

# *FAULTLINES*

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

Volume 31



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Volume 31

edited by

AJAI SAHNI



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THE INSTITUTE FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



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FAULTLINES: THE K.P.S. GILL JOURNAL OF 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

The parameters and dimensions of conflict and power in the modern world are being transformed dramatically by technology and by the consequent strategic and tactical adaptations necessitated by the dizzying pace of change. Both domestic and international structures of power have been radically destabilized across the world, with long-established equations disintegrating, creating spaces for a range informal – often malignant – power centres that exert significant influence on events and developments, but find no recognizable space in the institutional arrangements of nations and the world. Terrorism and terrorist organisations have long been perceived as one such entity, operating, at once, as proxies of states, as well as renegade and autonomous organisations with agendas of their own. Progressively, organised criminal groups – long in existence and with varying histories of influence in political affairs – are assuming a scale and diversity of operations that construct altogether new threats to traditional structures of power. Their potential danger is magnified manifold when these groups team up with terrorist formations and with private military corporations to create an amalgam well beyond the capacities of many lesser nation-states to control, and that is difficult even for the most powerful states to cope with.

These threats compound an environment where national power is under relentless threat from what are being described as ‘new ways of warfare’ that lie well below the threshold of declared armed hostilities, but can have an impact that is as devastating. Wars today, increasingly, are without beginning and without end,

lacking the clarity of objective and outcome that characterized the wars of history, existing before and continuing well after, and even in the absence of, any armed hostilities, and lacking even a meaningful notion of victory and defeat. The nations and peoples of the world find themselves locked into unending struggles, unconstrained by any norms of civilized conduct, with the entire structure of society and governance under unremitting attack, and with the capacities and strategies of response often, if not invariably, lagging well behind the inventiveness and variety of the attack.

While there is much talk of global cooperation and a coordinated response to these augmenting and often shared dangers, the world is yet to evolve beyond the now anachronistic doctrines of the primacy of 'interests of state', with both the great and lesser powers engaging in actions that further undermine whatever remains of the crumbling 'international order'. The vaunting edifices of international organisations are now being rapidly supplanted by opportunistic 'bilateral' and 'regional' cabals that yield fitful, often dubious, advantages for their members, but do little to stem the corrosive tide.

Even as new dangers emerge, traditional threats to security persist. Managing these cumulative challenges requires levels of understanding and political sagacity that are increasingly rare. Indeed, the political response across the world has been regressive, with a resurgence of atavistic, xenophobic, and extreme ideologies increasingly occupying the political space. Such perspectives have no potential to address the growing hazards to the contemporary world order, but have met with great success in a milieu of increasing inequality and the marginalization of large proportions of the world's populations. However, with environmental and resource crises mounting globally, these ideologies of blind rage and their corollaries of economic appropriation and capture, have little to offer by way of solution.

Solutions do, of course, exist. But they demand that mankind step back and away from the recklessness of the past centuries of accelerating ‘progress’ – a progress that has ravaged the earth and that has now put the survival of the species at risk. To do this, we will have to re-examine the malign ideologies that have underpinned these processes, and to which the world’s leaders remain obdurately attached. Such a re-examination is, however, difficult even to imagine at anything but the margins of the current and fraught environment.

Ajai Sahni

Delhi,

August 20, 2023



# **From Communism to Criminality**

## **The evolution of Chinese secret societies and smuggling networks**

Prem Mahadevan\*

The voice of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) chief Jiang Zemin wafted over the airwaves through the autumn darkness. It spoke of a new economic model for China. To a committed Marxist like Professor Xie Wanying, the party boss' message foretold the death of all he had believed in. He pulled out a copy of the CCP's theoretical journal and scribbled on the front page: 'Communism will certainly triumph!' He then hurled himself off the balcony of his fifth-floor apartment.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Xie's death in autumn 1992 was a tragic footnote in a 'crisis of ideology' that had gripped the People's Republic of China (PRC). For decades, citizens had scorned private enterprise. Suddenly they began hearing their national leaders assert that 'to get rich is glorious'. Almost overnight, profiteering became respectable and notions of service to the wider community were dismissed as *feihua* or 'empty talk'.

The evolution of ethnic Chinese organized crime has been influenced by the transition shock from communism to state-

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\* Prem Mahadevan is a researcher in intelligence and irregular warfare.

1 Jaime A. FlorCruz, "The Crisis of Ideology in China", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1994, p. 169.

led capitalism. The PRC's economic reforms over the last four decades have come at a hidden cost: massive psychological dislocation that, when combined with systemic rigidity, has fed crime waves. These waves have successively shown greater signs of being 'organized'. China's economic miracle fostered a criminogenic environment within which subversion of state authority has taken the form of official corruption, corporate crime and private protection rackets. These trends affect not just the mainland, but also overseas Chinese communities and territories, such as Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, as well as the enormous Chinese diaspora.

#### A COMPLEX AND NUANCED PHENOMENON

Chinese organized crime can be understood as a multifaceted and multi-layered entity, characterized by three subdivisions. First, there is a basic distinction between elite corruption and gang criminality. In many countries, elite corruption might not be thought of as a form of 'organized crime' but the PRC is special. A permanent concentration of power in the communist party leadership, and the party's inclination to respect not the 'rule of law', but instead to 'rule by law', gives the CCP some of the characteristics of a mafia-style organization.<sup>2</sup> No

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2 Jian Xu, "The Role of Corporate Political Connections in Commercial Lawsuits: Evidence From Chinese Courts", *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 53, Number 14, 2020, p. 2326. The argument that the CCP is a mafia-style entity is politically sensitive to Chinese ears, but it has repeatedly come up in the course of researching this paper. One interviewee openly stated this (Interview of British expert on Chinese security policy, September 16, 2022). A member of a Hong Kong criminal or 'triad' society told researchers: 'The CCP is the largest triad society in the world with 90 million members.' See T. Wing Lo, Sharon Ingrid Kwok and Daniel Garret, "Securitizing the Colour Revolution: Assessing the Political Role of Triads in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement", *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 20, 2021, p. 13. An exiled Chinese businessman and political dissident, Desmond Shum, who was once among the most influential tycoons in the PRC, now describes the CCP as 'almost like

criminal entity in the country can either survive or prosper for any length of time without a ‘protective umbrella’ to shield it from police action. The umbrella is typically provided by local CCP leaders. If a gang gets targeted by the police, it is because the protective officials have themselves either fallen from grace or have been transferred to different locations within China. Either way, elite corruption is a prerequisite to gang-level criminality.

The next layer of subdivision is within gang criminality. There are two types of actors here: those who are primarily based in mainland China, and those who are based in overseas Chinese territories such as Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The second type of groups are sometimes loosely referred to as ‘triad societies’. The term has little analytical value except to distinguish them from groups that originated on the Chinese mainland. It is near-impossible for non-governmental researchers to distinguish who is a triad member from who is not. Only law enforcement professionals, skilled in surveillance and undercover operations, can gain such insight, based on monitoring techniques that are normally off-limits to NGOs, academic scholars and investigative journalists.<sup>3</sup>

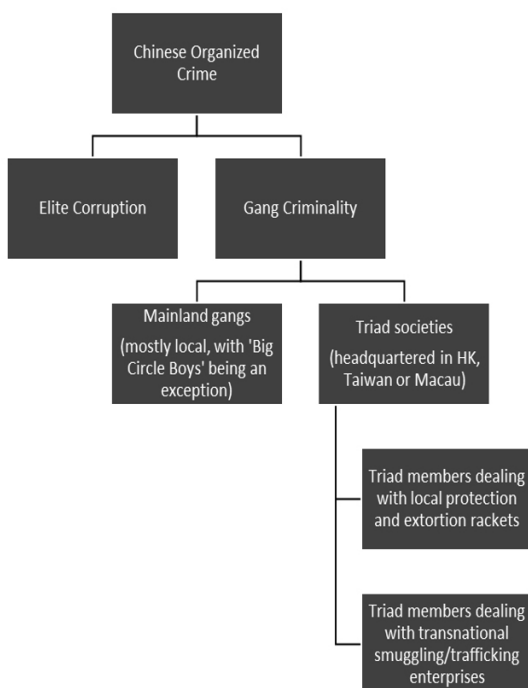
The third and final layer of subdivision is between individual members of a triad society who might engage in local racketeering such as extortion, and those among their peers who engage in transnational criminal enterprises such as drug smuggling. The latter often have highly personalized social capital that links them with legitimate entrepreneurs outside of the triad fraternity. They prefer to keep their distance from ‘domestic’ counterparts who lack comparable business

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a mafia’. See transcript of his interview on the Jordan Harbinger Show, accessible at <https://www.jordanharbinger.com/desmond-shum-wealth-power-corruption-and-vengeance-in-china/>.

3 Interview of Professor Roderic Broadhurst, June 22, 2022.

contacts, for fear that the latter will blab about their activities out of carelessness or jealousy and expose their international networks to police action. The triad community is fairly close-knit and loose gossip as well as rumours spread quite easily. To protect themselves, triad members who are engaged in high-risk activities such as transnational organized crime keep their domestically-focused counterparts at bay to minimize any risk of information leakage.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it can be the case that a single triad society will have an internal divide between members who engage in transnational criminality and those who engage in racketeering based on territorial control and selling protection services.



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4 Interview of Dr. Sharon Kwok, July 2, 2022.



Five characteristics of Chinese organized crime are identified in this study:

1. It is predominantly of a local (often city-level) nature, whether in mainland China or overseas, with personal networks being crucial to enabling trafficking and smuggling operations across both long and short distances.<sup>5</sup> These networks are based on blood ties, as well as extra-familial relations based on common places of origin (such as a village or school).
2. Criminality is shaped by opportunities at the provincial level rather than the national level, due to the regionally fragmented nature of illicit markets within China. Thus, a landlocked province like Yunnan which faces South East Asia's Golden Triangle region, would be a hub of drug and human trafficking, while a coastal province with strong overseas diaspora links like Fujian would be a hub of money laundering and migrant smuggling.<sup>6</sup>
3. Whatever overarching governance exists over the ethnic Chinese criminal fraternity, it is exercised by the PRC state machinery being willing to permit the local activities of transnational criminal groups for larger political or strategic purposes. The degree to which this is permitted for strategic purposes versus simple criminal conduct by individual officers, however, can

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5 An Chen, "Secret Societies and Organized Crime in Contemporary China", *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 39, Number 1, 2005, p. 81; Robert J. Kelly, Ko-Lin Chin and Jeffrey A. Fagan, "The dragon breathes fire: Chinese organized crime in New York City", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Volume 19, 1993, p. 247 and Zhang, Sheldon, "China Tongs in America: Continuity and Opportunities", in Dina Siegel and Henk van de Bunt eds., *Traditional Organized Crime in the Modern World: Responses to Socioeconomic Change*, Springer, New York, 2012, p. 110.

6 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

sometimes be hard to separate.<sup>7</sup> At non-state level, there is no central authority in Chinese organized crime and no controlling body, either formal or informal, as one might find in the case of criminal groups in Europe (such as the Sicilian Cosa Nostra).<sup>8</sup>

4. Over the last 30 years, since the end of the Cold War and the phase of economic reform launched in 1992, there has been a shift in the structure of Chinese organized crime groups such as the Hong Kong triads, from a hierarchical to a networked model, with at least as much emphasis on white-collar economic crime as on rent collection through extortion.
5. Three ethnolinguistic identity groups within the wider Chinese community stand out in the literature on organized crime (this is not to suggest that such identities have an inherently criminal quality to them, but only that sharing a distinct sub-regional Chinese dialect often serves as an instrument of trust-building in illicit transactions). The identities are Teochow (from the eastern areas of Guangdong province adjoining Fujian province), Cantonese (from Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong more generally) and Fujianese (from Fujian, as well as Taiwan).

These five points reappear as markers of Chinese organized crime throughout this paper.

## **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

This paper is based on a literature review of just over 100 academic articles on Chinese organized crime. The articles yielded valuable insights about long-term crime trends in China,

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7 Interview of expert on Chinese foreign policy, June 21, 2022.

8 Interview of British expert on Chinese security policy, September 16, 2022.

as well as the evolution of the Hong Kong triad societies and on human smuggling operations from Fujian province to the US. The author also interviewed eleven academic and policy experts on Chinese organized crime. All were based outside of Chinese territory. Approaches were made to another twenty experts but these were often impeded by political restrictions, as the majority of the experts were located within Chinese territory. For example, one expert based in Hong Kong told the author that the new National Security Law, enacted on the PRC mainland in 2015 and extended to Hong Kong in 2020, made it too dangerous for him to speak on organized crime.

Another expert, based outside China, when informed of the difficulty of interviewing in-country experts, expressed scepticism that any such interviews would be possible, or that any insights would be gained from field visits. His doubts were supported by a second respondent, who pointed out that it is against Chinese law for officials to associate with foreign researchers without authorized permission. This latter respondent also said that Western-based scholars cannot realistically hope to examine the nature of overseas networks of Chinese criminality without expert guidance. His assessment was that since Chinese criminal actors in foreign countries often subcontract to local gangs, especially those consisting of ethnic minority groups with few legitimate job prospects, it is difficult to untangle ‘local’ from ‘transnational’ organized crime in practice.<sup>9</sup>

Also, much of the business of Chinese organized crime in Western countries is transacted in ethnically-distinct environments such as Chinatown restaurants, massage parlours and gambling houses.<sup>10</sup> Caucasian or other Western researchers

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9 Interview of Dr. Hai Luong, June 23, 2022.

