



# DEFENCE AND DIPLOMACY

IN PURSUIT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

VOL. 11 NO. 1

ISSN 2347 - 3703

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2021

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# MAOIST INSURGENCY IN NEPAL: SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

UDAY PRATAP SINGH

In Nepal violence has played a major role in their politics. To substantiate this, two events were important. First was the Kot massacre that occurred in the year 1846. It was the Rana Dynasty that reduced the powers of the king. And second was the Royal Palace massacre in June 2001. In due course, the monarchy rule was ended in 2008. The Naxalite movement in West Bengal inspired the insurgent activities in Nepal. Like India, the Nepali insurgent movement was deeply embedded with the social and economic conditions of its society. It has emerged from an idealistic Communist Party. The Maoist insurgents were successful in overthrowing the national government. They controlled almost 80 per cent of the country's population. They were successful not only through military action but also through proper cooperation with several political parties of Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

The causes of the communist insurgency in Nepal were political and socio-economic compulsions that began in the last decade of the

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Dr **Uday Pratap Singh** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Iswar Saran PG College, Central University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, U.P.

1. S. DeBlicek, "Why Mao? Maoist Insurgencies in India and Nepal", *Journal of Peace Conflict and Development*, University of Bradford, UK, issue 9, July 2006, p. 16.

twentieth century. Nepal's young, educated and rural populations contributed immensely in bringing the political change. Despite resort to change after the return of democracy in the 1990s, "In 2004 Nepal ranked 140th on the HDI (Human Development Index), with 82.5% of its population living below the poverty line and approximately 20% classified as undernourished".<sup>2</sup>

### **POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

In politics of Nepal the largest parties have failed to consolidate their organisational base in the vast hinterland of Nepal. Instead of strengthening new leadership in non-urban areas where 83.4 per cent of the population lives, the first ruling party of new democratic Nepal appointed the same classes that had ruled under the previous regime to continue to govern the provinces. In 1994, when a united front of communist parties took control, "the hopes were very high that the parties would work over the issues of injustice and poverty, but the opportunism and disunity that they brought with them only contributed to a feeling of malaise".<sup>3</sup>

### **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

In recent years, one saw a consolidation of several élite groups in the proper management of the state. It was largely dominated by Nepal's civil service employees. As a result, the number of civil service employees rose from 69 per cent to 89 per cent in the mid-1980s.<sup>4</sup> For social perspective one has to rely on UNDP's 2004 *Human Development Report*. The report showed concerns about the Dalit population of Nepal along with literacy, life expectancy, and income. This type of inequality undoubtedly forced radicals to resort to violent action so that social, political and economic order could be set up in Nepal. Deepak Thapa observes this as "hope in a radical solution" and "a function of poverty rather than a consequence of Maoist ideology".<sup>5</sup> In 1991, Nepal witnessed peaceful solution to the problem of democracy but it failed to implement.

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2. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 141, 148, 162.

3. See S. DeBlicek, n. 1, p. 20.

4. Thapa and Sajapati, *Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996-2004* (UK, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), p. 77.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 79.

The important issue was, why did Nepal's radical groups opt for Maoism? The reason perhaps was the Chinese ideological influence on Nepalese population. One of the reasons for this was Mohan Bikram Singh joining the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN); by 1957 he had attained high stature in the party. He was successful in developing a strong communist organisation. Generally, it was found that the CPN underwent a series of political differences especially when one saw the deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s.

Soon, Mohan Bikram Singh expected an urgent election for a new constitutional assembly. He was instrumental in establishing a radical Maoist wing in the mid-1960s. But it did not work for long as there was much internal strife within the party. This led to the establishment of his own party in 1983, known as the Communist Party of Nepal (Masal). Instead of promoting democracy in Nepal he insisted on a constitutional assembly. At that time, he could not muster much support from the Nepali people. While accepting the reality of Nepal's politics he left his district and formed a more extreme Maoist organisation that could take advantage of poor people. The primary reason was that for five decades poor people had been indoctrinated against participating in parliamentary politics.<sup>6</sup> It was CPN(M) that learnt much from Mohan Bikram Singh's style of functioning in 1996. "Peoples War" was launched and was led by Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai. Consequently, the communist insurgency was successful when it expanded its main areas in western Nepal. It covered almost 80 per cent of the country. The functioning of CPN (M) is similar to that of the Indian communist party. It mobilised the underprivileged rural people because there was much dissension within the party about accepting democratic rule in the country. Unlike the Naxalites, the CPN (M) is imbued with a personality cult. The communist leadership tried to spread discontent with national policies. In the early phase of operation, it targeted "class enemies". The class enemies included members of other communist parties but did nothing against the state security forces.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Ibid., p. 67.

