

FAULTLINES

The K.P.S. Gill Journal of Conflict & Resolution

Volume 22

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edited by
AJAI SAHNI



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THE INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



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FAULTLINES: WRITING ON CONFLICT & RESOLUTION

Edited by Ajai Sahni

FAULTLINES - THE SERIES

FAULTLINES focuses on various sources and aspects of existing and emerging conflict in the Indian subcontinent. Terrorism and low-intensity wars, communal, caste and other sectarian strife, political violence, organised crime, policing, the criminal justice system and human rights constitute the central focus of the Journal.

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Foreword

In 2009, it seemed all of South Asia was aflame. According to partial data compiled by the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (SATP), 29,637 people died in the multiple insurgencies and terrorist movements in the region (this is excluding Afghanistan), and it seemed that things could only get worse. And yet, less than a decade down the line, total fatalities in these conflicts had fallen to 2,143 in 2017, and total 772 in 2018, till July 8, suggesting further declines in the annual toll [all data, SATP].

More significantly, enduring movements of violence have collapsed. Sri Lanka saw 15,565 fatalities in 2009, but, with the comprehensive defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, has not recorded even a single terrorism-linked killing since 2010. In Nepal, the bloody Maoist insurgency had already arrived at a formal conclusion in 2006, but occasional fatalities in factional feuds continued for several years thereafter; however, Nepal has also recorded no insurgency-linked fatality since 2013. Bangladesh was thought by some to be the 'next Afghanistan' in the early 2000s, and there were deep apprehensions that the radicalizing politics within the country would provide fertile ground for the proliferation of extremist cadres pushed out of the Afghan theatre in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the consequent Operation Enduring Freedom launched by US-led international coalition. Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina has, however, used every power at her disposal to neutralize Islamist extremism and terrorism in her country since assuming power in 2009, and the Islamists now have little room to hide. There were 80 insurgency/terrorism

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related fatalities in Bangladesh in 2017 – but an overwhelming majority of these, 65, were alleged ‘Left Wing Extremists’, who continue to be killed in significant numbers, though visible indices of their own violent activities are negligible. Bhutan has seen little terrorism, even in the most turbulent years for the region; some overflows from India’s Northeast region had come to afflict it on the margins in the 1990s and early 2000s. Even these small irritants – more a problem for India, as a result of insurgent safe havens on Bhutanese soil – have now disappeared, since the expulsion of all insurgent formations in 2004. Though occasional attacks were recorded in subsequent years, there has been no fatality since 2009.

It is principally India and Pakistan that continue to be afflicted by a multiplicity of movements of armed violence. Even these have seen sharp declines in long term trends of violence, albeit with transient variations. The Maoist insurgency along India’s eastern board has suffered massive leadership losses, and has lost its dominance in most of its erstwhile strongholds. Maoist violence peaked in 2010, with 1,180 fatalities, but has gradually diminished, bottoming out at 251 in 2015, and then rising again, to 433 in 2016 and 333 in 2017. 250 persons have already been killed in Left Wing Extremist (LWE) violence this year (SATP data till July 8). In India’s Northeast, most insurgencies have collapsed, with at least 51 armed groups in various agreements or talks with the Government, to find a ‘peaceful solution’ to their divergent troubles. The remaining active groups are principally barely surviving fragments of once-dominant insurgencies. They have little remaining political legitimacy and essentially engage in extortion and other criminal activities.

The preponderance of all continuing violence in the region is now accounted for by, or emanates from Pakistan. Pakistan itself recorded 1,260 fatalities in 2017, down from a peak of 11,704 in 2009. Terrorism and separatist violence in Jammu & Kashmir, fed by safe havens and resources provided by Pakistan, resulted in

358 fatalities in 2017, down from 4,507 in 2001, the worst year of the insurgency, but up from enormously improved conditions in 2012, when 117 lives were lost. To Islamabad's account one may also add the rising carnage in Afghanistan, again fed by explicit state support from Pakistan.

Despite the continuing harm Pakistan does – to the neighbourhood and the wider world, of course, but also to itself – the terrorist enterprise in the region appears to be unravelling. Apart from a few rogue powers, the earlier and enormous 'tolerance of terrorism' practiced by the world powers and international institutions, has largely dissipated. Pakistan's 'credible deniability' has been entirely discredited, and Islamabad now stands entirely exposed. It is a different matter that no great power has yet arrived at a workable response to a nuclear state sponsor of terrorism – beyond appeasement and an occasional and relatively mild flourish of the stick. The trajectory of history, however, is grinding slowly against the Pakistani enterprise. The country's economy is in crisis, and though much hope has been pinned on the 'all weather friendship' with China and the CPEC project, the numbers appear stacked against Pakistan. Moreover, given China's large investments not only in Pakistan, but increasingly in Afghanistan as well, Beijing will seek stability in the region. Pakistan's terrorist adventurism sits poorly with this objective.

Nevertheless, a new dynamic of destabilization is evolving. The collapse of global equations of power is at the heart of this emerging source of strife, with marginalized players as well as a few ambitious runts seeking to occupy what are perceived as vacated spaces – at least temporarily, with some success. Deeper undercurrents, the slow movement of demographic change, accumulating environmental catastrophe, an increasingly unequal and inequitable economic order, and a global crisis of leadership, ideology and, indeed, decency, threaten all order. While present movements of violence may decline, consequently, future

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discord, potentially greatly augmented by rapidly accelerating technological transformation, is an overwhelming likelihood. Given Pakistan's history, the profile of its leadership and population, and its enduring trajectory, the country will remain a probable location and source of regional instability, even as the wider region's own vulnerabilities augment.

Unsurprisingly, three papers in the current volume of *Faultlines* focus or touch upon Pakistan. There is also an effort to examine the weakening insurgencies of India's Northeast, as well as the diminishing Maoist rampage. Even as we contemplate and prepare for the turmoil of the future, the disarrays of our present must be brought to order.

Ajai Sahni

July 10, 2018

Pakistan

The Unabated Killings of the Hazaras[♦]

Tilak Devasher*

If there ever was a sign of the demise of the Pakistani state it is the killing of the Hazara community of Quetta¹

The persecution of minorities in Pakistan in recent decades has been systematic, sustained and continuous. Even among the minorities, “The targeting of the Shia Hazaras² of Balochistan is one of the most violent and persistent persecution (*sic*) of any community in Pakistan on account of religious beliefs.”³ Not surprisingly many have termed it ‘ethnic cleansing’ while the BBC in 2013 had termed Quetta “hell on earth” and that

♦ Portions of the article have been excerpted from the author’s forthcoming book on the region.

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1 Khaled Ahmed, *Sleepwalking To Surrender: Dealing With Terrorism In Pakistan*, Penguin Random House, Gurgaon, 2016, p. 273.

2 Though not all Hazaras are Shias the majority are.

3 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC), 2013, Balochistan: Giving the People a chance: Report of a Fact-Finding Mission, June 2013, <http://www.hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/pdf/Balochistan%20Report%20New%20Final.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2018).

‘Quetta’s Hazara community is on the front line of Pakistan’s battle with violent extremism.’⁴ Since 2002, close to 3,000 Shias have been killed, most of them belonging to the Hazara community.⁵ A popular, though macabre, saying in Quetta is that a Hazara is born in Afghanistan, grows up in Pakistan and is buried in Iran.⁶

The wanton killings have come to such a pass that the pro-active Chief Justice of Pakistan, Mian Saqib Nisar, was compelled to observe, on April 10, 2018 that his “head hangs in shame due to targeted killings of the Hazara Shia community.”⁷ A month later he termed the attacks “ethnic cleansing”⁸ adding that, in his opinion, the Hazara killings were “equivalent to wiping out an entire generation.”⁹

The systematic targeting of the Hazaras has been compounded by the inability or unwillingness of the state to prevent further attacks or prosecute the perpetrators who openly proclaim their involvement.

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- 4 Mobeen Azhar, ‘Hell on Earth: Inside Quetta’s Hazara community’, *BBC World Service*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22248500> (accessed May 15, 2018).
 - 5 Mushtaq Rajpar, ‘No end in sight’, *The News*, October 19, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/238136-No-end-in-sight> (accessed May 15, 2018).
 - 6 Farid Kasi, ‘Feeding the forces of Extremism,’ *Newsline*, February 2014, <http://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/feeding-the-forces-of-extremism/> (accessed May 15, 2018).
 - 7 ‘CJP says ‘head hangs in shame’ over Hazara Shia killings’, *Pakistan Today*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/04/10/cjp-says-head-hangs-in-shame-over-hazara-shia-killings/> (accessed May 15, 2018).
 - 8 Muhammad Zafar, ‘CJP calls killing of Hazaras ‘ethnic cleansing’, *The Express Tribune*, May 11, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1707695/1-hazara-killings-tantamount-ethnic-cleansing-cjp/> (accessed May 15, 2018).
 - 9 Syed Ali Shah, ‘Hazara killings tantamount to wiping out an entire generation, says chief justice’, *Dawn*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407011> (accessed May 15, 2018).

The targeting of the Hazaras is not an isolated process. It forms part of the larger problem of the targeting of Pakistan's Shia community, which constitutes about 20 per cent of the country's overwhelmingly Muslim population. The Hazaras in Balochistan, numbering about half a million, have been particularly vulnerable to targeted attacks due to their distinctive facial features and Shia religious affiliation. Despite being forced to live in virtual ghettos in Quetta, they continue to suffer the same fate while going to/returning from pilgrimages to Iran, or while going about their daily lives. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW), "There is no travel route, no shopping trip, no school run, no work commute that is safe."¹⁰

Recognising this, the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement on October 23, 2016, urged the Pakistan Government to bring to justice the perpetrators of the preceding terrorist attacks on Shia Muslims, which killed over 40 people, including several children. The attacks had been carried out by the banned Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).¹¹

WHO ARE THE HAZARAS?

There are at least three theories about the origins of the Persian-speaking Hazaras.¹²

According to scholars like Armenius Vambery,¹³ Mountstuart Elphinston,¹⁴ Alexander Burns¹⁵ and H.W. Bellew,¹⁶ the

10 Human Rights Watch, 'We are the Walking Dead: Killings of Shia Hazaras in Balochistan, Pakistan.' June 2014, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/pakistan0614_ForUpload.pdf (accessed May 15, 2018).

11 Malik Siraj Akbar, 'Who Is Killing Pakistan's Shias?' *Huffington Post*, October 26, 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/malik-siraj-akbar/who-is-killing-pakistans_b_8396140.html (accessed May 15, 2018).

12 They should not be confused with the Hindko-speaking largely Sunni Hazaras (*Hazarewal*) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

13 John Murray, *Travel in Central Asia*, 1864, London.

14 *The Kingdom of Kabul*, 1978, Nisa Traders, Quetta.

15 John Murray, *Travels into Bokhara*, 1839, London.

16 Thacker, *The Races of Afghanistan*, 1880, Spink & Co, Calcutta.

Hazaras are the descendants of Mongol soldiers who came to Afghanistan with Changez Khan's army in the 13th century. According to Bellew, Mongol soldiers were,

...planted here [central Afghanistan] in detachments of a thousand fighting men by Changez Khan in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. It is said that Changez Khan left ten such detachments here, nine in the Hazarah of Kabul and the tenth in the Hazarah of Pakli [Pakhlai] to the east of the Indus.¹⁷

According to this version, the word Hazara is the Farsi equivalent of the Mongol word *ming* or *mingan*, meaning a thousand. The Mongols divided their troops into groups of ten: *dah*, hundred: *sad*, and thousand: *hazar*.

According to Olaf Caroe, Changez Khan left Afghanistan in 1222, after having decimated large parts of it. On his death bed in 1227, he bequeathed the Afghan provinces to his second son Chaghatai. Chaghatai and his successors did not make any efforts to occupy or administer these Afghan provinces. What he left were military colonists in central Afghanistan. These Mongol colonists came to be known as Hazaras, derived from the Persian *hazar* for one thousand.¹⁸

Most western scholars and specialists on Afghanistan, such as E.F. Fox, W.K. Fraser-Tytler, E.E. Bacon, W. Thesiger and G.K. Dulling and certain Afghan scholars like Sayed Jamaluddin Al-Afghani have accepted the theory of the Hazaras as descendants of the Mongols.¹⁹

17 Sayed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras Of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic And Political Study*, 1998, Curzon Press, Surrey, p.24-25.

18 Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, 1958, OUP, Oxford. This edition is OUP, Karachi, 2009, pp.135-36.

19 Sayed Askar Mousavi, Op cit. p.26.

A variation of this theory as developed by H.F. Schurmann,²⁰ is that the Hazaras are not the descendants of the Mongols alone; rather they represent a mixture of races – Mongols, Turks, Tajik, Afghan, etc. According to this theory, the Hazaras emerged between the 13th and 15th centuries as a mixed people from the integration of several races and cultures.

According to M.H. Kakar,²¹ the Mongol soldiers who entered Afghanistan were either unmarried or did not have their wives with them; they married Tajik women of the central and neighbouring regions of Afghanistan. Inter-marriage with the Tajiks, who were of Iranian origin and spoke Farsi, influenced the language of these newcomers and laid the foundation for the new Farsi dialect known as *Hazaragi*.²²

A third theory, as developed by French scholar J.P. Ferrier,²³ is that the Hazaras have inhabited Afghanistan since the time of Alexander. As proof of his theory, he quotes battle accounts by the Greek historian Quintus Curtius, of the excursions of Alexander into central Afghanistan. Ferrier seeks to establish that the people mentioned in these battle accounts were in fact the forefathers of the people currently known as the Hazaras.²⁴

According to Afghan scholar Abdul Hay Habibi, the existence of the name *Hazara* in ancient Chinese and Greek works discredits claims that the name is of Mongol origin coined at the time of Changez Khan. Habibi maintains that *hazara* is an ancient Aryan word, meaning ‘pure-hearted’ and ‘generous’, and not in this case *hazar* (or thousand), the Farsi

20 *The Mongols of Afghanistan*, 1962, University of California.

21 *Afghanistan: A Study in International Political Development: 1880-1896*, 1971, Punjab Educational Press, Lahore.

22 Sayed Askar Mousavi, Op cit., p.29-30.

23 John Murray, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Baluchistan*, 1857, London.

24 Ibid, pp. 21-22.

translation of the Mongoli *ming*.²⁵ Subscribers to this idea point to the similar facial structure of the Hazaras with those of Buddhist murals and statues in the region.²⁶ Firdousi also mentions the fiercely resistant warriors of Babaristan which can be identified as Hazarajat or the central province of Bamyan. Famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang passed through central Afghanistan in 644 and mentioned two capitals, Ho-See-Na (Ghazni) and Ho-See-La (Hazara) in Archosia (Afghanistan).²⁷

Anthropologists and historians will no doubt continue to discuss the merits of each theory endlessly, but for our purposes suffice to say that the Hazaras were settled in central Afghanistan.

HAZARA MIGRATION INTO BRITISH INDIA/ PAKISTAN

The Hazaras moved into what is Pakistan today in three distinct waves. The first was a trickle when some Hazaras came to British India, largely to seek employment as manual labourers in construction projects like the railways (including the Bolan Pass railway connecting Quetta and Karachi), mining and quarrying. During the first Anglo-Afghan War (1838-1840) some Hazaras from Afghanistan enlisted in the British-Indian Army as scouts and infantrymen and served in 'Broadfoot's Sappers'.²⁸

The second wave was much more substantial and induced by the persecution during the reign of Amir Abdul Rehman (1880-1901) in Afghanistan. According to some reports, almost half of the Hazara population in Afghanistan was either killed or

25 Ibid, p. 23.

26 Imran Yusuf, 'Who are the Hazara?' *The Express Tribune*, October, 5 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/267225/who-are-the-hazara/> (accessed May 16, 2018).

27 Sayed Askar Mousavi, op cit, p. 22.

28 Sayed Askar Mousavi, op cit. p. 142.

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forced to flee. It was during this time, especially after 1893, that pockets of Hazara refugee population started forming in Quetta.

The third wave, after Pakistan was created, was during the Taliban period in Afghanistan in the 1990s and thereafter. The Taliban, who view the Shias as blasphemers, targeted the Hazaras for supporting the Northern Alliance, forcing them to seek refuge in Pakistan, Iran or Central Asia. In August 1998, when Taliban forces entered the northern Afghanistan city of Mazar-i-Sharif, they killed at least 2,000 civilians, the majority of them Hazaras. In the immediate aftermath of the city's occupation by the Taliban, the newly installed governor, Mullah Manon Niazi, delivered public speeches in which he termed the Hazaras "infidels" and threatened them with death if they did not convert to Sunni Islam. These events caused many Hazaras to flee.²⁹

HAZARAS IN BRITISH INDIA

While there was a smattering of Hazaras in the British Indian army in the 19th Century, a more sustained presence came about in the 20th. Lord Kitchner, the then commander-in-chief (C-in-C) in India, while touring the North West Frontier in 1904, directed Major C.W. Jacob to raise a battalion of Hazara pioneers. Previous to this, the bulk of the Hazaras in the Indian army were those enlisted in the 124th and 126th Balochistan Infantry and a troop in the Guides Cavalry. Major Jacob (later Field Marshal) created the famous 106th Hazara Pioneers by combining the 124th and 126th Balochistan Infantries. The composition of the battalion was eight companies of Hazaras and their permanent peace station was Quetta. At this point the Pioneers were mostly engaged in non-combative service such as road-building and other heavy works. During WWI,

29 Human Rights Watch, *op cit.*

the 106th Hazara Pioneers were sent to fight in Mesopotamia and later to France in 1915 where the company served with distinction. Still later it served in the NWFP, Kurdistan, Baghdad, East and North Africa and in Waziristan in 1923-24.³⁰ Due to the economic crisis threatening Britain after WWI, all Pioneer Regiments in India, including the Hazara Pioneers, were disbanded in 1932-33.³¹

However, during WWII the British recruited more Hazaras in the British Indian Army. Some thrived: one of them was General Musa Khan, who later became C-in-C of the Pakistan army and was the army chief during the 1965 war against India.³² Other Hazaras joined the colonial government of British Balochistan in the civil service; some started small businesses and cottage industries that flourished alongside the colonial economy of Quetta.³³

Gradually, over a period of time, the Hazaras were able to assimilate into British-run Quetta. A key factor for this was that many Hazara children received English education in British-run schools. They were considered to be among the most developed communities, being educated, hardworking and with impressive women's literacy figures. The women worked in hospitals, schools and universities. By the 1940s, the Hazaras, who then numbered about 50,000, were better established in the civil and military bureaucracy of the province, as compared to the much larger Baloch and Pashtun populations.³⁴

30 Sayed Askar Mousavi, op cit. p.143.

31 Ibid, p.144.

32 According to Khaled Ahmed, op cit. Musa Khan probably foresaw the fate of the Hazaras in Pakistan and left a will to get himself buried in Mazar-i-Sharif.

33 'The Shia Hazara of Pakistan; A Community Under Siege', *Minority Support Pakistan*, Ohio: USA, February 2012, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/msp/pages/181/attachments/original/1410931791/The_Hazara_Shia_of_PakistanvApril_16_edited.pdf?1410931791 (accessed May 16, 2018).

34 Ibid.

HAZARAS IN POST-PARTITION PAKISTAN

The Hazaras, living in what became Pakistan in 1947, were among the first groups to accept and endorse the leadership of Mohd Ali Jinnah. The first group of Hazaras led by one Ustad Gholam Nabi, arrived in Delhi on October 1, 1946, for a meeting with Jinnah, almost a year before Partition eventually took place. Later, they would send representatives to Karachi, the then capital of Pakistan, as a further sign of their support.³⁵

Since the creation of Pakistan, the Hazaras have become an underprivileged community there. At present about 500,000 to 600,000 of them are mainly confined to Quetta, where they are dispersed around two main areas of the city: Hazara Town and Marriabad. The second largest concentration is in Mach. Marriabad is near the cantonment and the commercial district of Alamdar Road. Hazara Town is situated at the eastern extreme of the city. A prominent Hazara businessman established it in the late 1980s as affordable housing for lower-income Hazara families as well as for recent Hazara arrivals fleeing the Talibanization of Afghanistan.³⁶

Though well integrated into Pakistan society, it was not until May 10, 1962, that the government of Pakistan formally declared their status. This was operationalized on June 15, 1963, when the City Magistrate in Quetta issued a formal notification: "This is to certify that, [the] Hazara tribe has been declared as a local tribe of Quetta division by the Government of Pakistan." Thus the Hazaras, who had migrated to British India at the turn of the century, found themselves formally, some sixty years later, as nationals of Pakistan.³⁷

The Hazaras have served Pakistan with distinction. Apart from Gen. Musa Khan, others who have won gallantry awards

35 Sayed Askar Mousavi, *op cit.* p.145.

36 The Shia Hazara of Pakistan, *op cit.*

37 Sayed Askar Mousavi, *op cit.* p.145.

include Air Marshal S.A. Changezi, Lt. Col. Zafar Ali, Flt. Lt. Samad Ali, Maj. Mohammad Ali, and Capt. Zulfiqar Ali. The last two died fighting in the Kargil War.

The eminent position that the Hazaras enjoyed got a jolt when a quota system was implemented in Balochistan in 1972, to accommodate the relatively undereducated and underrepresented population of the province. As a result, quota recruitment gradually replaced merit placements and it is believed that the last generation of all-merit Hazara civil servants had retired by the beginning of the 21st Century. The Hazaras thus lost “their educational advantages due to a system in which ethnicity was prioritized over ability.”³⁸ Consequently, the public workforce in Balochistan today is approximately 95 per cent non-Hazara, almost all Pashtun and Punjabis, with a smattering of Baloch. Prior to the quota system, the Hazaras had occupied nearly 50 per cent of all civil service positions in Quetta. According to statistics compiled from the Balochistan Public Service Commission, Hazaras today still score, on average, two to three hundred points higher on civil service and university entrance exams than do their Baloch and Pashtun counterparts. Yet, their total share of civil service positions has fallen to less than 5 per cent in 2012 due to the quota system.³⁹

With 5 per cent representation in the civil service, the Hazaras have lost the kind of access to power that they had formerly enjoyed. Now, they have to depend on others to resolve their issues. The impact of this is visible when they are faced with violence and have to run from pillar to post to get justice.

The Pakistani Hazaras have developed significant differences with the Hazaras in Hazarajat in Afghanistan.

38 The Shia Hazara of Pakistan, op cit.

39 Ibid.

For example, the two speak with different accents. While the latter speak a very pure Persian with a Hazaragi accent and dialect, the former speak a Persian greatly influenced by Urdu and English, to the point where other Hazaras understand them only with difficulty. Another major difference is the lessening of tribal prejudices and feuds among the Pakistani Hazaras, while these are still very much in existence inside Afghanistan. Such prejudices and feuds have been replaced with a unity of identity. This strong sense of identity has led to the glorification of Changez Khan, who is hailed as the true father of all Hazaras, and the supreme politico-military leader of all times.⁴⁰

SECTARIAN MILITANCY IN PAKISTAN

The targeting of the Hazaras, has to be seen in the larger context of the growth of intolerance and sectarianism in Pakistan and the large-scale killing of the Shias in different parts of the country. Over the years, the minorities in Pakistan have become victims of hate speech, frequently accused of blasphemy and subject to attacks on their person and places of worship. Mohammad Ali Jinnah's August 11, 1947, speech in the National Assembly, "you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques...", and so forth, has been all but forgotten, resurrected and dusted out only on his birth anniversary, if that. Today, not only are non-Muslims the victims but also Muslim sects like the Sufis, Ahmadis and Shias. As the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) notes: "pervasive intolerance [is] widely tolerated" and the "religious and sectarian minorities [pay] the price for that with their blood."⁴¹ According to Farahnaz Isphani, in the

40 Ibid, pp.146-47.

41 *'Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Annual Report 2012'*, HRCP (2012): Islamabad.

eighteen months period between 2012 and part of 2013, there were seventy-seven attacks against Shias, fifty-four against Ahmadis, thirty-seven against Christians, sixteen against Hindus and three against Sikhs.⁴²

Shias in Pakistan are the second largest Shia population after Iran. They are spread across the length and breadth of the country. Concentrations are in Gilgit-Baltistan, where they are in a majority, Quetta and other cities like Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and Multan. Shia mosques dot the landscape across the country.

The majority of Pakistan's Shias are adherents of the Twelver school of thought. There are also other sub-sects like the Ismailis, Khojas and Bohras. Most of the Shia are not easily distinguishable by either name or identity, except for the Hazaras, who stand out because of their facial features and language. It is the Hazaras who have borne the brunt of the killings. According to estimates, of every 10 Shias killed in Pakistan, five are Hazaras.⁴³ As a result of the targeted killings, Hazara women have started wearing *purdah* in order to hide their distinctive features, something they had not done earlier. The men have taken to wearing sunglasses to prevent identification.⁴⁴

The roots of religion playing such a fundamental part in the country's politics can be traced to the Pakistan movement and, specifically, the opportunistic use of Islam sanctioned by

42 Farahnaz Ispahani, *Purifying The Land of The Pure: Pakistan's Religious Minorities*, 2015, Harper Collins India, Noida, p. 3.

43 Uzair Hasan Rizvi, 'The Rising Threat Against Shia Muslims in Pakistan', *The Wire*, June 11, 2016, <https://thewire.in/politics/the-rising-threat-against-shia-muslims-in-pakistan> (accessed May 16, 2018).

44 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), "Balochistan: Giving the people a chance", June 2013, p.28. <http://www.hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/pdf/Balochistan%20Report%20New%20Final.pdf>.

Jinnah in the run up to the 1945-46 elections.⁴⁵ With slogans like: “Pakistan ka matlab kya? – la ilah illallah” [What is the meaning of Pakistan – there is no God but Allah], there was no way that the religious genie could be put back into the bottle. The Constituent Assembly, even before it had drafted the constitution, approved the Objectives Resolution in which Muslims were enabled to “order their lives, in the individual and collective spheres, in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah”, while the religious minorities were promised “adequate provision to freely profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures.” Zia would surreptitiously remove the word ‘freely’.⁴⁶

Chandra Chattopadhyaya, the leader of the Opposition in the Constituent Assembly voiced a passionate plea against the adoption of the Objectives Resolution: “I say, give up this division of the people into Muslims and non-Muslims. Let us call ourselves one nation. Let us call ourselves one people — people of Pakistan.” But his words fell on deaf ears. He went further, arguing: ‘I do not consider myself a member of the minority community. I consider myself to be one of seven crore Pakistanis. Let me have the right to retain that privilege’.⁴⁷ No one paid attention.

The Justice Munir Commission that was set up in the wake of the 1953 anti-Ahmadi riots in Lahore debated the status of the Shias, since leading Deobandi *ulema* had issued edicts

45 For details, see the authors’ *Pakistan: Courting the Abyss*, 2018, Harper Collins India, Noida, pp. 33-37.

46 Khaled Ahmed, *Pakistan: Behind The Ideological Mask*, 2004, Vanguard Books, Lahore, p.15.

47 Raoof Hasan, ‘Look, there is blood on our hands’, *Daily Times*, May 1, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/234387/look-there-is-blood-on-our-hands/> (accessed May 16, 2018).

of apostasy against them. The report clearly recognized the dangers that the use of Islam in the Pakistan movement had created and tried to warn succeeding generations about the explosive issue of sectarianism, that is tearing Pakistan apart today. “What is happening now”, said the judges, “seems almost a writing on the wall, and God help us if we do not stop these... people from cutting each other’s throat.” Unfortunately, the fundamentals of the report were ignored then and continue to be ignored now.

Prior to the early 1980s, clashes between the Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan were sporadic and occurred usually during Muharram processions. With the exception of Z.A. Bhutto’s 1974 constitutional amendment declaring the Ahmadis as non-Muslims, the state itself did not really have a sectarian agenda. This changed under Zia under whom Islamization moved inexorably towards ‘Sunnification’⁴⁸ and that too, of the Deobandi variety. It created dissensions among various Islamic sects and the government’s effort to implement *sharia* brought out the old juristic and doctrinal differences not only between the Shias and the Sunnis, but also among the four Sunni schools themselves. Additional factors like the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Afghan *jihad*, among others, culminated in the exponential growth of sectarianism. Pakistan became the playground between Iran which supported the Shias in their effort to counter Zia’s Islamization, and Saudi Arabia, which backed his efforts.

The Pakistani Shias set up the Tehrik-e-Nifaze-Fiqh-e-Jafaria (TNFJ) in 1979 to protect the community from Zia’s efforts to create a Sunni state, while the Sunni Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) supported the establishment of the militant Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) in 1985, founded by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi. SSP was an outright militant

48 Farzana Sheikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, 2009, C Hurst & Co., London, p.64.

organization, whose objective was to erode the Shia influence in Pakistan. It indulged in several high-profile assassinations of Iranian diplomats, including that of the Iranian Consul-General in Lahore, Agha Sadiq Ganji, in 1990. With militant organisations on both sides, there was a spate of assassinations of government and military officials, both Shia and Sunni, as well as the targeted killings of ordinary citizens, mostly Shia, on the basis of sectarian identity.