10 Sander Huisman, “Investigating Chinese Crime Entrepreneurs”, *Policing*, Volume 2, Number 1, 2008, pp. 41-42.

can attract unwanted attention in these places if they turn up and start asking unusual questions. To elicit information from other customers, the proprietors, or even just observe goings-on without being harassed or threatened, it is necessary to have the cooperation of an ethnic Chinese researcher, ideally one who is familiar with the dialect of the criminal group being studied.

Finally, a third respondent, who had, in the past, conducted extensive fieldwork in the PRC on organized crime actors, pointed out that the country's 2017 National Intelligence Law made it legally risky to conduct field studies for the foreseeable future.<sup>11</sup>

These restrictions on data collection mean that the information produced in this paper comes from secondary sources and interviews with the few experts who agreed to offer their insights. The paper only aims to introduce the topic of 'Chinese organized crime' to generalist readers, and identify further angles of research and exploration. Most respondents agreed that, under President Xi Jinping, the PRC has significantly reduced its openness to the outside world and this has had a chilling effect on academic research as well. Further studies will have to adapt to operational reality and focus on 'doable' topics such as reports of elite-level corruption within China as well as gang criminality outside of Chinese territory, particularly in countries affected by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

### **THE 'SOUTHERN TOUR' AS A TRIGGER FOR CRIMINALITY**

The year of Professor Xie's death – 1992 – was a crucial year in the evolution of Chinese organized crime. It was the year when Deng Xiaoping, the PRC's paramount leader and guiding light of post-Maoist revisionism, embarked on

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11 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

what became known as his ‘southern tour’. The much-hyped event accelerated China’s economic transition towards what one prominent writer has termed ‘crony capitalism’.<sup>12</sup> In the opinion of that writer as well as others, contrary to what over-optimistic Western analysts thought in the 1990s, the PRC never totally gave up on communism. Rather, under Deng and his successors, the CCP elite only loosened restrictions on international trade and permitted the emergence of private enterprise in economic sectors that catered to consumer spending.<sup>13</sup> High-value industries and those deemed of strategic value remained firmly under state control.

The 1949 establishment of the PRC had led to the banishment of so-called ‘secret societies’ to fringe territories such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, which at the time lay outside the communist regime’s jurisdiction. From the 1970s, however, variants of such societies, shorn of rigid hierarchies and cult-like rituals, began clandestinely appearing in the PRC. Labelled as ‘black societies’ by communist officialdom, their origins lay in a convergence of three factors: the tenuous control that CCP cadres maintained over their own areas of responsibility; the tenuous nature of employment (especially for rural workers) as China’s economy transitioned to manufacturing; and the celebration of private wealth acquisition that accompanied Deng’s economic reform process (first launched in 1978).

The initial wave of reforms in 1978 had attracted foreign investment by devolving power to provincial governments to make economic decisions. Starting with four special economic

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12 Minxin Pei, *China’s Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay*, MA: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 7-9.

13 Darrell D. Irwin and Cecil L. Willis, “Success or sorrow: the paradoxical view of crime control campaigns in China”, *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, Volume 38, Number 1, 2014, p. 74.

zones in the next two years, the PRC followed an enclave-based model of development that loosened regulations on a localized basis. This localization would play a crucial role in shaping the extent to which criminal syndicates could expand: their operations were circumscribed by the degree to which each municipality's officials tolerated illicit commerce for the sake of encouraging overall economic growth. Even as more areas in China opened up to foreign investment, criminality never lost its localized nature. In the 2020s as much as the 1970s, organized crime in the PRC remains influenced by physical limits that are determined by local CCP officials. This collusion has been described by one scholar as a red-black collusion ('Red' to depict communist officials and 'Black' for the explicitly criminal entrepreneurs who survive due to the protection provided by their government partners).<sup>14</sup>

The 1992 reforms were important because, for the first time, a distinction was made between ownership rights of industrial facilities and usage rights of these facilities.<sup>15</sup> The state retained ownership of many industrial units but allowed them to be managed by private individuals in a manner that emphasized cost-efficiency. The result was an increase in asset productivity, but one which did not require a transfer of ownership rights from the state. The beneficiaries – those assigned usage rights – were often individuals with ties to the CCP and thereby to the state coercive apparatus. They were the relatives and associates of high-ranking CCP functionaries. Combined with administrative reforms which had taken place eight years earlier in 1984, and tax reforms which came into effect two years afterwards, in 1994, the 1992 reforms birthed the modern Chinese mafia.

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14 Peng Wang, "The Increasing Threat of Chinese Organised Crime", *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 158, Number 4, 2013, p. 8.

15 Minxin Pei, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

## **BUYING AND SELLING OF PUBLIC SPACES**

Until 1984, appointments of government officials in the PRC had to be vetted at two levels: the director supervisor of the appointee, as well as the supervisor's supervisor. But after the administrative reforms came into effect, this was reduced to one level of scrutiny, that of the direct supervisor.<sup>16</sup> Thus, a practice of buying and selling of public offices took hold in the country. Government bureaucrats bribed their immediate superiors to promote them into prestigious posts. When in 1992, the linkage between ownership rights and usage rights of state-owned assets was broken, corrupt officials ensured that they would be appointed to posts where they could decide the allocation of public contracts to companies owned by their cronies. And even if an official did not yet have personal networks of cronies, merely occupying a post where s/he could allocate contracts made him/her a magnet for bribery from private entrepreneurs.

Besides the three sets of reforms (1984, 1992 and 1994), there were two other factors which led to a rise in organized crime in China during the 1990s. One was the growing presence of Hong Kong triad societies in the Chinese mainland, a development that, as this paper will show, was not contested by the CCP leadership. The triad bosses injected liquid capital into the country through initial investments in the entertainment and hospitality sectors. These investments later served as commercial covers for the expansion of their illicit businesses in the vast Chinese market for vice and luxury products.<sup>17</sup>

A second factor was the inflow of money that poured into the PRC from all other (non-triad) sources, including Western companies. With this inflow of capital came a sense that, if

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16 Ibid., pp. 71-72.

17 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

one was lucky enough to occupy a senior public office, one needed to make the most of it, often also through bribe-taking.<sup>18</sup> Although corruption had been a problem in China previously, it rose significantly in the 1990s and has remained high since then. The presidency of Jiang Zemin (1993-2003) was characterized by a shotgun marriage between the CCP and the private sector.<sup>19</sup> This allowed the party to squarely associate itself with the success of the economy and of private enterprise, and it allowed select businessmen to prosper based on personal ties with influential policymakers.

A culture of impunity and rampant cronyism came into being by the turn of millennium, which Jiang's successor Hu Jintao (2003-13) made an ineffectual effort to control. It was in this context that Xi Jinping was brought in as the CCP's General Secretary in 2013, with a mandate from the party elders to recentralize decision-making and combat corruption. He did so, but he focused most of the state's coercive might on first breaking up patronage networks run by his political rivals. Given the systemic nature of corruption, cleaning up the system of governance as a whole, would also risk undermining his own power base. The system of collusion under Jiang's regime had meant that no-one could stay completely uncorruptible and yet hope to rise within the party. The CCP's promotion structure gave one's immediate boss both career-killing and career-boosting power, which meant that if the boss was on the take, so would his most loyal subordinates have to be.<sup>20</sup>

A researcher who lived in China for many years told this author that, in the Beijing start-up scene, there used to be a saying: it is better to do one bad thing (basically, an illegal

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18 Interview of Dr. Nis Gruenberg, September 2, 2022.

19 Interview of Jason Tower, Myanmar Country Director, United States Institute of Peace, September 6, 2022.

20 Interview of Dr. Nis Gruenberg, September 2, 2022.



act) in collusion with your boss than to do one hundred good things (favours or good deeds) out of deference to your boss. To do one bad thing would mean that ‘your fates are entwined in the Chinese political landscape where the Party is not afraid to employ extra-legal measures if needed.’<sup>21</sup> Your boss would thereby feel more obliged to protect you in difficult times, because he cannot easily sacrifice you without risking his own standing in the social and political hierarchy. This is an illustration of how official corruption and cronyism ensure that even an accurate reading of levels of criminality is difficult to produce, due to interference from within the party-state machinery in China.

#### **‘BLACK SOCIETIES’ AND THEIR CORRUPT PATRONS**

The 1994 tax reforms centralized most of the revenue yield from taxation, delivering it from the provinces to Beijing. Municipal and provincial administrators thus came under pressure to meet their own operating costs as best they could, with whatever means were at their disposal. In some jurisdictions the police had to raise up to 50 per cent of their budgets through whatever rackets they could unofficially engage in. Among the methods resorted to was falsely charging young women with prostitution offences (sex work being illegal in the PRC) and imposing administrative fines upon them as well as anyone they identified under police coaching as being a sex client. In some of these cases, the alleged prostitutes turned out to be virgins and charges against them were dismissed in court.<sup>22</sup> Another way of meeting operating costs was to reach a discreet accommodation with the local

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21 Email correspondence with expert on Chinese corruption and political patron-client networks, February 14, 2023.

22 Elaine Jeffreys, “Exposing Police Corruption and Malfeasance: China’s Virgin Prostitute Cases”, *The China Journal*, Volume 63, 2010, p. 138.

mafia. In one jurisdiction in Sichuan province, a hard-up police station depended on a local criminal gang to pay for officers' salaries, fuel needed for patrol cars and even the upkeep of jail cells.<sup>23</sup>

During the 1990s, it reportedly became common for some taxi drivers to brag that they earned more income than even the governors of their respective provinces. The failure of the CCP to prepare a soft landing for soon-to-retire government officials in the midst of a transforming economy gave rise to the '59 phenomenon'.<sup>24</sup> This was a term implying that bureaucrats aged 59 and thus one year away from retirement, were highly susceptible to bribes. Since their personal authority stemmed solely from their official status, once they would step down from public office, they faced the prospect of obscurity and financial hardship. This hardship would be accentuated in a China where the state intervened a lot less in individuals' lives than previously, leaving them free to make a range of personal consumption choices provided they had the money to do so. While many senior administrators were able to enrich themselves through accepting bribes from legitimate businessmen, for low- and mid-ranking policemen the opportunity to generate comparable illicit revenues was severely limited. They had little to offer wealthy private entrepreneurs or corrupt managers of state-owned enterprises, both of whom would already have powerful patrons in the state machinery.<sup>25</sup> All they could do was to interfere effectively with any criminal racket unless they were well paid to ignore it.

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23 Ming Xia, "Assessing and Explaining the Resurgence of China's Criminal Underworld", *Global Crime*, Volume 7, Number 2, 2006, p. 170.

24 Ko-Lin Chin and Roy Godson, "Organized Crime and the Political-Criminal Nexus in China", *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 9, Number 3, 2006, p. 26.

25 Minxin Pei, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

Thus, relationships began to be established between criminal gangs and local police officials.

The numbers tell the story: in 1990 there were an estimated 500 mafia-type syndicates in the PRC. Two years later, as the property rights reforms were introduced, that figure more than tripled to 1800.<sup>26</sup> The same year, a district in Yunnan province (adjacent to the Golden Triangle of South East Asia's heroin-producing states) was almost taken over by drug traffickers from a Muslim ethnic minority. A major offensive had to be launched by armed police before the district could be pacified.<sup>27</sup> By the late 1990s, according to one estimate, mafia-style crime had risen from 6.5 per cent to 30 per cent of total criminality reported in the People's Republic.<sup>28</sup> Another estimate suggests that overall crime rates rose eight-fold between the 1980s and the early 1990s.<sup>29</sup> In part, this was because of political events within the country, which have always had an impact on its crime trends.

#### **THE LINK BETWEEN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CRIMINAL TRENDS**

Between 1949 and 1999, the PRC experienced six crime waves. All of these occurred on the heels of a major domestic political event. The first, in 1950, followed the establishment of the People's Republic and of communist rule. The second, in 1961, flowed from the failure of Mao's Great Leap Forward and the catastrophic famine that it caused. The third, in 1973, marked the decline of Mao's personal hegemony as ideological guide for the Chinese people, as it occurred on the back of the Lin Biao incident, when intrigues within the CCP led to

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26 Ming Xia, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

27 Guilhem Fabre, "State, corruption, and criminalisation in China", *International Social Science Journal*, Volume 53, Number 3, 2001, p. 462.

28 An Chen, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

29 Ko-Lin Chin and Roy Godson, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

an abortive coup. This wave coincided with the time when scholars believe indigenous organized crime groups started to appear again in mainland China. Previously, such groups had been driven out following the 1949 revolution. The fourth wave of criminality occurred in 1981. It was characterized by a rise in particularly brutal crimes, including sex crimes against women. The state apparatus responded with the first of many ‘*yanda*’ or ‘strike hard’ campaigns, intended to overawe criminal gangs through displays of massive force. Although the inaugural *yanda* campaign, which lasted from 1983 to 1986, did bring down crime rates temporarily, these rose again once the campaign began to lose momentum. The fifth crime wave occurred in 1991, two years after the PRC had been rocked by popular protests (and, it is alleged, Army mutinies) prompted by pro-democracy activists at Tiananmen Square in June 1989. The sixth wave occurred in 1999, when the Chinese central government clamped down on a new quasi-religious cult that was agitating for regime change in the country. The cult’s name was Falun Gong, and its year of formation, 1992.<sup>30</sup>

Political repression went alongside economic reform. The reforms led to job insecurity; during the 1990s, 50 million people were sacked from state-owned enterprises and another 18 million were forced into accepting roles that offered far less professional stability than they had been used to. Between 1993 and 2010, the annual number of ‘mass disturbances’ in the PRC rose 18-fold, from 8,300 incidents to 180,000. Likewise, during the period 1994–2005, the annual number of collective petitions protesting abuse of power by government officials rose from 1.6 million to 10 million.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, not

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30 Ming Xia, op. cit., p. 169.