7. S. DeBlieck, n. 1, p. 24.

## CONFLICT ZONE

The insurgents began violent activities in more than 68 of the 75 districts that comprised Nepal. It affected both the moderate and extreme elements in these districts. For example, in mid-western Nepal, though one finds the official presence in the districts of Kalilot, Jajarkot, Rolpa, Salyan, Rukum and Pyuthan, one can also sense the limited presence of Maoist insurgents in these district headquarters. The Home Ministry of Nepal has classified these districts as 'Sensitive Class A'. 'Sensitive Class B' districts are comprised of Achha, Dang, Gorkha, Dolakha, Sindhupalchowk, Sindhuli, Ramechhap, Karvepalanchowk and Surkhet. There were 17 'Sensitive Class C' districts. These were Arghakhachi, Baglung, Bardiya, Dailekh, Dhading, Dopla, Gulmi, Jumla, Khotang, Lalitpur, Lamjung, Makwanpur, Nuwakot, Okhaldhunga, Parbat, Tanahu and Udaypur.<sup>8</sup>

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The government of Nepal under King Gyanendra took a firm decision against the Maoist insurgency. The Royal Nepalese Army was deployed to crush the Maoist insurgency in 2001. Instead, it resulted in cruelty. King Gyanendra had no option but to declare an emergency on February 1, 2005. Some 3,000 people were put behind bars. The number of local people ranged between 8,000 and 200,000.<sup>9</sup> Unparliamentary language by both sides forced Amnesty International to comment that the war has "destroyed human rights in the countryside." Even today, Nepal is facing law-and-order situations.

The King tried his best to tame the Nepali Maoists, but he failed to do so. This boosted the Maoists' morale and in November 2005, the Maoists entered into an agreement with the then Nepali government to constitute a new assembly to determine the future structural course of action. It led to a boycott of the local elections called by the King in February 2006. The CPN(M) took a decision to block the major roads in mid-March 2006. It showed results when the people gathered around Kathmandu to end the rule of monarchy and established democracy

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8. Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1995).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

in Nepal. There were mass protests that shook King Gyanendra and forced him to reinstate the parliament on April 24, 2006.

The army was used by the Royal Nepal Army against the Maoist insurgents. In the initial phase, the Royal Nepal Army expectations were not up to the mark. It had never experienced such type of resolute and well-organised ideological rebellion. There were at least 23 operations between November 2001 and December 2002. The Maoists surged ahead in all these operations except three or four.<sup>10</sup> During these operations, army camps were destroyed and the insurgents captured most of the weapons. The army then expanded its base. The communist insurgents' strength rose too. It was almost 1 lakh by April 2006 when the second Jan Andolan began. It brought a change in the political set-up of Nepali politics. The Maoist uprising resulted in a stalemate where the army could only protect its cantonments and completely failed to check the Maoist insurgency in urban or rural areas. This ongoing rivalry polluted the whole peace process in Nepal. It was soon found that if the problem was not solved the insurgency would relaunch its offensive action against the government.

### **NEPAL'S MAOIST STRATEGY**

We have seen that there has been great transformation in Mao's strategy since the Nepali insurgents came to power. What is Mao's strategy? Mao believed in a long-drawn-out war, both political and military. Though there was internal murmuring amongst the Nepali people, Mao's strategy did not collapse altogether. The insurgents have acted in a pragmatic manner throughout the conflict. Side by side they have also realised the necessity of an open dialogue for future rehabilitation and reconciliation with the main party to obtain the objective. These insurgents are quite aware that outright military victory is not possible without the support of the people. The Maoists realised that transition to socialism was quite a difficult task. They were ready to compromise to a certain extent and at the same time wanted to involve the domestic and external political powers.