Of late, many of the attacks in Quetta, including those on the Hazaras and the Christian community, have been claimed by or have been linked to the Islamic State (IS, previously Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham, ISIS). IS and LeJ have claimed some of these attacks jointly. There does appear to be an understanding between the two: LeJ providing the operatives who carry out the attacks while using the IS moniker to enlarge its appeal and reach. The ideological common ground between the two terror outfits is violent anti-Shia bigotry.

The impact of the growth of sectarianism has been such that even enforcement officials have not escaped it. According to Raza Rumi,

While Mumtaz Qadri's case⁴⁹ is, perhaps, the best known, but across the country, the police, judges and other state functionaries demonstrate worrying signs of bias, ideological posturing, and in rare cases, direct violence. Judges have also shown fear and sometimes bias influences their decisions. State officials are influenced by society and we have turned the country into a cesspool of ideological confusion with vague theocratic aspirations.⁵⁰

49 Mumtaz Qadri was the security guard who shot dead Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in January 2011, accusing him of blasphemy.

50 Raza Rumi, 'Pakistan's beleaguered Hazaras', *The Express Tribune*, November 16, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/791727/pakistans-beleaguered-hazaras/> (accessed May 15, 2018).

According to partial data on the South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP) targeted violence against Shias from 2001 to May 2018 has resulted in a total 2693 killed and 4847 injured in 471 incidents. The violence peaked in 2013, with 504 killed and 965 injured in 81 incidents.⁵¹

HAZARA KILLINGS

The objective of the organized and systematic violence against the Hazaras in Quetta is nothing less than their complete extermination in the country. According to Farahnaz Isphani, “while human rights experts quibbled over whether the numbers of dead merited the use of the term ‘genocide’, other convincingly argued that the purpose of the anti-Shia attacks in Balochistan was, in fact, similar to that of genocide – to eliminate an entire people.”⁵²

Such violence has developed over three phases.

The first phase, from 1981 till the mid-1990s, consisted of vicious propaganda and the spewing of hatred. Prior to 1981 there was very little anti-Shia propaganda in Quetta, or anywhere else in Pakistan for that matter. It was Zia-al-Haq’s rule that injected sectarianism across the country. The anti-Shia campaign centered on labelling the Shias as *Kafirs* (infidels). The first such messages of ‘Shia *Kafir*’ were found scrawled on the walls of Quetta in 1981. Not much attention was paid to this, since at that time Pakistan was still a relatively pluralist society.

The second phase of violence against the Hazaras began on October 5, 1999, when two gunmen on foot shot Sardar Nisar Ali Hazara, Balochistan’s Education Minister, at point-blank range just as he was leaving his office at the Quetta Secretariat. His driver and bodyguard were killed immediately, while the

51 South Asia Terrorism Portal, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/Shias_killed_Pakistan.htm (accessed May 20, 2018).

52 Farahnaz Isphani, op cit, p.224.

minister lay bleeding, mistakenly left for dead by the attackers. The almost two decade-long anti-Shia propaganda of the LeJ in Quetta had finally erupted into physical violence. Deterioration was rapid thereafter.⁵³

Between 1999 and 2003, 17 high-profile members of the Hazara community were assassinated in broad daylight in Quetta. Hazara professionals such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, businessmen, bureaucrats and students were the key targets of the attacks.⁵⁴ In what was to become a pattern, not a single perpetrator was brought to justice. What the killings demonstrated was the ease and the freedom with which LeJ terrorists operated in Quetta. The *modus operandi* was simple: the terrorists waited in crowded commercial areas near the workplace of the victims, opened fire when they came out and then disappeared into the crowd.⁵⁵

The third or current phase of violence is characterized by a continuation of high-profile assassinations together with an increasing number of mass-killings of the Hazaras. The first such mass-killing happened on June 8, 2003, when 12 Hazara police cadets were gunned down while they were going to the police training academy. Two LeJ terrorists on motorcycle intercepted their van at a traffic circle, opened fire on the vehicle with high-powered weapons, killing 12 and injuring 9.

This first attack set off a torrent. Less than a month later, on July 4, 2003, three LeJ terrorists entered an Imam-Bargah during Friday prayers and opened fire with AK-47s and hurled grenades on the more than 500 worshippers gathered there. The attack led to the death of 47 Hazara men and boys and injured more than 65.⁵⁶ The LeJ claimed responsibility for the attack.

53 *The Shia Hazaras of Pakistan*, op cit.

54 Raza Rumi, op cit.

55 *The Shia Hazaras of Pakistan*, op cit.

56 'Attack on Quetta imambargah leaves 44 dead', *Dawn*, July 5, 2003, <http://archives.dawn.com/2003/07/05/top1.htm> (accessed May 15, 2018).

Eight months later, on March 24, 2004, the LeJ slaughtered 36 Hazara men and boys, including a 5 year old, as their procession was going through Liaquat Bazar, near the Balochistan Governor's house. In what has become their trademark, LeJ terrorists opened indiscriminate fire with AK-47s and hurled grenades from four separate rooftop locations surrounding the street, in a well-planned and coordinated attack. The terrorists continued firing for about 20 minutes, while the police guarding the procession scrambled for cover. In the ensuing chaos, police fired on the crowd itself, killing five Hazara men. There were massive protest demonstrations in Quetta in the days that followed.

These three attacks signaled that the LeJ campaign of sectarian killings targeting Shias elsewhere in Pakistan would henceforth be focused on the Hazaras as the primary target. After each attack, the LeJ has claimed responsibility and vowed to continue their program of "purifying Pakistan", until all Shia Hazaras were eliminated from Quetta.

The deadliest attacks, resulting in the highest death tolls recorded in sectarian violence in Pakistan occurred in January and February 2013, when bomb attacks in Quetta killed at least 180 Hazaras.

On January 10, 2013 there was a suicide bombing in a snooker club frequented by Hazaras. It killed 96 and injured at least 150. Many of those killed and injured were the victims of a car bomb near the club that exploded 10 minutes after the first, striking those who had gone to the aid of the wounded. According to HRW, initial government indifference and apathy was met by the Hazara community's refusal to bury the dead in protest. They sat on the road for several nights in freezing temperatures, with the bodies of their dead kin, awaiting justice. This sparked countrywide demonstrations in solidarity with people from all walks of life joining in and sitting on the

roads, till the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government caved, suspended the provincial government and declared governor's rule in Balochistan.⁵⁷

A month later, on February 17, 2013, at least 84 Hazaras were killed and more than 160 were injured when a bomb exploded in a vegetable market in Hazara Town. Hundreds of kilograms of explosives that had been rigged to a water tanker were remotely detonated when the market was packed with shoppers.⁵⁸

Despite the change of governments in both the centre and the province after the 2013 general elections, the woes of the community continued. In January 2014, 28 Hazaras were killed in a suicide bomb attack in Mastung on a bus carrying pilgrims returning from Iran. This led the Hazaras to once again take to the streets with dead bodies of the victims. The government responded by temporarily suspending the bus service to prevent further attacks.

Statistics of the number of Hazaras killed vary. According to Hazara Human Rights Org, HOPE (@hopeHazara), to date there have been over 209 attacks on the community, killing over 1500, wounding over 3500, and forcing migration of 30 to 50 per cent of the entire Hazara population from Pakistan. According to the Pakistan National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) some 509 Hazara have been killed in Quetta from January 2012 to December 2017 during 46 incidents of target killing and bomb blasts, while 734 were injured.⁵⁹

57 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

58 Mohammad Zafar, 'Horrific attack: Terror revisits Quetta', *The Express Tribune*, February 17, 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/508527/horrific-attack-terror-revisits-quetta/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

59 'Hazara Trader Gunned Down in Quetta', *The Daily Times*, April 19, 2018 <https://dailytimes.com.pk/229867/hazara-trader-gunned-down-in-quetta/> (accessed May 15, 2018).

According to other figures, up to 2,000 Hazaras have been killed in the last 15 years in different incidents of targeted killings and suicide bombings.⁶⁰ In May 2018, the Quetta Deputy Inspector General (DIG) submitted a report on Hazara killings to the Supreme Court, according to which 399 Shias, 36 Sunnis and 29 settlers from the Hazara community had been killed in targeted attacks during the preceding six years.⁶¹

An analysis of the Hazaras killed between October 1999 and October 2011 shows that the maximum killings till then had taken place in 2011 (24 per cent of all killings in this period) followed by 2005 (10 per cent), 2010 (9 per cent) and 2009 (8 Per cent). During the same period, the bulk of the killings took place on Liaquat Bazar-Prince Road-Mizan Chowk area (35 per cent), Saryab Road (14 per cent), Kirani Road (6 per cent) and Akhtar Road (5 per cent).⁶² Since the terrorist-prone areas are known, it is surprising that attacks continue to take place in the same locations.

The frequent attacks and killing of at least 30 Hazaras in the first four months of 2018, including six Hazara men shot dead and one injured in four separate attacks in April 2018, provoked the community to again take their protests to the streets at the end of April. Leading the women protesters, Advocate Jalila Haider said that they would not end their fast until the Army Chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the hunger strike camp and detailed concrete steps to bring the killers to justice and to protect them. She added that the killing

60 'This has to stop. Standing with the Hazara', *The Daily Times*, April 7, 2018. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/224726/standing-with-the-hazara/>; Nasir Iqbal, 'Commission sought to probe Hazara killings', *Dawn*, January 8, 2018, www.dawn.com/news/1381724/commission-sought-to-probehazara-killings (accessed May 17, 2018).

61 Syed Ali Shah, 'Hazara killings tantamount to wiping out an entire generation, says chief justice', *Dawn*, May 11, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407011> (accessed May 17, 2018).

62 The Shia Hazara of Pakistan, op cit.

of Hazara people had become a matter of routine. Perhaps nobody was bothered, as no one involved in the ‘genocide of Hazara community’ had been arrested so far by the security agencies.⁶³ This demand struck a chord, since it was based not merely on the ineffectiveness of the civil government, but also because, in Balochistan, it is the Army that has been calling the shots for decades.

Not surprisingly, despite the Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Abdul Quddus Bizenjo and Home Minister Mir Sarfaraz Ahmed Bugti holding talks with the protesters and assuring them of ‘all-out efforts’ to protect citizens, the protestors were not convinced.⁶⁴ Likewise, they refused to call off their protests when the Federal Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal met them. This reflected the loss of faith in the government’s ability to bring the attackers to justice. It was only after a meeting with the Army Chief Gen. Bajwa on May 1, 2018, that the leaders of the Hazara community agreed to call off the protest. To his credit, following the assurances he gave the protestors, the security forces were galvanized into action. On May 17, 2018 they gunned down Salman Badeni, the provincial commander of the LeJ, and two operatives in a firefight in which an Army Colonel also lost his life.⁶⁵

Several elements of the targeted killing of the Hazaras are worth noting. First, these attacks have continued and the roots

63 ‘Hazaras on hunger strike in Quetta want assurance of security, justice from Gen Bajwa’ *Dawn*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404828/hazaras-on-hunger-strike-in-quetta-want-assurance-of-security-justice-from-gen-bajwa> (accessed May 17, 2018).

64 Saleem Shahid , ‘Govt talks with Hazara protesters inconclusive’, *Dawn*, May 1, 2018 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1404857/govt-talks-with-hazara-protesters-inconclusive> (accessed May 17, 2018).

65 ‘Col martyred, Pak army kills LeJ commander involved in killing over 100 Hazara people’, *The News*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/317542-army-officer-martyred-lej-commander-among-three-terrorists-killed-in-bstan-op> (accessed May 20, 2018).

of terrorism targeting the community have not been traced despite the deployment of a large number of security personnel and all shades of intelligence agencies in Quetta. All this raises questions about the failure and inability of the state to protect half a million people in a single urban concentration.⁶⁶ Second, the attacks themselves are well-planned and coordinated and are not random. This would indicate availability of sufficient advance information. Third, almost every family in the community has lost a relative in these attacks and there does not appear to be an end to the targeting. As the *Dawn* put it, “Clearly either the state is complicit or its security policies are flawed.”⁶⁷

THE MASTUNG MASSACRE

The massacre of a group of Hazara pilgrims in September 2011 is especially noteworthy because it exhibits many dimensions of what is happening to the Hazaras repeatedly.

On September 20, 2011, a group of 37 Hazara men, women, and children of Quetta boarded a bus headed for Taftan on the Pakistan-Iran border. From there they would proceed to various Shia holy sites in Iran. Thousands of Hazaras make visits to the tombs of Shia Imams in Iran and Iraq. For them, these pilgrimages hold nearly as much reverence as the Haj.⁶⁸

After traveling for about two hours, the bus was intercepted near Mastung by heavily armed men in three vehicles in broad daylight on a major highway, N25, linking Quetta to Taftan.⁶⁹ Wielding AK-47’s and rocket propelled grenade launchers

66 Mushtaq Rajpar, op cit.

67 ‘Hazara killings’, *Dawn*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1357041/hazara-killings> (accessed May 17, 2018).

68 Sayed Askar Mousavi, op cit. p.148.

69 According to Khaled Ahmed, op cit. (2016) the Mastung Road approach to Quetta is a death trap despite the fact that the district contains a cadet college supplying manpower to the army, p.264.

the unmasked attackers boarded the bus; they let the Sunni passengers go and thereafter ordered the Hazara passengers to disembark. The attackers forced them to sit facing the bus, and began shooting them at point blank range, killing 26 and wounding 6. Then as they had arrived, the assassins drove back down the highway toward Quetta.

Later in the evening, three Hazara men travelling by car to the scene to search for missing relatives were waylaid by the same attackers on the outskirts of Quetta. The attackers sprayed their car with automatic weapons, killing two of the three Hazaras, and drove off.

The Balochistan High Court held four proceedings on the massacre on September 26, October 4, November 16, and December 13, 2011. The investigators were unable (or unwilling) to present any physical evidence or testimony in the case. They admitted to having interviewed only the bus driver and presented a two-page transcript of the interview conducted with him at the scene of the attack. There was, however, no gathering of forensic or crime scene evidence; no attempt to interview any of the 11 surviving witnesses; no attempt to trace the three vehicles used by the attackers; no attempt to contact the security force personnel at the six check-posts through which the vehicles would have passed. Even a map showing all the locations relevant to the case could not be produced. Ironically, the terrorists themselves provided the evidence: a grainy video depicting the entire massacre from start to finish, which they posted on YouTube and Jihadist websites in mid-November 2011.⁷⁰

A few key conclusions about the Mastung massacre are noteworthy as they are applicable to nearly all incidents of sectarian terrorism that have taken place/are taking place.

70 The Shia Hazaras of Pakistan, op cit.

Firstly, the blame game about why no preventative measures were taken to ensure the safety and security of the pilgrims. The Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police publicly blamed the Baloch-owned Shalimar Transport Ltd. company for failing to notify the police and obtain permission for their proposed travel route. The company, in turn, claimed it did notify the local police commander but received no response.

Second, about 20 minutes after leaving the station, the bus was stopped at the final police check-post located on the outskirts of Quetta city. The driver provided an itinerary and passenger manifest to the commander of the check-post. He either chose to take no further action or, as many Hazaras now suspect, played a role in notifying the attackers of the bus's timing and whereabouts. The bus then continued on its journey passing through one Frontier Corps (FC) check-post and two Balochistan 'Levies' (tribal militias) check-posts, the last of which was located about 200 yards from the site of the massacre.⁷¹

Third, the police response immediately following the massacre was tardy and deeply flawed. It took them and rescue workers an hour to arrive at the scene. Even thereafter, the crime scene remained unsecure and chaotic. No attempts were made to gather evidence or conduct forensic investigation.

Fourth, the Mastung shooting marked the first time—though it would not be the last—that the LeJ perpetrated a mass killing of Hazaras after first segregating them from the Sunnis.⁷²

IMPACT ON HAZARAS

The *Dawn* perhaps best summed up the impact of the targeted killing on the community when with it wrote editorially:

71 Ibid.

72 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

What the Hazaras have had to endure over the last several years in Balochistan is nothing less than a blot on this nation... They have been driven into enforced ghettoisation for the sake of safety, rendering their children's education disrupted and thriving businesses abandoned. Tens of thousands have chosen to risk the perils of illegal migration to Australia over their restricted existence and the dangers that lurk on the streets of the province's heavily securitised capital.

It also noted with regret the diminishing outrage, attention and solidarity in the rest of the country with regard to the Hazaras. "The slow yet steady decimation of the Hazara community has been relegated to a footnote, even as we congratulate ourselves for having triumphed over violent extremism."⁷³

According to HRW, quoting survivors and victims' family members, the ongoing attacks have caused profound harm to the social, cultural, and economic life of the Hazara community.⁷⁴ Increasingly, members of the community have been compelled to live a fearful existence of restricted movement and activities limited to the Hazara-dominated neighborhoods of Marriabad and Hazara Town. This has caused economic hardship and curtailed access to education. The oppressive situation has prompted large numbers of Hazaras to flee Pakistan for refuge in other countries.⁷⁵ Some Hazaras feel that the attacks were meant not only to kill them but to worsen their precarious economic situation by forcing Hazara-owned businesses to move from other parts of the city into Hazara-dominated neighborhoods or even leave the country for the sake of their safety. Some families have become destitute after the sole

73 'Hazara protests', *Dawn*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1405138/hazaraprotests> (accessed May 16, 2018).

74 Human Rights Watch.

75 *Ibid.*

bread earner was killed and have become dependent on doles from neighbours. Some have described their plight as akin to being taken hostage. There is a widespread belief that the law enforcers were on the side of the killers. Community leaders say they see little interest from the government in bringing an end to the killings.

As a result, the one industry that has started booming in Quetta is that of human trafficking. Thousands of Hazaras have sought refuge in Australia convinced that the government and military cannot or will not protect them from violent extremists. Declan Walsh describes the dangers that they face on the journey. The illegal journey — across Southeast Asia by air, land and sea at the mercy of unscrupulous human traffickers — is long and perilous. Several hundred Hazaras have died on that route in recent years, especially when rickety boats have sunk at sea between Indonesia and Christmas Island. The latter is a small Australian territory about 240 miles off the Indonesian coast, where they apply for political asylum. There are some people whose entire families have drowned *en route* to Australia.⁷⁶

Between late 2001 and June 2012, 964 asylum seekers and crew members from various countries are known to have lost their lives on this passage. In the first week of April 2013, according to official figures, the Australian Navy intercepted 10 boats carrying 760 people, most bound for Christmas Island. The majority of cases from Afghanistan and Pakistan were ethnic Hazaras, whose numbers have grown to about 25,000 in Australia, officials say.⁷⁷

76 Mobeen Azhar, 'Hell on Earth': Inside Quetta's Hazara community', *BBC World Service*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22248500> (accessed May 15, 2018).

77 Declan Walsh, 'Fleeing Pakistan Violence, Hazaras Brave Uncertain Journey' *The New York Times*, April 27, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/28/world/asia/fleeing-violence-in-pakistan-hazaras-brave-uncertain-journey.html> (accessed May 16, 2018).

However, for the Hazaras, the journey was worth the risk. As one of them told Walsh, “I’d rather die in the boat than in a bomb blast. At least this way, I get to choose.” He went on to say that the next bomb was only a matter of time and that, “We can live without the basics of life — gas, electricity and so on — but we can’t live with the fear.”⁷⁸ Or as a university student said, he could not live “looking behind my shoulders” for the rest of his life, and decided to migrate.

Estimates vary about the number of people who have so migrated. According to one estimate, about 60,000 people have left Quetta since 2013. Citing HRCP, advocate Jalila Haider puts the number to be about 90,000, including those who have either migrated internally and those who could afford it, who have fled to Europe, the US or Australia.⁷⁹

Not surprisingly, the Hazara community feels under siege. Its leaders told a HRCP delegation in 2009 that “security agencies and the government bore ethnic and sectarian biases against them and were protecting and patronizing the perpetrators of the crimes against them.” HRCP’s conclusion was that the community had lost trust in the provincial government’s ability to book the perpetrators.⁸⁰

Sectarian considerations apart, HRCP further noted the relative prosperity of Hazara community due to the substantial remittances received through expatriates. This also accounted for the increasing crimes against the community. “It seemed a campaign had been launched to terrorize the community so

78 Ibid.

79 Zofeen T. Ebrahim, ‘Killing them slowly’, *The News*, May 2018 <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/killing-slowly/#.WvfxCyC-nIU> (accessed May 20, 2018).

80 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), 2009, *Pushed to the Wall*, Report of the HRCP Fact-Finding Mission to Balochistan, October 2009 <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/pdf/ff/14.pdf> (accessed May 16, 2018).

that they left Quetta by selling their businesses and property at throwaway prices. Pamphlets had been left at their homes telling them to sell their houses and leave.’⁸¹

An HRCP mission that met the representatives of the Hazara community in June 2011 found that there was no change in their targeting. Despite meeting everyone in the hierarchy from police officers to the President and Prime Minister, nothing had changed. The political parties just joined the community for *fateha* (the first verse of the Qu’ran, in this case, read in the memory of the recently killed) and left. The inescapable conclusion was that the state was getting them killed since they were being killed in front of check-posts.⁸²

One other consequence of the killings is the impact it has had on the education of the next generation of the Hazaras. Some years earlier, there were around 250 Hazara students in Balochistan University in Quetta. By 2013 there were only two or three left. The majority of the Hazara students in the university used to be girls because boys were usually sent to big cities outside Balochistan for education. By 2013, there were no Hazara girls in Balochistan University. Of the 11 Hazara faculty members at the University, none remained.⁸³

LAKSHKAR-E-JHANGVI⁸⁴

The anti-Shia and anti-Iran hard-line Deobandi sectarian terrorist outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks and killings of the Hazaras.

81 Ibid.

82 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), *Hopes, Fears and Alienation in Balochistan*, Report of an HRCP Fact-finding Mission, Lahore, May 2012 <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/pdf/ff/12.pdf>, p-10 (accessed May 16, 2018).

83 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), June 2013, op cit, p-28-29.

84 For details of the origins of the LeJ, see <http://www.satp.org/terrorist-profile/pakistan/lashkar-e--jhangvi-lej>.

The LeJ, founded in Punjab in 1996, was an offshoot of the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). The main support base of the SSP was Punjab's Sunni urban upper-middle class business owners and merchants. Its main agenda was and is to convert Pakistan into a Sunni state and declare the Shias *kafirs*, worthy of death. In its early years SSP's operations were limited to targeting the Shias in Punjab. The Hazaras were not yet on their radar. An unstated objective was "to create a counter-weight to the economic hegemony and pro-democracy political influence of the feudal landowners of central Punjab, the majority of whom were Shias."⁸⁵ Little wonder then that the SSP received strong support from General Zia.

A section of SSP broke away over leadership issues to form the LeJ, which soon established itself as the most violent sectarian organization in Pakistan, claiming nearly all incidents of sectarian terrorism in the country. Its founder Riaz Basra was killed in an 'encounter' in 2002 and was succeeded by Akram Lahori and Malik Ishaq. Both these terrorists were imprisoned on and off for years, despite which they carried on directing LeJ operations.

LeJ has had a close working relationship with the Taliban and the Haqqani network. Its targeting of the Hazaras started initially in Afghanistan when almost its entire leadership, with the prompting of the Pakistan Army fought alongside the Taliban against the Northern Alliance in the 1990s. In 1998 it aided the Taliban in the massacre of hundreds of Hazaras living in Mazar-e-Sharif, leading to the flood of Hazara refugees into Balochistan.⁸⁶ There was a spike in Hazara killings in Pakistan,

85 The Shia Hazaras of Pakistan, op cit.

86 Human Rights Watch, 2018 'UN Urged to Prevent More Killings as Taliban Offensive Continues', news release, September 15, 1998, <http://www.hrw.org/news/1998/09/13/un-urged-prevent-more-killings-taliban-offensive-continues> (accessed May 16, 2018).

after 9/11 when the Taliban were ejected from Afghanistan and a large number moved into Quetta.

Malik Ishaq succeeded Riaz Basra in 2002. He was officially charged with seventy murders and forty-four other cases of terrorism, including the March 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore. In October 1997, Ishaq admitted in an interview with an Urdu daily that he was involved in the killing of 102 people.⁸⁷ On 14 July 2011, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered Ishaq's release because of insufficient evidence produced by the prosecution. Coinciding with Ishaq's release, the LeJ promptly issued a written threat against the Shia population. The letter, written in Urdu and widely circulated in Quetta and beyond, stated:

All Shi'ites are worthy of killing. We will rid Pakistan of unclean people. Pakistan means land of the pure and the Shi'ites have no right to live in this country. We have the edict and signatures of revered scholars, declaring Shi'ites infidels. Just as our fighters have waged a successful jihad against the Shi'ite Hazaras in Afghanistan, our mission in Pakistan is the abolition of this impure sect and its followers from every city, every village, and every nook and corner of Pakistan.

As in the past, our successful *jihad* against the Hazaras in Pakistan and, in particular, in Quetta, is ongoing and will continue in the future. We will make Pakistan the graveyard of the Shi'ite Hazaras and their houses will be destroyed by bombs and suicide bombers. We will only rest when we will be able to fly the flag of true

87 The release of Malik Ishaq," *The Express Tribune*, July 15, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/210440/the-release-of-malik-ishaq/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

Islam on this land of the pure. *Jihad* against the Shi'ite Hazaras has now become our duty.⁸⁸

Immediately after the circulation of the latter there was a spike in terrorist incidents: at least 16 incidents of assassination and mass-murder in which 53 Hazara men, women and children were killed and at least 75 were injured. No efforts were made by the law enforcement agencies to investigate the incidents, apprehend known suspects or bring them to justice.

The Supreme Court again released Ishaq on bail in December 2014 after his acquittal in sixty-four murder cases due to lack of evidence or withdrawn witness testimonies. During his twelve years in confinement, seventy-two judges and prosecution lawyers expressed their inability to hear or pursue cases against him and his sons, most of them either going on leave or refusing to continue hearing them 'on personal grounds.'⁸⁹ According to HRW, the failure to bring Ishaq to justice underscored serious failings in Pakistan's criminal justice system and the impunity that thrived as a result of this failure.⁹⁰ Ultimately, on May 28, 2015, Malik Ishaq, like Riaz Basra before him, was extra-judicially executed in an 'encounter' in the Muzaffargarh District of Punjab. The US had declared him a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" on February 6, 2014.

Though the military denies any links, formal or informal, the reality is that the LeJ has long enjoyed a close relationship with it. In the 1990s, the military encouraged LeJ to forge strong links with armed Islamist groups fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan. In October 2009, Malik Ishaq was flown from Lahore to Rawalpindi on a military plane to negotiate with Al-Qaeda and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists

88 Amir Mir, "Blood flows freely in Pakistan," *Asia Times*, October 5, 2011, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MJ05Df01.html (accessed May 17, 2018).

89 Khaled Ahmed, op cit. (2016) pp. 407-08.

90 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

linked with the LeJ for the release of several high-ranking military officers taken hostage in an attack on the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters.⁹¹ While Ishaq's intervention at the behest of the Pakistani military was widely reported but never officially acknowledged by the authorities, a military official speaking on condition of anonymity confirmed the reported facts to Human Rights Watch.⁹²

The earlier relationship between the military and LeJ has become more complicated over the last decade. LeJ joined the TTP network that has been involved in high profile attacks on the Pakistani military, government officials and civilians. LeJ has emerged as the TTP's principal partner in Balochistan and, crucially, in Pakistan's heartland – Punjab – where it has its origins. HRW quoted a now-retired Pakistani intelligence official saying that the Pakistani government did not consider LeJ's presence in Balochistan a "cause for concern" until the July 4, 2003, attack on the Hazaras in Quetta. Until then, the official said, "we saw the LeJ guys as allies, if not friends. Their activities were manageable. But these attacks on the Hazaras did change the perception and then many of us stopped thinking of them as allies. But, importantly, many of us did not." Another official added, "While these people are hostiles and often attack us, it is important to maintain some level of goodwill with them as they can be useful."⁹³

STATE RESPONSE

The callousness of the state is best exemplified by the response of the then chief minister of Balochistan Aslam Raisani to a question on how he intended to "stem the tears" of the Hazara community after the September 2011 Mastung

91 'The release of Malik Ishaq', op cit.

92 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

93 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

attack. He responded “of the millions who live in Balochistan, 40 dead in Mastung is not a big deal. I will send a truckload of tissue papers to the bereaved families. I’d send tobacco if I weren’t a politician.”⁹⁴

The federal government has done little better. President Mamnoon Hussain in April 2018 trotted out the usual line about how “a handful of vested interests and enemies” were trying to stop the Baloch people from enjoying the fruits of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Or when he referred to the local citizenry as “true Pakistanis” who “would not let anyone threaten the unity of this country.”⁹⁵ Minister for Interior Ahsan Iqbal echoed similar sentiments when he declared that, since banned outfits were not organised in the country, foreign-funded targeted activities against the Hazara community in Quetta were a conspiracy to create chaos and sabotage the CPEC project.⁹⁶

The sectarian massacres have taken place under successive governments since a time prior to Pakistan’s return to democratic governance in 2008 and have continued unabated thereafter. According to HRW, “To many Hazaras, the persistent failure of the authorities at both the provincial and national levels to apprehend attackers or prosecute the militant groups claiming responsibility for the attacks suggests that the authorities are incompetent, indifferent, or possibly complicit in the attacks.”⁹⁷

There are several elements in the response of the state that need to be highlighted.