31 Wooyeal Paik and Richard Baum, “Clientelism with Chinese Characteristics: Local Patronage Networks in Post-Reform China”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 129, Number 4, 2014–15, p. 691.

everyone was benefiting from the country's economic miracle. This was an ugly truth buried under tight state control of crime statistics. Knowing that Western governments would seize upon any facts and figures that suggested popular unrest within the People's Republic, the CCP has maintained a degree of censorship over data relating to crime trends. As the PRC has transitioned towards becoming an economic superpower, it has developed an underclass of formerly agrarian workers who now constitute a floating population of job-seekers. Lacking social support networks in the country's large cities, where the bulk of jobs have been generated, members of this underclass have been left to fend for themselves on the margins of society. When the first wave of reform was launched in 1978, they were thought to number around two million.<sup>32</sup> By 2000, that number had risen to 121 million, then to 160 million in 2009, even as the size of the economy tripled between 2001 and 2008.<sup>33</sup>

#### **THE 2008 SHOCK AND A SEVENTH CRIME WAVE**

The next years are crucial: the number of impoverished itinerant workers shot up to 221 million in 2010 and reached 245 million in 2013, the same year that Xi Jinping became the PRC's president.<sup>34</sup> The jump from 2009 to 2010 might have been due to the global financial crisis, which particularly affected employment rates in the country's southern coastal belt. The region has long been a manufacturing and export-oriented hub. What happened here was a combination of bad luck and poor planning. In 2007, the communist party had

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32 Shi Li, "The Economic Situation of Rural Migrant Workers in China", *China Perspectives*, 2010/4 (2010), <https://journals.openedition.org/chinapersonpectives/5332>, p. 8.

33 Roderic Broadhurst, "The suppression of black societies in China", *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 16, 2013, p. 97.

34 Travis S. K. Kong, "Sex and work on the move: Money boys in post-socialist China", *Urban Studies*, Volume 54, Number 3, 2017, p. 678.

forced industrialists to create welfare funds for workers, which depressed profit margins.<sup>35</sup> It did this, perhaps anticipating that the boom years would continue for some time to come. However, a year later, this decision came back to haunt the CCP when overseas demand for Chinese products dropped as a result of the financial crisis. Although the central leadership in Beijing should have anticipated that a slowdown in the American market would eventually occur, it was nonetheless caught unprepared for such an eventuality.<sup>36</sup> To tide over the economic shock, it released massive stimulus funds to local and provincial governments, who used these, not to boost consumer demand directly, but to invest in state-owned enterprises, in the stock market and the real estate sector. Thus, private enterprise in China continued to retreat in 2009-10, but the government's favoured industries prospered through speculative investments. It was around this time that a seventh crime wave began to appear in the PRC, fuelled by economic distress.<sup>37</sup>

Even as the number of workers threatened by job losses grew, a political drama was unfolding in Beijing. Zhu Yongkang, a top CCP leader who was considered the third most powerful man in the country, was intriguing to prevent Xi Jinping from becoming President. His gambit failed and from 2012 Zhu together with his loyalists was subjected to an anti-corruption investigation that had overtones of a score-settling purge. It is estimated that as of mid-2021, the careers of up to four million civil servants had been adversely affected to varying degrees as a result of this internal power struggle.<sup>38</sup> The Xi regime doubled down on domestic policing,

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35 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

36 Interview of British expert on Chinese security policy, September 16, 2022.

37 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

38 Ge Xinghang and Cai Xuejiao, "Four Million Chinese Officials Punished for Graft Since 2012, Watchdog Says", *Caixing Global*, June 30, 2021,

which already in 2012 had consumed a larger budget than defence against external threats (USD 111 billion compared to USD 106 billion).<sup>39</sup> Part of the reason for such nervousness may have been that, over the previous two decades, China's economic growth had not only lifted several hundred million citizens out of poverty, it had also resulted in a worsening of socio-economic equality. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP rebuilt a welfare system for the rural poor which has since ameliorated the worst effects of the 2008 crisis. This has been an important reason for the containment of organized crime in China since the early 2010s, together with the deterrent effect of the anti-corruption crack down launched by Xi.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE GEOGRAPHY OF ORGANISED CRIME

Guangdong province (often Anglicized to 'Canton' and home of the Cantonese language) is thought to have the strongest presence of organized crime actors in China.<sup>41</sup> Three of the four special economic zones that were set up in the country immediately following the 1978 reforms were in Guangdong, in the cities of Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shantou. The fourth SEZ was in Xiamen in neighbouring Fujian province, which is also known for a particular type of organized crime activity: migrant smuggling.

Shenzhen lies adjacent to Hong Kong, while Zhuhai is adjacent to Macau. All four cities are clustered in the Pearl River Delta, together with the provincial capital Guangzhou and several other Chinese cities that are world leaders in the

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<https://www.caixinglobal.com/2021-06-30/four-million-chinese-officials-punished-for-graft-since-2012-watchdog-says-101734343.html>.

39 Steve Tsang, "Making sense of China's 11% increase in defence budget", *The Asia Dialogue*, March 6, 2012, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2012/03/06/making-sense-of-chinas-11-increase-in-defence-budget/>.

40 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

41 Ming Xia, op. cit., pp. 166-167.

manufacturing sector. Shantou, located further to the east near the interprovincial border with Fujian, is often clubbed with a nearby city called Chaozhou. The so-called ‘Chaoshan’ (Chaozhou plus Shantou) region is known as the Sicily of China, due to its propensity for smuggling and racketeering based on tightly-knit clan-based networks.<sup>42</sup> People in the Chaoshan region (known as Teochew or Chiu Chow) are distinct from the predominantly Cantonese-speaking population of the Pearl River Delta. Their language is a variant of the southern Min language found in southern parts of Fujian, which itself is distinct from the northern Min spoken by inhabitants of northern Fujian. Two researchers consulted for this paper independently stated that the Teochew language is sufficiently unusual that a Cantonese speaker would struggle to follow a conversation in it, unless s/he had either trained specifically in this dialect or had a family background in it.<sup>43</sup>

The four original SEZs (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen) between them attracted 60 per cent of total foreign direct investment in China in 1981. Although their share of FDI rapidly declined thereafter, as other SEZs were set up elsewhere in the country, they ensured that Guangdong and Fujian provinces got a head start in integrating into the world economy. Guangdong, in particular, became the PRC’s biggest revenue earner, with a provincial gross domestic product in 2011 equivalent to that of South East Asia’s most populous nation, Indonesia.<sup>44</sup> The Cantonese language shared between

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42 Chuin-Wei Yap, “Underground Banks Trace Roots to the Sicily of China”, *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-27972>.

43 Interview of Professor Roderic Broadhurst, June 22, 2022 and Interview of British expert on Chinese security policy, September 16, 2022.

44 John S. Van Oudenaren, “Enduring Menace: The Triad Societies of Southeast China”, *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Volume 41, Number 3, 2014, p. 138.



Guangdong and the formerly colonial territories of Hong Kong and Macau meant that the province was susceptible to infiltration from triad societies based in these two safe havens.

During the 1980s, as the countdown began for ending British rule in Hong Kong, the Chinese Communist Party leadership in Beijing and the Hong Kong triads explored the possibility of reconciliation. Although the triads had initially supported Taiwan during the years following the 1949 revolution, by the 1980s their leaders had come to accept the inevitability of CCP control over Hong Kong in the foreseeable future. They were encouraged by none other than Deng Xiaoping himself, who made statements that some of the triads were patriotic and that outreach should be made towards them. His message was amplified by the deputy head of the Chinese news agency Xinhua in Hong Kong, who told triad leaders that, as long as they stayed within limits and respected the PRC's national interests, they would be free to pursue their profit-making activities, regardless of how the local Hong Kong police viewed these activities.<sup>45</sup>

The most cohesive and regimented of the Hong Kong triad societies, the Sun Yee On, was led by the Heung family, who originally hail from Chaoshan. This society is the closest that Hong Kong has got to a Cosa Nostra-style mafia. The Sun Yee On is part of a larger Teochow cluster of triad organizations that, in the 1950s, had set up heroin trafficking operations in partnership with remnants of the fleeing Kuomintang Army's 93rd Division.<sup>46</sup> Following the communist victory in China,

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45 Bertil Lintner, "Chinese Organised Crime", *Global Crime*, Volume 6, Number 1, 2004, pp. 90-91.

46 John Clark, "'Tradition' in Thai Modern Art", *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, Volume 4, Number 2, 2020, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/770697> and Peter Dale Scott, "Operation Paper: The United States and Drugs in Thailand and Burma", *The Asia-*

the Division had sought refuge on Myanmar's Shan state and later in Thailand's Chiang Rai province, where there was already a Teochow settler population. Its soldiers turned to cultivating opium to raise funds for a future invasion of the PRC, an invasion that never occurred. The Chaoshan group of triads leveraged its ethnolinguistic ties with the Thai Teochow, some of whom had commercial interests in Hong Kong, and also built relations with the Union Corse, the Corsican mafia based in Marseilles.

Chemists in the Teochow triads' employ travelled to the tri-border area of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos, to set up heroin-refining laboratories.<sup>47</sup> This infrastructure allowed the triads to corner a large share of the international heroin trade between the 1950s and '80s, before South West Asia's Golden Crescent firmly displaced South East Asia's Golden Triangle as the world's leading producer of opium.

One writer comments that the Thai Teochow, which were probably the most successful and politically influential of all diaspora Chinese networks,

... were somehow predestined to become the main suppliers of the Golden Triangle's opium and heroin since one of their Siamese commercial associations had very early on obtained an official license for opium retail sales in Shanghai's French concession: the first opium retail store of Shanghai, Hongtai, was owned by Teochiu [*sic*] merchants.<sup>48</sup>

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*Pacific Journal*, Volume 8, Number 44, 2010, <https://apjjf.org/-Peter-Dale-Scott/3436/article.html>.

47 Mark S. Gaylord, "The Chinese laundry: International drug trafficking and Hong Kong's banking industry", *Contemporary Crises*, Volume 14, 1990, p. 25.

48 Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud, "Drug trafficking in and out of the Golden Triangle", in Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy ed., *An Atlas of Trafficking in*

It was this early relationship between the Chaoshan triads and the colonial French presence in Asia that later enabled the westward transportation of heroin to the United States. The so-called ‘French Connection’ run out of Marseilles by the Corsican mafia, which had previously trafficked European women to Shanghai brothels in exchange for opium, meant that the influence of Chinese organized crime in the global opiate trade was disguised.<sup>49</sup> In recent decades the Teochow are thought to remain highly active in the international drug trade, which has shifted towards amphetamine production using precursor chemicals sourced from the Chinese and Indian pharmaceutical industries.<sup>50</sup>

### THE SUN YEE ON AND THE CCP

The Sun Yee On was among the most active triad societies in moving into Shenzhen in the mid-1980s. This city’s proximity to Hong Kong has made it by far the most favoured landing spot for criminal organizations from the former British territory that were looking to gain a presence in the massive Chinese market for illicit goods and services. For the longest time, there had been an expectation among crime analysts that the Hong Kong triads, accustomed to the liberties of a partly-free society, would attempt to move their operations out of Chinese territory prior to the handover. Instead, the opposite happened: the triads were only too glad to establish a presence in the PRC, seemingly confident that their activities would not be interfered with. In 1993, a senior Sun Yee On leader opened a nightclub in Beijing. One of the co-owners of this nightclub

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*Southeast Asia: The Illegal Trade in Arms, Drugs, People, Counterfeit Goods and Natural Resources in Mainland Southeast Asia*, IB Tauris, London, 2013, p. 8.

49 Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping*, Harper Collins, Gurugram, 2022, pp. 8-9.

50 Interview of Professor Roderic Broadhurst, June 22, 2022.

was Tao Siju, the PRC's minister for public security, a position which equated with being the communist regime's chief of police.<sup>51</sup> The same year, a Chinese-born Australian citizen was abducted from a hotel in Macau (which was still a Portuguese colonial possession at the time) and smuggled across the border to Shenzhen. On PRC territory, he was charged with fraud and sentenced to eighteen years in prison, although there have been allegations that he was the victim of a business dispute with Deng Xiaoping's niece. His kidnappers were allegedly from the 14K triad, the largest and most powerful triad society in Macau.<sup>52</sup>

In more recent years, there has been speculation that the PRC government has leveraged the global reach of ethnic Chinese criminal networks to kidnap self-exiled dissidents living overseas.<sup>53</sup> As documented in a January 2022 NGO investigation, since 2014 Beijing has coerced, coaxed and intimidated 10,000 fugitives to return to the PRC.<sup>54</sup> In a minority of the cases, the targets appear to have been kidnapped, sometimes brazenly by covert operatives (who might be members of organized crime gangs) and at other times, with the informal cooperation of local law enforcement agencies in the countries where they were hiding out. Details of such operations might never appear in the public domain, or

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51 T. Wing Lo, "Beyond Social Capital: Triad Organized Crime in Hong Kong and China", *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 50, Number 5, 2010, p. 856.