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10. S. D. Muni, *Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: The Challenge and the Response* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2003), pp. 88-89.

## MAOIST LEADERSHIP

The leadership plays an important role in developing the Maoist insurgency and converting it into 'people's war'. The Maoist movement began in Nepal in the early 1970s. It was inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the rise of Naxal revolt in India. The Nepalese Maoists were far too occupied with the domestic ideological and leadership differences. Most of them favoured the idea that their armed struggle should be based on the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist insurgency model. The present leaders of the Maoist movement accepted the reality of the situation in Nepal because they were better educated. The high educational level of this leadership has helped them to understand the problems and link with the people's suffering. This enabled them to widen their approach so that they could carry their movement forward. The communist leadership also analysed the failure of the Maoist movements. On the other hand, with much vigour they evolved a synthesis of the idealism and the realism in true Marxist sense. Explaining his approach to 'people's war', Prachanda said:

We must also learn war by waging war. The intellectuals' instinctive tendency is that we have to learn all these things, we should read everything ... and then we can make war. These kinds of tendencies were there right from the beginning. But we said, no. This is not Maoism. This is not Marxism. This is not dialectical materialism. ... The issue is of learning through war itself.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore in 2001, he added:

In our opinion, the real key to rapid development of the people's war is the fusion between the science of proletarian revolution, on the one hand, and the needs and fighting spirit of the Nepalese people, on the other.<sup>12</sup>

The new Maoist leadership had to face tough challenges within the organisation. Tensions brewed and were reflected in such issues

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11. S. D. Muni, *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Origin and Evolution*, ISAS Working Paper, National University of Singapore, No. 111, July 28, 2010, p. 11.

12. Ibid.

related to Maoist ideology and tactics. It was soon seen in communist ideological campaign and personality clash between the Maoist Prachanda and deputy, Baburam Bhattarai. But the party was able to manage organisational unity, mainly because of Baburam Bhattarai who was above personality projection and wanted the communist insurgency to spread in Nepal.

### **SINO-NEPAL NEXUS**

Insurgency in India has cross-border linkages. As a result, border management becomes important because it affects India's internal security management. In the recent years, continuing insecurity has grown because of Chinese influence in Nepal. It has affected India badly. The India-Nepal border (1,751 km) touches twenty districts of five Indian states. The geographical nature of Nepal-China border is unlike Nepal-India border. The Sino-Nepal border passes through high mountains, and the major part of Indo-Nepal border covers rivers and plains. The Indo-Nepal border is porous and people can travel from one country to the other without visa. For mutual trade there are 22 agreed routes. Out of 22 routes, 15 are marked for land traffic. Most of the border areas pass through such routes which are undeveloped and overpopulated and where the crime rate is high. The areas are marked by poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, and an ill-equipped police force. These conditions are not conducive to growth and stability in India and Nepal. Moreover, illicit trade flourishes in forest products and wildlife. The porous border and lack of effective authority in Nepal have resulted in smuggling of drugs. There are volumes of reports that indicate that Nepal's Maoist insurgents indulge in smuggling drugs and other nefarious activities in India in order to mint money to buy arms.<sup>13</sup> Thus, drugs and mafia on the Indo-Nepal border pose a serious threat to the national security of India.

India was quite apprehensive about China's activities in Nepal. The then Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Ramesh Rokhriyal Nishank said:

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13. Nepal, *South Asia Monitor*, at <http://www.southasiamonitor.org/nepal/2006>. Accessed on July 10, 2021.



There is an increase in the activities of China in Nepal, Tibet and also Pakistan. We apprehend that there will be increase in anti-India activities on the Indo-Nepal border via Nepal, which will pose a danger to our country in the near future. Uttarakhand shares its border with China and Nepal. It shares 350 km of the LoC and 250 km of the International border with the two countries. There is a growing threat to security due to increase in the activities of China in areas bordering the state.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from strategic implications, China has developed a railway to link its border with Nepal so that Nepal dependency on India can be reduced. This is done in order to import petroleum products from China. A joint China-Nepal collaboration would not be in India's interest.