94 Ibid.

95 ‘Standing with the Hazara’ *The Daily Times*, April 7, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/224726/standing-with-the-hazara/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

96 ‘Attacks on Hazaras foreign-funded: Ahsan’. *The Nation*, May 6, 2018 <https://nation.com.pk/06-May-2018/attacks-on-hazaras-foreign-funded-ahsan> (accessed May 17, 2018).

97 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

First, the law enforcement agencies have done little to investigate the terrorist attacks or taken steps to prevent the next attack. Of late, even the desultory efforts to arrest, detain, or question known suspects has fallen into abeyance. More often than not, the crime scene is washed down soon after the incident without conducting any forensic or criminal investigation of any sort. Akbar Durrani, Balochistan's Home Secretary, told HRW that many terrorists had been arrested but they were unable to prosecute them due to lack of evidence. "We cannot proceed simply on the basis of suspicion. We need evidence, and sadly this is very hard to obtain."⁹⁸The fact that evidence was deliberately not sought was, of course, glossed over.

Second, the police were clearly ineffective in combating extremist violence and attacks by the LeJ. Factors responsible for this included the force itself being targeted by the LeJ and lack of resources. The police had human resources but did not have requisite weapons, equipment, or forensic facilities to successfully combat the terrorist violence.⁹⁹ Resultantly, while occasional attempts have been made to arrest and imprison LeJ terrorists, their vast majority remained at large and operated with complete impunity.

Third, as has become standard practice, the police round up several alleged suspects after an incident though few stand trial and are released due to lack of evidence. In the words of one local Hazara leader, the police in Quetta keep staging the same drama again and again. First, they afford safe passage to the real murderers while arresting innocent people in a public display of purportedly acting against the terrorists. Next, they release those who were arrested on the grounds that there is no

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

solid evidence linking them to the attack. The complacency shown by police officials in the face of sectarian killings lends credence to such claims.¹⁰⁰

Fourth, the federal and the provincial governments have mostly responded to the sectarian violence with mere condemnation and condolences, reiterating their resolve to take stern action against the culprits and to bring them to justice. However, there is little or no follow up action in terms of catching and charging terrorists. If anything, they have suggested that the Hazaras accept open-ended ghettoization, ever increasing curbs on movement and religious observance, and ongoing economic, cultural, and social discrimination as the price for staying alive. Yet the LeJ still finds ways to attack and kill them.¹⁰¹

Fifth, the media and civil society denounce the terrorist incidents as anti-Islamic. Once the hype subsides, however, the incident is forgotten until the next one takes place. Moreover, for the civil society, neither violence against the Hazaras nor the Baloch is mainstream news, except when there is a really horrendous incident. All the national media houses are based in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad with very little coverage of news from Balochistan. As Matthew Green of Reuters wrote in 2012: “The grip Lashkar-e-Jhangvi exerts on Quetta is difficult to appreciate from the drawing rooms of Islamabad, where brief reports of bombings or assassinations carried on the inside pages of newspapers fail to capture the scale of the persecution now faced by the city’s 500,000 Hazaras.”¹⁰²

100 Mumtaz Sajidi, ‘Fate of the Hazara: the community caged within its own city’, *The Daily Times*, April 26, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/232769/fate-of-the-hazara-the-community-caged-within-its-own-city/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

101 Ibid.

102 Khaled Ahmed, op cit. (2016) p. 266.

The Hazaras also suffer from the lack of international attention. A report by the Human Rights Watch (“We are the Walking Dead”) and the BBC (“Hell on Earth”), as well as Hazara Diaspora staging protests in international capitals has not so far attracted ‘eyeballs’ internationally.

Sixth, the situation is compounded by elements within Pakistan’s security agencies who view the Hazaras with suspicion. Speaking on condition of anonymity, retired members of the Frontier Corps, described the Hazaras to HRW as ‘agents of Iran’ and ‘untrustworthy.’ One former official even suggested, without evidence, that the Hazaras “exaggerated” their plight in order to seek asylum abroad and ‘gain financial and political support from Iran to wage its agenda in Pakistan.’¹⁰³ Recent revelations have even linked the police with LeJ. On May 25, 2013, a senior Quetta police official informed the media about the arrest of Assistant Sub-Inspector Yahya Sumbal who was in telephonic contact with LeJ men.¹⁰⁴

There could also be a much darker aspect to the state’s apathy and could well be due to Pakistan’s national security policies. As Farahnaz Isphani puts it, the Sunni extremists were seen as allies in the Army’s campaign against Baloch nationalists and in curbing the growing influence of Iran. Hence, rather than protect Hazaras from the terrorists, the security forces chose to look the other way in return for intelligence on Baloch separatists.¹⁰⁵

Finally, the judicial system has been unable to provide relief to the Hazaras. So far none of the attacks on Hazaras

103 Human Rights Watch, op cit.

104 Syed Arfeen, ‘Shocking details of links between policemen and LeJ emerge’, *The News*, May 25, 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-23089-Shocking-details-of-links-between-policemen-and-LeJemergeBy-Syed-Arfeen> (accessed May 16, 2018).

105 Farahnaz Isphani, op cit, p.224.

have been accounted for, very few sectarian terrorists have ever been convicted and even when convicted, they have managed to inexplicably escape. The classic example was when Usman Saifullah Kurd, LeJ's then Balochistan operational commander, his second-in-command, Dawood Badini and another operative Shafiq Rehman Rind escaped from an Anti-Terrorism Force jail in Quetta's highly guarded Army Cantonment on January 18, 2008, under mysterious and unexplained circumstances.¹⁰⁶ Four Hazara officers assigned to guarding Kurd and Badini had been inexplicably erased from the duty roster earlier in the week. No other guards were ever questioned by the authorities. No investigation was carried out and the entire episode was quickly forgotten. All signs point to "orchestration from the upper most levels of the military establishment."¹⁰⁷ Given low conviction rates, it is hardly surprisingly that the courts are seen as being soft on terrorism cases.¹⁰⁸ It is also indicative of the weakening capacity of the criminal justice system during the past two decades.

The reality is that, for the Pakistani state, the Hazara community is not of much importance. Neither is the violence against them. They are a minority, both in terms of religion and ethnicity who do not have any anti-state agenda. What, in fact, the sectarian violence does, is to allow the state to undermine the secular Baloch nationalists who are fighting for independence.

The failure to prevent the LeJ from killing Hazaras led Balochistan Governor Zulfiqar Ali Magsi to retort: "It is evidence of our and our intelligence agencies' weakness that we cannot catch them [sectarian terrorists]...It is upsetting. There are two possibilities: one, you cannot track them at all;

106 Amir Mir, 'Usman Kurd, the man who caused fall of Raisani govt,' op cit.

107 The Shia Hazara of Pakistan, op cit.

108 Raza Rumi, op cit.

and two, everybody is scared because [the security forces] may think they will become targets themselves.’¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

The wanton and systematic killing of Hazaras in Quetta is perhaps the most acute example of the general problem of intolerance in Pakistan. It is symptomatic of how Pakistan has treated its minorities. It shows the failure of the National Action Plan (NAP), the failure of the law and order machinery and the abject failure of the leadership, both civil and military, to develop measures to tackle the sectarian menace. As Raza Rumi notes, “It is time for civil and military authorities to review where we are headed and take corrective measures before it is too late and violence gains further legitimacy and acceptance.”¹¹⁰

Despite the much-touted military operations against terror, the targeted killing of the community has not ended. This raises serious questions about the government’s claims that the terrorists have been defeated.¹¹¹ Likewise, despite repeated protests, there has been no respite for the community from the ongoing violence. For the Hazaras, every incident is yet another glaring example of the impunity and brazenness with which sectarian terrorists operate in Balochistan. What makes matters worse is that these recurrent attacks have been taking place in the face of significant presence of military, paramilitary, and civilian security forces and intelligence

109 Abubakar Siddique, ‘Pakistan’s Hazara Killings Bring Sunni Extremist Group Into Focus, *Radio Free Europe*, February 18, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-shiite-hazara-targeted/24905910.html> (accessed May 17, 2018).

110 Ibid.

111 Ailia Zehra, ‘Hazara killings and flawed security policies’, *The Daily Times*, April 9, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/225518/hazara-killings-and-flawed-security-policies/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

agencies in Balochistan. Additionally, the cases are not significantly investigated and go unpunished, while elements within the security establishment display discriminatory attitudes and hostility toward the Hazaras.

The Hazaras in Quetta called off their April 2018 protest on the intervention of the Army Chief Gen. Bajwa, but he needs to accept that there are glaring loopholes in the strategy against terrorism. Killing a few terrorists or hanging of some others has not rooted out terror. For that to happen, the Army will have to take across the board action against all shades and hues of terrorists and not only the ‘bad terrorists’ targeting Pakistan. If the ‘good terrorists’ (those who target India and Afghanistan) are allowed to prosper, terrorism will continue to prosper in Pakistan as well.

The fact of the matter is that terrorist and sectarian infrastructure has grown in Pakistan thanks to the active facilitation of the security agencies. This fact has now been testified to by no less than the three-time former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.¹¹² However, Sharif’s admission cannot absolve him of part of the blame since sectarian hatred and its infrastructure has its roots in Punjab, the bastion of Nawaz’s party. For the sake of electoral advantage Nawaz and his brother, the Chief Minister of Punjab, have winked at the activities of such groups for years.

As a result of such complicity by both the Army and the civil government, sectarian violence in Pakistan continues with impunity. It is a sad reality that such perpetrators of sectarian violence do not face any threat of legal action or punishment. Rather they are emboldened due to the complicity of the state

112 Cyril Almeida, ‘For Nawaz, it’s not over till it’s over’ *Dawn*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407192/for-nawaz-its-not-over-till-its-over> (accessed May 15, 2018).

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and the inability or unwillingness of the police, law enforcement agencies, and judiciary to effectively intervene. The terrorists are confident that those responsible for investigating and prosecuting acts of sectarian violence will fail to act. The result is that the killing of the Hazaras has reached genocidal levels. As *The News* puts it, “What is missing is the will to take the fight to every militant group and to finally stick our necks out for a community that has been discriminated against for decades.”¹¹³

113 ‘Hazara killing’s’, *The News*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/311408-hazara-killings> (accessed May 16, 2018).

No Need to Talk Answering the Maoist Question♦

Uddipan Mukherjee*

It no doubt appears interesting and away from the normal when the Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh says he is ready to talk to the Maoists.

It is all the more surprising when this comes from the top political leadership of a state which has been negotiating Left-Wing Extremists (LWE) since its formation – with the history of the insurgency in the region going back to the 1980s. The Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, Raman Singh however puts across one definite condition – the top leadership of the Maoists must come to the parleys. He is categorical as he says that the government won't budge until the ultras plead for discussions.

♦ The author dedicate this piece to the memory of his respected father, Bimal Kumar Mukherjee.

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Fine enough.

Raman Singh asserts that the government is ready, but cannot talk to district-level Maoists since as per strict hierarchy, the district-level leaders only follow the directions of top Maoists. Whenever there are talks – and it needs to be noted with attention – it would be with the top leadership; Singh stresses the point.

For Singh, the ‘top leadership’ includes the Politburo members of the Communist Party of India – Maoist (CPI-M). Perhaps, in his statement he also implicitly includes, and justifiably so, the members of the Central Military Commission, along with the Politburo.¹

DATA IS IMPORTANT

On April 16, 2018, a few days before Raman Singh came out with his approach to ‘talks’ with the Maoists, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA) released a report², which took stock of the Left-Wing insurgency that India is facing since 1967 – the erstwhile Naxalbari metamorphosing into the post-2004 ‘Maoist rebellion’.³

The report projected a fresh and encouraging dimension. Though it considers Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and

1 Brajendra Nath Singh, “Willing to talk to top Maoist Leadership: Chhattisgarh CM”, *The Quint*, April 4, 2018, accessed on June 8, 2018, <https://www.thequint.com/hot-news-text/willing-to-talk-to-top-maoist-leadership-chhattisgarh-cm>.

2 “Maoists area of influence shrinks; 44 districts removed from affected list: Union Home Secy”, *The Economic Times*, April 15, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://economictimes.com/news/defence/maoists-area-of-influence-shrinks-44-districts-removed-from-affected-list-union-home-secy/articleshow/63769620.cms?>.

3 For an exposition on Naxalism, read Rabindra Ray, *The Naxalites and their Ideology*, 1987 Oxford University Press, Oxford, and Sumanta Banerjee, *In the Wake of Naxalbari*, Shishu Sahitya Samsad, Kolkata, 2008.

Bihar as states that are severely affected by LWE; West Bengal, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are now considered partially affected. Interestingly, between 2004 and 2011, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh were a part of the severely affected category. Efficient counter-insurgency tactics through the elite ‘Greyhound’ squads in Andhra Pradesh and the targeted approach against the top Maoist leadership in West Bengal (the elimination of Kishenji in 2011 being the game-changer) surely bore fruits.

Another riveting yet expected aspect of the report is that the Maoists are making a foray into Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and planning to link the Western and Eastern Ghats through these states. After being repeatedly hounded out of their present guerilla base in the Dandakaranya region, it is quite logical for them to establish a fresh base at the tri-junction of these three states. The report further notes that the Maoists are attempting to make inroads into Northeast India – again implying a variety of strategic issues.

If one turns the pages of history, an interesting story pops up. In the early 1970s during the Bangladesh Liberation War, a number of Manipuri activists and leaders ended up in prison; especially in Tripura, where they came into contact with Naxalite prisoners. This in turn influenced the Manipuri groups with the ideology of Mao Zedong’s strategy of Protracted People’s War (PPW).⁴

It is not unlikely that Maoists could spread their net in the Northeast – more so, with the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) existing in Manipur since 1980.

4 For details on the terror network of the Maoists in the North-East, see Uddipan Mukherjee, “Maoists, North-East and China- Expanding net of terror”, *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, December 19, 2011, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.claws.in/744/maoists-north-east-and-china-expanding-net-of-terror-uddipan-mukherjee.html>.

Being a geographical continuity to North Bengal via the so-called Chicken's Neck Corridor, and with the historical origin of the insurgency at Naxalbari in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, Assam proffers an extension of base for the Maoists – especially due to the presence of tea plantations and its proletariat workers. Exploitation of workers and concomitant grievance fuel an anti-establishment sentiment, augmented by the urban-bred-cum-intellectual Maoist leadership. Similarly, tribal and ethnic issues are intricately entwined with the political realm to give rise to a militant insurgency in other states of the Northeast – at times facilitating inroads for the Maoist ideology, which seems to offer amelioration for the neglected and deprived.

The upshot of the UMHA report of April 16, 2018 was that 44 of the 126 LWE-affected districts reporting negligible violence were removed from the list. Eight new districts, however, which witnessed Maoist activities, were added to the account. Curiously and with somewhat ominous portents, out of eight districts, three belong to Kerala. Currently, just 30 worst affected districts contribute to 90 per cent of LWE violence in the country.⁵

On the occasion of Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary on April 14, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed to the Maoists to give up the path of violence. Nevertheless, he was pragmatic and tactical enough to expose the 'true nature' of the ultras, stating, "None of their chiefs is from your area. They have come from outside to your state. If you read their names, surnames, you will understand who they are. They do not die. They hide safely in the jungles. They send your children in

5 Rahul Tripathi, "The contours of the new Red map", *The Indian Express*, April 17, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/naxalism-maoist-attacks-home-ministry-modi-govt-national-policy-and-action-plan-5140028/>.

front to face the bullet. Would you leave your children behind such people”⁶

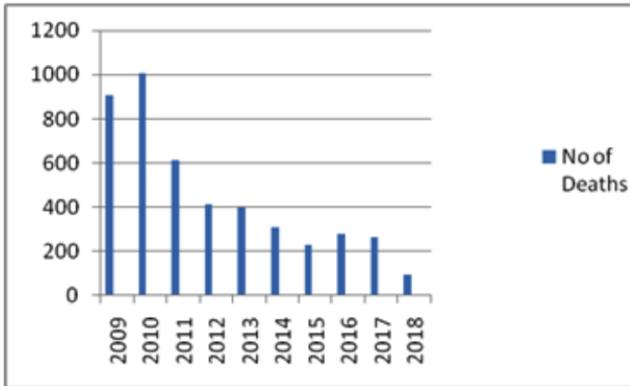


Table 1- Number of Deaths in Maoist Violence⁷

WHAT’S HAPPENING IN PHILIPPINES, COLOMBIA AND NEPAL?

Separated by over 4,000 km from the place of conflict in India, the daughter of the President of Philippines Rodrigo Duterte appealed to her father to reconsider his decision to resume talks with communist insurgents. Her words echoed the obvious, “Mr. President, the country will move forward if the government is able to eliminate the rebels and end this senseless rebellion. Just like a battered lover, there is a time to finally say no to pain and suffering”⁸.

6 “PM Modi urges Maoists to shun path of violence”, *The Times of India*, April 14, 2018, accessed on June 8, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-urges-maoists-to-shun-path-of-violence/articleshow/63765933.cms>.

7 The Histogram clearly indicates fall in violence after 2010, when Azad and Kishenji were eliminated by the security forces. Data is taken from *Union Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, <https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/LWEO300520180945.pdf>.

8 Manolo B. Jara, “Duterte asked to end talks with Red rebels”, *The Gulf Today*, April 15, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.gulftoday.ae/portal/a2a42fb8-1916-45ee-acb7-514e3b8943f7.aspx>.

Quite similar to its Indian counterpart, the Communist insurgency which Manila is combating began in the historic year of 1969, when not only the South Asian people, but even people in Latin America as well as Europe, were demanding ‘change’. An ambience of resistance swept all over the globe. While chasing his dream of a Communist world, Che Guevara was being hunted down within the confines of land-locked Bolivia and when Mao Zedong voiced his concerns regarding revisionism creeping into the domain of Communism through the controversial Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution – guns were taken up by a section of the populace in the erstwhile colonies of the European powers. The Philippines was one of these. India was another. Interestingly, both the countries are still witness to the two movements which commenced almost in parallel – at nearly the same time, only separated spatially.

Another look from India’s zone of conflict – this time towards the west – across 15,000 km over the Atlantic, presents a similar yet different view. In the year 2016, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) reacted angrily to the arrest of one of its prominent members, Seuxis Paucis Hernández Solarte, *alias* Jesús Santrich, on drug charges, while part of the main delegation at the negotiations that led to the peace deal announced in Cuba.⁹ They warned the government that the move is an obstacle to peace – a peace whose initial failed attempt bestowed the Nobel Peace Prize on Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016. Of course, a conflict which had claimed 220,000 lives and displaced eight million people since 1964 deserved topmost attention by the world

9 “Colombian president says Nobel peace prize win helped end civil war”, *The Guardian*, December 10, 2016, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/10/colombia-nobel-peace-prize-juan-manuel-santos>.

at large. However, the Cuban and Norwegian governments, which sponsored the talks and the peace agreement, expressed concerns.¹⁰ To make matters more volatile, 64 former combatants have been killed since the signing of the peace agreement in November 2016. Chris Kraul, writes on June 5, 2018, that FARC claims 17 relatives of its ex-rebels have also been killed.¹¹

In the Colombian case, an unprecedented military offensive – first under President Álvaro Uribe from 2002 to 2010, which continued with minor adjustments under Santos – reduced FARC’s total strength. The military onslaught by the government dramatically reduced FARC’s territorial control and pushed the guerrillas into ever more remote and sparsely populated hideouts, often close to territorial or internal border regions. This sustained action by the state ‘pushed’ the guerrillas to sit for negotiations.

A fourth vertex of the ‘insurgency quadrilateral’ is Nepal – with India, Philippines and Colombia being the remaining three vertices. The final outcome in Nepal is analogous to that of Colombia, but the process which led to it is quite dissimilar. A strategic lesson to be gleaned from peace talks is the fact that rebels, especially communist ultras who believe in protracted guerrilla warfare, come to the negotiating table either when they see a victory on the horizon or are cornered in the military sphere and find peace to be the viable alternative to survive

10 “Cuba, Norway Say Colombia-FARC Peace ‘Living Difficult Moments’”, *Telesur TV*, April 16, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Cuba-Norway-Concerned-About-Colombia-Peace-Accord-With-FARC-20180416-0008.html>.

11 Chris Kraul, “Killings of demobilized rebels threaten peace process in Colombia”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2018, accessed on June 08, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-colombia-farc-killings-20180605-story.html>.

for the time being, as well as to exist in permanence.¹² FARC agreeing to talk with the authorities under the tutelage of Cuba and Norway is an instance of the latter, while the peace offer of the Nepali Maoists was a typical example of the former.

Against this checkered backdrop, the moot point of the discourse is whether an option for talks is viable/feasible/profitable enough for the Indian Government from tactical or strategic perspective – more so, when it is in a ‘position of strength’ and the Left-Wing hardliners are losing their traditional ground.

The laying down of arms by FARC rebels or by the Nepali Maoists can serve as a Conflict Resolution Model for the sub-continent, no doubt. One issue, however, is worth noting.

Though the strength of FARC rebels diminished over the years, the civil war was still very much ongoing. It created ripples down the Santos administration and that meant the Colombian government was way too eager to resolve the conflict, even through negotiations mediated by third parties. Nepal, on the other hand, was always hanging on the anachronistic pendulum of a monarchical government and with its ‘not so challenging’ armed forces, couldn’t offer a tough resistance to the Maoists.

The Maoists in India are cornered due to loss of leaders and cadre. Though they are extending themselves and attempting to spread their tentacles to other parts of the country, towards the north-east and into the south, this is essentially a long term perspective. With its formidable Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) at the forefront and the mighty Army to back up them, the Indian Government is not under any serious threat so as to even sit near the discussion table.

12 For a brief history of the Maoist Civil War in Colombia, see Uddipan Mukherjee, “Fragile Peace in Colombia”, *Diplomatic Courier*, March 18, 2016, accessed on June 08, 2018, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/fragile-peace-in-colombia/>.

Moreover, the Indian authorities appear confident that they will weed out the insurgency permanently through a security-cum-development model. In May 2017, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh announced a new strategy against the Maoists¹³, called SAMADHAN. The acronym elaborated into S: Smart leadership, A: aggressive strategy, M: motivation and training, A: actionable intelligence, D: dashboard-based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas), H: harnessing technology, A: Action Plan for each theatre and N: no access to financing.

The Maoists too, especially their top leadership is not eager to ‘talk’ because it is obvious that, at this stage, they have to ‘lay down arms’ as a pre-condition for talks. Hence, the ultras are not willing to put across the idea of talks *suo moto* and lose grounds in the negotiation at the very outset. Unlike the instance of Colombia, third party mediation in the Indian case is out of question – at least for now, since the issue is not of such gravity as to pull in the world’s major powers. Moreover, the Maoist issue in India does not affect any border areas and has remained primarily a domestic problem.

All said, the peace processes in Colombia and Nepal do provide empirical evidence of conflict resolution. Rebellions may systematically decline because of the following features:¹⁴

13 S K Gurung, “SAMADHAN: Rajnath Singh coins an acronym to wipe out left-wing terror”, *The Economic Times*, May 8, 2017, accessed on June 09, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/rajnath-singh-calls-for-unity-of-purpose-to-tackle-naxals/articleshow/58571588.cms>.

14 For detailed discussions, see Paul W. Staeheli, “Collapsing insurgent organizations through leadership decapitation: a Comparison of targeted killing and Targeted incarceration in insurgent Organizations”, Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School March 2010, file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/10Mar_Staeheli.pdf and Martha Crenshaw, “How Terrorism Declines”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 1991, pp 69-87.

1. physical defeat
2. decision of the group to abandon terrorist strategy
3. organisational disintegration.

In the Indian context, it may be proposed that some or all of these features may be achieved through ‘talks’. But ‘talks’ or any attempts towards negotiation with the Maoists, have failed in the past. Moreover, bringing the guerrillas to the negotiating table is always accompanied by the danger of giving them the space to regroup.

When government officers are abducted as a quid-pro-quo mechanism to release some ultras, ‘talks’ between the Government and the Maoists are a natural fallout. This has happened a couple of times at least since 2010.

Rights activists and mediators like Swami Agnivesh had even appealed to both the Government and the Maoists to opt for a 72-hour ceasefire to facilitate a peace process.¹⁵ According to Agnivesh and others, the peace process probably could have shaped up, but was abruptly halted when reports of the death of the Maoist spokesperson Cherukuri Rajkumar *aka* Azad surfaced in the first week of July 2010.

In 2009, the year when the Lalgarh uprising re-ignited the flames of the insurgency in West Bengal – Azad had stated his party’s intentions of holding talks with the Government, in a letter to Swami Agnivesh.

However, in May 2010, speaking to the media from the confines of Bastar in Central India, Ramana, a senior Maoist leader, rejected the offer for ‘talks’ by the Government and said, “We cannot give up our weapons.”¹⁶

15 Joseph John, “Won’t shy from talks with Naxals”, *MSN News*, February 13, 2011, accessed on February 22, 2011, <http://news.in.msn.com/national/article.aspx?cp-documentid=4915485>.

16 Anuj Chopra, “India’s Maoist rebels spurn government offer of talks”, *The National*, May 19, 2010, accessed on June 9, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/india-s-maoist-rebels-spurn-government-offer-of-talks-1.556371>.

Referring back to the Filipino case, the Philippines Government and the Maoist-guerrillas had been involved in ‘stop-start’ negotiations over the past 25 years, without any concrete results. In the meantime, the fighting has consumed close to 40,000 lives.

In a seminal work titled: “How Insurgencies End”, published by RAND Corporation in 2010, researchers Ben Connable and Martin Libicki demonstrated on the basis of data that, the longer an insurgency lasts, the more likely the government is to win.¹⁷ In tune with this finding, it may be stated that the state-actors would generally benefit if a low-intensity insurgency lasts long. Besides, until the rebellion spills into major towns and cities, the danger from an insurgency to the security of the nation-state is not really significant.

CAN GANDHI COME TO THE RESCUE?

The messiah of peace, non-violence and truth, Mahatma Gandhi was pragmatic in his approach while spearheading the Indian National Movement. He followed a methodology of Struggle-Truce-Struggle, so as to conserve the energy of the masses and on each occasion, carry on the Satyagraha with renewed vigour.

This was sensible and tactical. After all, Gandhi’s war was also a protracted war by and for the people. If the people were drained of their adrenaline too soon, even though it was a non-violent movement, the very objective of pressuring the British Raj would hardly have been served.

The Maoists however are no Gandhians – not even ‘Gandhians with guns’, though some commentators choose to elevate them to that level. Nevertheless, as far as strategy and tactics are concerned, they reflect an uncanny resemblance

17 Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, “How Insurgencies End”, *RAND Corporation*, 2010, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG965.html>.

with the Gandhian variety. Periods of peace are to be treated as punctuation marks in the path of the Protracted People's War (PPW), suitably adjusted, keeping in view the relative power exercised by the state and the insurgents.

Talking with/to the state authorities is a viable option, but only as a tactical choice for the Maoists, in periods of a downslide for them, or if they plan to re-group/re-orient/re-configure their efforts. Peace is definitely an asset in times of distress or more technically speaking, 'strategic defensive'. In other situations, when the Maoists aim to push the ground towards a strategic offensive, peace is a liability. However, during the middle phase of a guerrilla war – that is, the strategic stalemate,¹⁸ the choice of peace is influenced by several factors, sharply analysed and thereafter decided. Considering the geographical spread of India and the relative 'spread' of the Maoists, it will be hard for the insurgents to come to a definite conclusion at any particular abscissa of time, whether it is in a situation of strategic defence, stalemate or offensive, since the situation could vary vastly across different regions. For instance, if there happens to be a Lalgargh 'bull' for the insurgents, then it could turn out to be a 'bear' of *Operation Anaconda* in the Saranda forests at the same time. The Andhra Talks of 2004 and the Bengal Talks of 2011 need to be viewed against this phenomenological backdrop.

Amit Bhaduri, with visible sympathies towards the insurgents, writes that every time the authorities say they want to initiate a peace process, they want their armed adversaries to 'abjure violence'. This peace, he continues –

18 In a Strategic Defence state, the insurgents retain their militia status and being weaker than the security forces, primarily depend on guerrilla warfare. However in a Strategic Offence phase, the ultras form a conventional people's liberation force and take on the government forces in a head-on war.

without categorical guarantee of safety from the government's onslaught – is dangerous for underground Maoist leaders. Bhadhuri even goes to the extent of saying that the state policy all along has been to liquidate illegally its Maoist opponents in the name of 'peace talk'.¹⁹

Intriguingly, such rhetoric fails to appreciate the fact that, for a compact modern state to flourish, the 'monopoly' of using force lawfully must be with the state itself. Allowing armed groups to loiter around in any significant segment of the state's territory is a clear signal of the failure of the state apparatus. Furthermore, it is strange to expect peace negotiations to commence while a parallel war is going on. A mutual ceasefire is a pre-requisite to any 'talks' with the adversary. The luminaries who spew venom against the state regarding the latter's approach towards peace talks again seem to have a poor memory – abysmally failing to grasp the varied maneuvers adopted by the Indian state in dealing with the Maoists in the Andhra Talks and with several insurgent groups in the Northeast as well as in Jammu and Kashmir.