52 Fredric Dannen, "Partners in Crime: How Beijing is teaming up with Hong Kong's gangs", *New Republic*, June 14, 1997, <https://newrepublic.com/article/90738/partners-in-crime>.

53 Interview of expert on Chinese foreign policy, June 21, 2022.

54 "Involuntary Returns, China's covert operation to force 'fugitives' overseas back home", *Safeguard Defenders*, January, 2022, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/INvoluntary%20Returns.pdf>.

might take a long time to come out. For a loose parallel, one might recall that, following the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989, Hong Kong triad societies facilitated the escape of around 150 pro-democracy activists from the PRC, via Hong Kong to the West. ‘Operation Yellowbird’, as the smuggling operation was known, was one of the reasons why the Chinese communist regime grew eager to reach an accommodation with the triads, to stop them from supporting further anti-regime activities in China.<sup>55</sup> There is also a hypothesis that the escape of the most high-profile dissidents actually suited Beijing’s interests at the time, since it allowed the PRC to avoid hostile international scrutiny that could have arisen if the dissidents had been put on trial.<sup>56</sup>

In any case, by the turn of the millennium, with both Hong Kong and Macau returned to Chinese sovereignty, triad societies like the Sun Yee On and the 14K were expanding into the mainland with little interference from the state. One reason for this is that the triads had significantly bought off officials of the various public security organizations in southern China.<sup>57</sup> Guangdong was especially susceptible. Eventually the triads set up synthetic drugs factories in the province, especially near Guangzhou, because authorities at the commune and county level were so easily corruptible.<sup>58</sup>

Shenzhen too was a favoured hunting ground. When the PRC abolished movement controls into the city in 2003, rates of violent crime such as murder and assault rose by a third and kidnappings by 75 per cent. Some of this increase could

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55 T. Wing Lo and Sharon Ingrid Kwok, “Triads and Tongs”, Gerben Bruinsma and David Weisburd eds., *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Springer, New York, 2014, pp. 5338-5339.

56 Roger Faligot, op. cit., p. 191 and 195.

57 Interview of British expert on Chinese security policy, September 16, 2022.

58 Interview of Professor Roderic Broadhurst, June 22, 2022.

be attributed to the influx of migrants from across the PRC, and not specifically to organized crime. But the Hong Kong triads' impact was seen in another sphere: following the 1997 handover – the street price of narcotics in Shenzhen dropped to half of that in Hong Kong. A survey among Chinese businessmen found that the city was 2.5 times more likely to host bribery and corruption scams than Hong Kong, and that extortion levels were comparable with the latter city.<sup>59</sup>

### **TAIWAN AND THE POLITICAL USE OF TRIADS FOR 'REUNIFICATION'**

There remains only Taiwan, which has long been a refuge for triad members since the 1949 communist revolution. But in recent decades the CCP appears to have reached an accommodation with Taiwanese triads as well, tempting them with business opportunities in the vast mainland market. As far back as 2001, Fujianese authorities estimated that up to 17 criminal organizations from Taiwan had invested in the province, taking advantage of the lessening of bilateral tensions.<sup>60</sup> That year, Beijing launched an economic integration programme known as 'Three Links', connecting the Taiwanese island of Kinmen with the city of Xiamen in Fujian province. Kinmen is an anomaly in that it is much closer to the PRC than the rest of Taiwan (depending on where one calculates from, the island is between two and six kilometres from Xiamen's shoreline but nearly 300 kilometres from Taipei).

The 'Three Links' (interconnectivity of transport, postal services and telecommunications) brought the island psycho-

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59 Roderic Broadhurst and Lee King Wa, "The Transformation of Triad 'Dark Societies' in Hong Kong: The Impact of Law Enforcement, Socio-Economic and Political Change", *Security Challenges*, Volume 5, Number 4, 2009, pp. 32-35.

60 Jason Blatt, "Recent Trends in the Smuggling of Chinese into the United States", *Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*, Volume 15, Number 2, 2007, p. 267.

logically closer to communist-ruled territory than had ever been the case during the Cold War.<sup>61</sup> Kinmen also became a favoured hunting ground for pro-Beijing businessmen and triad societies (in Taiwan, the boundaries between politics, business and criminality were increasingly blurred during the 1990s, a trend that worked in favour of the PRC's efforts to build influence).<sup>62</sup>

The most prominent such Taiwanese triad, the United Bamboo (sometimes called the Bamboo Union) was, for much of the Cold War, opposed to the PRC. But as Taiwanese authorities cracked down on its illicit activities within Taiwan itself, one of its leaders, Chang An-le, fled to the PRC. There, he built up cordial relations with CCP officials and after years of living in self-imposed exile, returned to Taiwan in 2013. He immediately set about creating a political party, the China Unification Promotion Party, whose objective is stated in its name.<sup>63</sup> The CUPP has worked to intimidate anti-Beijing activists in Taiwan, using mafia-style tactics. One incident in January 2017 seemed to suggest that Chang An-le was part of a larger network of PRC assets. On that occasion, a number of pro-democracy leaders from Hong Kong were coming to visit Taiwan. They were first assaulted at Hong Kong airport by pro-Beijing activists and then, after catching their flight to Taipei, were subjected to an attempted assault upon landing. Chang's son Chang Wei was involved in the latter altercation. Among

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61 Amber Lin, "Will Kinmen, Taiwan's Frontline, Become the Next Crimea?", *Pulitzer Center*, January 25, 2020, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/will-kinmen-taiwans-frontline-become-next-crimea>.

62 Cain Nunns, "Taiwan and the Mob", *The Diplomat*, June 15, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/06/taiwan-and-the-mob/>.

63 J. Michael Cole, "Nice Democracy You've Got There. Be a Shame If Something Happened to It", *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/18/nice-democracy-youve-got-there-be-a-shame-if-something-happened-to-it/>.

the suspects arrested for the attempted assault in Taipei was a former United Bamboo member, who had defected to join another triad society, the Four Seas Gang. The two criminal organizations are suspected of being part of an influence campaign by the PRC to prepare public opinion in Taiwan for reunification with the mainland.<sup>64</sup> Since it is illegal for a political party such as the CUPP to receive funding directly from the PRC or CCP, the triads, whose commercial interests span across the Taiwan Straits, might serve as intermediaries for laundered money to reach the CUPP.

Another organization with suspected links to organized crime is the ‘Hongmen’, a worldwide network of ethnic Chinese with some characteristics of a secret society. In Taiwan, the Hongmen are believed to support the ‘For Public Good Party (FPGP)’, which advocates the peaceful ‘reunification’ of Taiwan with the PRC (although the PRC since its formation has never actually ruled Taiwan, the term ‘reunification’ is widely used in Chinese discourse).<sup>65</sup> A former leader of the 14K triad society in Macau, Wan Kuok-Koi, better known as ‘Broken Tooth’ has set up a Cambodia-based World Hongmen History and Culture Association. The US government considers this entity a front for organized crime and ‘Broken Tooth’ as linked to the CCP.<sup>66</sup> His 14K faction is reported to have ties with the Japanese Yakuza, and he has been observed visiting Pacific island nations such as Palau, which are transit points for drug

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64 J. Michael Cole, “On the Role of Organized Crime and Related Substate Actors in Chinese Political Warfare Against Taiwan”, *Prospect and Exploration*, Volume 19, Number 6, 2021, [https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646ebb06a4ddba2449c950a42533d/Section\\_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf](https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646ebb06a4ddba2449c950a42533d/Section_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf).

65 Amber Lin, *op. cit.*

66 Bertil Lintner, “Why the US bit back at China’s ‘Broken Tooth’”, *Asia Times*, December 12, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2020/12/why-the-us-bit-back-at-chinas-broken-tooth/>.



shipments originating from the PRC and also money laundering hubs, due to the presence of online casinos. The drugs might be imported inside shipping containers, since many island nations rely on imports from the PRC. On a visit to Palau, ‘Broken Tooth’ was hosted by a prominent local politician and also by an influential Chinese entrepreneur who is believed to be a CCP member.<sup>67</sup>

### THE ECONOMICS OF COLLUSION

Understanding the PRC’s influence over formerly hostile triad societies such as the Sun Yee On, 14K and United Bamboo, requires recognition of how greatly economics shape the relationship. With the PRC’s economy offering a vast market to criminal actors that have already saturated their home bases, cooperation with the CCP is an offer they cannot refuse. As has been noted by one writer on Chinese organized crime, rather than families it is business enterprises that are the organizing units which give structure to a mafia-style actor.<sup>68</sup> Many gangs are hidden in plain sight within legitimate companies that create cover jobs for musclemen to engage in criminal violence and intimidation. These for-hire thugs work alongside *bona fide* office staff who engage in ordinary corporate sector duties. Such an arrangement gives contemporary Chinese mafias more of a white-collar character than has been associated with triad societies in the past. Originally, the triads had been linked with migrant welfare. They recruited from the hordes of impoverished youth fleeing communist China for better economic opportunities in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. But with such opportunities

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67 Interview of researcher based in the Pacific islands, who is tracking Chinese organized crime, August 22, 2022.

68 Peng Wang, “The rise of the Red Mafia in China: a case study of organised crime and corruption in Chongqing”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 16, 2013, p. 61.

now being found in the PRC, the structure of triad societies has changed. They are less hierarchical and regimented than before, and more like entrepreneurial networks, with flexible and overlapping memberships. Promotion is determined not on the basis of who is the fiercest street fighter, but on who is more adept at understanding how to run legitimate businesses.<sup>69</sup>

The Sun Yee On still maintains a largely centralized structure and is thought to have the closest ties with the CCP, of all the Hong Kong triad societies. The Teochow-dominated triad, and other triads of the Chaoshan group, preserve a tight sense of cohesion due to their distinct dialect. Regardless of where they are located, members of these triads anywhere in the world are linked by a native tongue shared by just seven villages in the vicinity of Shantou city.<sup>70</sup> For other triads, such as the Wo Shing Wo and especially the 14K, centralization has long given way to local opportunism. This is remarkably similar to what happened within the state machinery of the PRC itself over the last four decades.

The decision-making power afforded to provincial authorities as a result of Deng's economic decentralization has fostered an informal culture of tolerance for criminality. There have been reports that local officials ignore abuses of labour law, including child trafficking, because they see this as a form of successful entrepreneurship which benefits the wider community. Private businesses that rely on forced child labour, such as in the mining and construction sectors and some factories, are spared rigorous inspections so that abuses can

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69 John S. Van Oudenaren, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

70 Glenn E. Curtis, Seth L. Elan, Rexford A. Hudson and Nina A. Kollars, "Transnational Activities of Chinese Crime Organizations: A Report Prepared under an Interagency Agreement by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress", *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 7, Number 3, 2002, p. 20.

remain undiscovered as far as official records are concerned. In some cases, officials have obstructed investigations into child trafficking operations and hampered rescue efforts, going to the extent of informing the traffickers of planned law enforcement actions.<sup>71</sup>

### **RED-BLACK COLLUSION**

One of the sectors that is most prone to red-black collusion is the real estate sector. Local officials who are keen to build new infrastructure projects often face resistance from so-called ‘nail households’.<sup>72</sup> These households consist of families or even lone individuals who refuse to sell their properties at rates that are arbitrarily determined by government bureaucrats. They insist that the financial compensation offered to them is insufficient, a claim that may sometimes be true. Officials are wont to requisition private land at very low rates and resell this to large-scale developers at a steep premium. In such cases, with legal options having been exhausted and the developers wary of being embroiled in prolonged litigation, the task of evicting the households is delegated to extra-legal enforcers. The latter use a combination of tactics, including physical stalking, threats and illegal trespass, to intimidate recalcitrant homeowners into relocating for their own safety.

Likewise, certain sectors of the illicit economy which are perceived to stimulate local entrepreneurship, such as gambling and the sex industry, are tolerated by government officials. It is generally accepted in the PRC that a ‘hidden rule’ of attracting foreign investors to a city is to offer forbidden hospitality

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71 Anqi Shen, Georgios A. Antonopoulos and Georgios Papanicolaou, “China’s stolen children: internal child trafficking in the People’s Republic of China”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 16, 2013, pp. 43-44.

72 Peng Wang, “The Chinese mafia: private protection in a socialist market economy”, *Global Crime*, Volume 12, Number 4, 2011, p. 310.

services, such as high-end prostitution, which would charm visiting businessmen.<sup>73</sup> The practice of bribing local law enforcement officials and party chiefs with free sexual services is also a favoured tactic of criminal syndicates. Chinese law has not explicitly criminalized sex-related corruption because it is difficult to gather evidence to support a prosecution, unlike instances where large amounts of money has changed hands, and also because sex is seen as a private matter. Were a government official found to have been influenced by paid-for sexual favours provided by a private businessman or a crime boss, that would be seen as a moral problem rather than a criminal offence. For this reason, the use of sex to corrupt government officials is fairly commonplace in China.<sup>74</sup>

#### THE CASE OF FUJIAN

In the province of Fujian, where a thriving migrant smuggling industry operated through the 1980s and '90s, provincial officials are thought to have turned a blind eye because of the overseas remittances that flowed in. In Chinese history Fujian has long been an outward-looking province with a seafaring tradition, located as it is on the PRC's southeastern coast. Since it was thought to be the likely frontline of any war fought between the PRC and Taiwan, it received a paltry budgetary allocation from the central government after 1949. This changed in the 1980s as relations between the PRC and Taiwan improved and the threat of war receded. But Fujian's lack of development meant that it had a surplus of labour and not enough jobs. Since a number of Fujianese had managed to escape abroad during the years after 1949, often by leveraging linguistic links with Taiwanese smugglers who had extensive

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73 Peng Wang, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

74 Peng Wang, *The Chinese Mafia: Organized Crime, Corruption and Extra-Legal Protection*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, p. 162.

contacts in the West, and especially the US, awareness spread of the high wages that illegal migrants could earn overseas.

