIED attacks in Kashmir, as suggested by the HM leader Riyaz Naikoo. Neither would every child in Kashmir would become a suicide bomber in the coming months, inspired by the likes of Adil Ahmad Dar. However, as the government invests enormously on internationally isolating Pakistan and at the same time, alienating Kashmiris with a range of sanctioned misadventures, while keeping democracy under suspended animation in the state, the security situation could only be projected to deteriorate. The threat to kill all those who take up gun, may lead to only a temporary dip in militant capacities, but such a policy is inherently inadequate to bring durable peace to the state.

End Notes


[8] Ibid.


India’s Defence Diplomacy with Myanmar: State of Play

Bibhu Prasad Routray

Abstract

New Delhi’s strategic objectives in Myanmar remain important, yet ambiguous. Firstly, the country is a lynchpin for India’s Act East policy. Secondly, it is a theatre where New Delhi is seeking to challenge the decades-old dominance of Beijing. And thirdly, Myanmar holds key to ending the remnants of the insurgencies in India’s northeast. To fulfil these objectives, New Delhi intends to boost the bilateral defence ties. While India’s Act East policy is a work in progress and the insurgents from North East India have not been dislodged from Myanmar’s territory, the ties between the defence forces of both countries have demonstrated signs of strengthening. For fulfilment of strategic objectives, however, there is a need to go beyond rhetoric and work on deliverables.
Introduction

Real or anticipated joint operations between the Indian Army and their counterparts in Myanmar hogs the media headlines quite regularly. In the past couple of years, such operations have reportedly taken place or are planned against the insurgent outfits operating in India’s northeast, who have found safe haven in the ungoverned spaces of Myanmar, primarily on the border region. The impact of such operations is not known, as the insurgents continue to be in Myanmar and their activities includes intermittent hit and run attacks, extortion and recruitment of new cadres. It appears that barring minor losses such as destruction of their camps and killing of handful of insurgents, they are under little pressure either from the surgical strikes by the Indian forces or from the joint and coordinated operations by forces from both countries. This shortcoming notwithstanding, defence cooperation between the two countries has witnessed considerable progress signifying the fact that India’s stakes in Myanmar is much larger and can continue even with the lack of achievement in curbing the activities of the insurgents of the northeast.

Flurry of Visits

Although New Delhi reversed its earlier Myanmar policy and started engaging with the military junta in the 1990s, the May 2012 visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the country initiated an era of deeper engagement between the two countries. Singh’s visit focused on bilateral economic relations. It was followed by then foreign minister Salman Khurshid and Air Chief Marshal N A K Browne visiting the country in November-December that year and the January 2013 visit by then Indian Defence Minister, A K Antony and the Indian Naval Air Chief. In early September 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Myanmar during three MoUs with respect to maritime cooperation were signed between both countries. Both countries ‘reviewed the security situation in their immediate neighbourhood and agreed upon the special need for enhancing closer bilateral cooperation in maritime security. They also agreed to foster mutually beneficial and deeper defence cooperation between the two countries.’[1]

Modi’s visit had been preceded by a four-day trip by Indian army chief General Bipin Rawat to Myanmar to discuss ongoing defense cooperation. In May 2017, Rawat met with a number of high-ranking officials, including Foreign Minister and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, military chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar’s army
Two months later, in July 2017, Commander-in-chief of Myanmar armed forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing undertook a rare eight day visit to India. His schedule included meetings with the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, and the National Security advisor. Min Aung’s previous visit to India was in July 2015.

After two months, in September 2017, Myanmar’s Navy chief came calling to India. During his four-day trip (18-21 September) trip, Admiral Tin Aung San met India’s Defence Minister and the chiefs of India’s Army, Navy and Air force. The timing of the visit was important especially when Myanmar was seeking support for its actions on the Rohingya amid wide-spread criticism by several countries. India had provided ample indications that, like China, it is with the government of Myanmar and is willing to ignore the blatant abuse of human rights by the Myanmar military at the altar of real politik. The joint statement during Modi’s visit had referred only to the attacks by Rohingya terrorists in which Myanmar security forces had lost their lives and had made no references to the refugee crisis following the military operations carried out by Myanmar against the Rohingya.

In July 2018, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and her Myanmarese counterpart Wunna Maung Lwin met in New Delhi under the first ever Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) Meeting.

In September 2018, Indian Air chief Marshal B. S. Dhanoa visited Myanmar. The visit was followed up by a 78-member tri-services delegation of senior Indian military officials to Myanmar in December 2018. The visit was part of the first-ever exchange programme to enhance mutual trust between the forces of two countries guarding the border. Coinciding with the visit, 120 Myanmarese defence personnel came to India. Indian air force facilitated the travel of these personnel some of whom were travelling with their spouses.

Capacity Building and More

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has identified India as one of the five top sellers for weapons for the Myanmar military. The other countries are China, Russia, Israel and Ukraine. Primarily directed at increasing its profile in Myanmar and seeking its cooperation against the northeastern insurgents, India has
described its defence cooperation as a tool for ‘better border management’ and ‘capacity building’ exercise for the
Myanmar military. In addition to the armed forces, it has also sought to assist the nascent Myanmar Navy.

Both countries conducted their first ever joint Naval exercise in March 2013. A frigate and a corvette of the
Myanmarese Navy participated in the exercise in the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of Visakhapatnam. Subsequently,
both navies engaged in coordinated patrol along the maritime boundary between Myanmar’s Coco Island and
India’s Landfall Island, the northern most island of the Andaman group.[4]

In the same year, New Delhi agreed to assist Myanmar in building Offshore Patrol Vehicles (OPVs) in Indian
Dockyards and also to train their pilots on Russian Mi-35 helicopters. India supplied four Islander maritime patrol
aircraft and naval gun-boats and a few 105mm light artillery guns, mortars, grenade-launchers and rifles. Over the
years, the supply was expanded to include bailey bridges, communication gear, night-vision devices, war-gaming
software, sonars, acoustic domes and directing gear. A $37.9 million deal for supply of lightweight torpedoes was
finalised in March 2017.