In this context, it is interesting to note that Sujato Bhadro – the West Bengal based historian and TV commentator, who was interestingly also an interlocutor during the Bengal Talks with the Maoists in 2011, writes that the Maoists took the lives of three activists [of other political parties] in a ruthless manner even after a round of peace talks with them was completed on a positive note. Bhadro further notes: "On September 29, however, thanks to the government's willingness to continue the dialogue process, the peace talks got a chance..."²⁰

19 Amit Bhadhuri, "Peace That is More Dangerous Than War, In Peoples' War As Strategy and Peace Talks as Taktics, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, Setu Prakashani, 2012, Kolkata, pp. 18-19.

20 Sujato Bhadro, "Peace-talk Process in Junglemahal: A Brief Review", in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, p. 62.

Further, Act 5 of the Joint Declaration (on behalf of the West Bengal Government and the Civil Society) issued in July 2011 stated: “In Jangalmahal, and the whole of West Bengal, all parties have to withdraw arms.” And as another interlocutor Chhoton Das predicates,²¹ ‘all parties’ implied the Maoists as well as the government – and obviously not the government alone!

The joint forces started operation in Lalgarh on June 18, 2009. A week later, Das writes, the mass organisation *Lalgarh Mancha* issued a press statement whose main thrust was: “Stop Joint Forces’ operation in Lalgarh and begin talks.” There was no demand of withdrawal of the Joint Forces. In fact, the CPI-Maoist ‘state secretary’, in a statement issued on September 30, 2011, demanded just one condition for the creation of a congenial environment for peace talks and that was the government’s promise to halt joint operations for one month.²² To ask for halt of operations and later on dissolve the talks on the allegation that the state reneged on the promise of ‘withdrawal’ of the security forces, was merely a ruse.

Kunal Chattopadhyay seems sceptical²³ and to a large extent cynical about the productivity of peace talks. He argues that the Indian state uses the pretext/bogey of the Maoist insurgent to unleash violence on the Adivasis. Naturally, on Chattopadhyay’s analysis, the Indian state would be reluctant to engage in ‘true’ talks. On the other hand, the Maoists too, are not serious about talks since they are built on the solid

21 Chhoton Das, “Why the Talks Failed?”, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, pp. 73-74.

22 Ibid.

23 Kunal Chattopadhyay, “Maoists and the Indian State: Is Peace Possible?”, in People’s War as Strategy and Peace Talks as Tactics, in Biswajit Roy ed., *War and Peace in Junglemahal*, 2012, Setu Prakashani, Kolkata, p. 179.

platform of Stalinism-Maoism, which hardly believes in the precepts of socialist democracy. Chattopadhyay continues, “given its ideology, which involves the principle that any struggle other than ‘armed struggle’ is revisionist, a sell-out to the ruling establishment, the Maoists cannot engage in fruitful peace talks.”²⁴

Actually the problem is broader and runs deep. The fundamental ideology of Maoism rests on the protracted people’s war in order to topple the so-called ‘reactionary bourgeoisie regime’. Similar movements, launched in Cuba under the Castro-Guevara combo, in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas or in Peru under Guzman have all done exactly the same: followed the prototype model of the Chinese Revolution of Mao Zedong. Whether all these movements have been fully successful or not is not the point of debate; the fact remains that these insurgencies followed a set, well-planned model of ‘people’s war’ through ‘guerilla tactics’.

And forget about the manifesto; ‘holding talks’ was never even in the agenda of these non-Indian Maoists.

Only the Nepalese Maoists deviated to a degree by joining mainstream politics. However, that is held to be the ‘Prachanda Path’ and their Indian counterparts are still to acknowledge it unequivocally. Furthermore, Prachanda had a solid reason to renounce arms temporarily and join national politics. That was a ‘tactical alliance’ by the Nepalese Maoists with the parliamentary parties in order to effect a strategic victory of capturing power at Kathmandu. The common enemy of all the parties at that point in time was the monarch and hence that ‘tactical alliance’ was consequential.

In the Indian context, at present, the Maoists have no ‘tactical partners’ in the mainstream political fray. They cannot even consider forging an alliance like the Nepalese

24 Ibid.

Maoists. The oil price hike, inflation and Indian camaraderie with the Western Hemisphere can still be relevant issues of commonality between the different communist parties (say, the Communist Party of India-Marxists) and the Maoists, but that cannot be the foundation of their friendship; more so when each attacks the others' comrades.

The best the Maoists would do by accepting the 'offer for talks' is to utilise the interregnum to bolster their party infrastructure and acquire some breathing space and time. A ceasefire would give the rank and file of the ultras ample scope to regroup. But this argument holds good for the government too, as had been pointed out by this author.²⁵ Moreover, a mutual ceasefire would not only be beneficial to both the parties, but also bring succour to the Adivasis who are caught in the crossfire.²⁶

It can be well agreed that the ultras have their own set of demands. They want the release of their top leaders such as Kobad Ghandy, who are languishing in prisons. On this count, it is worth mentioning that the Maoists are also not very clear about their 'pre-conditions'. Earlier, as reported in 2010, CPI-M 'general secretary' Ganapathy had put in place three demands as pre-requisites for talks with the government. The first one was stopping of Operation Green Hunt by withdrawal of paramilitary forces. The second demand was lifting the ban on the party and its mass organisation wings. And, the final one was the release of 'their comrades'.²⁷

25 Uddipan Mukherjee, "The Bad War: Analysing Dantewada", Boloji, April 27, 2010, <http://www.boloji.com/articles/9341/the-bad-war-analysing-dantewada> and "The Bad War", *Newslines*, April, 2010, <http://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/the-bad-war/>.

26 Uddipan Mukherjee, "Caught in the Crossfire", *Newslines*, February 2010, <https://newslinemagazine.com/magazine/caught-in-the-crossfire/>.

27 "Interview with Comrade Ganapathy, the General Secretary of Communist Party of India (Maoist)", *People's March*, November 19, 2010, <https://ajadhind.wordpress.com/tag/ganapathy/>.

The then Maoist ‘spokesperson’ Cherukuri Rajkumar *aka* Azad had clarified the ‘prisoner release’ agenda. He in fact had diluted Ganapathy’s original hard line and interpreted the demand to be a part of the talks: that is, leaders and other prisoners may be released as the talks proceeded toward a fruitful direction.

It is clear that there are conditions and pre-conditions of going ahead with the talks from both sides and none of the incumbents till date have really expressed their proclivity toward any amicable settlement of the dispute.

It must be borne in mind that nobody, be it Karl Marx, or Vladimir Lenin or Mao Zedong, on whose theoretical principles the CPI-M bases itself, talk of ‘talks’. They strictly abhor partnering with the ‘bourgeois regime’. They speak of overthrowing the existing parliamentary democracy. They hate ‘revisionism’

And the present Maoist leadership idolises Mao Zedong’s Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution of 1966. They despise the deviationist line adopted by Deng Xiao Ping, the maker of modern China, which espouses State controlled Capitalism

LET’S HAVE SOME EXPERT OPINION

On a rather positive note, Peter Sederberg of the Department of Government and International Studies, University of South Carolina, proposes the ‘war model’ and the ‘rational actor model’ – through which he shows that these models actually incorporate conciliatory strategies while the state negotiates with the terrorists.²⁸ Though he acknowledges that conventional wisdom suggests that regimes should never bargain with terrorists, Sederberg also notes that conciliatory strategies have

28 Peter C. Sederberg, “Conciliation as Counter-Terrorist Strategy”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Volume 32, Number 2, 1995, pp. 295-312.

been used, sometimes with considerable success. In the paper, he identifies a number of tactical factors that might affect the choice of conciliatory strategies.

Stephen Stedman, at the Centre for International Security and Arms Control of the Stanford University, also appears optimistic. He agrees that the greatest source of risk in peacemaking comes from the spoilers – that is, leaders and parties who believe that peace threatens their power and necessarily use violence to undermine attempts to achieve peace. But as Stedman points out, not all spoilers do succeed in stalling peace processes. In support of his argument,²⁹ he cites the cases of the Mozambique National Resistance and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia – the latter being more pertinent to this discussion as it represented the most obnoxious form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

And speaking from an American perspective, Daniel Byman asserts that talking with the insurgents is often a necessary first step toward defeating them or reaching an acceptable compromise. Interestingly, along the lines of what the Colombian government and FARC rebels had been doing, Byman further states³⁰ that these talks must often be gone ahead with even as insurgents shoot at U.S. soldiers and they, in turn, shoot at them. More apposite to this discussion is how Byman cogently concludes:

Talks with insurgents are politically costly, usually fail, and can often backfire. Nevertheless, they are often necessary to end conflicts and transform an insurgent group into a legitimate political actor or wean them

29 Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes”, *International Security*, Volume 22, Number 2, 1997, pp.5-53.

30 Daniel Byman, “Talking with Insurgents: A guide for the Perplexed”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 32, Number 2, 2009, pp. 125-137.

away from violence. Policymakers and analysts alike must recognize that the conditions for success are elusive.³¹

ARE THE INDIAN MAOISTS INTERESTED IN PEACE?

Or to ask a far more practical question, are they amenable to negotiations? As already highlighted in this paper, they are more concerned with ‘hoisting their Red flag of revolution over the historic Red Fort’. They are far more interested in materialising their New Democratic Revolution (NDR) within the periphery of Marx’s historical materialism. They are obdurate in pursuing their combat role against the Indian state. They are eager to push forward, occasionally trudge forward as a tactical move, in this asymmetric yet long war. They have a vested interest in prolonging the violence, provoking state structures to initiate a reaction, which can then be misconstrued as ‘state repression.’

Still, in this carefully engineered process, the Maoists, specifically the leadership – intellectuals, non-intellectuals or even pseudo-intellectuals – are cautious about winning the hearts and minds of the *Adivasis* and other inhabitants of the projected Red Corridor – keenly adhering to Mao’s maxim: “The Guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.” The moment the guerrilla loses his safe havens among the people, the movement fizzles out. After all, it is a war for the people and has necessarily to be fought by the people. This is exactly where the fundamentals reside.

The Indian state needs to and is knowledgeable enough to target the real stakeholders in this war – a rather ‘bad war’. The *Adivasis* in Chhattisgarh or the deprived lower-castes in Bihar-Jharkhand or the malnourished in Amlasole and Lalgarh in West Bengal; they are the real stakeholders and needs to be

31 Ibid.

targeted as far as appropriate governance and developmental schemes are concerned. In a Euclidean parallel, the leadership of the Left Wing ultras could be pruned – systematically, as a strategy. Extreme caution must, however, be ensured so that a rampage of violence is not unleashed – at least at a scale which affects the population, and in turn depletes intelligence gathering by the Security Forces. Violence or power (as the interpretation may go) could be skilfully used by the state to diminish the movement without permitting humanitarian excesses and rights violations, which would only result in a defeat in the war of propaganda at a mammoth scale, both in the national and international arena.

With *Al Jazeera* getting interested in the Maoist insurgency and interviewing the 1960s Debra-Gopiballavpur veteran, the now de-scaled and politically stigmatised Ashim Chatterjee; with young scholars in top notch US universities trying to script their Masters and Doctoral theses on this insurgency; and articles on the issue even popping up in established and stylised magazines such as *Foreign Policy* and the *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, the issue is certainly serious. For the Indian state, it is important to contain the insurgency – but equally important to win the war in the media, national and international. And for that, an unrestrained use of force, devoid of rationale, could be catastrophic. At the same time, any lapse into passivity would be scoring a duck in the field – which the state can ill afford. In this context, Home Minister, Rajnath Singh’s categorical statement acquires tremendous significance, “There is no question of any talks now. We will take a balanced approach. But the forces will give a befitting reply if the Naxals launch attacks.”³²

32 Vijaita Singh, “Rajnath Draws Hard Line on Maoists”, *The Indian Express*, June 28, 2014, accessed on October 7, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/rajnath-draws-hard-line-on-maoists-no-talks-attacks-will-get-befitting-reply/>.

The Greyhounds' success in flushing out the Maoists from Andhra Pradesh is recent enough not to have been forgotten. No wonder freshly recruited IPS officers are now undergoing gruelling training in counterinsurgency warfare and attachments with Greyhounds units, and also enduring short exposure to life in the jungle, in order to 'fight the guerrilla like a guerilla'. Later in their careers, they would be taking on an enemy whose cadres take pride in being inflicted with malaria every few weeks in the jungles, describing disease as 'men's menstruation'; feeding on snake-soup in the Dandakaranya. Police leaders will have to be conditioned to equally adverse situations if they are to win the war. If tomorrow's unit-level and district-level Police leaders are sufficiently trained, equipped and mentally prepared to confront to counter-insurgent's task of 'eating soup with a knife'³³, the country would have little cause for worry.

Edward Luttwak once wrote in his seminal essay in *Foreign Affairs*, "Give War a Chance."³⁴ With the Andhra Talks³⁵ of 2004 breaking down, the Bengal parleys of 2011 crumbling, and the ever obstinate stance of the top Maoist leadership in their commitment to violence, talks are not impossible but have probability of success 'tending to zero'. It can, consequently,

33 John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya, Vietnam, and Iraq*, 2005, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

34 Edward N. Luttwak, "Give War a Chance", *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug 1999, p. 36, <https://peacelearner.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/edward-luttwak-give-war-a-chance1.pdf>.

35 A 3-month ceasefire commenced in Andhra Pradesh in June 2004. The discussions ended without any agreement and the guerillas went back to their hideouts. Maoists did not agree to put down their arms. Clashes with police and security forces resumed in January 2005. The intensity of Maoist violence increased after the failed talks with the merger of the Maoist Communist Centre based in Bihar-Jharkhand and the People's War Group of Andhra.

safely be concluded that, for the Indian state, there is *no need to talk* to the Maoists – at least at this juncture and as long as the Leftist insurgents refuse to give up arms.

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Russia's Geopolitics in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Gaurav Kumar*

Afghanistan has the enduring curse of being at the perpetual epicenter of the interplay of perfidious games of major global and regional players. It has been caught up in a war forced on it by great power competition for nearly forty years, and over the past half a decade, has returned to the centre of the strategic chessboard. Global and regional players have been destabilizing Afghanistan to further their own divergent interests and to counter their opponents. The current situation in Afghanistan reflects the detrimental impact of global involvements in the region, coupled with internal strife.

Afghanistan, through all these years of push and pull, has become a victim of its own geostrategic centrality, making it a perfect 'playground' for conflicting interests, ambitions and political ideologies. The change in the contours of global power relations has not diminished its miseries. In a bi-polar world, under the shadow of the Cold War, the US and the Soviets fought a 'hot war' in Afghanistan. When the USSR

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disintegrated, and the country appeared to be setting itself free from the clutches of the Russian and American influence, the Pakistanis came in hot pursuit to consolidate the enormous influence they had usurped during the US war on communism. Pakistan's purported strategic interest was to gain 'depth' in the region in order to counter a rising India. The calculation, based on mere apprehension that India might use Afghanistan as a springboard to launch anti-Pakistan activities, led to sinister designs that led to the formation and rise of the Taliban. The use of militancy by Pakistan as a tool of foreign policy to achieve its interests not only expanded in scale, it also deepened the ethnic fissures between Pashtun and non-Pashtun within Afghan society. Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan have had catastrophic regional and international consequences.

One of the disastrous consequence was the 9/11 attacks in the US, which changed the dynamics of the conflict in Asia. The US, which had barely shown any interest in Afghanistan after the early 1990s, returned with all its military might. Pakistan with its own design, suddenly became a 'benign partner' in the region, narrowly escaping the threat of being bombed back into the Stone Age.¹ It would be imprudent to suggest that the US presence has not worsened the situation since 2001. The policies adopted by the US-led international community lacked a proper understanding of regional dynamics, as well as the role of Pakistan as a powerful destabilizing entity and a master of the game of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds. Rory Stewart, a member of the British Parliamentarian aptly summarized the reasons for the failure in Afghanistan:

The truth is that the West always lacked the knowledge, power, or legitimacy to fundamentally transform

1 "US 'threatened to bomb' Pakistan", *BBC*, September 22, 2006, Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5369198.stm.

Afghanistan. But policymakers were too afraid, too hypnotized by fashionable theories, too isolated from Afghan reality, and too laden with guilt to notice that the more ambitious Afghanistan mission was impossible and unnecessary.²

Over the past few years, the volatility has increased, escalating violence and instability in the region, creating a power vacuum and luring other players to come to Afghanistan in order to either further or protect their divergent interests.

The current vacuum in Afghanistan provides ample space for regional players like India, Iran, China and Russia to intervene in Afghan affairs, slowly increasing their stakes in the region. Russia and China have emerged as a powerful bloc in formulating regional policies, with widening implications for Afghanistan. The US, on the other hand, is stuck with its flailing policy, with growing concerns among its allies on the future of Afghanistan. The sense of commitment and responsibility towards Afghanistan has been progressively and severely eroded among these allies. The adversarial relationship between the Russian and the United States manifesting itself on the ground in Afghanistan may well transform this hapless nation once again into a theatre of Russian-American conflict – a pawn in major power rivalry. With China, along with the Pakistan, aligning itself on the Russian side, new equations are emerging in the conflict. Indeed, while not explicitly formalized, the new relations between China and Russia raise the spectre of an unprecedented rivalry with the US. Despite its tragic history through the Cold War, Afghanistan has never witnessed such powerful alignments working simultaneously against each other in the past.

2 Wittmeyer, A.P, "What Went Wrong in Afghanistan?", *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2013, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/04/what-went-wrong-in-afghanistan/>.

It is not just these complex interests and calculations of the global players that contribute to the violence and instability of Afghanistan. The internal rivalries at the ethnic and national level create ample spaces for the international community to intervene on behalf of one faction or the other. It was General Mohammed Daud's turning to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance in early 1950s that provoked the great power rivalries that played out on Afghani soil thereafter, as he sought to play off Western forces against the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of December 1979 brought in a direct confrontation of unprecedented proportions, far beyond the Cold War competition South Asia had witnessed before this. The culmination of series of events, backed and supported by regional forces, marked the beginning of Afghanistan's violent disintegration, a process it is still trying to pull itself out of.

Even after the Soviet withdrawal, the Moscow-backed Najibullah Government tried to keep the Soviet interest alive in Afghanistan, despite the fact that it was unable to extract substantial support from the Government in Moscow. The end of Najibullah government came when he was forced to step down as a president by the rebels within its own party and military, with the help of the *mujahedeen*.

The *mujahideen*, a patchwork army of Islamist guerrillas and warlords backed by US and Pakistani intelligence agencies, fought among themselves for supremacy throughout the early 1990s. A handicapped and dysfunctional government under the leadership of the Buhrauddin Rabbani administered chaos, before the violent tide of the Pakistan sponsored *Taliban* swept across the region. The Taliban rampage, however, stalled in Northern Afghanistan, with anti-Taliban Tajik and Uzbek forces upsetting their ambitions.

Over the last five decades, events suggest that the power rivalry between the ethnic groups in Afghanistan have

enormously compounded problems, creating the spaces for international intervention. Ethnic fissures among the Afghans were on full display when the Tajiks and Hazaras, later joined by the Uzbeks, fought against the Pashtun majoritarian Taliban. The rise of the radical Taliban led to an incessant bloodbath in Afghanistan with global repercussions, including the 9/11 attacks in the US, which changed the entire dynamics of the region after the US invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001.

The fall of the Taliban and the setting up of the democratic government since then has hardly changed the fate of the civilians who have long been caught in the crossfire. The failure of US-led international forces to contain extremist violence has left the region insecure and unstable. Political fissures and the uncertainty over the role and presence of the US-led coalition has resulted in the emergence of power blocs with competing, often conflicting, interests. The consequences go well beyond Afghanistan, and several countries, particularly the Central Asian republics, are enormously concerned about the impact of growing instability in Afghanistan on their own populations and boundaries. Moreover, after a quarter-century hiatus, Russia and the United States are again on the verge of a new power-play in the region, with potentially catastrophic consequences. How Afghanistan will evolve from this point onwards will not only depend on how the US-led coalition acts, but also on how a resurgent Russia, backed new partners, will react.

THE COLD WAR PERIOD: SOVIET IN COMMAND OF THE REGION

The Soviet Union's military intervention in Afghanistan began on December 25, 1979, with the sole aim of defeating the anti-communist insurgency and consolidating a pro-Soviet

Government in Afghanistan. The Saur Revolution (April 1978), which helped the Soviets overthrow the Afghan President Mohammed Daoud Khan, could be considered a prelude to the Soviet invasion.³ The subsequent period was marked with high levels of volatility that forced Moscow to engineer frequent regime changes in Kabul. Despite repeated attempts at subduing the Afghans at both the military and political level, the Soviets were unable to contain the violent insurgency against its puppet regimes. Their nearly 10-year long military and political adventure in Afghanistan was a catastrophe at the ideological and strategic level, both for the Soviets and the Afghans, and achieved none of its intended objectives. It is, however, imperative to recognize what Soviet concerns and interests in the region were, which provoked its military adventurism, and the degree to which these have survived into the current scenario. This requires an examination of the Soviet policy towards Central and South Asia, its immediate neighbours, and the broader Third World.

The foremost factor was the kind of political ideology Soviet Union sought in order to create a peaceful world order. It saw itself grappling with an ideological struggle against the West, with Communism pitched against anti-people imperialism. Protecting and promulgating the ideology in newly independent countries of the Third World was seen as necessary in order to support and promote Communism. The belief was that, in the long haul, ex-colonial countries would gravitate to 'Socialism.' A new sense of optimism emerged in the USSR, after initial setbacks to the Khrushchevian

3 A. Z. Hilali, "The Soviet penetration into Afghanistan and the Marxist Coup", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Volume 18, Issue 4, 2007, pp- 673-716, DOI: 10.1080/13518040500354984.

model.⁴ The United States was seen as a declining power, the correlation of forces as moving decisively in favour of 'socialism', and the Third World as entering a new era of revolutionary transformation.⁵ It was believed necessary to add more and more countries to the Socialist bloc, drawing them into the Soviet sphere of influence. Military power was one of the tools employed, along with political and economic intervention in the Third World. Principally, any movement against the Soviet-backed Governments in the 'satellite states' was considered a movement against the policy and ideology of the Soviets. Afghanistan was a test case for this strategy.

Afghanistan was also an immediate neighbour and was located at a strategic crossroads – sandwiched between Iran and Pakistan, two CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) members of the Baghdad Pact, and the only non-aligned country south of the Soviet Union. Afghanistan acted as the only barrier between the US ally Pakistan and the highly diversified industrial complex in Soviet Central Asia.⁶ The Soviets wanted to protect Afghanistan against the growing US influence through its ally, Pakistan, which had joined the Western Bloc in order to counter India.

4 Khrushchev model can be defined as a policy approach for newly independent countries, Third World countries for a rapid transition toward socialism, toward Soviet-type societies and close association with the Soviet international bloc. Fritz W. Ermarth, Director of National Security Programs at the Nixon Center states that process was guided by the example of Soviet national development, protected from the depredations of imperialism by the deterrent shield of Soviet strategic power, and accelerated by a modicum of Soviet economic and military aid.

5 Maley, William, and Amin Saikal, *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, 1990, Cambridge University Press.

6 Hasan, Zubeida. "The Foreign Policy Of Afghanistan." *Pakistan Horizon*, Volume 17, Number. 1, 1964, pp. 48–57. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41403798.

Similarly, volumes of literature highlight the importance of the oil-rich Persian Gulf in the overall Soviets strategic decision to attack Afghanistan. The breach of the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979 led to an increased American presence in South West Asia, with a particular buildup of naval units in the Persian Gulf. This fed into the Soviet narrative that the US sought to use the Persian region and Iran to encircle it.⁷ The relatively weak response of the US Government to the situation in Iran gave the impression that its intervention in Afghanistan might go relatively unchallenged.⁸ It is still unclear how far the Soviets were willing to drive through towards the Arabian Sea, dividing the CENTO allies Pakistan and Iran. However, this fear played an important role in defining the western response.

Additionally, there were apprehensions among Soviet leaders of Muslim radicalization in the Central Asian states. The rebellion against the Soviet-supported Government at Kabul and the prospect of the collapse of communism Afghanistan, coupled with the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, constituted a serious ideational and possibly geopolitical threat to the Soviet Union.⁹ The Soviets feared that the radicalization in Afghanistan might reach its boundaries, with an explosion of religiously-motivated violent extremism across Central Asia, to the detrimental of the highly militarized Central Asian

7 Freedman, R.O. *Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy since the Invasion of Afghanistan*, 1991, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

8 Goldman, Minton F. "Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan: Roots & Causes." *Polity*, Volume 16, Number 3, 1984, pp. 384–403. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3234556.

9 Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Islam and security narratives in Eurasia", *Caucasus Survey*, Volume 1, Number 1, 2015, pp: 5-26, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23761199.2013.11417281>.

security complex.¹⁰ The rise of Islam was also against the stated ideology of Communism, which adhered firmly to atheism. Throughout their history, the Soviets feared the radicalization of their own Muslim population through the Islamic countries bordering it. The change of language and shift from Latin to Cyrillic had similar political and ideological underpinnings, as it was intended to distance the Soviet Muslims from the West and Turkey (the latter had adopted the Latin script), and to enhance the learning of Russian.¹¹ The move was aimed at cutting the Muslim dominated regions of the USSR off from any kind of provocative Islamic literature.

It was, consequently, a culmination of series of considerations and potential challenges to their power that prompted the Soviets to invade Afghanistan.

AFTER THE COLD WAR: RISE OF THE MUJAHIDEEN

The nearly decade-long war in Afghanistan and the face-saving withdrawal of Soviet troops had a disastrous impact on the Soviet Union. The war and the subsequent withdrawal from what was initially considered by the Soviets to be a minor conflict with containable and minimal implications, turned out

10 Kornfeld, R., "Afghanistan: Reflections on the Invasion", *Harvard International Review*, Volume 3, Number 6, 1981, pp- 10-11. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42763658>; Gompert, D., Binnendijk, H., & Lin, B., "The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1979" in *Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*, RAND Corporation., 2014, pp. 129-138, Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1287m9t.18>; James D. J. Brown "Oil Fueled? The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Volume 29, Number 1, pp- 56-94, accessed from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1060586X.2013.778543>.

11 Fouse, G, *The language of the former Soviet republics: their history and development*, 2000, Lanham, NY and Oxford: University Press of America, quoted in Ismailova, B. M., "Language Policy in Central Asia" (2001). Master's Capstone Projects. 60, University of Massachusetts Amherst, p.26.

to be one of the major causes of the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet power. The economic, military and diplomatic costs of the Afghan war widened the political fissure between the leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and, much worse, the defeat of the national Red Army had a huge impact on the population. The Army till that point had been seen as the torchbearer of communism. Apart from other systemic institution failures, the Afghan war played an important role in collapse of the Soviet's global stronghold in the bipolar world order, leaving the US as the only hegemonic power. The Afghan misadventure was the final folly of the Brezhnev era, Gorbachev's "bloody wound", highlighting the system's bankruptcy and undoubtedly speeding up the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹²

The Soviet collapse decisively impacted on Russia's clout and capacity to manage its periphery and satellite states. Afghanistan was no exception. The fall of the Soviet Union handicapped the Najibullah Government in Afghanistan, which continued to receive extensive economic and political support from Moscow even after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army. Though the US sustained only symbolic interest in the region after the withdrawal of the Soviets, Pakistan had maneuvered itself to the helm. The shrinking resources from Russia soon resulted in loss of Najibullah's control, compounded further by the rising power of rival Mujahideen warlords, all of which soon precipitated into a full blown civil war, leading to the overthrow of the Najibullah Government.

The fall of the Najibullah Government drew the curtain on all kinds of official influence Russia had in Afghanistan. The successor Burhanuddin Rabbani Government had little

12 Feifer, Gregory, *The great gamble: the Soviet war in Afghanistan*, 2009, New York, Harper Collins.

opportunity of meaningful engagement with a fading Russian power. Pakistan's increasing influence on the Rabbani Government in the initial years, and equally on the opposing *mujahideen* factions, curtailed any kind of external influence in Afghanistan.

This was also the period when post-Soviet Russia was battling a nearly collapsed economy, with major industries facing imminent closure and a former single all-union power, transport and communications system on the verge of collapse. Between 1991 and 1998, Russia lost nearly 30 per cent of its real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and suffered numerous bouts of inflation that decimated private savings. Russians also saw their disposable incomes decline rapidly and there was a massive flight of capital from the country, with close to \$150 billion flowing out between 1992 and 1999.¹³

Russia's inability to maintain its economic assistance to the newly independent Central Asian countries, which were also facing economic turmoil, limited its capacities to influence Afghanistan as well. Russia considered the Central Asian republics a natural sphere of influence, and sought to maintain some sway there, but, for reasons both of incapacity and unwillingness, progressively abandoned its ambitions beyond this region. The loss of its dominant position in Central Asia and its own internal crises kept Russia at bay in Afghanistan.