During the 1990s the outflow of migrants became a flood that transformed the province's economy. Whereas in 1990, foreign investment in Fujian was USD 379 million, five years later it had climbed to USD 4.1 billion.<sup>75</sup> The increase was largely driven by remittances from Fujianese living in the West, where wages for even unskilled work were much higher than in China. The provincial authorities thus had an incentive not to look too closely at the migrant smuggling business, lest they be forced to shut off an inflow of cash. Even if they were compelled to go after smugglers, they focused on the small fry while high-level financiers tended to escape arrest or even identification. This is not to suggest that the PRC government at the apex level was indifferent to the problem of migrant smuggling. Indeed, it was acutely aware that stories of poorly-educated and low-skilled Chinese nationals swarming to the shores of democratic industrialized nations was bad publicity for the People's Republic. But the calculations of the central government were overridden by the exigencies of provincial development.

Like the Teochow triads, Fujianese migrant-smugglers relied on a distinct dialect (northern Min) to build trust among themselves and with their clients. They solicited for business in the area around Fuzhou, the provincial capital, located in the north. Their primary service was offering passages by air and sea to the United States. It has been estimated that during the 1990s, anywhere between 80 and 90 per cent of all illegal Chinese migrants to the US came from Fujian, an astonishing

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75 Patrick Radden Keefe, *The Snakehead: an epic tale of the Chinatown underworld and the American dream*, Doubleday, New York, 2009, p. 45 and 47.

predominance for what is geographically and demographically a small province within China. But there were also smuggling lines to Europe. Countries of the former communist bloc, such as Hungary, were favoured destinations because they had a local Chinese community from the days of Cold War solidarity, into which undocumented migrants could disappear. There was, reportedly, already a triad society presence in cities like Budapest and Szeged. Perhaps because the spirit of the times encouraged private risk-taking as a means of boosting one's personal fortune, rather than depending on state intervention to raise overall living standards, local officials in Fujian seem to have encouraged the export of labour to Europe. In the 1990s, authorities in Mingxi county (which is in Fujian) proposed to the Hungarian embassy in Beijing that it set up a visa processing centre in nearby Sanming city. The Sanming administration itself sought to establish 'sister city relations' with the 8th district of Budapest, where many Chinese migrants, both legal and illegal, had settled. Both proposals were declined by the Hungarian government, perhaps due to concerns that closer ties with Fujianese society would only increase the flow of illegal immigration.<sup>76</sup>

#### **THE GLOBALISATION OF CHINESE ORGANISED CRIME?**

In the 1990s and 2000s, two distinguished American professors of ethnic Chinese origin, Sheldon Zhang and Ko-Lin Chin, conducted meticulous fieldwork on Chinese organized crime.<sup>77</sup> Much of their research focused on the activities of

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76 Mette Thunø and Frank N. Pieke, "Institutionalizing Recent Rural Emigration from China to Europe: New Transnational Villages in Fujian", *The International Migration Review*, Volume 39, Number 2, 2005, p. 505.

77 Sheldon X. Zhang and Ko-Lin Chin, "Snakeheads, mules, and protective umbrellas: a review of current research on Chinese organized crime", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Volume 50, 2008, p. 182 and 189.

‘snakeheads’ or migrant smugglers. Their work suggested that migrant smuggling networks were *ad hoc*, transnational and entrepreneurial, and thus less suited to overarching control by traditional organized crime groups such as triad societies.<sup>78</sup> The latter were modelled as being regimented, territorially-defined and reliant on protection racketeering for the bulk of their revenue. Zhang and Chin’s research has had an indelible impact on how transnational aspects of Chinese organized crime have been perceived, but there are grounds for a re-appraisal.

A 2009 study that contrasted migrant smuggling and drug smuggling networks in the Netherlands threw up extremely interesting findings. Migrant smuggling, according to this study, did indeed seem to be a form of crime that lent itself to relatively flat and loose networks of part-time collaborators, who came together on an opportunistic basis. As documented by Zhang and Chin, the Netherlands case suggested that such smugglers were usually not career criminals. They may have treated migrants as merely a lucrative commodity that they dealt in as a side-hustle to their main business or day-job, which could be perfectly legal. In contrast, drug smugglers tended to be involved in a broader range of crimes, were more open to collaborating with criminals of different (i.e., non-Chinese) ethnicities, and operated under a measure of centralized direction.

Whereas migrant smugglers tended to operate in family-based networks, extra-familial loyalty was quite rare because it did not make business sense. There seemed to be no overarching authority in the case of migrant smuggling, even if individual

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78 Sheldon X. Zhang and Ko-Lin Chin, “Enter the Dragon: Inside Chinese Human Smuggling Organizations”, *Criminology*, Volume 40, Number 2, 2002, p. 762.

families or cells that made up part of a smuggling network were hierarchically organized at a local level. The same was not true of drug smugglers, who seemed to have greater deference to centralized control across large distances because of the ever-present risk of brutal reprisals if they acted in a selfish and opportunistic manner. Even though drug smugglers seemed more loosely organized than the family-run migrant smuggling networks, they were actually more likely to be controlled by a larger criminal entity with roots back in China.

There was also a difference in age profile and socio-economic backgrounds: migrant smugglers were younger and, more often than not, recent arrivals in the host society where they committed their crimes. Drug smugglers were older and better integrated into the host society. Lastly, because most illegal migrants from China originated from Fujian and Zhejiang provinces (the latter is immediately to the north of Fujian), the working languages of migrant smugglers were Fujianese (northern and southern Min dialects) and the Wu dialect commonly used in Zhejiang. Mandarin was only used when smugglers from the two provinces collaborated. What was notable was the subordinate role of Cantonese-speakers in migrant smuggling. People from Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau were not prominent among recent waves of illegal migrants from China. So migrant smugglers had little need for this language. In contrast, drug smugglers, whether they dealt with heroin in previous decades or synthetic drugs more recently, tended to be Cantonese-speakers, because Guangdong was a hub of the Chinese pharmaceutical industry and Hong Kong was a major transshipment seaport. The importance of bottlenecks in the drugs supply route suggested that access to them would constitute a prize for a territorially-defined



criminal group, such as a triad society.<sup>79</sup> The 14K in particular, has been mentioned in connection with the drugs trade through the Netherlands.

One of the experts interviewed for this paper explains why Zhang and Chin's conclusions about the lack of Chinese organized crime group involvement in smuggling might need to be qualified:

In drug trafficking, there is a real need for violence, and there is a real need for organization to ensure that for each part of the process, from the source country to the destination country, there is an overarching view of the planning and investment involved. In human smuggling, you do not have to control people if you are not going to be using them as trafficked labour or for the sex trade. But in drug trafficking, you do need to exercise power, through violence, to punish people if they step out of line. Human smuggling appears more sporadic and is dominated by legitimate or semi-legitimate people who like to make money on the side. With drug trafficking, we are talking about professional criminals who are in a very tight network because it takes a lot of trust and it takes strong relationships to conduct that type of activity.<sup>80</sup>

The same view was voiced by another interviewee, that human smuggling is more a 'mom-and-pop' business that has little need for violence, in contrast to high-risk cargoes such as drugs.<sup>81</sup>

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79 Melvin R. J. Soudijn and Edward R. Kleemans, "Chinese organized crime and situational context: comparing human smuggling and synthetic drugs trafficking", *Crime, Law and Social Change*, Volume 52, 2009, p. 464, 466-468 and 471-472.

80 Interview of Dr. Alex Chung, June 11, 2022.

81 Interview of Professor Roderic Broadhurst, June 22, 2022.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL NETWORKS

Seen with the benefit of hindsight, the *zeitgeist* of the 1990s and the 2000s emphasized the power of adaptive networks over procedure-bound hierarchies. This perhaps led to an under-estimation of the need for identity and security among migrants, especially illegal ones. A study of Chinese migrants in the Czech Republic found that they noticeably self-differentiated, depending on their communities of origin. Even though hailing from a common province (Zhejiang), they tended to speak one of three distinct local dialects. Their sense of belonging was derived from their specific place of origin, whether it was a city (like Hangzhou) or a county (like Qingtian county). While the host society viewed them homogenously as ‘Chinese’, they remained acutely conscious of differences between themselves.<sup>82</sup>

The same differentiation applied in New York’s Chinatown during the massive wave of Fujianese illegal immigration in the 1980s and ‘90s. The wave is thought to have peaked during the period 1988-93. It was at this time that the US government liberalized its asylum policy as regards Chinese nationals, offering refuge to those fleeing political persecution after the June 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in China, and also those fleeing the country’s one-child policy (which had outraged American conservative politicians). Snakeheads, as the migrant smugglers were called (because the routes taken to cross international boundaries featured many twists and turns, like the body of a moving snake), tutored their clients on what to tell US immigration judges. It became comically common for Fujianese asylum seekers in American courts to claim that they personally had been present in Tiananmen

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82 Markéta Moore and Czeslaw Tubilewicz, “Chinese migrants in the Czech Republic”, *Asian Survey*, Volume 41, Number 4, 2001, p. 621.

Square during the crackdown, or that they were being hunted by Chinese authorities for having had more than one child. It was not until 1993 that the US State Department began to sensitize immigration officials that Fujian was not as hellish as the asylum-seekers claimed. Meanwhile, the Fujianese migrants disappeared into Chinatowns across the country, which soon became miniature ghettos within a larger ghettoised community.<sup>83</sup>

Since the 1850s, Chinatowns in American cities had been dominated by Cantonese-speakers, descendants of labourers who had laid the railway lines that connected the US east and west coasts in the years following the California Gold Rush. The Cantonese saw themselves as something of an entrenched elite among the Chinese diaspora, and looked down on the recent Fujianese arrivals for being rustic and undignified. They referred to them as ‘eighteen thousand dollar men’ – the going rate in the 1980s for securing a place on a smuggling route from Fujian to the US.<sup>84</sup> The fact that the Fujianese worked extremely long hours doing menial tasks such as dish-washing in Chinatown restaurants only added to the sense of contempt. For their part, the Fujianese resented the condescension received from their Cantonese counterparts and stuck to themselves in specific areas of Chinatown. The result was that localities where migrant smuggling operations were run became black holes for intelligence collection. In 1993, when about 80 to 90 per cent of all illegal Chinese migrants to the US came from Fujian, there was only one law enforcement officer at any level of government in the New York area, who spoke Fujianese.<sup>85</sup>

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83 Patrick Radden Keefe, *op. cit.*, p. 192-193.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

85 Jennifer Bolz, “Chinese Organized Crime and Illegal Alien Trafficking: Humans as a Commodity”, *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Volume 22, Number 3, 1995, pp. 153-154.

The small number of Cantonese-speakers in agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation were of limited value in interrogating suspects, since their effectiveness depended on the suspects' ability (and willingness) to communicate in Cantonese. Telephonic wiretaps were also of marginal use, since any intelligence that could be derived from them became stale and non-actionable by the time it was translated, if at all that happened.

Regional dialect also explains why Fujian in particular, became a place of origin for migrant smuggling to the US. The crucial link was Taiwan, which shared the southern Min dialect of south Fujian. Although most America-bound migrants came from the north of the province, the similarity of dialect with Taiwan allowed collaborative linkages to be fostered. During the Cultural Revolution, smuggling between Fujian and Taiwan had laid the groundwork for transporting human cargo. Political turmoil in the PRC prompted a weakening of individuals' trust in the communist system, which was so consumed by fratricidal warfare that it seemed to be devouring its own.<sup>86</sup> Instead of relying on the state, citizens fell back on blood ties and trusted only their closest associates – those whom they knew from school-going days, while conducting any transactions. The result was the emergence of highly personalized and secretive networks, which relied on members having a shared place of origin, dialect and impeccable references from insiders.<sup>87</sup> In the case of Fujian and Taiwan, the cross-strait ties that sprang up during the Cultural Revolution prepared the mainland population in how to subvert the laws of a totalitarian system for private benefit. These skills were put to considerable use as the Fujianese diaspora built up from the 1980s onwards, and a distinctly Fujianese sub-mafia emerged.

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86 Interview of Dr. Nis Gruenberg, September 2, 2022.

87 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

When the Taiwanese government attempted to boost its ties with Latin America in the 1970s, by providing assistance to governments in the region in setting up industries, it strengthened the smuggling trend. Snakeheads used the cash generated from cross-strait traffic and the political connections forged by Taiwanese entrepreneurs in Latin America, to corrupt policymakers in Guatemala, Belize and Honduras.<sup>88</sup> Officials in these countries were, at various stages in the 1990s, involved in assisting the movement of Fujianese migrants to the United States. Their involvement could consist of selling genuine national passports to the migrants, providing security to smuggling ships that approached their territorial waters, or simply ignoring the activities of snakeheads.