The Chinese have made their presence felt in Nepal in a big way. The net result is more and more Chinese assistance that has kept Nepal aloof. The construction of roads has provided a direct access to Nepal that is maintained through a difficult Tibetan route. To India, it is a matter of grave concern as it will give Naxalites in India much needed assistance from Nepal's borders. Moreover, the Maoist-led Nepal has been also influenced by China in its foreign policy decision-making. It would make matters worse for India as there will be enough space for Chinese agents to infiltrate on Indian soil and then try to destabilise the socio-economic system of India. China still emphasises the Sun Tzu dictum that "To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."<sup>15</sup>

### INDIA'S CONCERN

The influence of Mao's ideology of revolution has immensely shaped the normal functioning of the government where the poor people were neglected. At the same time, the communist leadership tried to expand its base. So far as Nepal was concerned, communist insurgents established their first contacts with the Naxalites of India

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14 P. Murthy, "Nepal Between India and China", *World Focus*, New Delhi, September 2010.

15 See S. Kondapalli, "India-China Relation, 2009-10", *World Focus*, New Delhi, September 2010.

in the 1970s. Reports prove that Prachanda was a major player in the political game by merging India's Maoist Community Centre (MCC) and the People's War group.

### **CREATION OF COMPACT REVOLUTIONARY ZONE**

The Naxalites, with the help of Nepali insurgents, had planned to form a "Red Corridor". It would stretch from the border with Nepal to Kerala. The idea of creating a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ), or the Red Corridor, came into existence in August 2001. It expanded from the jungle tracts of Adilabad (Andhra Pradesh) to Nepal and passes through the jungle tracts of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Nepal. It was conceptualised at Siliguri by Maoist leaders. The CRZ was basically an extension of Maoism in the subcontinent. Today the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) has assumed a greater role to play in the country's politics. "The concept and reality of CRZ in India had indeed made big strides. The consolidations in West Bengal and Bihar are the key to the achievements of the CRZ. The Naxalites plan to use West Bengal as a corridor between their areas of domination in India and Nepal."<sup>16</sup>

The important question is, what are the implications of CRZ? The impact of CRZ could be seen as follows:

- **Free Movement:** With such kind of aggressive arrangement, the Naxalite insurgents can freely move throughout the CRZ including crossing over to Nepal. In future it might launch joint operations. The following regions are reportedly being used by CPN-M cadres:
  - Uttarakhand: Baluakot, Banbasa, Dharchula, Garbygang, Golagad, Jhulaghat, Rauthi and Sirkha.
  - Uttar Pradesh: Nautanwa, Sonauli, Tuthibari, and jungle tracks in Baharaich, Balrampur, Kheri, Maharajganj and Philibit, districts along the India-Nepal border.
  - Bihar: Bhaisatlan, Dhobini, Haraiya, Mahadevnath, Mahuwa, Raxaul and Sikta.
  - West Bengal: Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Siliguri districts.

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<sup>16</sup> R. K. Kujur, "From CRZ to SEZ: Naxal Reins of Terror", April 21, 2007, at [www.ipcs.com](http://www.ipcs.com). Accessed on July 12, 2021.

- **Sanctuaries:** Depending upon the role of the state's security force, Maoist cadres can establish safe havens and hideouts for training, operations, medical aid, evading prosecution/contact with security forces. CPN-M cadres are reported to have taken shelter in:
  - Uttarakhand: Banbasa, Dharchula, Jhulaghat, Pithoragarh and Tanakpur.
  - Uttar Pradesh: Baghekhane, Bankati, Dhenera, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Nautanwa, Nichloul, Sampuran Nagar, Thulibari, and Varanasi.
  - Bihar: Bhaisatolan, Chhauradano, Gardi, Ghorshan, Narkatiyagang, Ramnagar, Sirsamu, Sonbarsa and Valmikinagar.
  - West Bengal: Bijanbai, Darjeeling, Manebhangan, Mirik, New Jalpaiguri, Pokhri, Siliguri and Sukhiya.
- **Training:** The Naxalite affected areas are under developed and from there joint training camps can be organised safely. It has been observed that a few Maoists have been possibly trained in Bihar's districts: (i) Aurangabad, (ii) West Champaran and Jharkhand's districts, (i) Kodarma, (ii) Palamu. There are reports that CPI-ML (PW) cadres are imparting specialist training to Nepal's Maoists in Ropla district.