During the second half of the 1990s, the rise of radical Islamist Taliban and the formation of the Northern Alliance under the leadership Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masood pitched the Russians against the Taliban, in favour of the Northern

13 Johnston, M, "The Russian Economy since the Collapse of the Soviet Union", *Investopedia*, January 21, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/012116/russian-economy-collapse-soviet-union.asp>.

Alliance. Russian engagement with the Northern Alliance was primarily limited to military and technical support.¹⁴ India, Iran and Russia joined hands against the Taliban, a group they considered to be a destructive regional force and a brainchild of Pakistani military-intelligence.

Russian foreign policy remained largely dormant for many years under Boris Yelstin, and gained momentum only under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Nevertheless, the country was able to regain some of its lost prominence by the late 1990s, particularly under the guidance of Yevgeny Primakov who served as Foreign Minister between 1996 and 1998, and then as Prime Minister, till May 1999. This was a period in which Russia recovered some level of its economic and military heft, despite an economic crisis in 1998, giving it the wherewithal to restructure its foreign policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russian foreign policy at this stage was directed towards building the country's image and consolidating relations within the region under what came to be known as the 'Primakov Doctrine'.¹⁵ The core of the doctrine was built on the idea of recovering Russia's international status and its role as a centre of influence over the former Soviet states,¹⁶ and to build a Eurasian counterbalance to the American-led Atlantic

14 O'Flynn, Kevin. "Russia in Multi-Million Arms Deal with Northern Alliance." *The Guardian*, October 23, 2001, retrieved from www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/23/afghanistan.russia.

15 Primakov Doctrine can be defined as an outline of the conceptual foundation for Russian dominance in the post-Soviet area. Its primary aim was to challenge the unilateral dominance of the US in the global politics by establishing a multipolar world. Doctrine aimed at freeing Russia from its subservient foreign policy guided by the US. According to Ariel Cohen, Analyst at Heritage Foundation, "the Primakov doctrine is designed primarily to dilute America's strength and influence while increasing Russia's influence and position in the Middle East and Eurasia."

16 Beitāne, A. Sources of Russia's Strategic Thinking towards Central Asia. (n.d.), retrieved from <http://liia.lv/en/analyses/sources-of-russias-strategic-thinking-towards-central-asia-344>.

Alliance by forging closer ties between Russia, China and Iran, as well as, possibly, India and France.¹⁷ Russia did gain some regional clout during this period, but it still lacked the components of hard power¹⁸ to back a comprehensive foreign policy direction.

It was under Putin that Russia began to reassert itself on the global platform. In the initial years, Putin concentrated more on the Eurasian region, as a net regional security provider. After 2000, Russia gradually began to eschew the old Soviet approach of emphasizing the maintenance and deployment of its military power to ensure its geopolitical position and moved, instead, in the direction of first building up and then starting utilizing its economic resources to encourage neighbouring states to associate more closely with its regional policies.¹⁹ Moscow's policy objectives sought, first, to bring back the Central Asian republics to its strategic ambit. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, these countries had adopted a geopolitical orientation in favour of the West, particularly towards Russian arch-rival, the US.²⁰ To achieve this objective, Russia sought to integrate the

17 Cohen, Ariel. "The Primakov Doctrine": Russia's Zero-Sum Game with the United States, *Heritage Foundation*, December 15, 1997, www.heritage.org/report/the-primakov-doctrine-russias-zero-sum-game-the-united-states.

18 Hans Morgenthau offers description of the state power in terms of Hard Power. He emphasizes the use of coercive force in enumerating political power. Accordingly he suggests, "In international politics in particular, armed strength as a threat or a potentiality is the most important material factor making for the political power of a nation." Similarly, Scholar Joseph Nye identifies hard power as "the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will."

19 Hill, Fiona, "Energy Empire: Oil, Gas and Russia's Revival", *Brookings The Foreign Policy Centre*, September, 2004, retrieved from www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/20040930.pdf.

20 Rumer, Eugene, et al. "U.S. Policy Toward Central Asia 3.0." *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, January 25, 2016, retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/01/25/u.s.-policy-toward-central-asia-3.0-pub-62556>.

Central Asian countries into a comprehensive and cooperative economic and trading system. In the initial period of the Putin era, Russia invested much of its energy and resources in these former Soviet states. Second, Russia was keenly aware, from past experience, that the stability of Afghanistan was key to stability in the Central Asian states. Significantly, as far as its strategic interests were concerned, unlike the US, for Russia the road to Kabul did not go through Rawalpindi. It is the Central Asian countries that played the decisive role in maintaining Moscow's ties with Afghanistan. Central Asia was, thus, both means and end for Russia.

9/11: THE RETURN OF THE US

History has the tendency to repeat itself in bizarre ways. On October 22, 2001, during a meeting with the Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Burhanuddin Rabbani, Russian President Putin observed, "We presume that the position of the legitimate, internationally recognized government of the Islamic state of Afghanistan – that the Taliban movement should not be represented in the future government – is well grounded."²¹ This was the time when US Secretary of State Collin Powell stressed the role of moderate elements of the Taliban in a postwar Afghan government.²² These positions are in complete contrast with their current stands on the Taliban issue.

Despite President Putin's declaration of "outright support" for the United States in Afghanistan and Moscow's backing of

21 Mereu, Francesca. "Russia: Kremlin Affirms Ties With Northern Alliance." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, April 9, 2008, retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/1097777.html>.

22 "The United States and the Global Coalition Against Terrorism, September 2001-December 2003", Office of the Historian Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, June, 2004 <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/pubs/fs/5889.htm>.

the Northern Alliance, along with the international forces, with a heavy supply of weapons, training and logistical support, there was an apparent sense of apprehension on the future US role in Afghanistan. This concern was equally shared by Iran and China. Russia and the US also disagreed on what form any post-Taliban government should take. Washington and its closest ally in the region, Pakistan, wanted “moderate” Taliban leaders to be included in the government, while Russia was unwilling to accommodate any fraction of the Taliban in the new Government.²³ This difference was the first seed of future discord between the Russians and the Americans in post 9/11 Afghanistan.

The subsequent decade saw a lull in Russia’s foreign policy towards Afghanistan, even as its presence and influence saw significant ups and downs in the Central Asian region. However, insurgency and instability in Afghanistan remained a major concern for Moscow, particularly with regard to the rising flow of opium and derivative products into Russia.

RUSSIA’S CURRENT POLICY AND CONCERNS IN AFGHANISTAN

Russia has always seen Afghanistan through the prism of Central Asia, and its interests in the region are proximately linked with Central Asian energy development, with a new focus on gas as markets expand in Europe and Asia.²⁴ From Russia’s foreign policy perspectives, the politico-geographic conception of the region has always considered Afghanistan and Central Asia as a single, shared geostrategic sphere. At

23 Paul Watson, “Russia Fears U.S. Has Hidden Afghan Agenda, Fighter Says.” *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 2001, retrieved from latimes.com/2001/oct/22/news/mn-60213.

24 Yenikieff, S.M, “Energy Interests of the ‘Great Powers’ in Central Asia: Cooperation or Conflict?”, *The International Spectator*, Volume 46, Number 3, 2011, pp: 61-78.

a strategic level, this gives Russia an added advantage in countering US influence on the Central Asian countries, and an extended ground for its action or reaction in Afghanistan. The policy has hardly seen any drastic shift since the cold war era.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation reflects a comprehensive understanding of Putin's initiatives in Central Asia and Afghanistan. The fundamental foreign policy objectives or general principles according to the Concept include 'to create favourable external conditions for the steady development of Russia', and 'to form a good-neighbourly belt along the perimeter of Russia's borders, and to promote the elimination of existing and prevent the emergence of potential hotbeds of tension and conflicts in regions adjacent to the Russian Federation'.²⁵ In particular, the Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept of 2013 and 2016 discuss an array of interests: vital geopolitical positions, economic and trade opportunities, lasting Russian cultural impact, presence of Russian-speaking communities, etc., on risks and challenges. The FP Concept notes that "Russia will build up cooperation with the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Member States in ensuring mutual security, including joint efforts to combat drug trafficking, transnational crime, and illegal migration. Priorities here are the neutralisation of specified threats coming from the territory of Afghanistan and the prevention of destabilisation of the situation in Central Asia."²⁶

25 Nygren, B., "The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin's Foreign Policy towards the CIS Countries", 2008, Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series, no. 10. London, Routledge, xiv, page 20.

26 Oliphant, C., "Russia's Role and Interests in Central Asia", *Saferworld*, October, 2013, retrieved from <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/russias-role-and-interests-in-central-asia.pdf>.

Similarly, 2016 papers talk about overcoming challenges and threats faced by the post-Soviet space amid growing pressure from various global and regional players.²⁷

RUSSIA'S THREE MAJOR CONCERNS

Retaining a major role in Central Asian gas production and export is a key issue for Russia's energy industry.²⁸ Moscow has been able to wield substantial influence over the former Soviet states, with a few exceptions, through political and economic confederations like the Eurasian Economic Union, and CIS. A constant threat of extremism always looms large in the primarily authoritarian Islamic Republics of Central Asia. Russia's own territory has been threatened by the spillover from Afghanistan (and increasingly, destabilized states in West Asia) through Central Asia, by Islamic militancy, terrorism, and drug trafficking.²⁹ The Afghanistan problem has, consequently, always been considered a major issue for Russian security. Islamist radicalization has been a constant threat, compounded by narcotics flowing from Afghanistan. Moscow's interests in the region primarily relate to three issues: narcotics flowing from Afghanistan; the growing imprint of the Islamic State; and the long term presence of the US in the region. These concerns have a strong impact on Russia's interests both at a domestic as well a regional level.

27 "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 1, 2010, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents//asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248.

28 Ibid.

29 Hill, Fiona. "The United States and Russia in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran," *Brookings*, July 29, 2016, retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/the-united-states-and-russia-in-central-asia-uzbekistan-tajikistan-afghanistan-pakistan-and-iran/>.

The Drug Problem

The growing inflow of opium and its derivatives from Afghanistan via Central Asian countries is an urgent issue for Moscow. Russia is both a trans-shipment and final destination for narcotics from Afghanistan. There has been an annual increase in the flow of drugs, mainly opiates from Afghanistan, through what is called the ‘Northern Route’, which has become a significant external threat to the Central Asian region and Russia. Moreover, drugs in Afghanistan have strong links with insurgency and instability in the region. The Federal Statistics Agency of Russia estimates that there are 8.5 million drug users in the country and 1.5 million heroin addicts. Each year illegal drug use reportedly kills 70,000 persons in Russia.³⁰ According to Viktor Ivanov, Director of the Federal Drug Control Service of Russia, “Over the past 14 years, since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghan heroin has killed more than one million people in Eurasia, including at least half a million Russian citizens.”³¹ In the 61st session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2018, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov expressed concern about the current drug boom in Afghanistan. At the same time, Moscow is talking about engaging with various regional and international platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), to counter the narcotics menace in the region.

30 “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report” Volume I, Drug and Chemical Control, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law, Enforcement Affairs, *United States Department of State*, March, 2014.

31 “Afghan Heroin Has ‘Killed’ At Least 500,000 Russians Since 2000 - Drug Watchdog Head,” *Interfax*, May 15, 2014, <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=505009>.

The IS Imprint

The return of Islamic States fighters from Syria and Iraq had alarmed the Russians in 2014. The matter was compounded by the rise of the IS in Afghanistan, the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK). As ISK started to gain momentum in Afghanistan, many Taliban fighters abandoned their parent organisations and started joining the new formation. The most noticeable case was of Qari Hekmat, a prominent Taliban leader in Jowzjan, who switched allegiance to join the IS-affiliate in the Jowzjan Province. His group was joined by about 400 IS-affiliated fighters from China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Chechnya. A number of Algerian and French nationals have also been identified in the largely IS-controlled District of Darzab in Jowzjan province. Since 2017, Afghanistan has witnessed a steep spike in the numbers of attack carried out by IS, leading to huge civilian casualties. Despite the April 13, 2017, U.S. targeted bombing on an extensive IS tunnel-and-cave complex in Nangarhar with the largest non-nuclear bomb in the U.S. arsenal, a GBU-43 [Massive Ordnance Air Blast, MOAB, also called the Mother of All Bombs], the IS still constitutes a major threat to the region.³²

The IS problem for Central Asia can be compounded by any potential spillover from Afghanistan, adding to the security threats in the region. There is a real possibility of Afghan IS fighters joining forces with Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and other fighters in Central Asia. Unlike the Taliban, which claims to be fighting for Afghanistan, the IS forces are primarily a transnational movement with tendency to expand beyond any

32 Bezhan, Frud, "Islamic State Proving Resilient In Afghanistan In Face Of Targeted Campaign.", *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 5 Aug. 2017, www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-proving-resilient-afghanistan-targeted-campaign/28659602.html.

one country or region. The growing concern in Russia in this regard was highlighted by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs Meet at Beijing on April 24, 2018, when he observed that IS was "becoming entrenched in Afghanistan's northern provinces, which border on our allies in the CSTO. This certainly means that we must redouble our efforts to preclude the proliferation of conflicts from Afghanistan."³³

At a tactical level, the booming opium production and increasing IS foothold in Afghanistan provide Russia a rallying point against US-led forces in that country. Russia has used various platforms to criticize the US and the international community for its failure to combat and control drugs, as well as to stop the growing IS imprint.³⁴ Through these devices, Russia also seeks to alleviate its third concern: the long term presence of American forces in the region.

US Presence: Russia's overlapping Security and Strategic Interests

Russia and the US are locked in a bloody conflict in Syria. Respective interests and capabilities of the two countries have determined the kind of support they have been able to provide to the opposing camps in Syria. The prolonged conflict in Afghanistan and any unprecedented effect leading to instability in any of the Central Asian countries might give the Americans

33 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions following a meeting of the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, April 24, 2018, retrieved from http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3190325.

34 "US to Blame for Spike in Opium Production in Afghanistan." Noticias|TeleSUR, *TeleSUR*, April 16, 2015, retrieved from www.telesurtv.net/english/news/US-to-Blame-for-Spike-in-Opium-Production-in-Afghanistan-20150416-0028.html.

a reason to create a permanent military base in Afghanistan, or worse, seek expansion into Central Asia.³⁵ American expansion in the Central Asian region or a permanent base in Afghanistan will put Russian interests at risk. First, despite Russia's strongholds in the region, the American presence will reduce Moscow's strategic depth. The United States maintained two bases in Central Asia, in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, for its postwar operations in Afghanistan. However, under immense pressure from Russia and China, the US was forced to evict these in 2005³⁶ and 2014,³⁷ respectively. The Uzbek and the Kyrgyz Government were not able to handle the pressure because of their significant dependence on the Russian Government.

Secondly, the US presence and consequent influence in the region will diversify control of oil and natural resources. Russia and its ally China currently control the majority of oil export routes from reserves in Central Asia and the Caspian region. Diversification may break the Russian energy-transit monopoly, and would also open the region to intensified competition over energy resources.³⁸ With the Russian economy still in an evolving stage, it avoiding any contest for energy dominance with the US is entirely natural.

35 "Russian Envoy Questions Ongoing U.S Military Presence." *Tolo News*, January 3, 2017, retrieved from www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/russian-envoy-says-soviet-invasion-may-have-led-radical-group.

36 "U.S. Evicted From Air Base In Uzbekistan." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, July, 2005, retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/29/AR2005072902038.html>.

37 Dzyubenko, Olga. "U.S. Vacates Base in Central Asia as Russia's Clout Rises." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, June 3, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kyrgyzstan-usa-manas/u-s-vacates-base-in-central-asia-as-russias-clout-rises-idUSKBN0EE1LH20140603?feedType=RSS>.

38 Cohen, Ariel, "U.S. Interests and Central Asia Energy Security" *Heritage*, November 15, 2006, retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/us-interests-and-central-asia-energy-security>.

THE RUSSIAN STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

The relative intractability of the Afghan environment as well as the decline of its own economy has forced Russia to pursue its goals in Afghanistan at a multilateral, rather than bilateral level. Moscow has adopted a two pronged strategy to address both its concern and its interests. First, in order to limit the influence of the US-led international forces, it is working with multiple actors and stakeholders in the regions. Russia's new-found love for Pakistan, once the staunchest of US allies in the war against the Soviet Union, is a part of this new strategy in the region. Similarly, the scrapping of the Iran nuclear deal by the Trump Administration will further strengthen ties between Tehran and Moscow, even as Iran would now be more apprehensive of the US presence in the region. Finally, the grouping of Central Asian countries on the Afghan periphery, as well as China's dominant presence adds to Russia's advantages.

Secondly, in order to control the threats arising in Afghanistan, Moscow is working in parallel with regional players, and at the same time adding collective pressure on the international forces in Afghanistan to address the threat of narcotics and the IS.

CONSOLIDATE AND CONTAIN

The rising violence and the increasing instability in Afghanistan are mere symptoms of the continuously failing failed strategy of the US-led international forces. The resulting apprehensions among regional and sub-regional players of the possible vacuum that would be created by the withdrawal of the international community, or of Afghanistan turning into a failed state, has forced these players to look for alternatives. Russia, in order to protect its interests, and also to alleviate

concerns of some regional player, is actively strengthening various regional and global forums to bring all the stakeholders together.

On January 19, 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov asked the UN to deliberate on the “Formation of regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia” as a model for coordinating security and development. In the same speech, he talked about the Russian initiatives in the form of the Moscow format, the work of the SCO-Afghanistan contact group and developing Afghanistan’s partnership with the CSTO, in cooperation with Russian partners and fellow-thinkers.³⁹

One of the successful examples of the Russian initiative is gaining consensus among the many regional players on the Moscow Format- a plan to incorporate local players in the peace process, including the Taliban. At the International High-Level Conference on Afghanistan “Peace process, security cooperation and regional connectivity,” at Tashkent on March 27, 2018, Russia was able to bring all the Afghan neighbours on the table. Russia, China, India, Iran, and the Central Asian countries participated in the conference.⁴⁰ One of the key issues discussed during the conference was the appropriateness of direct “bargaining” in a political crisis. The direct bargaining

39 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks at the UN Security Council session on “Formation of regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model of coordinating security and development,” New York, January 19, 2018 - Press-Releases, retrieved from https://afghanistan.mid.ru/en_GB/-vystuplenie-ministra-inostrannyh-del-rossii-s-v-lavrova-na-zasedanii-soveta-bezopasnosti-oon-na-temu-sozdanie-regional-nyh-partnerstv-v-afganistane-i-?inheritRedirect=true.

40 Declaration of the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan: Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity, March 2018, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan. retrieved from <http://uza.uz/en/politics/declaration-of-the-tashkent-conference-on-afghanistan-peace--28-03-2018>.

in the case of Afghanistan is the condition in which both the Afghan government and the Taliban sit together for dialogue without any precondition.

SECURITY THROUGH MULTI-LATERAL PLATFORMS

Russia is actively proposing new mechanisms in the existing platforms, to engage more and more players of prominence. It is working on the security aspects of multiple platforms as a collective alternative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Forces in Afghanistan. As an alternative to NATO, Russia supports the development of strengthened regional security arrangements in which it would have a greater influence.⁴¹ Engagement and cooperation with CSTO is an issue of importance to Afghanistan as, from the perspective of the CSTO member-states, Central Asian stability is linked directly to Afghan stability.⁴² Similarly, Russia was instrumental in reviving the SCO-contact group after a seven-year hiatus, when they meet in October 2017. One of the key highlights of the summit was the deliberations on terrorism as a key common security threat.⁴³

Russia has been able to rally the CIS behind it, in its support for Afghanistan. In 2016, the member countries signed 17 agreements, including a statement on combating international terrorism and an agreement on military cooperation through 2020. Addressing the media, Russian President Vladimir

41 Radin, Andrew, and Clint Reach. "Russians Views of The International Order." *Rand Corporation*, 2017, retrieved from www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1826/RAND_RR1826.pdf.

42 CSTO Statutory Bodies <http://www.odkb-csto.org/>.

43 "SCO Resumes Afghanistan Contact Group Meeting after 7 years", *ToloNews*, October 11, 2017, retrieved from <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/sco-resumes-afghanistan-contact-group-meeting-after-7-years>.

Putin observed that closer military cooperation was necessary because “the situation [in Afghanistan] is close to becoming critical.”⁴⁴

Moscow has been able to bring many regional players including China, Pakistan and Iran under its initiatives for a coordinated response to the threat of terrorism and Narcotics arising from Afghanistan. India is another key player in the region with substantial positive influence in Afghanistan, largely the result of its resources of culture, values as well as economic aid to the Government of Afghanistan. The use of soft power is a crucial tool against terrorism and insurgency, supplementing the application of hard power.⁴⁵ India, therefore, presents itself as a formidable partner in Afghanistan.

CAN THERE BE CONVERGENCE OF INDIAN AND RUSSIAN INTERESTS?

India's benign presence in Afghanistan throughout history has now been overshadowed by its rivalry with Pakistan. However, Delhi's interests in the region extend well beyond just countering Pakistan, which it blames for harbouring terrorist groups that operate both against India and Afghanistan. India has time and again reiterated that it would like a stable government and environment in Afghanistan, and Kabul has been sensitive to Delhi's interests. India's support for a stable Afghanistan is also influenced by several extraneous factors, including India's historic conflict with Pakistan. Islamabad, through its proxies in Afghanistan, has used Kabul's territory

44 RFE/RL, “CIS Leaders Sign Military Cooperation Pact.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, October 16, 2015, retrieved from <https://www.rferl.org/a/cis-summit-military-cooperation-pact/27309627.html>.

45 Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Volume 616, Issue 1, pp. 94 – 109 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>.

against India. Moreover, India's expanding economy and search for markets in Central Asia via Iran and Afghanistan also enters into this unstable dynamic.⁴⁶

India shares strong bilateral ties with Afghanistan, as well as with both Russia and the US. Though India is not a major player in Afghanistan, its soft power is significant, and has resulted in both major power blocs seeking its support in Afghanistan.

While announcing his South Asia policy, Donald Trump recognized India's contribution in rebuilding Afghanistan, and asked Delhi to increase its involvement in the region in terms of economic assistance and development.⁴⁷ India is considered to be one of the rare constructive regional players in Afghanistan. Sten Rynning, a Research Fellow with the NATO Europe-Atlantic Partnership Council, has argued that India is poised to go from soft power to hard power (in Afghanistan).⁴⁸ Delhi has, however, till date, avoided flexing its hard power in Afghanistan.

During the recently held informal summit between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Putin, India thanked Russia for its inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). For the first time, the two countries have decided to undertake a joint project — possibly

46 Kaur, Bineet, "India - Afghanistan: An Analysis of Strategic and Security Concerns," *Mainstream Weekly*, February 21, 2017, retrieved from www.mainstreamweekly.net/article6978.html.

47 "Full Texts of Donald Trump's Speech on South Asia Policy", *The Hindu*, August 22, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/full-texts-of-donald-trumps-speech-on-south-asia-policy/article19538424.ece>.

48 Griffiths, James. "Who Are the Key Players in Afghanistan?" CNN, *Cable News Network*, September 19 2017, retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/26/asia/afghanistan-pakistan-india-china-russia-us/index.html>.

in the development sector — in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ However, there are some concerns in India about Russia's new alignments in the region. India is particularly concerned about the growing ties between Pakistan and Russia. In February 2018, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov acknowledged Pakistan's counter terror efforts and suggested continued assistance to Pakistan to bolster its counterterrorism capabilities.⁵⁰ This development is in stark contrast to the principled stand Russia had taken against Pakistan's support to terrorism in the past. India has legitimately argued that one cannot fight terrorism by allying with a country like Pakistan, which promotes terrorism. By bolstering Rawalpindi's counterterrorism capabilities, Russia might play into the hands of the Pakistan Army, which has a long history of using such capabilities to promote terrorism.

Russia was instrumental in bringing both India and Pakistan into SCO, in order to enable cooperation between the two countries at a multilateral level. It might, however, end up injecting more uncertainty into the neighbourhood, particularly on the issue of Afghanistan. Although India has softened its stance over the issue of peace talks with the Taliban, it is less likely that Delhi would accept any 'alternative model', which gives significant room to the Taliban or, in other words, to Pakistan. Pakistan certainly would want a government in Afghanistan which is hostile to India, and pliant and supportive to Islamabad's interests. It is unlikely that Russia will be able

49 Roy, Shubhajit. "India, Russia Set to Work Together in Afghanistan for the First Time." *The Indian Express*, May 3, 2018, retrieved from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-russia-modi-putin-to-work-together-in-afghanistan-for-the-first-time-5188991/>.

50 "Russia Will Continue to Boost Pakistan's Counterterrorism Capacity, Says FM Lavrov," *The Dawn*, February 20, 2018 retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1390621>.

to bring India and Pakistan together to a mutually agreeable position on Afghanistan.

The Russian stand on China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is, again, in sharp contrast to India's, particularly on the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) component. According to the Asian Competitiveness Annual Report 2018, moreover, CPEC is being extended into Afghanistan.⁵¹ Russia's Acting Ambassador to Pakistan, while delivering a talk to members of the Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI), stated that Russia was 'eagerly awaiting' a formal invitation from China and Pakistan to invest in CPEC.⁵² India considers the CPEC project to be in violation of its territorial integrity. India has strong objections to the project, as it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), which is Indian territory.⁵³ Russia's willingness to join CPEC will not only give legitimacy to Pakistan's occupation of Indian territory, and would certainly be seen in Delhi as a sign of Russian insensitivity to India's sovereignty. Incidentally, CPEC is also backed by the US,

Further, the extension of CPEC into Afghanistan has raised Indian concerns about the expansion of China's direct strategic imprint. It would, at the same time, give Pakistan genuine reasons for further meddling in Afghan affairs, to the detriment of India's interests.

51 "CPEC Being Extended to Afghanistan: Report," *The Hindu*, April 9, 2018, retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/cpec-being-extended-to-afghanistan-report/article23478277.ece>.

52 "Russia: A New Player in the CPEC Market." *CPEC Latest News*, Wwww.cpecinfo.com, retrieved from <http://www.cpecinfo.com/news/russia-a-new-player-in-the-cpec-market/NTEyOQ>.

53 "US backs India's stand in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *The Hindu*, October 4, 2017. retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-backs-indias-stand-in-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/article19795047.ece>.

In all likelihood, Russian involvement in Afghanistan would follow patterns no different from the US intervention, which has relied heavily on Pakistan. On the other hand, the changing trajectory of the Russian-Pakistan-China relation hardly justifies any optimism regarding India's future prospects in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

The spiraling violence in Afghanistan simply confirms the colossal failure of US strategy in the region. The US has not only failed to control and combat the violent activities of insurgent groups, it has largely failed to build sustainable political institutions. The kind of flip-flop the Trump Administration has performed on Afghanistan has only exacerbated the situation. While unveiling his South Asia Policy in August 2017, Trump had given particular prominence to his Afghanistan policy, acknowledging Pakistan's predatory strategy in the region, and warning Islamabad to mend its ways. However, no concrete action followed against Pakistani institutions which actively continue to patronize militant groups in Afghanistan. Similarly, Trump had clearly stated that the US Government would not be involved in nation-building in Afghanistan, but would direct its resource against the insurgents. This demonstrated an enduring lack of vision, even as increasing the air strikes and bombings on the terrorist hide-outs failed to produce satisfactory results.

It is, consequently, natural for regional players to be apprehensive of US policy and its fading impact on peace and security in the region. This creates widening strategic spaces for Russia as a legitimate stakeholder, to address its interests and concerns, and augment its influence, in the region. The Russian policy for Afghanistan does offer some positive elements, to the extent that it has been able to secure collective support to

address elements of the Afghan problem. There are, however, major flaws and perversities as well. The most significant of these is the duality of its response to the Afghan insurgency; on one hand, Moscow wants the international community to come down hard on the IS; on the other, it has taken a soft line on the Taliban and on Pakistan, while it focuses its military-strategic anti-insurgency response solely against the Islamic State.

Further, contemporary Russian foreign policy objectives suggest hardly any change in Moscow's orientation towards the US. Moscow's concerns are still driven by the strategic centrality of a containment policy directed against the US. However, strategic brinkmanship by both Putin and the US will only add to the instability of the region. Syria is a perfect case study of how not to handle terrorism and terrorists.

Finally, Russia has mobilized its resources to re-establish its primacy through an overambitious plan to include all stakeholders in the region. The plan is likely to backfire, in case the interests of individual players are compromised. In India's case, the Russia-China-Pakistan alliance is visibly detrimental. Moreover, if Russia approaches Afghanistan as zero sum game⁵⁴ against the US, the outcome can only be catastrophic.