The actual routes taken by migrants varied, depending on local conditions. During the early 1990s, Fujianese migrants would be taken to the PRC's Yunnan province, which abuts South East Asia. From there they would cross the land border with Myanmar, before proceeding further south and entering Thailand. Within Thailand, they would move south to Bangkok, where forged travel documents awaited them. Those travelling by air would be put on planes to Latin American countries, from where they would be relayed northward across the continent by various subcontractors until they crossed the US-Mexico border. An alternative route was to travel by sea at least part of the way, or even directly to the US. The sea route was preferred by snakeheads because they could make a greater profit by transporting their cargo (migrants) in bulk. Plus, document checks at Bangkok airport became stricter from 1992 onwards, prompting a search for alternative means of transportation.

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88 Patrick Radden Keefe, "Snakeheads and Smuggling: The Dynamics of Illegal Chinese Immigration", *World Policy Journal*, Volume 26, Number 1, 2009, pp. 41-42.

In June 1993, the existence of the sea route was dramatically revealed to the American public when a squalid ship carrying nearly 300 Chinese migrants, almost all from Fujian, appeared off the New York shoreline. Television news cameras captured footage of law enforcement personnel chasing the bewildered migrants around and corralling them onto buses to be taken into detention. The whole scene, as one writer described it, equated Chinese migrant smuggling with being a mafia-style version of the Normandy landings of World War II, an invasion of the United States, launched by sea.<sup>89</sup> The publicity surrounding this one incident prompted a series of policy changes in the US, including putting migrants into detention and sensitizing immigration courts about false asylum claims. Ultimately, such changes slowed the rate of illegal migration. Changes in the PRC's economy probably made a bigger difference though: by the late 2000s, societal norms in Fujian emphasized that it was better to remain in China and become an entrepreneur than become indebted to smugglers and perform low-skilled work in a foreign land, where one would have few social connections. No longer was a young person's social status enhanced by emigrating to the West, legally or otherwise.

#### **MIXTURE OF TERRITORIALITY AND TRANSNATIONALITY**

All of this paints a mixed picture about how much of the Chinese migrant smuggling business is characterized by transnational market forces that are independent of local factors. The importance of territoriality is occasionally emphasized through the use of street gangs to handle some of the logistics of smuggling. For example, the June 1993 seaborne landing in New York happened to fall in the glare of the news media only by accident. A local Fujianese gang, the Fuk Ching, was supposed to receive the migrants discreetly using hired boats

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89 Patrick Radden Keefe, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

which were to meet the transport ship offshore.<sup>90</sup> But it had been crippled by fratricidal warfare and a police crackdown. Investigators found that the gang worked as subcontractors for a snakehead known as ‘Sister Ping’, a Fujianese lady based in New York’s Chinatown. Sister Ping was more of an illicit entrepreneur than a mafia godmother. She had in fact previously been the victim of a home invasion and armed robbery by the same gang that she later subcontracted to be her logistics agents. The gang’s main source of revenue came from extortion rackets. The Fuk Ching was widely thought to be affiliated with a New York-based Fujianese welfare association known as the Fukien American Association, an allegation that was denied by the latter entity. Whether acting on its own, or under covert instructions from the Association, the Fuk Ching levied protection fees on businesses in the Fujianese parts of Chinatown. Migrant smuggling was a highly lucrative side-show for the gang, but one it had diversified into at a later stage.

A similar dynamic seems to have been replicated in parts of Latin America where Fujianese communities came up, consisting of snakeheads and those of their customers who had dropped out of the effort to emigrate to the US. In Argentina’s small provincial towns, Fujianese gangs set up protection rackets that mirrored those found in New York.<sup>91</sup> Such rackets were not fundamentally different from those associated with larger ‘traditional’ crime organizations like the Hong Kong triad societies. Even if the triads themselves were not directly involved in smuggling migrants to the US, their business model

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90 Andrew J. Sein, “The prosecution of Chinese organized crime groups: the Sister Ping case and its lessons”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 11, 2008, pp. 168-170.

91 R. Evan Ellis, “Chinese Organized Crime in Latin America”, *PRISM*, Volume 4, Number 1, 2012, pp. 66-67.

was replicated across the world because it operated on the universal principle of selling protection services to vulnerable entrepreneurs with immigrant (Chinese) backgrounds.

### THE ‘TRIAD MODEL’ OF ORGANISED CRIME

By one count, in the early 1990s there were over 50 triad societies in Hong Kong, of which no more than 15 regularly came to the attention of law enforcement agencies.<sup>92</sup> This, in itself, represented a drastic reduction from the mid-20th century, when the number of societies was estimated to be 300, and up to one-sixth of Hong Kong’s population was thought to consist of triad members.<sup>93</sup> By the 1990s this had reduced to one in every twenty persons. The 1970s had seen a notable decline in the triads’ influence as a result of anti-corruption measures instituted within the colonial police. Membership of triad societies, already criminalized by the colonial regime since 1845, became easier to prosecute as a result of new laws introduced in the 1980s and early ‘90s. Even so, the societies managed to outlast the colonial apparatus and adapted to a new political order when Hong Kong returned to the control of mainland China in 1997.

The strength of the triads lay in the fact that, although they were underground (illegal) entities, they provided a valuable service in assimilating new migrants to Hong Kong. Following

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92 Zhang, Sheldon X., “China Tongs in America: Continuity and Opportunities”, in Dina Siegel and Henk van de Bunt eds., *Traditional Organized Crime in the Modern World Responses to Socioeconomic Change*, Springer, New York, 2012, p. 111. Also see John Dombrink and John Huey-Long Song, “Hong Kong After 1997: Transnational Organized Crime in a Shrinking World”, *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Volume 12, Number 4, 1996, p. 330.

93 Yiu Kong Chu, “Hong Kong Triads After 1997”, *Trends in Organized Crime*, Volume 8, Number 3, 2005, p. 5 and T. Wing Lo, “Triadization of Youth Gangs in Hong Kong”, *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 52, Number 3, 2012, p. 556.



the 1949 communist revolution in the PRC, Chinese youth fleeing the mainland had sought shelter in the British-controlled territory. The British authorities, until 1980, followed a liberal asylum policy that allowed such youth to stay on in Hong Kong, despite being illegal migrants (some curbs were introduced in 1974, as a result of the global economic slowdown caused by the oil price shock).<sup>94</sup>

Since there were not enough jobs to keep the migrants gainfully employed, triad societies served as an informal welfare system. Such had been their role since the 19th century. Not all triads were engaged in criminal activity. Those that were, had an hierarchy of cut-outs to protect the top bosses from being incriminated in illegal activity. As documented in ethnographic research conducted by Hong Kong-based scholars, there were two layers of criminal involvement. At the lower level, were youth gangs that consisted of teenagers and pre-teens aged 12-18 years, although some were as young as ten. These youth banded together mainly to avoid getting picked on by neighbourhood bullies. They were a kind of preparatory school for entry into triad societies. Some of their members left the gang upon completion of their schooling, or at the insistence of their parents, or upon moving to a new address. Those that stayed, might move on to the next level. At the next level came street gangs, consisting of older teens and young adults (aged 16-25 years) who had personal ties with triad members.<sup>95</sup> These ties took the form of a boss-subordinate relationship, where the triad member would offer protection to his subordinates in

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94 Jon Vagg, "The Borders of Crime: Hong Kong-China Cross-Border Criminal Activity", *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 32, Number 3, 1992, pp. 319-320.

95 James J. McKenna Jr., "Organized Crime in the Royal Colony of Hong Kong", *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Volume 12, Number 4, 1996, pp. 321-322.

exchange for their obedience and subservience. They would provide the muscle in case any dirty work needed to be done. The street gang members were akin to criminal probationers, on course to becoming career criminals within a triad society, for which they would need to pass various initiation rituals. These differed from one triad to another.

### **LESS STRUCTURE, MORE FLEXIBILITY**

Due to fear of undercover operations by the Hong Kong police, as well as changes in market conditions as Hong Kong integrated into the PRC, the cult-like rituals and strict hierarchy associated with triad membership have slowly been diluted.<sup>96</sup> Some triads, like the 14K, have become almost indistinguishable from street gangs, fighting between themselves for dominance of turf. The decentralized nature of its activities means that 14K is among the most opportunistic and active of triad societies, which gives it a greater global reach than most other societies, barring the Wo Shing Wo (from the Wo group of triads, the oldest triad cluster in Hong Kong) and the so-called ‘Big Circle Boys’. The latter was formed by former Red Guards who fled the city of Guangzhou for Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution. One story says that since Guangzhou was marked in police maps by a big red circle, these fugitive gangsters became known as the Big Circle Boys (BCB).<sup>97</sup>

The BCB did not originally have criminal intentions when they settled in Hong Kong. But discrimination by local inhabitants pushed them to the margins of the legitimate economy. As migrants from Guangzhou, they spoke the same

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96 John S. Van Oudenaren, op. cit., p. 133.

97 Stephen Marche, “The Company Man”, *Toronto Life*, November 1, 2021, <https://torontolife.com/city/this-man-is-the-jeff-bezos-of-the-international-drug-trade/>.

Cantonese language as Hong Kongers. But their distinctive accent was ridiculed. When they tried to work as street hawkers, local triad societies preyed on them for protection money.<sup>98</sup> With the desperation of refugees who had little to lose, the BCB went on the offensive against the triads, battling for territory which they would in turn, offer protection services in. Like the 14K triad society, which had been formed as a paramilitary organization to fight the CCP in the 1940s, the BCB had a violent sub-culture, forged as a result of its members having been brutalized in various ways by the Chinese state apparatus during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>99</sup> Hong Kong triads were unprepared for this level of aggression, and soon came to regard the BCB as potential allies in their own internal conflicts. Some of the triad societies admitted BCB members into their ranks. The group represented a new (but slow) trend in Chinese organized crime: less hierarchical, more entrepreneurial, but willing to use violence on a localized and opportunistic basis. Like the 14K, it had a flatter structure than most of the Hong Kong triads, which gave its members greater flexibility in decision-making and carving out their own territories against competitors.

The BCB demonstrated something which was alarming for the triads: a propensity to learn fast, innovate and scale-up. To some extent, it can be seen as representing the entrepreneurial hunger of a socialist PRC mainland that was discovering the luxuries of capitalism in Hong Kong. The former British colony's underworld did not unite in the face of this external threat. Some BCB networks became among the

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98 Alex Chung, *Chinese Criminal Entrepreneurs in Canada, Volume I*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2019, pp. 75-76.

99 Martin Purbrick, "Patriotic Chinese Triads and Secret Societies: From the Imperial Dynasties, to Nationalism, and Communism", *Asian Affairs*, Volume 50, Number 3, 2019, pp. 312-314 and Stephen Marche, op. cit.

most successful Chinese criminal actors worldwide due to the flexibility afforded by their interpersonal contacts. In Canada, they began as street pickpockets, but within a short period of time, using their connections to the PRC, upskilled to the much more lucrative business of credit card fraud.<sup>100</sup> In Guangdong in the 1980s, they learned how to ‘cook’ synthetic drugs using techniques taught to them by the Hong Kong triads, who expected the BCB networks to work under their supervision as subcontractors. But once some BCB members mastered the necessary techniques, they showed little hesitation in kicking the triads out and going into business for themselves, as the triads’ rivals.<sup>101</sup>

The triads themselves were forced to adapt. One study summarized how the leading societies have operated since the 1990s, when China’s economic take-off gathered momentum:

Triads transformed from formal societies organized for the purpose of mutual protection to interlinked informal networks, which associate primarily for economic gain. In many ways triad organizational structure has come to resemble franchises as opposed to centralized businesses where headquarters calls the shots. Locally based triad-gangs benefit from the mother group’s established reputation and name recognition (street cred), but they have broad latitude in how they generate income. In return for the overarching triad organization’s brand name and protection, subgroups kick up a portion of their income to the top. High-level triad leaders do not derive most of their income directly from gang activity, but from monetary gifts delivered in red envelopes to bosses on special occasions such

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100 Interview of Dr. Alex Chung, June 11, 2022.

101 Interview of Dr. Sharon Kwok, July 2, 2022.

as Chinese New Year. Obviously, the money in the envelopes probably comes from crime, but the gift-giving ritual provides another layer insulating leadership from illicit activity. Greater emphasis on profit maximization and the need to launder money has led triads to invest in legitimate enterprises and to form partnerships with normal white-collar businessmen.<sup>102</sup>

Among the professions most compromised by triad influence in Hong Kong is the legal profession. Triads can allegedly manipulate the workings of the court system through inside support among legal clerks. Traditional mafia-style activities, such as collecting protection money from local shops, street hawkers, restaurateurs, as well as taxi stands, construction sites, bars, brothels and nightclubs continue to generate revenue, as do low-level crimes such as cigarette and fuel smuggling. At a higher level, beyond narcotics, some of the triads specialize in certain sectors of the illicit economy. The Sun Yee On has a strong grip over Hong Kong's film industry, to such an extent that it is the triad society of choice for actors who wish to avoid being threatened and coerced by other triads that are more brutal in their efforts to control which actors appear in which films.<sup>103</sup> The Sun Yee On offers protection from such coercion. The 14K meanwhile, is thought to specialize in gambling (owing to its dominance of Macau's casinos) while the Wo Shing Wo was once reported to be a leader in pirated videos.