### RECENT FATALITIES IN NEPAL

The Communist rule in Nepal has denied justice and undermined the rule of law in the country in recent times. There have been people protests against the Maoists but they were brutally crushed by the insurgents. One cannot forget the violence that erupted in Nepal in 2015. Though the Tarai people protested against the new government, in that protest some 65 people, including 10 policemen, were killed. Many such incidents have occurred from time to time. On January 23, 2019, a Nepali policeman was shot and killed in police custody. Shambhu Sada, a member of the Dalit community, was found dead in the police cell in Dhanusha district on June 10, 2020. Though Shambhu had surrendered two weeks earlier, the police claimed it was a suicide. Similarly, Rajkumar Chepang, a member of Chepang indigenous community, was brutally tortured to death on July 22,

2020. Such deaths are unending. Though the National Human Rights Commission took notice of these incidents, there was no concrete result. The nature of Nepalese communist insurgents tried its best to subdue the people but they could not succeed in making Nepal a communist state.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With the detailed examination of the various phases of Maoist activities, it becomes important to answer the major analytical question: Do Maoists in India and Nepal, today and in future, pose a qualitatively and quantitatively different and a more serious threat to security than in the past? How can the Maoist upsurge in Nepal be eliminated, or at least contained?

One can argue that there is a need for the governments of India and Nepal to review their current strategy of tackling Maoism, and reorient a comprehensive agenda of protection and affirmative action that would wean away the tribals from the influence of the Maoists. The governments in both the countries face political pressure to counter the threat to internal security. They must commence diplomatic means to get the viable support of friendly states to check infiltration by insurgents. Talks must be initiated by the Centre and state representatives and all militant groups. To solve this difficult problem, all political parties should come together to take a united stand. What is more important is the involvement of the people in the fight against the Maoists. The recent incidents of backlash by the public against the Maoists in some states are a positive indicator. Moreover, the central and eastern parts of India and Nepal as a whole are relatively undeveloped as compared to other parts of the country. The governments must tackle the problem of social disparities on a war footing. Though complete eradication of poverty cannot be achieved instantly, poverty could be reduced to a great extent by the government fulfilling the demand for development amongst the local masses.

This could be more effectively done by central schemes with liberal funding. Moreover, the government must rely on psychological and

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17 "No Law, No Justice, No States for Victims, The Culture of Impunity in Post-Conflict Nepal", November 20, 2020, at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/11/20/no-law-no-justice-no-state-victims/culture-impunity-post-conflict-nepal>. Accessed on July 12, 2021.

other means of warfare. The weaknesses in the Maoist ideological framework must be exposed. For India, the ouster of K. P. Sharma Oli as Nepal's Prime Minister might change the political scenario under the leadership of Sher Bahadur Deuba. In the month of September 2021 Indian and Nepali forces have set up a joint help desk at Banbasa in Uttarakhand's Champawat district to facilitate the crossing of the border by people of both the countries.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, both the countries began a 15-day military exercise in Pithoragarh of Uttarakhand with a focus on counter-terror drills and disaster relief operations.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, people should be made more aware of development taking place in international politics, particularly emphasising the diminishing role of Communism as we saw in the collapse of communism in the USSR. The leadership of the Maoist movement comprises the ruling elites and the cadres play a subordinate role in obtaining the objective. Socialism can be attained through peaceful methods by following democratic procedures. Many South Asian and South American states have not progressed despite strong leftist movements. In the era of globalisation and liberalisation, applying the Maoist strategy is not significant for both India and Nepal.

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18 "Indian, Nepalese forces set up joint help desk at border", *Hindustan Times*, September 5, 2021.

19 "Indo-Nepal joint military exercise in Pithoragarh", *The Times of India*, September 21, 2021.