Tinkering with political players like the Taliban is one thing, whereas managing the evolving security environment in Afghanistan quite another. Whatever resources Moscow possesses as a strategic driver in the region, Russia and its allies are completely incapable of replacing the US in Afghanistan. Russia and China cannot hope to match the kind of economic and military assistance the US can bring to Afghanistan.

54 In international relations, a Zero Sum Game is a theoretical framework within the political realism school of thought that explains interstate relation in terms of power, where each state wants to maximize its gain in terms of military, economic and strategic power at the cost of the adversary.

Russia's Geopolitics in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Finally, in its new 'great game' with the US, Russia has abandoned the principled stand it had taken against terrorism and Pakistan's role in the region. Moscow needs to revisit some of its present policies in view of Russia's chequered history in the region.

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The Milli Muslim League Politics of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba

Manish*

Almost ten years after the fateful 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's Prime Minister at the time of the attack, in an interview on May 18, 2018, clearly acknowledged, for the first time, the presence of militant outfits in Pakistan and their use by Pakistan's so called 'deep state'.¹

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1 "Political scientists and foreign policy experts have used the term deep state for years to describe individuals and institutions who exercise power independent of—and sometimes over—civilian political leaders. They applied it mainly to developing countries like Algeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey, where generals and spies called the real shots in nominally democratic societies and replaced elected leaders when they saw fit.", as stated by Michael Crowley, "The Deep State Is Real", Politico Magazine, September/October, 2017, June 1 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/deep-state-real-cia-fbi-intelligence-215537>. "In recent years, analysts have begun using the expression 'deep state' for Pakistan to reflect the fact that a coterie of current and retired military and intelligence essentially run the state irrespective of the policy preferences of Pakistan's civilian leaders. An implication of this is that the civilians exert virtually no control of these elements.", as stated by C. Christian Fair and Sarah J. Watson, "Introduction: Pakistan's Enduring Challenges", in C. Christian Fair and Sarah J. Watson (eds.), Pakistan's Enduring Challenges, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2015, p. 22.

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The recently ousted Prime Minister stated,

Militant organisations are active. Call them non-state actors, should we allow them to cross the border and kill 150 people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can't we complete the trial?²

“The trial” was a reference to the Mumbai attacks-related cases which have stalled in a Rawalpindi anti-terrorism court. The former Prime Minister indeed went further to state, “You can't run a country if you have two or three parallel governments. This has to stop. There can only be one government: the constitutional one.”³ Nawaz Sharif was unambiguously referring to the Pakistan Army and its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and their most subservient proxies: the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its affiliates which have been functioning in Pakistan despite a ban. These entities constitute what can best be described as Pakistan's ‘deep state’.

The LeT is one of Pakistan's largest militant Islamist organisations. Founded in 1987 by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, it has played a central role in indoctrinating, recruiting, and training thousands of jihadists to fight for Pakistan. The group has since expanded its targets to include the U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan and the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). Hindus and Sikhs have been its major targets in J&K through the 1990s, and their operations include the March 20, 2000, massacre of 35 Sikhs at Chattisinghpora, Anantnag, on the eve of the then US President Bill Clinton's visit to India.

In 2002, LeT was banned by the Musharraf Regime due to severe international pressure. But the organisation continued to

2 Mohammad Imran, “What did I say that was wrong ?”: Nawaz responds to controversy around remarks on Mumbai attacks”, *Dawn*, May 14, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1407622>.

3 Ibid.

grow in its scope and activities under the umbrella of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). After the 2008 Mumbai terror incident, in which 166 people were killed in a coordinated attack at multiple locations by 10 members of the LeT international pressure further mounted on Pakistan to ban JuD. However, defying all bans, the LeT, the JuD and other affiliated front outfits like the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) have continued to operate freely in Pakistan under the guise of so called charity organisations.

More recently, in August 2017, LeT floated a new political outfit, the Milli Muslim League (MML) with the aim of participating in electoral politics of Pakistan. At the time of its launch, party President Saifullah Khalid, stated: "We have decided to make a new political party, so that Pakistan is made a real Islamic and welfare state." Saifullah Khalid has been a long-time office bearer of JuD and a close associate of Hafiz Saeed. Clearly, this could not have happened without the knowledge and support of the Pakistani establishment. The spokesperson of the newly formed MML, Tabish Qayoum, announced that the party had filed for registration with Pakistan's Election Commission, but this was denied after protracted litigation. However, JuD fielded a candidate as an 'independent' for the 2017 by-election to Constituency National Assembly (NA) 120, vacated by disqualified Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

The MML again announced its intention to contest the July 2018 general elections for Pakistan's National Assembly from Punjab (Pakistan), on the platform of a dormant but registered political party – *Allahu Akbar Tehreek* (AAT). This party was registered in 2013 with Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) under the leadership of Mian Ahsan Bari. What is noticeable is that Hafiz Saeed's son, Hafiz Talha, and son-in-law, Hafiz Khalid Walid, will be contesting the July 25, 2018 general elections from the Punjab Province of Pakistan, with MML support.

The crucial question that begs attention is why Saeed developed an interest in forming a political party and contest elections at this juncture? Does the likely transition from an Islamist terror organisation to a political party mean that Pakistan has changed its policy of using Saeed's organisation to settle scores with India?⁴ The trend does not auger to this direction. As we know, Islamist militant groups within Pakistan have proliferated and are also divided on various ideological-doctrinal and theological approaches. Some of them have closely worked with the state. There are the Deobandi groups like the Jamait Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), which believe jihad is a holy obligation, but at the same time participate in electoral politics. Most of the Afghan Taliban in the pre-9/11 period came from the Deobandi madrasas of Pakistan and were close allies of Pakistan's military and the ISI. However, there is a new breed of highly conservative- hard-line Deobandis, which is not willing to work within the confines of Pakistan's realpolitik and are ready to challenge the state. Amidst this situation, there is this Wahabi group, the LeT headed by Hafiz Saeed, backed by Saudi money and supported by the ISI.

The fact that the LeT has never attacked a target within Pakistan, indicates that it remains most loyal to the establishment. As noted Pakistani scholar Hussain Haqqani puts it:

Saeed now heads his organisation with the name Jamaat-ud-Dawa from a large campus facility at Muridke, outside the Pakistani city of Lahore. Pakistan authorities have repeatedly refused to move against either Lashkar, which continues to operate in Kashmir, or Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which operates freely in Pakistan. In return Saeed has urged Islamists to defend the

4 Mohammad Imran, "What did I say that was wrong?": Nawaz responds to controversy around remarks on Mumbai attacks", *Dawn*, May 14, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1407622>.

Pakistani state and to spare it from terrorist attacks even if the state policies appear to contradict the global Islamist agenda. LeT and Jamaat-ud-Dawa's policy seem to be to secure the support of the Pakistani state for organisational survival while limiting criticism of Pakistan.⁵

It is for this reason that Pakistan watchers believe that the emergence of MML is driven by a domestic agenda, wherein the Pakistan Army wants to mainstream the LeT and JuD cadres to counter its civilian adversaries. By doing so, JuD could get relative autonomy to operate. And the state may be hedging that participation in mainstream politics by keeping JuD cadres away from militant activities. Whether that translates into action and influences policy is anyone's guess. But the larger trend, as manifested elsewhere, has been that radical Islamist groups cannot be incorporated into mainstream politics because of their ideology and also for the reason that the political systems in some Muslim countries lack the structure and legitimacy to absorb them into formal politics.⁶ These groups are also aware of the fact that they cannot compete in mainstream politics, as they lack the organisation and experience. On their part, the move toward organised politics and negotiations is, therefore, often driven by the desire to pursue their radical goals through different means.⁷ If that is the objective behind the formation of MML, then it should be a serious cause for concern. MML, JuD and LeT have a symbiotic relationship and are part of the broader Salafi-Markaz clan. They will continue to work

5 Husain Haqqani, "Islamism and the Pakistani State", *Hudson Institute*, August 9, 2013, <http://www.hudson.org/research/9952-islamism-and-the-pakistani-state>.

6 Kamran Bokhari, "Radical Islam by Different Means", *Geopolitical Futures*, August 8, 2017, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/radical-islam-different-means/>.

7 Ibid.

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in tandem to accelerate their ideological and militant agenda. Indeed, a more realistic assessment of the situation is offered by noted American expert, C. Christine Fair:

I contend that the Pakistan's move is much more profound than a quest to find an alternative to demilitarizing the LeT/ JuD or even manipulating electoral outcomes. I contend that the formation of the MML is part of a more serious effort to use the pro-state organisation against a myriad militant groups tearing the state apart, while also investing in another political alternative to the current political parties that will pay dividends over the longer time horizon. Based upon the available information about the MML, its ties to the JuD and its mentorship by Pakistan's security organisation, I reject the claim that the MML's formation signals a new effort on the part of the Pakistani state to redirect JuD's external militarism towards more domesticated political role, and thus serves as a state-directed "de-radicalisation" or "de-mobilisation" effort to mainstream Islamist militants. I argue, instead, that the MML will be a compliment to JuDs effort to stabilize Pakistan internally and enhance LeT's external activities in the service of the deep state.⁸

THE STATE AND MILITANCY IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan's support to Islamist militancy is not new, and is a deliberate long-term grand strategy. Amongst the major grand strategic tools is the use of militant proxies. Ironically, it is only after the 9/11 attacks that the Pakistan-militant nexus received some attention. Pakistan has, since its inception, used Islamist

8 C. Christian Fair, "The Milli Muslim League: The Domestic Politics of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba", *Hudson Institute*, May 7, 2018, <http://www.hudson.org/research/14305-the-milli-muslim-league-the-domestic-politics-of-pakistan-s-laskar-e-taiba>.

militants to wage *jihad* to compensate for severe political and material weakness. This use of militancy has become so important that it is now a central component of Pakistani grand strategy. It is within this broader context, that the history of LeT and now its political front – MML – needs to be located.

Like many other jihadist outfits, LeT's origin is to be found in the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan. As we now know, the 1980's Afghan War changed the political landscape of Pakistan forever. Islamabad decided to become a party to the war at the behest of the West to achieve its own strategic goals, i.e. to expand its area of operation in Afghanistan to counter Indian influence. General Zia-ul-Haq promoted a hard-line Islamic ideology in his country and cracked down on liberal political groups and activists. General Zia also introduced Islamic laws, Islamised the educational curriculums, opened thousands of religious seminaries across the country, inducted Islamists into judiciary, bureaucracy and the army, and created institutions headed by Islamic clerics to oversee the affairs of the government.⁹

This decade-long program (1977–1988) of Islamising Pakistan had, by the 1990s, grown strong domestic roots, providing a plethora of armed groups such as LeT with a steady supply of volunteers, funding, and most important of all, concerted state support. LeT's three founders—Hafiz Saeed, its current Amir; Zafar Iqbal of the Engineering University of Lahore; and Abdullah Azzam of the International Islamic University in Islamabad, capitalised on this environment.¹⁰

9 Shamil Shams, "Pakistan's Islamization - before and after dictator Zia-ul-Haq", *Deutsche Welle*, August 17, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/pakistans-islamization-before-and-after-dictator-zia-ul-haq/a-19480315>.

10 Ashley J Tellis, "The Menace that is Lashkar-e-Taiba", *Carnegie*, March 13, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/13/menace-that-is-lashkar-e-taiba-pub-47512>.

The LeT was formed in 1987 as the armed wing of the Markaz Dawat-ul-Irshad (MDI), the Center for Proselytisation and Preaching. Lashkar-e-Taiba means the ‘Army of the Pure’ or ‘Army of God’. The objective of LeT is to establish “Nizam-e-Mustafa” or Rule of the Prophet or the Islamic Caliphate or Islamic Rule, and to bring back the lost glory of earlier Islamic empires. This led LeT to come together with Al-Qaeda, resulting in a wider reach.

Lashkar’s desire to engage simultaneously in *Tableegh* or preaching, and *jihad* or armed struggle, has found manifestation in different ways since its founding. Both, LeT and MDI are adherents of *Ahl-e-Hadith* Islam, which is of Salafist¹¹ orientation. MDI’s leaders aimed to unite the Pakistani Ahl-e-Hadith movement and purify society through *dawa* and *jihad*. From the outset it was a missionary and a militant organisation that, for most of its history, has placed an equal emphasis on reshaping society at home (through preaching and social welfare) and to waging violent *jihad* abroad.¹² Moreover, Lashkar’s *jihad* was not nation-centric, but rather pan-Islamist, and its members fought on several fronts during the early 1990s.

11 “Salafis are united by a common religious creed, which provides principles and a method for applying religious beliefs to contemporary issues and problems. This creed revolves around strict adherence to the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire. Salafis believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Qur’an and Sunna, they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God’s commands. From this perspective, there is only one legitimate religious interpretation; Islamic pluralism does not exist.”, Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 29, 2006, p. 207.

12 Stephan Tankel, “Lashkar-e-Taiba’s rise, before Mumbai”, *Foreign Policy*, August 3, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/03/lashkar-e-taibas-rise-before-mumbai>.

The Indian State of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) was the most important for LeT. Lashkar leaders considered Kashmir to be part of Pakistan, meaning it was not simply a foreign land under occupation.¹³ Nor was this simply a territory in need of liberation. The Kashmir *jihād* was part of a larger battle against Hindus, which the group's leaders assert (with little regard for history) has continued since the inception of Islam. Numerous other outfits were also active on this front, most, if not all, of them receiving some level of support from the Pakistan Army and its ISI. Lashkar was not initially the state's most favoured proxy, but over time it has assumed this role.¹⁴ The ISI chose to channel increased support to the group for several reasons. Most important was its small size and lack of natural allies in Pakistan, where Lashkar's interpretation of *jihād* as an individual obligation for all Muslims estranged it from the country's small *Ahl-e-Hadith* movement. The assumption was that the group could become powerful externally without building up a significant support base or threatening the state domestically, and hence that it would be easier to control than other outfits.

The offer of state sponsorship to promote the scale and lethality of Lashkar's participation in the Kashmir *jihād* was a significant opportunity, and the group seized it. Since that time, Lashkar's military activities have been informed both by its pan-Islamist rationale for *jihād* and its role as a proxy for the Pakistani state.¹⁵ *Jihād* against India to liberate Muslim land under perceived Hindu occupation aligned with LeT's

13 Ibid.

14 Ashley J Tellis, "The Menace that is Lashkar-e-Taiba", *Carnegie*, March 3, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/13/menace-that-is-lashkar-e-taiba-pub-47512>.

15 Ibid.

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ideological priorities and with state interests.¹⁶ Today, LeT remains Pakistan's most disciplined and obedient proxy; the group has become so powerful that there is a strong chance it could destabilise the state if it chose to do so. This also brought with it substantial benefits, including the support needed to construct a robust social welfare apparatus used for missionary and reformist purposes.

In addition to this infrastructure in Pakistan and a powerful military apparatus, Lashkar wove together transnational networks which have been used primarily to support non-violent activism in Pakistan, military operations in Kashmir and terrorism against India. Thus, its ability to reconcile the two dualities that define it – missionary and militant organisation, pan-Islamist outfit and Pakistan proxy – helped Lashkar to grow into the powerful and protected organisation it is today.¹⁷ And, with its political arm, MML, it now wants to “compliment JuD's efforts to stabilise Pakistan and enhance LeT's external activities in the service of deep state”.¹⁸ Militants who show skill at parliamentary politics would be candidates for an Army-supported government. In all likelihood, an Army-Islamist coalition might emerge. For India, therefore, the emergence of MML raises concerns.

THE MILLI MUSLIM LEAGUE

With the aim of keeping its focus on Kashmir, and advocating “self-determination for Kashmiris as per UN

16 Ibid.

17 Stephan Tankel, “Lashkar-e-Taiba's rise, before Mumbai”, *Foreign Policy*, August 3, 2011, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/08/03/lashkar-e-taibas-rise-before-mumbai>.

18 C. Christian Fair, “The Milli Muslim League: The Domestic Politics of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba”, *Hudson Institute*, May 7, 2018, <http://www.hudson.org/research/14305-the-milli-muslim-league-the-domestic-politics-of-pakistan-s-laskar-e-taiba>.

Resolutions”, the LeT/ JuD leadership decided, in August 2017, to enter politics and form a party with the name of Milli Muslim League (MML). The decision to form a political party was not incidental. C. Christine Fair notes, “rumors about a possible LeT / JuD-tied political party have been floating around for at least the past two years.”¹⁹ Thus, MML is to function as a political wing of the banned LeT and JuD, conceived of by terror-master Hafiz Saeed to legitimise his malignant actions, especially in Kashmir, as well as to evade international pressure and sanctions. By forming MML, Hafiz Saeed also intends to mislead the international community into speculating that he is a firm “believer” in the democratic process, apparently a ploy to avoid being labelled as merely a terrorist. On December 24, 2017, Saeed inaugurated the MML office in Lahore’s National Assembly-120 Constituency. During his visit to the Mohni Road area adjacent to the Data Sahib shrine, he listened to the civic problems of people in the area, who welcomed Saeed by showering rose petals on his vehicle. The JuD headquarters in Chauburji also falls under the NA-120 Constituency. Saeed’s visit and opening of the political office in Lahore pointed towards his grand plans to enter politics.²⁰

Since MML was yet to be registered by the Election Commission of Pakistan, the party decided to field Qari Yaqoub Sheikh as an independent candidate against ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s wife Kulsoom Sharif for the Lahore seat, which fell vacant after Nawaz Sharif’s disqualification. Qari Yaqoub Sheikh, a prominent JuD leader, has been a member of LeT’s ‘central advisory committee’, and has also

19 Ibid.

20 “Hafiz Saeed opens MML office in Lahore, plans to contest 2018 Pakistani General Election”, *Firstpost*, December 25, 2017, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/hafiz-saeed-opens-mml-office-in-lahore-plans-to-contest-2018-pakistani-general-election-4274525.html>.

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served as a leader in LeT's foreign affairs department. He has also been associated with JuD and is a leader of the banned FIF, the 'charity organisation' and a subsidiary of JuD, which has also been banned.

On June 13, 2018, Pakistan's Election Commission, for a second time, rejected an application by MML to register it as a political party. The ECP had been asked by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) to review its 2017 decision through which it rejected MML's registration bid. A four-member bench of the commission, chaired by its Sindh member Abdul Ghaffar Soomro, decided against allowing MML to be registered as a political party. Pakistan's Interior Ministry had also opposed MML's enlisting as a political party, arguing that it was an offshoot of the banned JuD. MML, however, denied that it had any links with the JuD or that its chief, Saifuddin Khalid, had relations with Saeed.²¹

MML's STRUCTURE

The launching of MML was announced by Saifullah Khalid, who was appointed as its President by Hafiz Saeed. The other central office bearers of the party include Vice President Muzzamal Iqbal Hashmi; General Secretary Fayyaz Ahmed; Joint Secretary Mohammad Haris; Finance Secretary Mohammad Ehsan; Information Secretary Tabish Qayyum; and Publications Secretary Faisal Nadeed Sheikh.²² Each

21 "Hafiz Saeed's MML can't contest general polls: Pakistan Election Commission", *Deccan Chronicle*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/world/asia/140618/hafiz-saeeds-mml-cannot-contest-general-polls-pak-ec.html>.

22 Kohli, S.C., "Milli Muslim League-the political party launched by Hafiz Saeed is looking to revive the Khalistan Movements in India", *Merinews*, August 19, 2017, <http://www.merinews.com/mobile/login.jsp?requestedURL=article/World/2017/7/19/milli-muslim-league---the-political-party-launched-by-hafiz-saeed-is-looking-to-revive-the-khalistan-movement-in-india/15926747>.

of the founding members of the MML have been closely associated to LeT-JuD and with the deep state, indicating the party's close affinity to the Markaz family and its ties to the Pakistan Army and the ISI. The founding President, Saifullah Khalid, has also praised Hafiz Saeed for rendering "selfless" services to the cause of Kashmir as well as to the needy people of Pakistan, particularly in the Tharparkar District of Sindh, Punjab (Pakistan) and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). Saifullah also criticised Hafiz Saeed's house arrest. More importantly, MML has severely criticised India and USA for allegedly conspiring against Pakistan.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The declared aims and the objective of the newly founded MML are clearly stated in the October 2017 issue of *Invite*, JuD's English language online magazine. As follows:²³

- To seek and strive, both within and outside the parliament, towards the practical implementation of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan that compels the society and the state to conform all laws to the Injunctions of the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, and to ensure no legislation repugnant to it shall be passed.
- To uphold and promote social values such as tolerance, harmony, brotherhood, compassion and social justice.
- To guard and protect our ideological, moral, ethical and cultural ethos.
- To try to make Pakistan a true modern Islamic welfare state.
- To inculcate the ideology of Pakistan in the citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

23 "The rise of MML and the mainstreaming debate", *ISSUU*, October 8, 2017, <https://issuu.com/invtthemag/docs/issue7>.

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- To promote a political environment in which all members of the society, especially the lower and the middle class, get complete rights and to prepare them for leadership roles.
- To restore and advance Pakistan's global stature in the world, and to promote ties with brotherly Islamic countries.
- To honour and safeguard the rights of the citizens, providing them dignity, equality, unity, brotherhood, healthcare and liberty, while empowering the weak and the helpless segments of the society, in accordance with the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.
- To enforce a unified and single educational system throughout the country and achieve a 100% literacy rate, and to promote science and research based education.
- To attain a highly productive industrial and agricultural output in order to reduce dependency on foreign debt and aid.
- To enact policies that will help bring together marginalised people of the community and promote the integration of the tribal people into a productive part of mainstream society.
- To safeguard and honour the rights of women.
- To protect the rights of the minorities.
- To morally and diplomatically support the people of Jammu-Kashmir in acquiring their right of self-determination, and to lead an effective struggle against the oppression being inflicted upon the people of the occupied valley.

- To counter the *takfeeri* extremist ideology of the *Kharijites*, educate the people in battling it, and to work towards curbing sectarianism.
- To devise an independent, clear and categorical foreign policy that is subject to national interest and promotes the security, protection and stability of the Muslim *Ummah*.

The objectives of the MML also are no different than LeT's and JuD. Noticeably, most of the stated objectives also overlap with those of the Pakistani state. But what may be of concern from an Indian point of view is the focus on minorities, particularly the Sikh minorities of Pakistan. The Sikh community is being invited to MML's public meetings in an effort to involve them within the support networks of the party. On August 13, 2017, Sardar Gopal Singh Chawla of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) and Chairman of the Punjabi Sikh Sangat, Pakistan, addressed a public rally in Lahore which was organised by MML. Chawla announced the support of the Pakistani Sikh community as well as of Sikhs settled in the United Kingdom, USA and Canada, to Hafiz Saeed and MML. In his address, Chawla aired anti-India views in favour of Khalistanis and Indian Kashmiris.

CONTESTING THE BY-ELECTION

Soon after the formation of the MML, the party filed for registration with the ECP. Pending registration, the JuD fielded Qari Yaqoub Sheikh, who pledged himself to the ideals of JuD, to contest the 2017 by-election in the NA 120 Constituency, which had fallen vacant after the Supreme Court's disqualification of then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Yaqoub was pitted against Nawaz's wife, Begum Kulsoom Nawaz of Pakistan Muslim

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League-Nawaz (PML-N).²⁴ Although, Yaqoub had contested as an independent candidate, the party campaign urged voters to vote for MML-backed candidate. The Constituency has a large number of Kashmir-origin voters as well.²⁵ Yaqoob Sheikh secured 5,822 votes and stood fourth in the by-election in Lahore's National Assembly Constituency.²⁶

More recently, and ahead of the July 25, 2018, polls in Pakistan, while there is a debate amongst various political parties on the influence and role of the military in these elections, the nomination papers of Hafiz Saeed's son and son-in-law have been accepted by the ECP. Hafiz Talha Saeed (son) and Hafiz Khalid Waleed (son-in-law) are contesting for the NA-91 (Sargodha-IV) and NA-133 (Lahore-XI) constituencies, respectively. As reported in Pakistan's media, the two are among 265 candidates who will be contesting the upcoming polls on AAT tickets. As already stated, the ECP had earlier refused to register MML as a political party. MML is now participating in elections to 80 NA and 185 provincial seats across Pakistan, on the AAT ticket. More importantly, the focus remains on Punjab, where 50 NA and 152 provincial assembly candidates are contesting; crucially, Punjab is the LeT/JuD stronghold. AAT has clearly stated that members of MML will also be the members of AAT.

24 Ashok Behuria, "JuD/LeT Mutating into 'Milli Muslim League'", *Weekly Bulletin*, August 07-13, 2017, <https://idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/PEW-Aug-2-2017.pd>.

25 Ibid.

26 "Pakistan government opposes Saeed's MML registration as political party", *Business Standard*, December 23, 2015, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/pakistan-government-opposes-saeed-s-mml-registration-as-political-party-117122300290_1.html.

WHAT EXPLAINS THE EMERGENCE OF MML?

It is clear that there has been a change in Pakistan's strategic approach in dealing with this group. It remains difficult to determine if this change has been propelled by domestic considerations or external compulsions. Saeed's participation in Pakistani politics may indicate the state's efforts to contain JuD's jihadist agenda and its domestic implications by offering it another outlet for its energies, possibly as the only way forward to deal with the group.²⁷ This may not, however, necessarily mean that Pakistan intends to terminate the use of the JuD-LeT complex as a tool of its foreign policy. Domestically, Pakistan's limitations have been evident when it comes to dealing with jihadist groups like JuD and LeT.²⁸ Moreover, these limitations also extend to the state's inability to counter their violent narratives.²⁹ For the past three decades, the country's policies have enabled, encouraged, and mainstreamed such practices. Particularly in Punjab, which is a melting pot of different jihadist groups, the limitations related to the state's counter-terrorism efforts are palpable. Accommodation rather than containment has been devised as the core policy approach. There are other examples from Punjab, where the state's attempt to co-opt sectarian jihadists into the country's political fold appear obvious. The recent election of Masroor Nawaz Jhangvi, son of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) founder Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, to the Punjab Assembly not only highlights the state's emerging approach to these groups, but also the limitations of this approach. If

27 Mohammad Imran, "What did I say that was wrong?": Nawaz responds to controversy around remarks on Mumbai attacks", *Dawn*, May 14, 2017, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1407622>.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

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Saeed is able to gain an electoral foothold in Punjab, it would only further enhance his ideological support base. The state, by allowing Saeed to grow politically, may not only further entrench militant Islamism in Pakistan, but would deepen the country's counter-terrorism challenges internally.

Secondly, the change in Pakistan's policy regarding Saeed's role in Pakistan's domestic politics also has implications regarding the state's intention to legitimise the group's branding, by portraying it as more moderate. The current political landscape, which is in turmoil, offers Pakistan's security establishment an ideal setting to introduce JuD into the country's political arena. And MML can capitalise on the so called charity work done by its affiliate outfits. Reports suggests that the FIF, an LeT affiliate outfit, runs 35 operations across Pakistan, including hospitals, earthquake-relief, ambulance services, vaccination and so on.³⁰ The result is that, despite US and international bans on all these outfits, they enjoy popular public support within Pakistan. Indeed, the United States has already placed MML on its list of foreign terrorist organisations. The State Department disclosed, in a statement on April 2, 2018, that it had designated MML as a foreign terrorist group because it was operating as fronts for LeT, which is also on the U.S. terrorist list.³¹

Third, the Pakistan Army is now looking for new political partners. In Pakistan, the Army seems to be least interested in engaging with mainstream parties, i.e., Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N).

30 Ashok Behuria, "JuD/LeT Mutating into 'Milli Muslim League'", *Weekly Bulletin*, August 07-13, 2017, <https://idsa.in/system/files/page/2015/PEW-Aug-2-2017.pdf>.

31 "U.S. Adds Pakistan's Milli Muslim League To Terror List", *RFE/RL*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-milli-muslim-league-u-s-terror-list/29141811.html>.

Other smaller parties like Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) are not in a position to form a government on their own. As a result, the Army appears to be looking for new political partners and MML could, today, be in a grooming stage. Notably, a Pew Institute survey suggests that LeT is more acceptable to Pakistanis as compared to other Islamist groupings, especially Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).³²

Fourth, a section of Pakistan's security establishment still views Saeed and his associates as useful tools in some measures, particularly vis-à-vis India. Moreover, Saeed and a number of other anti-India jihadist groups offer legitimacy and street power to Pakistan's confrontational policy toward New Delhi. In this context, the impending transition of the JuD from a proscribed organisation to a political party is hardly a result of international pressure.

Fifth, the JuD of late has been under pressure to raise funds. Being under a political umbrella gives them more freedom to operate and generate funds.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

MML may *prima facie* not appear to be a direct threat to India as a political outfit, but its emergence should be a cause for concern. As mentioned earlier, MML, JuD and LeT belong to the same family. Their aims and objectives are global, even if these may currently be limited by capacity or focus. The LeT-JuD-MML complex has a distinct ideology that underwrites a program of Islamic revanchism—and justifies collaboration with other terrorist groups. When it comes to Pakistan, LeT not only does not bite the hand that feeds it, it

32 Madiha Afzal, "Do Pakistanis hold a favourable view of the Lashkar-e-Taiba?", *Dawn*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1396877>.

in fact protects its patrons against other domestic adversaries.³³ LeT is a Janus-faced entity that is involved in terrorism and social development concurrently— which limits the Pakistani establishment’s ability to target it, even if it were so inclined.