The 14K has been mentioned specifically in connection with the drug trade in the Netherlands, while Wo Shing Wo is reported to have a stronghold in the UK. In London's Chinatown, an estimated 75 per cent of businesses operated by

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102 John S. Van Oudenaren, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-136.

103 James J. McKenna, Jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 322-323.

ethnic Chinese are required to pay ‘tea money’, a euphemism for protection fees.<sup>104</sup> In Paris, extortion rackets among the Chinese are divided up by place of origin. Gangs whose members originate from the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang province, for example, extort from merchants who also hail from Wenzhou. The Parisian Teochow also extort from their own people.

Payments can range anywhere from the equivalent of USD 500 to USD 2500.<sup>105</sup> The actual collection is done by gangs that are controlled by businessmen who form part of the upperworld of the Chinese diaspora in France. Much as in Hong Kong, ethnic Chinese gangs worldwide prey upon members of their own community, whose code of silence prevents local law enforcement from fully perceiving the degree of criminal activity. Triad societies themselves are a hybrid of traditional and entrepreneurial organized crime, which makes them more adaptive than might have previously been thought in the 1990s, when the first empirical studies were conducted on migrant smuggling. Rather, Chinese communities in the West tend to show a replication of triad-style criminality at a local level.

#### **THE EVOLVING NATURE OF ETHNIC CHINESE ORGANISED CRIME**

Five decades ago, the term ‘Chinese organized crime’ would probably have meant Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Macau triads. The turmoil of the Cultural Revolution was still in the process of weakening the Chinese Communist Party, and its effects were yet to be fully felt. Nor had Deng Xiaoping instituted his economic reforms. The PRC was, for the most part, sealed off from the rest of the world. Due to the totalitarian nature of the country, there was little room for ‘black societies’

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104 Peng Wang, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

105 Glenn E. Curtis, Seth L. Elan, Rexford A. Hudson and Nina A. Kollars, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

or street gangs to operate, unless their members had a death wish.

The phenomenon of street gangs was associated more with Hong Kong, due to its constant inflow of migrants from the PRC. When ethnic Chinese gangs first appeared in the United States in the mid-1960s, researchers traced their origins to a wave of migration from Hong Kong.<sup>106</sup> Taiwanese syndicates were dominant in the international narcotics trade, due to their links with ex-Kuomintang fighters (who had become drug cultivators) in South East Asia's Golden Triangle. Even during the 1980s, when Taiwan introduced political reforms to allow for a greater measure of democracy, it seemed to have a stronger problem of criminal infiltration of politics than the PRC. Fears of 'Black-Gold Politics' on the island were a forerunner to the 'Red-Black' nexus that appeared in the PRC during the 1990s. It was the 1984 administrative reforms, 1992 property reforms and 1994 tax reforms that made criminal collusion with state actors a widespread problem in China. The influx of Hong Kong and Macau triads into the mainland's illicit markets, as well as the massive amounts of cash that suddenly became available to lubricate business deals, fuelled corruption within state agencies.

Street gangs which lack the protective structure and loyalty oaths of triad-like secret societies, now instead have protection provided by state actors. In June 2022, a small example was provided when four female diners in the city of Tangshan in Hebei province were brutally set upon and beaten in public by a gang consisting of seven men and two women. Local police were at first slow to respond to the incident and attempted to

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106 Paul Takagi and Tony Platt, "Behind the Gilded Ghetto: An Analysis of Race, Class and Crime in Chinatown", *Crime and Social Justice*, Volume 9, 1978, pp. 14-15.

trivialize the serious injuries suffered by the victims (who did not know their attackers). The perpetrators were only arrested after an outcry erupted on Chinese social media. The police's shoddiness led to suspicions that the gang had a protective cover. This hypothesis received added weight when it emerged that, of the roughly two dozen people arrested, nine were police officers.<sup>107</sup> Seven members of the gang were alleged to have previously been involved with internet gambling and money laundering.<sup>108</sup> Some journalists reported that authorities in Tangshan were citing Covid-19 restrictions on free movement to interfere with their efforts to report on the case.<sup>109</sup>

The PRC's official reportage of crime trends and statistics needs to be treated with caution because it is suspected of being influenced by political considerations. Among these are the need to deny the existence of societal tensions caused by high-level corruption within the CCP, between the CCP and business figures, and between the police and gangsters. There is a need to present China's economic success as one that has benefited all sections of the polity. The incident in Tangshan, according to one foreign commentator, was symptomatic of a larger problem of under-policing in the PRC.<sup>110</sup> Focused on political surveillance and controlling civic protests, the country's police allegedly have few resources to actually

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107 Interview of Professor Ming Xia, September 8, 2022.

108 Zhang Yu, "Suspects in Tangshan assault case linked to other crimes", *China Daily*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202206/22/WS62b25109a310fd2b29e67b8b.html>.

109 "Chinese reporter Zhang Weihan recounts police harassment, detention in Tangshan", *Committee to Protect Journalists*, June 21, 2022, <https://cpj.org/2022/06/chinese-reporter-zhang-weihan-recounts-police-harassment-detention-in-tangshan/>.

110 James Palmer, "A Brutal Attack Stirs Anger and Shame in China", *Foreign Policy*, June 15, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/15/china-tangshan-attack-gender-violence-anger/>.



investigate criminal offences of a non-political nature. Thus, although the PRC may claim that ‘organized crime’ in the sense of the Sicilian mafia does not exist within the country, such assertions are half-truths at best.<sup>111</sup> Given the sheer size of China, it is understandable that no mafia organization can have a nation-wide presence. But localized influence, perpetuated with the aid of corrupt officials is very possible. With more Chinese nationals now going abroad in ever-greater numbers to work on projects connected with the Belt and Road Initiative, there is an urgent need to map out the geography of ‘black societies’ in China and compare this with the places of origin of many of the Chinese expatriates working on BRI projects. Thus far, little hard information is available in the public domain about the regional origin of many Chinese firms engaged with the BRI.

This paper has demonstrated that dialect and regional networks are crucial factors that give structure to ‘Chinese organized crime’. The term itself is almost too broad to serve an analytical purpose, but with the PRC’s growing international stature and the CCP’s tight control over domestic politics, it serves to focus attention on a policy issue of considerable relevance. In China, ‘organized crime’ does not exist independently of some degree of local tolerance from officialdom. But its proliferation in other parts of the world, which may be characterized by different political systems and police apparatuses, requires that it should be studied, not as a national but an international policy concern.

Previously there had not been any such monolithic entity as ‘Chinese organized crime’, due to political divides between

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111 Margaret K. Lewis, “China’s Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”, *Asian Criminology*, Volume 2, 2007, p. 181.

communist China on the one hand and Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan on the other. But with the PRC's growing international political and economic profile and more importantly, the centralization of political power in Beijing, it is becoming more accurate to speak of such an entity. The Belt and Road Initiative, most experts seem to agree, will add more routes, methods and personnel to the Chinese criminal underworld, allowing it to assume unprecedented dimensions.

The knowledge base and existing literature on Chinese organized crime focuses more on the southern coastal region, not because other parts of the country do not have issues with or a presence of organized crime, but because organized crime groups in the former have deeper ties into Hong Kong and Macau, where historically it has been easier for researchers to conduct fieldwork.<sup>112</sup> Southern Chinese criminal groups, such as the triad societies, are more likely to interface with Western law enforcement agencies, due to the historical trans-oceanic spread of Cantonese-speakers and more recently, Fujianese-speakers. The BRI might now open up the landlocked interior of the PRC to the outside world, through out-migration of construction workers and project specialists who would bring their own local dialects and networks with them. The ability of non-Chinese researchers and law enforcement professionals to penetrate these networks, or even engage with them in a spirit of honest discussion, is likely to be very limited. For such reasons, it might make more sense to study Chinese organized crime not as a standalone phenomenon, but more in relation to how it affects crime trends outside of China. Two possibilities exist. One is to examine whether local ie., non-Chinese criminal networks show signs of long-term behavioural and structural

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112 Interview of Jason Tower, Myanmar Country Director, United States Institute of Peace, September 6, 2022.

changes as a result of the PRC's growing economic profile in the developing world. The challenge with such an approach is proving causality: it is easy to hypothesize but obtaining empirical evidence will remain a challenge. A second approach is to study the Chinese model of elite corruption, including state surveillance and political authoritarianism, and examine whether Beijing's attempts to promote its own favoured paradigm of state-led capitalism is enriching or destabilizing countries which are trying to implement it.

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# No Victor, No Vanquished

## The Notion of Victory in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Wars

Lt. Gen. A. B. Shivane\*

### GLOBAL INSTABILITY: REDEFINING THE STRATEGIC SECURITY EQUILIBRIUM

During the 20th Century Cold War era, great power rivalry and competing spheres of influence defined the global politics of a bipolar world. The disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1991 paved the way for the US-led unipolar world to exhibit exceptionalism and unilateral intervention norms. However, the 21st Century is witnessing the decline in US global power status and retrenchment, China's assertive rise, with incremental expansion impacting global realignments and the strategic churn in Europe, and with a revanchist Russia flexing its muscles authoritatively.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, there is turmoil in the Islamic world, with terrorism engulfing the

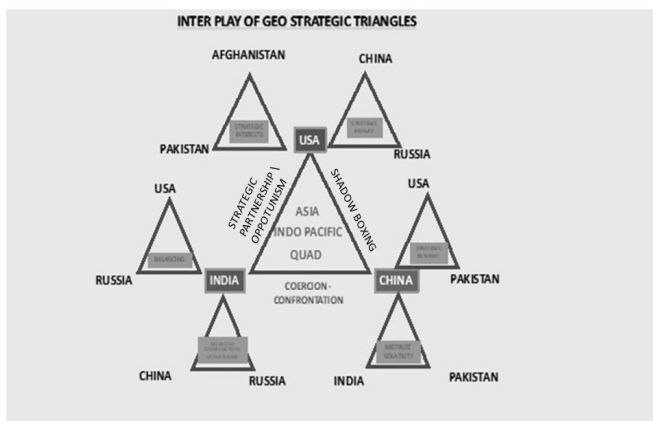
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1 A.B. Shivane, *Professional Military Education: Making of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warrior*, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2023.

Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, and financial crises creating global instabilities.

In this geopolitical melee, inter-state relationships are based on the convergence of national interest and strategic opportunism. Strategic behaviour has an inter-relationship based on these realities. This volatile triangle and its geostrategic periphery also form the epicentre of the global stability–instability paradox. Thus, it bears the shadow of overlapping triangles such as US-India-China and China-India-Russia, for the furtherance of their interests and national agendas. The triangular conundrum among stakeholders is depicted below.<sup>2</sup> All triangles have an interplay among themselves, some more pronounced and impactful, some less.



## NEVER ENDING WARS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21ST century wars, conflict initiation is the easier strategic decision than the more difficult one of conflict resolution. These are “never-ending wars”, wherein the entry

2 A.B. Shivane, “India-China-Pakistan: The Triangle of Strategic Instability”, *Raksha-Anirveda*, July 31, 2020, <https://raksha-anirveda.com/india-china-pakistan-the-triangle-of-strategic-instability/>.

is a show of power and the exit, of an unresolved dilemma.<sup>3</sup> The ease of initial entry distorts perception, obscures ground realities, and promotes a skewed strategy, which often results in an unresolved dilemma of an honourable exit. It is always easier to pervade but difficult to prevail. Geography, regional geopolitics, and nationalism too play an important role in the evolution of these wars which must not be ignored. The intervention objectives may have clarity, but the end game of the war is often unformulated and unforeseen. Further, the trajectory of these wars is increasingly unpredictable, and its grammar is nebulous. Such wars do not end based on just shifting frontlines, but a host of structural and geopolitical realities beyond the immediate battlespace. Neither do they end with the same objectives as they were started.

Research from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, using data from 1946 to 2021, found that 26 per cent of interstate wars ended in less than a month and another 25 per cent within a year. But when interstate wars last longer than a year, they extend on average to over a decade.<sup>4</sup> These never-ending wars can not only be catastrophic in terms of economic and human costs but their effect also spills beyond geographical boundaries, with a negative cost-benefit ratio. Often their fallout has both regional and global ramifications, both in the global power play and third-world supply chain challenges.

The key challenge to conflict resolution lies in the complexity of the notion of victory. The traditional notion of

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3 A.B. Shivane, “Never-Ending Wars of 21st Century”, *Indian Defence Review*, September 24, 2021, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/never-ending-wars-of-21st-century/>.

4 Benjamin Jensen, “How Does It End? What Past Wars Tell Us about How to Save Ukraine”, *CSIS*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-does-it-end-what-past-wars-tell-us-about-how-save-ukraine>.

victory or defeat based on success in battle is simply a historic relic from a bygone era. This is not how wars end in the 21st century.<sup>5</sup> They are not conducive to clear-cut endings. Thus victory, more than an act of prevailing, is seeking a shade where the contest between who loses, or is perceived to be losing, less. From the clash of wills through the clash of egos, to face-saving negotiations, is a treacherous process often resulting from hot war to negative peace. The elusive challenge remains developing the diplomatic track to complement not contradict the dynamics on the battlespace. It may be complex and spread over several rounds beyond just the military, focusing on nonmilitary elements of contestation, but is the only way forward. The key remains to decipher the complexities of contemporary wars and the nuanced understanding of accommodative victory, to find a mutually acceptable path for the cessation of hostilities.