During Myanmar Navy chief Admiral Tin Aung San’s September 2017 visit, New Delhi promised to consider
supplying arms to Myanmar. Both sides discussed the supply of OPVs, which had remained unimplemented since
A K Antony’s trip in 2013. Both countries also talked about ‘training Myanmar sailors on top of the courses taught
to its army officers at elite Indian defense institutions’. [5]In contrast, a week back, Britain had announced that it
was suspending its training programme for the Myanmar military, demanding it take steps to end the violence
against civilians.

The bilateral ties were to further strengthen in the subsequent months. In November 2017, 31 officers from Indian
and Myanmar military participated in the six-days India-Myanmar Bilateral Military Exercise (IMBAX-2017), which
was organized in a newly established joint training node at Umroi in India’s Meghalaya state. [6] Hailed as the first
military training exercise between both countries on United National Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), the
exercise focused on training Myanmar forces on the conduct of such operations.

Continuing the trend, in March 2018, Myanmar participated in the MILAN naval exercises hosted by India at Port
Blair. In the same month, between March 15 and 18, both sides held the sixth iteration of the India-Myanmar
Coordinated Patrol Exercise (CORPAT) as scheduled. The third exercise of the month was the nine-day long India-
Myanmar Naval Exercise 2018 (IMNEX-18). The exercise was held in the Bay of Bengal in two phases: a harbour
phase at Visakhapatnam, followed by an at-sea phase. ‘On the Indian side, vessels included anti-submarine
warfare corvette INS Kamorta, Shivalik (Project 17)-class frigate INS Sahyadri, and a Type 877EK ‘Kilo’-class
submarine, along with one helicopter and two Hawk advance jet trainer aircraft, and on the Myanmar side, vessels
included the frigate UMS King Sin Phyu Shin and offshore patrol vessel UMS Inlay.’ [7]

In July 2018, during Sushma Swaraj and Wunna Maung Lwin’s JCC Meeting, a joint statement announced that
New Delhi would assist modernisation of Myanmar’s Army and Navy to upgrade military to military cooperation
to the next level. The statement issued referred to India’s willingness to help Myanmar create ‘a national army,
cooperation in the field of IT, in dealing with emerging security challenges, and military to military cooperation
including in terms of training.’[8] The JCC also delved extensively on having better coordination and cooperation
between their security forces to deal with insurgent groups, particularly those from the northeast region.

The second edition of the India-Myanmar bilateral army exercise, IMBEX 2018-19, was held between 14 to 19
January 2019 at Chandimandir Military Station that houses the headquarters of the Western Command. 15 officers
each from the Indian and the Myanmar army participated in the six day exercise to train the Myanmar delegation
for participation in United Nations peace keeping operations. [9]

Lack of Deliverables

For a country that has global power ambitions, India’s policy of appeasement with Myanmar, which is in constant
search of international investment and support for its nascent economy, is intriguing. As the world condemns the
Myanmar military for its systematic violation of rights of the Rohingya and other minorities, New Delhi has maintained a studious silence in the hope that such capitulation would reap strategic benefits. In the process, New Delhi seems to have surrendered a key leverage that it possessed vis-à-vis Myanmar.

Some strategic thinkers opine the defence cooperation with Myanmar has allowed New Delhi to develop crucial ties with Myanmar military. Such ties with the defacto rulers of the country were non-existent before and in future, may allow New Delhi to pursue its strategic objectives in that country even in the scenario of a coup dislodging the civilian government headed by Aung San Suu Kyi. New Delhi also believes that when Myanmar’s civilian leadership has made common cause with the military, it makes little sense to flag the Rohingya issue. The future will bear testimony to the success or failure of such a policy.

At present, however, results of the deepening defence ties have remained a mixed bag. The remnants of the northeastern insurgencies continue to find safe haven in that country. Arms and drugs smuggling between the porous Indo-Myanmar border continues to be a major problem. Indian intelligence agencies believe that China could be assisting these Myanmar-based insurgents to destabilize the northeastern states.[10] The fact that India had to launch unilateral surgical strikes in Myanmar against the insurgents- in June 2015[11] and July 2018[12]- underlines that absence of any tangible cooperation between the two armies. India’s capacity building projects for the Myanmar military by providing them with weapons too has not adversely affected the insurgents operating in the northeast. Intelligence reports in the past have suggested that officers within the Myanmar military, for monetary benefits, have not only tipped off the insurgents about impending operations, but have used weapons provided by India in their internal wars, against their own ethnic minorities.[13]

India’s defence diplomacy in Myanmar is indeed a part of its overall scaled-up presence in Southeast Asia. However, it still remains at a nascent level and has certainly not grown to a stage where India can start expecting strategic results. Declarations such as ‘upgrading military cooperation to the next level’ and ‘assisting Myanmar to create a national army’ have little meaning when New Delhi fails to supply OPVs after making promises in 2013. Acquiescing to Myanmar’s out rightly appalling position on the Rohingya may please the military in that country, but would do little to protect India’s interests vis-à-vis the Chinese. There is certainly a need for greater effort and a sustained policy for engagement. New Delhi will have to move beyond rhetoric and implement measures that fulfil its strategic objectives in Myanmar.

End Notes


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