The MML and LeT possess a cohesive and hierarchical organisational structure that is effective at both the conduct of violence and the delivery of social programs. The group uses technology and social media to advance its political and jihadi goals. After a demonstrated terror program against India, MML/LeT will now have a definite political agenda against New Delhi, as a pressure group in the short run. However, if MML is able to form a government or even be part of a coalition which rules Pakistan, this would be a real worry, as it could constitute a direct and long-term nuclear security threat. MML president Saifullah Khalid stated, at a Press Conference on August 7, 2017, that the party would work in coordination with all parties and religious groups that believe Pakistan should lead a Muslim Ummah, declaring that “the fight will continue until the completion of Pakistan (by inclusion of) Kashmir.”³⁴

These stated aims, coupled with nuclear weapons, should alarm Indians and the world at-large. No wonder the world understands the Indian-dilemma. As pointed out on March 12, 2013, in testimony to the US Senate’s Select Committee on Intelligence, the Director of US National Intelligence James Clapper observed: “Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba

33 Ashley J Tellis, “The Menace that is Lashkar-e-Taiba”, *Carnegie*, March 13, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/03/13/menace-that-is-lashkar-e-taiba-pub-47512>.

34 Tufail Ahmad, “The New Long-Term Nuclear Threat To India – The Security Implications Of A Political Party Formed By Pakistani Jihadi Hafiz Muhammad Saeed”, *MEMRI*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.memri.org/reports/new-long-term-nuclear-threat-india-%E2%80%93-security-implications-political-party-formed-pakistani>.

will continue to be the most multifaceted and problematic of the Pakistani militant groups... The group has the long-term potential to evolve into a permanent and even Hamas/Hezbollah-like presence in Pakistan.”³⁵

Now that LeT has given birth to the Milli Muslim League, it poses a far more significant long-term security threat—especially to India—because such a political party is bound to work in ideological coordination with the ISI.

35 Tufail Ahmad, “Will the ISI use Lashkar-e-Taiba’s new political party to start a nuclear war?”, *The Print*, August 10, 2017, <https://theprint.in/opinion/will-the-isi-use-lashkar-e-taibas-new-political-party-to-start-a-nuclear-war/6177/>.

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Exploring Core and Peripheral Insurgencies in India's Northeast

M.A. Athul* and Giriraj Bhattacharjee**

Internal conflicts in India's Northeast are distinctly conceptualized within the framework of unique ethnic identities that are threatened by and in altercation with, the nationalist state, with the latter often viewed as an agent of an inchoate cultural 'mainstream'. While some of the conflicts in the region fit into this general framework of interpretation, few, if any, are absolutely explained by it. Several, in fact, are entirely unrelated to this reductionist scheme of 'freedom struggles' by ethnic minorities against the 'homogenising state'. Indeed, even where militant groups direct their rhetoric and their violence against the symbols of the state, the underlying motives and ideologies are more correctly interpreted in terms of conflicting tribal identities and histories of internecine conflict, based entirely on tribal, sub-tribal, or tribal-outsider rivalries and parallel antagonisms over control of or accesses to limited resources, especially land.¹

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1 Ajai Sahni, "Survey of Conflicts and Resolution in India's Northeast", Faultlines, May 2002, Volume 12, <http://old.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume12/Article3.htm>.

Have the ethnic insurgencies of India's Northeast entered their long waited final phase, as insurgency related violence records continuous declines over the past few year? Has the drop in violence in States such as Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur as a combined result of the loss of cross-border safe havens, geo political transformations, operational successes of Security Forces (SFs) and negotiations with militant groups, finally resulted in a cascading effect that could bring an end to the troubles in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and the North Cachar Hills as well? The quantitative data suggests that these insurgencies have entered a waning phase with incidents and fatalities declining to their lowest in a decade. The insurgency in Tripura has been substantially defeated, with no insurgency related fatalities recorded since 2015, while negotiations with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) are reportedly in their final stages.² Peace talks between United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and Government authorities are also nearing fruition with recent reports indicating that a consensus has been reached.³ Indeed, according to Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA) across the Northeast, 43 insurgent formations are now under Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreements with the Government and another nine have arrived at Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) / Memoranda of Settlement (MoS) with the Government.⁴

2 "Congress Demands PM's Clarification on Naga Peace Accord", *Northeast Today*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.northeasttoday.in/congress-demands-pms-clarification-on-naga-peace-accord/>.

3 Rajeev Bhattacharya, "Talks complete between Centre and pro-talks ULFA faction : Accord likely after completion of NRC", *First Post*, May 6, 2018 <https://www.firstpost.com/india/talks-completed-between-centre-and-pro-talks-ulfa-faction-in-assam-accord-likely-after-completion-of-nrc-4457623.html>.

4 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, "Northeast: Negotiated Success", *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 16, No.45, May 7, 2018 <http://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-16-No-45#assessment2>.

The road to the comparatively peaceful environment in the region has been a long and gory one, with a total of more than 15,000 insurgency-linked fatalities just between 1992 and 2005.⁵ However, between 2006 and 2018 the fatalities recorded in the region totaled 5,742, indicating a substantial fall in violence in the region.⁶ An even more remarkable drop in fatalities can be observed between January 2009 and June 22, 2018, with 3,021 fatalities in nearly ten years, while just the four years between 2005 and 2008 (inclusive) accounted for 3,441 fatalities in the region).

The dynamics of core and peripheral insurgencies in the region have been complex, and it remains to be determined whether the drop in violence in one State or group of States experiencing a ‘core insurgency’ has a ripple effect on the ‘peripheral insurgencies’ in the region.

Most of the insurgencies in the Northeast were initiated after significant agitations by articulate sections of the affected groups and civil society representatives leading agitations to promote their cause, sometimes violently. Later, sections of these agitated youth were drawn towards the armed insurgency due to the perceived lack of progress in meeting their demands. In a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic society, such violent means to achieve stated goals by particular ethnic groups has often led to a cycle of violence, which is then emulated by members of other ethnicities.

The larger ethnic militant groups, which have been responsible for a lion’s share of violence (constituting the core insurgencies) in the region, have propped up ‘peripheral’ insurgent groups, primarily in logistically vital areas to act as facilitators for the larger groups.

5 “Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Northeast 1992-2018”, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/Datasheets.aspx?countries=india>.

6 Ibid.

These 'peripheral' groups play a vital role for the sustenance of the insurgency because of their trans-border linkages, which cut across states and international boundaries (e.g., the Garo's inhabit Assam, Meghalaya and Bangladesh). Moreover, these groups also engage in a range of criminal activities, such as abduction and extortion, which provide additional sources of revenue for the patron groups. A mutually supportive insurgent ecosystem thus develops and is fed by and compounds the extortion, abduction and arms trade.

A widespread misperception about the conflict in the Northeast has been that the conflict exists primarily due to lack of administration and development. However, on closer inspection it can be determined that these reasons by themselves have not been the cause of the emergence, spread and sustenance of violence over a prolonged period of time. Rather, the ever-present threat of violence itself has contributed to the lack of administration and development. Violence has been sustained primarily because of the conflict dynamics itself, with the persistence of violence over a long period diluting the initial causes for the emergence of the conflict, and establishing an alternative and self-sustaining dynamic.

The insurgent groups in the region have ethnic and tribal underpinnings, with most groups being formed or dominated by tribes of the same or shared ethnicity. This tribal nature of the insurgency has also led to factionalisation of insurgent groups which, along with various other political factors, has resulted in a range of impediments to any negotiated resolution of these insurgencies. Any 'dialogue' is inevitably complicated by a multi-layered procedure to accommodate factions and ethnic fissures in once-unified groups, often protracting conflicts indefinitely. Naga groups such as NSCN-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the Khaplang faction, NSCN-K, is the primary

example of this pattern of fission and persistence of conflict. While NSCN-IM is dominated by Thangkuls and Semas,⁷ Aos and Konyaks dominate the Khaplang faction.

Political and insurgency dynamics of in the region are compounded by a variety of factors including ethnicity, tribalism, linguistic concerns and regional pride, which in turn are further accentuated due to a demographic destabilization as a result of immigration (starting from 19th century and continuing) and by narratives driven by loss of identity and political marginalization.

Further, although the multitude of insurgencies in the Northeast may seem like a conflict based on a homogenous factor, caused by antagonism between the state and its agencies on the one side and various ethnicities attempting to 'safeguard' their unique identities, on the other, the ground reality is quite different. Some insurgencies may genuinely have sprouted out of ideas of ethnic identity, provoking the insurgents to attack government forces and installations. However, the underlying reasons and motives for the majority of insurgencies can be traced to competition for scarce resources (such as land) and the historical animosity between various tribes or ethnic groups.

The indigenous tribal groups are known to have a strong attachment to the land and forests in their areas of demographic dominance, and any encroachment by 'outsiders' generally creates resentment and frictions between communities.⁸ The Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur during the early 1990's is a prime example of competition for land. In Assam, Bodo violence targeting the Muslim migrant and Santhal ('tea tribe')

7 Sashinungla, "Nagaland: Insurgency and factional intransigence", *Faultlines*, January 2005, Volume 16, <http://www.satp.org/faultline-chapter-details/29>.

8 B.G Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent*, 1996, Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, p.8.

populations can also be traced to land issues between the communities. The Nellie Massacre of 1983 was orchestrated by instigating the Tiwa tribal population against immigrant Muslims who were settled in land reserved for the tribals, which the latter believed the immigrants had ‘stolen’ from them.⁹

DEFINING ‘CORE’ AND ‘PERIPHERY’

The first armed insurrection in the Northeast emerged in 1952 in the form of the Naga rebellion. Later, insurgencies sprouted throughout the region, with insurgency being initiated in Manipur in the 1960’s, with the formation of United National Liberation Front – UNLF, the armed movement of the Meiteis; and in Tripura, with the formation of the Tripura Sena, as a result of inflow of ethnic Bengalis from erstwhile East Pakistan into the State); and in Assam due to the demographic destabilization resulting principally from illegal migrants from erstwhile East Pakistan and subsequently, Bangladesh. These States faced the brunt of insurgency-related violence, thereby forming the ‘core insurgencies’ of the region.

As a result of armed violence in these States, a spillover effect was felt within areas of Assam not affected by the principal insurgencies, such as the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong, which border Meghalaya and Nagaland; as well as Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, both flanking Assam and Nagaland. Armed violence spread to Meghalaya, with the formation of the Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC) in 1992. Arunachal Pradesh, which did not witness any substantial insurgent violence by local groups, primarily had to contend with a spillover from insurgency from the other States, principally dominated by the NSCN faction,

9 Ibid., p. 44.

but with other insurgent groups also vying for control of the borders with Myanmar.

The principal actors engineering the spillover were the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), who propped up local militant groups to act as facilitators in regions outside their direct spheres of influence. These groups acted as peripheral or support groups for the core insurgencies in the region. One example was the A'chik National Volunteer Council (ANVC), formed in the year 1995 and operational in the Garo Hill Districts of Meghalaya. ANVC coordinated its operations in tandem with a variety of insurgent formations, including NSCN-IM, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and ULFA. Naga militant groups also propped up peripheral insurgencies in Arunachal Pradesh, most recently the Eastern Naga National Government Group (ENNG) formed in January 2016.¹⁰ According to officials, the group was formed by NSCN-IM and was operating in the Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh.

CORE INSURGENCIES

Assam

The insurgency in Assam started in 1979, alongside the vigorous anti-outsider agitation, primarily targeting refugees from East Pakistan since Partition, with augmenting flows after the creation of present day Bangladesh. The movement was initiated by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) which initially demanded detection and deportation of those who had

10 Rishu Kalantri, "New outfit raises head in Arunachal", *The Telegraph*, April 27, 2017, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170428/jsp/northeast/story_148683.jsp.

entered India after 1951. Although the Government of India (GoI) agreed to the demands of the protestors, the cut-off date it insisted on applying was 1971,¹¹ which was not accepted by the agitators. This led to the breakdown of talks between AASU and AAGSP, on the one hand, and GoI, on the other. The anti-outsider agitation quickly mutated into a secessionist movement, marked by the formation of ULFA in 1979.

As ULFA gained force, the Bodos (one of the earliest settlers in Assam) started a parallel armed movement demanding the creation of a separate State. Bodo militants are primarily active in what is now the Bodo-dominated Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD), comprising of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. The first Bodo militant group was the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), formed in 1987. Later, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) emerged in 1994, with a declared goal of a 'sovereign Bodoland'. In due course of time, there were multiple splits within these organisations. Currently, peace talks are progressing with two factions of NDFB: NDFB Pro-talks Faction (NDFB-PTF) and NDFB-Ranjan Daimary (NDFB-R). However security operations are ongoing against NDFB-S (formed by I.K. Songbijit, currently led by Saoraigwra), which has been involved in large scale violence such as the December 2014 attack on Adivasis . The Bodo Liberation Tigers, formed in 1996, renounced violence in 2003, after signing a tripartite Memorandum of Settlement with the State and Union Government.

According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), between 1992 and June 22, 2018 at least 8,294 people were killed in Assam (4,298 civilians, 831 Security Force personnel and 3,165 militants).

11 "Assam Backgrounder", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/background/india-insurgencynortheast-assam>.

Manipur

Although the princely state merged with India in 1949, it became a full-fledged State only in 1972. This led to a sense of grievance, which resulted in Meitei dominated groups like UNLF and People's Liberation Army (PLA) launching violent insurgencies to restore 'sovereignty'. The Meiteis dominate the Imphal Valley areas, while the tribals residing in the Hill Districts were not enthusiastic about the idea of a sovereign Manipur, which they feared will be dominated by the Meiteis. The ethnic divide is widened further by the Hill-Valley distinction. The Meitei majority inhabitants of Manipur do not belong to the scheduled tribes and reside mostly in the fertile Valley Districts, while the various Kuki and Naga tribes dominate the hill Districts.

According to SATP, between 1992 and June 22, 2018 at least 6,140 people were killed in Manipur (2,292 civilians, 1,030 Security Forces and 2,818 militants).

Nagaland

The Naga secessionist movement is the oldest in the region. Though there were periodic negotiation between the rebels and Government, the issue remained unresolved. After the parent group, the Naga National Council (NNC), signing the 1976 Shillong Accord, it slowly lost prominence. It was replaced by a breakaway formation that rejected the Accord, NSCN led by Isak Chisi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S.Khaplang. Clashes between NSCN and SFs continued through the 1980's and the 90's. In 1988, after bloody internecine clashes, the NSCN split, leading to the formation of NSCN-IM and NSCN-K. GoI entered into a ceasefire agreement with NSCN-IM in 1997, and with NSCN-K in 2001. A 'framework agreement' was signed with NSCN-IM in 2015, shortly after NSCN-K walked out of its Ceasefire agreement. GoI has also

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taken on board seven member Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs)¹² in the ‘talks process’ to forge a ‘comprehensive solution’ acceptable to all.

According to SATP, between 1992 and June 22, 2018 at least 2,526 people were killed in Nagaland (812 civilians, 259 Security Forces and 1,455 militants).

PERIPHERAL INSURGENCIES

The spillover of insurgency into Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh can primarily be attributed to their locations. Meghalaya, with Bangladesh bordering it on one side and Assam on the other three, was a critical corridor for insurgent groups in Assam, as a ‘spring board’ to and from Bangladesh, where their safe havens and training camps were located. By virtue of its location the State became an important lifeline for the insurgency. With the Garo Hills bordering Bangladesh, insurgent groups could set up ‘transit camps’ in the region. However, given the probability that the locals would have turned against them if outside formations were to engage in any armed activity or intimidation, the groups cultivated local militants to provide logistical support, and to raise revenues through extortion.

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh, which borders Myanmar, has been used by Indian Insurgent Groups (IIG) to cross over to Myanmar, where insurgent camps have long been located. The hilly terrain, accompanied by thick jungles in the border areas offered attractive havens to the insurgent groups, making it easy for them to hide, while SFs have a difficult time pursuing

12 Giriraj Bhattacharjee, “Nagaland: Widening discord”, *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 16, No.20, November 13, 2017, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair16/16_20.htm#assessment2.

them. Although there were indigenous militant groups from Arunachal Pradesh such as Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF), National Liberation Council of Taniland (NLCT) and United Liberation Movement of Arunachal (ULMA), these groups have been rather ineffective and have not executed any noticeable attacks targeting Security Forces or Government installations in the recent times. Arunachal Pradesh has, thus, not witnessed any effective indigenous militant movement.

However, over the years, the state has become an important 'connector' for militant groups of Assam and Nagaland, to cross over to their safe heavens in Myanmar, with Tirap, Changlang and Longding (along the Myanmar border) forming the hub of militancy in the State. According to UMHA Annual Report (2017-2018)¹³ at least six insurgent groups from Assam and Nagaland, namely NSCN-IM, NSCN-KK, NSCN-K, NSCN-R, ULFA-I and NDFB-S¹⁴ were active in Arunachal Pradesh, and are also involved in extortion and recruitment in the State.

In recent years, militant activity in Arunachal Pradesh has increased. According to an April 10, 2017, statement by Hansraj Ahir, Minister of State (MoS) for Home Affairs, militant formations have shifted their 'centre of gravity' to the Indo-Myanmar border. Although insurgency-related fatalities have been minimal, there were 61 insurgency related incidents in the State according to the UMHA Annual Report 2017-18. In 2012 there were 21 insurgency-related incidents, after which the number increased steadily – 33 in 2014, 36 in 2015, 50 in 2016 and 61 in 2017.¹⁵

13 "Annual Report 2017-18", *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, <https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/MINISTRY%20OF%20HOME%20AFFAIR%20AR%202017-18%20FOR%20WEB.pdf>.

14 Ibid.

15 "Annual Report 2017-18", *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, <https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/MINISTRY%20OF%20HOME%20AFFAIR%20AR%202017-18%20FOR%20WEB.pdf>.

North Cachar Hills

Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao constitute the three Hill Districts of Assam. The predominantly tribal Districts have considerable autonomy. The major tribal communities residing in these Districts are Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki, Hmar, Tiwa, Zeme Naga, Biete, Hrankhols, Khelma and Rengma Naga.¹⁶ Non-tribal communities include Assamese, Bengali, Nepalese and Hindi-speakers.

During the mid- and late-1980's, the Mikir (later rechristened Karbi Anglong) and NC (North Cachar) Hill Districts (later renamed Dima Hasao) witnessed an agitation for an 'autonomous State' within the State of Assam led by the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). Militancy in the region started in the 1990's with the formation of groups such as the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Karbi People's Front (KPF). Later the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) carried out violent activities in the region with an objective of setting up '*Hamprek Khangtim*' (self-rule). Around the same time Dimasa militant groups such as the Dimasa National Security Front (DNSF) and later Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) and Black Widow (BW) fomented trouble in the NC Hills (Dima Hasao). These militant groups wanted to create a separate state for the Dimasa in areas of their demographic dominance, such as the Dima Hasao, Cachar, Nagaon and Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam and parts of the Dimapur District in Nagaland. Prominent militant groups, including Naga formations and ULFA helped raise Dimasa militant units in these Districts. The major groups also collaborated with local groups, sharing of extortion revenues and benefits from the arms trade.

Corruption within the autonomous council set up in 1952 (which was bifurcated in 1976 into Karbi Anglong and NC

16 The major tribal communities residing in these Districts.

Hills autonomous District Councils) benefited the militants. The presence of State and Central Government Public Sector Units (PSUs), private cement companies and major infrastructure projects like the East-West corridor and Broad Gauge Conversion Project were prominent targets. Funds meant for development were thus diverted due to the politician-militant nexus, which emerged as political parties exploited militant formations during electoral processes. Over time, diminishing state revenues and high recurring expenditures further undermined development in the area. At the same time, competitive ethnic assertion led to repeated ethnic violence, primarily led by the various ethnic insurgent groups, leading to the death of hundreds and displacement of thousands.

Meghalaya

Meghalaya, one of the four tribal majority States in the North East region, became an autonomous State in 1970 and was upgraded to a full-fledged State on January 21, 1972.¹⁷ The political situation in Meghalaya was heavily influenced by the ‘anti-outsider’ agitation in the neighboring Assam, which was spearheaded by student organisations such as AASU. Similar ethnically charged agitations began to take shape in Meghalaya later, spearheaded by the Khasi Students Union (KSU),¹⁸ primarily targeting ‘non-tribals’ (Bengalis, Biharis and Nepalese). Three major cycles of rioting in Meghalaya, where the non-tribal population was specifically targeted, were in 1979, 1987 and 1992. According to the Sharma Commission, the riots of 1979, 1987 and 1992 resulted in the death of more

17 Official website of Meghalaya Government, <http://meghalaya.gov.in/megportal/stateprofile>.

18 Leishipem Khamrang, “Geography of insurgency –Contextualisation of ethno-nationalism in Northeast India”, *Scientific Research*, June 11, 2015, https://file.scirp.org/pdf/JSS_2015061115202722.pdf.

than 100 people and more than a thousand were displaced.¹⁹ After the signing of 1985 Assam Accord, many tribal students in Meghalaya demanded that the accord be extended to Meghalaya as well.²⁰

The formation of HALC, a secessionist group, is widely considered to be the starting point of armed insurgency in Meghalaya. HALC was created with the assistance of NSCN-IM, and mobilized the Garos, Khasis and Jaintias. However, by 1992, tribal differences came to the fore leading to the split of group into two – Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) representing the Khasis and Jaintias, and the Achik Matgrik Liberation Army (AMLA) representing the Garos.²¹ AMLA was more of a vigilante group than a secessionist formation. AMLA too was backed by NSCN-IM. The group never numbered more than 30, and was involved in bank robberies and other crimes.²² AMLA surrendered in 1994, shortly after the death of its ‘commander in chief’ George Momin.

ANVC was formed in 1995²³ and operated till 2004, when it signed a cease fire agreement with the Union Government in 2004. In 2012 it came to be known that a split had occurred in the ANVC ranks, leading to the formation of the ANVC-

19 Nabanipa Bhattacharjee, “No more candle light vigils please”, *Mainstream* June 27, 2015, <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article5757.html>.

20 Indranil Banerjee, “Agitation against non-tribals by Khasi Students Union turn violent”, *India Today*, July 15, 1987, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19870715-agitation-against-non-tribals-by-khasi-students-union-turns-violent-in-shillong-799063-1987-07-15>.

21 Brigadier Sushil Kumar Sharma, op.cit., https://idsa.in/policybrief/gar-national-liberation-army_sksharma_180316.

22 Brigadier S.P. Sinha, *Lost opportunities*, Lancer, New Delhi p. 197.

23 Veronica Khangchian, “Meghalaya : Flawed cease fire”, *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 10, No.44, May 7, 2012, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/sair10/10_44.htm#assessment2.

Breakaway faction (ANVC-B). Although the split came to be known to authorities in 2012, Nado R. Marak, ‘personal secretary’ to ANVC-B ‘commander-in-chief’ Mukost Marak, claimed that the split had taken place as far back as in July 2004.²⁴

An ex-member of ANVC, Sohan D. Shira formed the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) in 2009, which rapidly emerged as the most violent militant formation in Meghalaya, until Shira was killed in an encounter with the Meghalaya Police in April 2018.

Meghalaya witnessed the peak of insurgency in 2014, with 179 insurgency-related incidents, and 76 fatalities. Since then the graph has declined steeply, with 123 incidents and 61 fatalities reported in 2015; 68 incidents and 26 fatalities in 2016; 28 incidents and eight fatalities in 2017; and three incidents and seven fatalities in 2018 (till June 21).

REASONS WHY LOCALS JOIN INSURGENCY

The reasons for locals joining insurgency tend to vary according to diverse local conditions. Some of the factors which contributing to local recruitment include:

School Dropouts

The lack of educational infrastructure in the region and probable lack of qualified teaching professionals is likely to have indirectly contributed to youngsters joining militant ranks. High dropout rates in primary and secondary schooling in the northeastern states has been identified as a reason for the militant recruitment.²⁵ Except for Tripura all other north-eastern states

24 Ibid.

25 “A dangerous silence in India’s northeast”, *The Hans India*, April 17, 2015, <http://www.thehansindia.com/posts/index/Hans/2015-04-17/A-dangerous-silence-in-Indias-north-east/144854>.

have dropout rate higher than the national average.²⁶ Youth unemployment (15-23 age groups) is significantly higher in the region, and could be a reason for restive youth joining militant ranks.²⁷

Fear of Loss of Identity

Another motivating factor is the fear of loss of identity and resources to the outsiders. As stated in an interview of Elangbam Johnson, president of the United Committee Manipur (UCM): “Many people of the State woke up only after a Nepali man won the elections in Kangpokpi constituency in Senapati district. The outsider issue is therefore affecting the Hill Districts too. The broad gauge line to Jiribam (Imphal East district) is going to start soon, which will bring more outsiders to the State. If we don’t act now, our land will be gone. Manipur will become another Tripura where the indigenous people have been outnumbered by the Bengalis who came from Bangladesh.”²⁸ UCM was formed in 2001 after the extension of the GoI-NSCN-IM ceasefire “without territorial limits”, with the aim of protecting Manipur’s territorial integrity.²⁹ The trust deficit is especially prevalent amongst the hill people towards outsiders, as is their resentment against perceived domination, by plainsmen, especially in the economic sphere.

26 “School drop-out rates: National average decreases, North-East states increase”, *India Today*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/drop-outs-in-north-east-india-322042-2016-05-06>.

27 “Employment situation in north eastern region of India: Recent trends and emerging challenges”, *VV Giri National Labour Institute*, 2012, <https://vvnli.gov.in/sites/default/files/2012-096.pdf>.

28 “Fears Over Land, Identity Fuel Manipur’s Bonfire of Anxieties”, *The Wire*, September 9, 2016, <https://thewire.in/politics/manipur-churachandpur-hill-valley-inner-line-permit>.

29 Wasbir Hussain, "Manipur: Caught in a Homeland War", *South Asia Intelligence Review (SAIR)*, Volume 2, No. 13, October 3, 2003, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_13.htm.

This sense of grievance combined with the fear of loss of their unique identity is a motivational factor for locals to join armed movements. Notably, the then Khasi Students' Union (KSU), Vice-president Fredrick Kharmawphlang resigned from KSU and joined the banned Khasi militant HNLC in February 2014. In his resignation letter addressed to the KSU, Fredrick Kharmawphlang asserted,³⁰

I have taken this step personally with a motive to send a strong message to the State Government that there is a need to protect our indigenous people... As a student leader I found that the Congress-led government has failed the people even on a simple issue of influx of outsiders. I believe 2014 is a political year and I speak as one of the victims of the Government of India even after 67 years of India's attaining freedom.

Later, on July 31, 2015, Fredrick Kharmawphlang surrendered before the Meghalaya Police in Shillong.

Violence as a Ticket to Political Power

Armed violence has emerged as a shortcut to political power. Many present-day mainstream politicians in the region were previously involved with militant formations. Mizoram has had a succession of former insurgents as Chief Ministers and Ministers. The present Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council (DHADC) Debolal Garlosa *aka* Daniel Dimasa was 'deputy commander in chief' of DHD-Jewel Garlosa. In Meghalaya, HNLC 'chairman' Julius K. Dorphang (who surrendered in 2007) became an Independent Member of the Legislative Assembly in 2013.

30 "KSU respects Kharmawphlang's decision to join HNLC", *Meghalaya Times*, February 24, 2014, <http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php/front-page/24167-ksu-respects-kharmawphlang-s-decision-to-join-hnlc>.

There is, consequently, an increasing perception that militancy could be a 'ticket' to the higher echelons of political power. Moreover, the politico-militant nexus is also very visible in the region. A recent and glaring example was the February 18, 2018, attack on the convoy of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) candidate Jonathone Nengminza Sangma in the East Garo Hills District in which four people were killed, besides the NCP candidate from William Nagar. The victims also included a surrendered GNLA 'commander' Nikam Ch Momin *aka* Baichung, 'second in command' of GNLA.³¹ On April 6, 2003, Meghalaya Police seized a State pool car allocated to the former Cooperation Minister and senior NCP leader Adolf Lu Hitler R. Marak when it was being used to ferry ANVC militants.³² According to DGP (Retired) Prakash Singh, the absence of accountability for past deeds has given the militants confidence and undermined available deterrents to militancy.³³

Porous Border

A reason for the insurgency to take hold is the location along porous borders with Bangladesh or Myanmar, from where insurgent groups smuggle arms into India. The strategically located Garo Hills region thus housed at least 22 militant formations in 2014.³⁴ With the easy availability of

31 "GNLA suffers body blow as top leader surrenders", *The Shillong Times*, December 10, 2016, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2016/12/10/gnla-suffers-body-blow-as-top-leader-surrenders/>.

32 Anirban Roy, "Shadow boxing in Meghalaya", *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 2, No.2, July 28, 2003, http://old.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_2.htm#ASSESSMENT2.

33 "Violence in Assam: Reasons behind the carnage and demands of Bodo militants", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0Vm3nDaAys&t=402s>.

34 Albert Thyrniang, "Critical look at the causes of militancy in Garo Hills", *The Shillong Times*, March 14, 2014, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2014/03/14/a-critical-look-at-the-causes-of-militancy-in-garo-hills/>.

arms, bands of criminals formed militant groups and engaged in extortion and abduction, collecting huge amounts of money in a short duration. Since its nascent stages, IIG have found safe havens across the border into Bangladesh (previously East Pakistan). Pakistani authorities provided training and support to Naga and Mizo rebels, as well as to militants from Manipur, from the very beginnings of their movements. Some years after Liberation, found renewed refuge in Bangladesh, and this continued till the Sheikh Hasina regime began to take harsh action against them after 2009. ULFA leaders such as Paresh Baruah were hosted by the Directorate General of Field Intelligence (DGFI), Bangladesh's military intelligence agency. In a statement made in 1997, the then Prime Minister Begum Khalida Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) openly declared support for militants in India's Northeast³⁵ and stated: "They (the insurgents) are fighting for independence. We also fought for it, so we are always in favour of any independence movement."³⁶

IIGs dependence on Bangladesh increased in the early 1990's, after the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Myanmarese insurgent group, withdrew its support. Bangladesh (along with the Pakistani ISI) started providing weapons to the insurgents.³⁷ In 2007 ULFA reportedly funded major political parties such as BNP and Awami League (AL) in Bangladesh.³⁸ By 2011, ULFA's Paresh Baruah had invested in several

35 "Khaleda's party backs militants in Northeast India", *Business Standard*, January 27, 2013, http://www.business-standard.com/article/specials/khaleda-s-party-backs-militants-in-northeast-india-197030301010_1.html.

36 Ibid.

37 E.N. Rammohan, "Manipur: Blue Print for Counterinsurgency", *Faultlines*, Volume 12, May 2002, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume12/article1.htm>.

38 "Ulfa funding Bangladesh parties", *The Economic Times*, February 26, 2007, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/ulfa-funding-bangladesh-parties/articleshow/1680553.cms>.

Bangladeshi companies, with interests in real estate, shipping, textile, power and medical care. Baruah reportedly invested in three Dhaka-based real estate firms, Basundhara Real Estate, Jamuna Group Housing Project and Eastern Housing Project. He owned a 30 per cent share in Samrita Hospital, 30 per cent in Chowdhury Shipping, and 30 per cent in Kasem Textiles, among others.³⁹

In 2005 during an India-Bangladesh Border Coordination Conference, Border Security Force (BSF) officials had handed over a list of 172 IIG camps⁴⁰ operating inside Bangladesh territory. There were no actions from the Bangladeshi side. During this time Bangladesh was ruled by BNP's Khalida Zia. However, things changed after 2009, when the Awami League came to power in Bangladesh.

The primary reasons for insurgencies finding roots in Arunachal Pradesh – in Tirap, Changlang and Longding Districts – are connected to geography and demography. The Districts border the Sagaing region of Myanmar, where the Myanmar Government has a minimal presence. ULFA, after losing its bases in Bhutan⁴¹ and Bangladesh,⁴² began to use Myanmar camps extensively for training and housing its cadres in Sagaing region, in areas contiguous to the eastern

39 “Ulfa's Paresh Baruah invested millions in Bangladeshi firms”, *First Post*, September 25, 2011, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/ulfas-paresh-baruah-invested-millions-in-bangladeshi-firms-91844.html>.

40 Ramananda Sengupta, “Why India is concerned about Bangladesh”, *First Post*, December 26, 2005, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/dec/22bspec.html>.

41 Wasbir Hussain, “Going for the Kill”, *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 2, No. 23, December 22, 2003, <http://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-2-No-23>.

42 Wasbir Hussain, “Dhaka Arrests Terror”, *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 8, No.43, May 3, 2010, <http://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-8-No-43>.

districts of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.⁴³ Although Myanmar has been a safe haven for Indian IIGs, this has less to do with the Myanmar's Government policy and more to do with the fact that Nay Pyi Daw does not have effective control in the peripheral Myanmar, which has also faced the issue of ethnic insurgency since its infancy as an Independent country. NSCN-K, with strong affinities with populations on both sides of the border, has had bases in Myanmar since the time of its formation in 1988.⁴⁴

Crucially, adjacent regions of Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar have a significant Naga population, with tribal and family linkages across the border, which have facilitated the spread of insurgency. In 2012, according to an agreement signed between NSCN-K and Myanmar authorities, autonomy was granted to Naga inhabited areas in three Districts (Lahe, Layse and Nanyang) in the Sagaing region.⁴⁵ The agreement provides freedom of movement of unarmed NSCN-K militants throughout the country.

The Wancho, Nocte, Tutsa, Singpo and Tanga tribes are the majority inhabitants in Tirap, Changlang and Longding Districts. Till 2000, the NSCN-K enjoyed dominance in Tirap and Changlang, as a result of Chipu Menon's efforts.⁴⁶ The insurgency in Tirap was politically imported in January 1999

43 Rajeev Bhattacharya, "The Sino-Myanmar border: The New Hideout for Separatist Rebels from North-east", *The Wire*, June 1, 2013, <https://thewire.in/politics/the-sino-myanmar-border-the-new-hideout-for-separatist-rebels-from-the-northeast>.

44 "FAQ: What is NSCN-K? Who is SS Khaplang?", *Rediff*, June 11, 2015, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/faq-what-is-nscn-k-who-is-ss-khaplang/20150611.htm>.

45 Nishit Dholabhai, "NSCN-K bags autonomy in 3 Myanmar areas", *The Telegraph*, May 15, 2012, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1120515/jsp/northeast/story_15477837.jsp.

46 T.T. Tara, "A Mismatched Priority", *Outlook*, July 23, 2003, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/a-mismatched-priority/220845>.

[allegedly by Mukut Mithi of Arunachal Pradesh Congress (M)], to overthrow the incumbent State Government led by Gegong Apang of the Arunachal Congress party. The use of militant groups to achieve political objectives was repeated after the October 1999 State Assembly elections, when some political leaders, deprived of expected ministerial berths invited NSCN-IM to 'protect' them from NSCN-K.⁴⁷ NSCN-IM influence is primarily concentrated in the Districts of Longding and Tirap while NSCN-K is said to be in prominence in District of Changlang.

Illegal extraction of minerals like coal⁴⁸ or illegal cultivation of opium⁴⁹ in the affected areas has also yielded revenues for militant groups. ULFA and NSCN factions were reported to have been involved in the coal trade which generated huge funds. Insurgent groups which were involved in illegal extraction of coal in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang District used the revenue to buy sophisticated firearms.⁵⁰ Moreover, an open border regime that allows free movement of people for up to 16 kilometres on both sides of the international border between India and Myanmar has also facilitated the movement of militants.

47 Dr Narayan Singh Rao, "Super power politics and growth of insurgency in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh", *United Service Institution of India*, June 25, 2008, <http://usiofindia.org/Article/?pub=Journal&pubno=573&ano=331>.

48 "Coal mining in Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh suspended in 2012", *Economic Times*, January 30, 2015, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/metals-mining/coal-mining-in-changlang-district-of-arunachal-pradesh-suspended-in-2012/articleshow/46066261.cms>.

49 Rishi Majumder, "Hurricane heroine", *Tehelka*, January 29, 2011, <http://www.tehelka.com/2011/01/hurricane-heroin/?singlepage=1>.

50 Sanjib Kumar Baruah, "N-E insurgents mined Arunachal coal to buy arms", *Hindustan Times*, October 3, 2003, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/n-e-insurgents-mined-arunachal-coal-to-buy-arms/story-Ww4IxxvMdDqDVvMtQw0gWyM.html>.

GEOGRAPHY AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AS DETERMINING FACTORS IN INSURGENCY

99 per cent of the boundaries of the Northeast region are international borders, with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China.⁵¹ These countries have, at different times and in various measures, either provided material and moral support to the insurgents, or have served as a base for their operations. The situation becomes murkier due to the porous nature of these borders and relationships across boundaries based on tribal and other kinship considerations. The proximity to the Golden Triangle (area known for opium production, located at the tri junction of Myanmar, Thai and Laotian border)⁵² and the flourishing markets for illegal arms are also responsible for the turmoil. Foreign intelligence agencies, including Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), Bangladesh's Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and Chinese intelligence have hand-held insurgents in various phases, compounding India's internal security problems, particularly in the Northeast.

INSURGENT LINKAGES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

China

North Industries Corporation (NORINCO), a state owned Chinese corporation has reportedly been involved in supplying weapons to militant formations in the Northeast. NORINCO's name reportedly surfaced in 2004, after the Chittagang arms

51 Problems of Border areas in North East India: Implications for the thirteenth finance commission Government of India 2009, http://fincomindia.nic.in/writereaddata/html_en_files/oldcommission_html/fincom13/discussion/report14.pdf.

52 "Opium Poppy cultivation in 'Golden Trinagle' hits new high in 2014-UN report", *UN News*, December 8, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485662-opium-poppo-cultivation-golden-triangle-hits-new-high-2014-un-report>.

haul, when Bangladeshi authorities recovered a consignment of 4,930 firearms meant for NSCN-IM and ULFA.⁵³ Further, according to UNLF ‘chief’ R.K. Meghen, his group had been in touch with China since 2008. Meghen also stated that his group met a Chinese agent in 2008. According to an intelligence official, the Chinese have been using corporate companies as fronts to supply weapons to non-state actors.⁵⁴ Moreover, according to a December 2011 report, ULFA-I leader Paresch Baruah had found shelter in Yunan Province of China near the Sino-Myanmar border.⁵⁵ Paresch Baruah continues to find shelter in China to the present day. Recently, L.R. Bishnoi, Additional Director-General of Police, Assam, disclosed, “Barua in fact has been in Ruili [a Chinese town bordering Myanmar] for quite a long time, and only occasionally visits the ULFA camps that are located closer to the Indian border, primarily because of security reasons.”⁵⁶

Bangladesh

Previously, DGFI, Bangladesh, had helped IIGs. In 2001, DGFI provided a safe house to Paresch Baruah in Dhaka.⁵⁷ At peak, Bangladesh hosted a total of 194 camps of Northeast

53 Sandeep Unnithan, “Chinese agents smuggle arms to revive militancy in north-east India”, *India Today*, May 28, 2011, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/investigation/story/20110606-chinese-agents-smuggle-arms-to-spread-militancy-in-north-east-746248-2011-05-28>.

54 Sudhi Ranjan Sen, “China’s growing link with north east rebels worries India”. *NDTV*, July 19, 2015, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/china-enabling-deadly-attacks-in-north-east-india-782703>.

55 “Paresch gives arms, funds to Maoists: JB”, *The Telegraph*, December 21, 2011 https://www.telegraphindia.com/1111221/jsp/frontpage/story_14908521.jsp.

56 Samudra Gupta Kashyap, “Chinese agencies helping North East militants in Myanmar”, *The Indian Express*, January 10, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/chinese-agencies-helping-north-east-militants-in-myanmar-4468384/>.

57 Bertil Lintner, *Great Game East*, Harper Collins, 2012, pp 183.

Indian insurgent formations.⁵⁸ Moreover, ULFA had a strong presence in the port city of Chittagong,⁵⁹ which was also a hub for illegal weapons. Militants from Tripura [National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)] and Manipur [People's Liberation Army (PLA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), United National Liberation Front (UNLF) and Kanglei Yowel Kanna Lup (KYKL)] also had camps in Bangladesh.

Pakistan

ISI has been supporting insurgent activity in the Northeast since the days of East Pakistan, and since the emergence of India's first insurgency in Nagaland.⁶⁰ In the 1990's ULFA leaders had established contacts with ISI.⁶¹ NSCN-IM's Thuingaleng Muivah was arrested at Bangkok Airport on January 19, 2000, while he was returning after a visit to Pakistan. Similarly, Ranjan Daimary, NDFB 'chief' (currently his faction is known as NDFB-PTF), is also known to have visited Pakistan in January 2000, indicating Islamabad's continuous coordination with insurgent groups in India's Northeast.⁶²

CAUSES FOR DECLINE IN INSURGENT VIOLENCE

According to the SATP database, between 1992 and June 3, 2018 at least 21,579 fatalities have occurred in insurgency-related incidents throughout the Northeast. Between, 1992 and

58 Wasbir Hussain, "Increasing Pressure", *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), January 12, 2004, Volume 2, No.26, http://old.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/2_26.htm.

59 Ibid.

60 "ISI's link with Northeast Insurgent groups", SATP, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/Pakistan_report/Anex_G.htm.

61 Ibid.

62 "ISI's link with Northeast Insurgent groups", SATP, http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/Pakistan_report/Anex_G.htm.

2008, there were at least 11 years when fatalities exceeded a thousand. Since 2009, however, no single year has seen total fatalities touch a thousand. The highest total fatality figure during this latter period was 852 in 2009. Fatalities in 2017, at 103, declined by 36 per cent as compared to 2016 (160), to their lowest level since 1997.⁶³

The operational capabilities of insurgent groups in the Northeast have clearly and dramatically diminished over the past decade. While sustained countering insurgency efforts by security forces have played a role, a range of other factors have influenced this outcome. These include:

- The change in the international scenario after 2001: After 9/11 non-state actors involved in armed insurgencies were increasingly perceived as a serious threat worldwide. Stricter enforcement of laws to counter arms trafficking, money laundering, the movement of cadres and the provision of safe havens, made the survival of armed insurgencies difficult. Intelligence agencies across the region and the world started sharing information more willingly and systematically. State agencies also cooperated with each other to detain facilitators for militant groups. A recent example was the case of Willy Naru aka Wthikorn Naruenatwanich, a Thai weapon supplier to NSCN-IM, who was brought to India in December 2015 by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under a red corner notice issued by INTERPOL.
- International cooperation against on armed non-state actors: Insurgent groups suffered another blow after

63 "Annual Report 2017-18", *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, <https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/MINISTRY%20OF%20HOME%20AFFAIR%20AR%202017-18%20FOR%20WEB.pdf>.

the global change in perception was accompanied by a change in the stance of the Bangladeshi Government. In a departure from earlier policy, Dhaka started taking actions against IIGs operating from its territory, once the Awami League Government led by Sheikh Hasina assumed power in 2009. IIG camps in areas such as Mymensingh, Moulvibazar and Rangamati were dismantled and, between 2009 and 2014, Bangladeshi authorities arrested 17 top Indian insurgent leaders, hailing from Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam.⁶⁴ Some of the prominent militant leaders arrested were Arbinda Rajkhowa, ‘chairman’ of ULFA (arrested in 2009); and ULFA’s ‘foreign secretary’ Sashadhar Choudhury, ‘finance secretary’ Chitraban Hazarika, and ‘commander’ Ranjan Chowdhry (arrested in 2010).⁶⁵

- On March 9, 2014, BSF handed over Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) a list of 66 camps of IIGs such as HNLC, ANVC-B, ULFA-I, NDFB-IKS, People’s Liberation Army (PLA), among others.⁶⁶ Subsequently, on January 23, 2015, the then BSF Inspector General (IG), Meghalaya Frontier, Sudesh Kumar had stated that the number of camps of Indian militant groups in Bangladesh had diminished after security authorities of

64 Devesh K. Pandey, “17 Indian Insurgent leaders arrested in Bangladesh in five years”, *The Hindu*, March 7, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/17-indian-insurgent-leaders-arrested-in-bangladesh-in-five-years/article6967230.ece>.

65 “Military training at 13 ULFA camps in Garo Hills”, *Bangla News 24*, July 23, 2010, <http://www.banglanews24.com/banglanews-special/article/2601/Military-training-at-13-ULFA-camps-in-frontier-Garo-hills>.

66 “BSF submits list of 66 camps of NE based outfits to BGB”, *The Shillong Times*, March 9, 2012, <http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php/front-page/24336-bsf-submits-list-of-66-camps-of-ne-based-outfits-to-bgb>.

that country launched a crackdown. In December 2017, the BSF Chief K.K Sharma stated that the number of camps had been reduced to zero over preceding years.

- Security Operations: Security successes have also been critical to the transformation in the region. For instance, sustained action by Bangladeshi Security Forces had an immediate impact on Meghalaya, as the state was used as a location for transit camps for cadres moving from Bangladesh into Assam, and eventually prompted IIGs to relocate from Bangladesh territory to Meghalaya, particularly to the Garo Hills (bordering Bangladesh), which was the main operational centre of groups such as GNLA. In 2014, an operation, code named *Operation Hill Storm* was launched by joint teams of the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT) of Meghalaya Police and Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), the commando force of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The Operation, which started in 2014 continued through 2016, resulted in the killing of at least 75 militants.⁶⁷ Moreover, towards the final stages of the *Operation Hill Storm* in 2016, at least 197 militants surrendered in the State. The operation also decreased the incidents of violence, which came down from 310 in 2013, 341 in 2014 and 310 in 2015, to 118 in 2016.⁶⁸
- Negotiations with major insurgent groups: Ongoing negotiations with the principal insurgent groups such as NSCN, vastly reduced the incentive or the stakes such groups had in fomenting violence throughout

67 M.A. Athul, “Meghalaya: Undercapitalized Gains”, *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 16, No. 31, January 29, 2018, <http://www.satp.org/south-asia-intelligence-review-Volume-16-No-31>.

68 Ibid.

the region. As stated earlier, at least 54 insurgent formations in the region are in various stages of negotiations with the Government. More significantly, peace talks with major groups such as ULFA-PTF and NSCN-IM are also heading towards a conclusion. On May 5, 2018 Arabinda Rajkhowa the leader of ULFA-PTF (faction which is in talks with Government) had stated, “Discussions with the government are over on the charter of demands submitted by us although the date for the signing of the agreement has not yet been decided.” Separately, the factionalisation of NDFB and ULFA, with splinter groups joining the peace process has also resulted in the decline of insurgency.

COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE PERIPHERAL INSURGENT GROUPS

The peculiarities of insurgency in these ‘peripheral’ states are also noteworthy. Unlike the principal insurgent groups of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam, which constitute the ‘core insurgencies’ in the region, the survival and activities of insurgent groups in the peripheral States are very short. For example UNLF of Manipur, a Meitei outfit was formed in 1964 while ULFA was formed in 1979. Additionally, currently active factions of NSCN (NSCN-IM and NSCN-K) were 1988, after the split of undivided NSCN, which came into existence in 1980. These groups, despite their periodic factionalisation, have had some ‘ideological continuity’ and have managed to survive over an extended period.

On the contrary, the shelf life of insurgent groups in Meghalaya has been shorter (with the sole exception of HNLC) as they lack ‘ideological continuity’ or, indeed, any coherent ideology to speak of. Thus, for example,

- AMLA was formed in 1992 and became defunct by 1994.
- ANVC was raised in 1995 and signed a cease fire agreement in 2004, though a splinter group, ANVC-B, emerged later.
- GNLA, formed in 2009, has been defeated as a group after SFs killed Sohan D. Shira, its ‘commander in chief’, in 2018. By 2013, GNLA had already split, with the creation of GNLA-F.
- In 2013, United A’chik Liberation Army (UALA) was formed by militants of GNLA and ANVC-B. UALA was disbanded in February 2016.⁶⁹
- The Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF), one of the oldest Garo militant outfits after ANVC, was formed in 2005 and surrendered in 2016.⁷⁰ The group had also factionalised during its relatively brief existence, with two ‘commanders’ Augustine Marak and Matthew Momin forming their own factions.⁷¹
- DHD was formed in 1995 and signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003. The Jewel Garlosa Faction rejected the peace deal and established the Jewel Garlosa faction, DHD-J. which underwent further factionalisation, but eventually surrendered en masse in 2009. 10 DHD-Jewel faction cadres led by Bihari Dimasa, floated the Dimasa National Democratic Front

69 "Meghalaya militant outfit UALA bids farewell to arms", *Newsx*, June 10, 2016, <https://www.newsx.com/national/31848-meghalaya-militant-outfit-uala-bids-farewell-to-arms>.

70 "LAEF ends armed struggle with leadership surrender", *The Shillong Times*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2016/04/18/laef-ends-armed-struggle-with-leadership-surrender/>.

71 "LAEF C-in-C, deputy & cadres surrender", *Oh Meghalaya*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.ohmeghalaya.com/laef-c-in-c-cadres-surrender-with-arms/>.

(DNDF) immediately after the October 2009 surrender of the parent formation. DNDF surrendered on August 3, 2011.

- The KPLT was formed on January 8, 2011, by the Anti-talks faction of Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLFF-AT). The group suffered multiple splits and is no longer active.

This continuous sprouting of new militant outfits, factionalisation and quick demise is a likely indicator that no widespread discontent against governmental agencies or policies underpinned these movements. These short-lived militant groups were primarily interested in extortion and abduction for ransom, and the tag of ‘militant’ acted as a factor of legitimization and intimidation.

In Arunachal Pradesh, known indigenous insurgency groups such as the Arunachal Dragon Force (ADF) and United Peoples’ Democratic Front (UPDF) have not been involved in any known incidents of insurgency-related violence. Almost all such violence in the State was perpetrated by ULFA or NSCN factions.

By virtue of their geographical location, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh became vital for IIGs, whose safe havens lay in Myanmar and Bangladesh. This helped the formations to spread their influence and prop up facilitator groups, which provided safe houses and logistical support in these regions.

Meghalaya shares its entire international border with Bangladesh and emerged as a transit point for militant groups and illegal fire arms. This geographical peculiarity explains the emergence of the succession of peripheral militant formations in the State. Arms dealers were reported to have been using Shillong and other parts of the state to meet Naga and Assam militant groups to negotiate arms deals. Moreover the militant

groups were using the East Garo Hills to cross over from Assam to Bangladesh and back.⁷² In return for their support, the peripheral formations received arms and training from NDFB and ULFA⁷³, who also maintained a presence in the Garo Hills. By 1985, ULFA had set up a base in the Moulavi Bazar District of Bangladesh, bordering Meghalaya. Other outfits, including HNLC, also had camps in Moulavi Bazar.⁷⁴

Beside the spillover from neighboring Assam and Nagaland, the state of affairs in Myanmar, which had a six decade-long history of continuous ethnic insurgency, influenced the security scenario in Meghalaya. KIA had camps in the Adedi area of Myanmar, bordering the Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh. During ULFA's initial days, its cadres fought alongside KIA militants against the *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar Army) to gain combat experience. NSCN-K had camps in Laung Lowang. Moreover, this was also the infiltration route from Myanmar into Assam, passing through Arunachal Pradesh.

FORESEEABLE DESTABILISING FACTORS AND CONCLUSION

The demographic imbalances due to both legal and illegal migration from other parts of India, as well as from Nepal and Bangladesh (East Pakistan before 1971), generated fear of

72 Anirban Roy, "Shadow Boxing in Meghalaya", *South Asia Intelligence Review* (SAIR), Volume 2, No.2, July 28, 20013, http://old.satp.org/satporgrp/sair/Archives/2_2.htm#ASSESSMENT2.

73 Jayanta Gupta, "Shillong a safe Haven for militants", *Times of India*, February 2, 2011, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Shillong-a-safe-haven-for-militants/articleshow/7414157.cms>.

74 "HNLC has seven camps in Bangladesh", *The Shillong Times*, March 16, 2015, <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2015/03/16/hnlc-has-seven-camps-in-bdesh/>.

political and economic marginalization among the ‘indigenous’ residents of the region. The fear of the ‘outsider’ and of loss of identity has been the common factor in various insurgencies in the region. Perceived political, ethnic and linguistic domination by major indigenous communities in relation to minor population groups, including indigenous groups, also led to discontent and protests by the latter.

Although violence and fatalities have declined over the years, the underlying factors of insurgency which have sustained violence in the region for decades have not been effectively addressed. The Rohingya crisis (mainly effecting Myanmar and Bangladesh) has a further potential to impact adversely on the security situation in India’s Northeast.

The Rohingya issue has been magnified over the past two years, after militant attacks in the Arakan State and counter operations by the *Tatmadaw*, resulting in a huge refugee influx into Bangladesh, and fears of a large spill-over into India. An Indian intelligence official had stated that, “We are wary of Rohingyas sneaking into India through Moreh in Manipur and through Indo-Bangladesh borders in Tripura.”⁷⁵ On May 16, 2018, Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh stressed the need for verification of all non-local settlers in the State. Similarly, the Finance Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma observed, “Our experience in the Northeast with immigrants has been very bad. Over 30 per cent people are immigrants and as a result, the indigenous people are fast losing their identity.”⁷⁶

75 Bikash Singh, “Northeast on alert as threat of influx by Rohingyas loom large”, *The Economic Times*, September 29, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/northeast-on-alert-as-threat-of-influx-by-rohingyas-looms-large/articleshow/60887580.cms>.

76 K.G Suresh, “The Rohingya Threat” *Indian Express*, September 27, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-rohingya-threat-rohingya-crisis-muslims-myanmar-rakhine-bangladesh-kg-suresh-4862759/>.

Significantly, according to reports, on May 24⁷⁷ and May 30,⁷⁸ 2018, at least 171 suspected illegal immigrants were arrested in Manipur.

Furthermore, the ongoing exercise to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is intended to identify ‘illegal immigrants’ in Assam, may also impact on the prevailing security situation. Compounding this, the Citizenship Amendment Bill proposes to decrease the required number of years of continuous stay from 11 to six for illegal immigrants from the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, to become citizens of India. There have been active protests against the proposed Bill as the local perception in Assam is that the passing of the bill will result in Hindus from Bangladesh who entered India after the cutoff date of March 24, 1971, becoming citizens of India. With illegal immigration (of both Hindus and Muslims) from Bangladesh at the heart of the Assam insurgency, the proposed amendment has the potential to be a significant impediment to political resolution. On May 29, 2018, ULFA ‘general secretary’ Anup Chetia threatened that ULFA would pull out of peace negotiations

77 Bikash Singh, “Northeast on alert as threat of influx by Rohingyas loom large”, *The Economic Times*, September 29, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/northeast-on-alert-as-threat-of-influx-by-rohingyas-loom-large/articleshow/60887580.cms>.

78 “Over 70 illegal immigrants nabbed in Manipur”, *Business Standard*, May 24, 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/over-70-illegal-immigrants-nabbed-in-manipur-118052401033_1.html; Sobhapati Samom, “Rohingya family arrested in Manipur without valid documents”, *Hindustan Times*, May 30, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/rohingya-family-arrested-in-manipur-without-valid-documents/story-3nQa63Z3t1Xg1p19JrxOuN.html>.

with the Government in case the Citizenship Amendment Bill was enacted.⁷⁹

These issues have the potential to reverse the counter-insurgency gains in the region and consequent de-escalation of violence. Although, it remains to be seen how the Rohingya problem, NRC and the Citizenship Amendment Bill issues will play out, it is imperative that the authorities are cognizant of the local and regional sentiments. The indigenous tribes apprehend the possibility of further demographic marginalisation, deepening the very grievances that provoked the insurgencies of the 1970s. If the same political narrative and movements are revived, this could unleash a renewed of large scale violence.

Separately, while the peripheral groups have effectively acted as conduits for the larger ethnic groups, and as facilitators and extortionists, as the violence in the region has ebbed, the role of the facilitator groups is also likely to diminish. Some of these groups have lost their relevance and withered away (like GNLA). However, given the porous nature of the border and the ongoing insurgency in adjoining Myanmar, the easy availability of weapons is likely to persist, tempting insurgent factions to engage in the trade in illegal arms even while they continue to engage in talks with the authorities. Additionally, prospects of surrendered or ex-militants forming criminal gangs and getting involved in the drug trade are also significant. The emergence of new narco-criminal gangs with access to lethal fire power is a potential risk. The proximity of the Golden Triangle is escalates this danger. With a porous border which is yet to be fully secured, smuggling of contraband, including drugs, has been a persistent issue. Major insurgent

79 Bijay Shankar Bora, "ULFA threatens to pull out of peace talks over citizenship bill", *The Tribune*, May 30, 2018, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/ulfa-threatens-to-pull-out-of-peace-talks-over-citizenship-bill/597155.html>.

groups such as NSCN-IM have already been involved in the drug trade and, with the settlement with GoI now imminent, the possibility that some of its leaders could use the political solution to further their involvement in drug trade cannot be ruled out. Additionally with the decrease in insurgent violence, more areas are likely to be targeted by narco-traffickers. One of the primary examples of this is Mizoram, where the absence of violence has made the state more attractive for traffickers.⁸⁰

Insurgency in Northeast India is at its lowest ebb in decades, and the region has an opportunity to address the long-standing developmental deficits. The development of infrastructure, including improvements in road and air connectivity with the rest of the country will improve the movement of goods and people, promoting the further integration of the region with rest of India.

80 Pratim Ranjan Bose, “Drugs and arms: Mizoram fights an uphill battle”, *The Hindu Business Line*, June 3, 2015, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/variety/drugs-and-arms-mizoram-fights-an-uphill-battle/article7383679.ece>.