### EVOLVING CANVAS OF CONTEMPORARY WARS

The rapid transformation in society and the global power play have brought about rapid changes in the geo-political and geo-economic canvas impacting war and peace. From competition to coercion to confrontation and conflict is now an escalatory ladder of contestation. While the traditional linkages between war and politics remain, the mechanisms driving these have altered.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary wars have witnessed a tectonic shift in the goals of war, the rules of war, the players, and the instruments of war, reshaping its character and redefining its lexicon. Culture, history, geography, technology, society, geostrategy, doctrines, economics, trade, financial system,

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5 Jo Adetunji, "Can wars no longer be won?", *The Conversation*, December 2, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/can-wars-no-longer-be-won-126068>.

6 Mohammad I. Zaidi, "The conduct of war and the notion of victory: a theory and definition of victory", Cranfield CERES, December 1, 2010, <http://dspace.lib.cranfield.ac.uk/handle/1826/4684>.



and nationalism all combine to shape the modern battlespace. Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan are glaring recent examples and the Russia-Ukraine War has added a new dimension of pawns, proxies and players complicating the notion of victory. There are more questions than answers. Are 21st century wars driven by objectives beyond the politico-military? Are proxies and mercenaries the new players in these hybrid conflicts? Are players driving and making war a lucrative business, including arms and oil/energy lobbies? Are these lobbies backdoor financial support systems, thus gaining political space? These are just some of the harsh realities of 21st century wars.

The Clausewitzian meaning of war gaining political favour, which dominated military thinking, that war has only one grammar, is today questioned by the experiences of the never-ending wars of today. The debate is on—How do we know we are at war? Who is participating in the war? What rules govern war? Who is winning the war? How do we know the war has ended?<sup>7</sup> Thus, the national security calculus and understanding of war dynamics demand a relook through a more holistic prism.

Prevailing in the future battlespace will also require a deep and wider understanding of its constituents and complexities. The weaponization of everyday technologies and the socio-cultural battle space used by those within and outside the military is fast transforming perceptions of good over evil. Perception management has become the new centre of gravity and narratives are scripting the contest of victory. These may, however, often diverge widely from ground realities. Thus, conflict resolution has also gone beyond those who

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7 A.B. Shivane, “Making The Military Future-Ready”, *Raksha Anirveda*, January 14, 2023, <https://raksha-anirveda.com/making-the-military-future-ready/>.

initiate conflict to geopolitical complexities and cheerleaders who grab the opportunity for their power play and national interest. In this muddle, there are players, pawns, proxy actors, mercenaries, fence-sitters, opportunists, and bulls with varied diverse interests playing for their selfish goals. This makes securing positive peace even more difficult.

### **DEFEAT MECHANISM**

Military power is a principal variable in theories of the geopolitics, geostrategy, state legitimacy, national identity, growth, and culture of a nation-state. It empowers diplomacy and is insurance for a nation's growth trajectory. Thus, its application in war must result in desired outcomes. This is also directly proportional to the nation's long-term investment in its armed forces for the D Day.

Traditionally, there have been three main drivers of military victory.



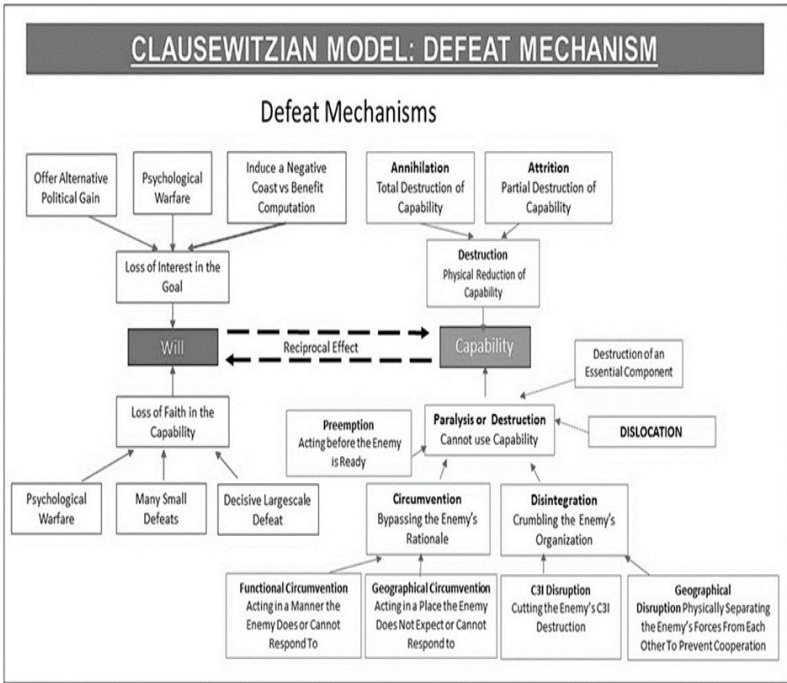
One, material resources, sometimes referred to as force ratios; two, a manoeuvre which results in the dislocation of enemy forces and three, nontangibles, such as human valour, courage, morale, and team spirit. Of course, technology and multi-domain capabilities are inbuilt into each of these. Their

interplay and synergy contribute to the theory of the defeat mechanism.

Defeat Mechanism is the process that targets the physical capabilities and the psychological vulnerabilities of an army, eventually resulting in its paralysis. The adversary's physical capability can be adversely diluted by the degradation of its manpower and its war-fighting resources, but not necessarily their complete annihilation. Often, partial destruction or sufficient degradation is adequate to dilute the warfighting capability below the desired threshold, because of the psychological effect of accumulating casualties and loss of means. The three principal means of defeat are preemption, dislocation, and disruption/degradation. Preempting the enemy army's preparations for offensive or defensive action, dislocating (physical, functional, moral, and temporal) its capabilities and disrupting its lines of communication or destroying of an essential component in its structure may also prevent that army from fulfilling its tasks.<sup>8</sup> This, in essence, is manoeuvre warfare, which targets the ability to fight and saps the will to fight. The will to fight can also be uprooted by convincing the enemy of the futility of fighting, or that the cost-benefit will be extremely adverse.

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8 Eado Hecht, "Defeat Mechanisms: The Rationale Behind the Strategy", *Infinity Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 2, 2014, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/Defeat-Mechanisms-The-Rationale-Behind-the-Strategy/>.



The above Clausewitzian model is too simplistic, yet enduring when applied to the contemporary battlespace. The complexities surrounding geopolitics, war economics, diplomacy, and strategy necessitate redefining the defeat mechanism. Victory and defeat, although opposites, are not binary. The lexicon of victory is as ambiguous as the perplexity of defeat. The key issue in the defeat mechanism is that the continuing power of physical and psychological resistance of the enemy must lie below the winnability scale. Thus, strategic success or strategic advantage assumes a more plausible term in contemporary conflicts.

Victory and defeat in contemporary conflict are inherently ambiguous, subjective, and transitory. Though victory can be

hideously costly in modern war, and invariably accomplishes far less than it is intended to achieve, it is not an entirely vacuous concept.<sup>9</sup> Victory may be seen in the context of achieving or denying an adversary politico-military objectives/end states, at least cost and minimum time, and is thus indicative of a better outcome than that which existed before the war. Sometimes the status quo for an adversary also constitutes a victory. What derives from antiquity here is not the general concept of victory itself, but the notion that, instead of yielding an absolute victory for one side and, conversely, an undeniable defeat for the other, modern armed conflicts are prone to descend into protracted, drawn-out endgames. Success is a matter of perspective, which varies with the perception of the players involved and nations at large. The challenge arising from this is to rethink how we define military victory in the 21st-century warfare. Historian Christopher Hill once wrote, “The ever-changing character of war demands that every generation must also rethink its understanding of military victory.”<sup>10</sup>

### COMPLEXITIES OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT

Wars are fought for securing peace, yet the connotation of peace, be it positive or negative peace, remains ambiguous. Negative peace implies that there is no war, no violent conflict between states or within states. Yet the absence of war by itself does not guarantee peace or prevent confrontation below the threshold of war. It is more commonly called ‘No War, No Peace’. Positive peace is essentially the restoration of trust

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9 Cian O’Driscoll, “Can wars no longer be won? *The Conversation*, December 2, 2019, <https://ca.sports.yahoo.com/news/wars-no-longer-won-060024739.html>.

10 Cian O’Driscoll, “What If No One Can Ever Really Win a War Anymore?” *The National Interest*, February 22, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/what-if-no-one-can-ever-really-win-war-anymore-126016?page=0%2C2>.

and relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population and the constructive resolution of conflict. The views of what constitutes a better peace will often differ widely between belligerents.

Victory as a concept is mystifying in general and even more so in the context of contemporary wars. Military victories alone do not conclude the outcome of these wars. They provide opportunities and conditions for the desired political end state. Even a political end state is not always a product of premeditated strategic choice. War termination often lacks rationality, and rarely follows a course anticipated by the participants, as states rarely finish wars for the same reasons that they start them. Different lenses can be used to look at the idea as several factors impede a clear-cut understanding of victory.<sup>11</sup> Victory is also subjective, with perceptions of the various actors in conflict, at different levels, varying according to their beliefs and manipulation. At the basic level are the physical, moral, temporal and perception domains, with a host of sub-factors adding to their complexity. This results in shades of victory and defeat. One of the most common synonyms for victory is ‘to prevail’, ‘to triumph’, whilst another common synonym is ‘success’. To reiterate, victory and defeat, although opposites, are not binary, as illustrated in the Figure below, introducing a scale of success – defeat, lose – not lose, stalemate, not win – win, and victory. These scales are closely related yet independent variables that can be used in analysing and understanding contemporary conflict.<sup>12</sup>

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11 E.A. de Landmeter, “What constitutes victory in modern war?”, *Militaire Spectator*, March 20, 2018, <https://militairespectator.nl/artikelen/what-constitutes-victory-modern-war>.

12 A.B. Shivane, “The Notion of Victory in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Warfare”, in AK Singh & Narender Kumar eds., *Battle Ready for the 21 Century*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2022, pp. 6-27.



Victory and defeat are opposites but are connected and can be described on sliding scales as a function of the interaction between opponents.<sup>13</sup> More often, military victory refers to achieving a favourable military end state for the furtherance of the war's political object. However, the defeated adversary and its population may choose not to accept their defeat and the peace on the victor's terms. Thus, victory does not necessarily end violence and often marks a transition to negative peace. Victory is also inherently subjective; it depends on the viewpoint of the actors involved in the conflict and how the result is perceived and assessed.<sup>14</sup> The subjectivity problem is further enhanced by the multiple actors, in particular non-state actors, and their wide variety of interests, methods, and goals. Thus, victory as a concept for contemporary wars/conflicts is ambiguous and debatable. The political and economic dimensions of victory, too, have outgrown the military. Further

13 E.A. de Landmeter, op. cit.

14 A.B. Shivane, "Youth and the changing geopolitical landscape", *Taaza Khabar*, May 2023, <https://taazakhabarnews.com/youth-and-the-changing-geopolitical-landscape/>.

victory is not just what is achieved in the battlespace, but also what is perceived by both domestic and global audiences. As seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and the ongoing Ukraine war, the formulation of victory now requires more long-term, abstract, and less tangible and immediate terms of interpretation. The diversity in perception of victory and defeat is now related to viewing different perspectives and their changes over time. Around-the-clock media coverage, information warfare and social media plausibly affect perceptions. Modern armed conflict has thus become a battle of narratives as much as a violent struggle. The multitude of complexities surrounding this illusive concept is indicated in the Figure below.



The notion of victory also requires considerable strategic patience, because while the hostilities may cease, the political, social, cultural, and economic issues may remain unresolved. Concurrently, both sides reach levels of strategic exhaustion and need to re-strategise, rebuild, and reapply forces. The fatigue factor of the public, because of destruction, loss of lives and economic costs, also plays its part in the dynamics, as nationalism is an important driver of conflict. Post-conflict reconstruction is another challenge for a war-torn economy, which exposes its vulnerabilities to exploitation by others. Such are the nuances of the notion of victory and beyond.



## **RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR- A CASE STUDY**

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is another never-ending war which is redefining the global order and creating new polarities. It may be termed as a non-contact, hybrid, third-world war, with players, proxies, and pawns. While the friction is embedded in the historical and geopolitical context, the narratives are built around the expansion of spheres of influence or regaining perceived historically lost influence. In short the US' NATO-fication and Russia's Russification. A war that has been provoked and ignited by the US-led West and initiated by Russia.

The provocation by the US and UK was essentially to expand NATO to Ukraine and Georgia, to surround Russia in the Black Sea region with NATO countries (Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Georgia, in counterclockwise order) having installed an anti-Russian regime in Ukraine. The ugly outcome is the US and UK have destroyed Ukraine and European economies for personal agendas of their leaders. An assurance of respecting Russian security concerns and assurances not to 'NATOfy' Ukraine could have averted this catastrophe. The fate of Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Yemen, Pakistan, and Yugoslavia is a testimony of the past outcomes of proxy confrontations. Russian President Vladimir Putin, on several occasions, stated that the war was not against Ukraine but against the United States. In a real sense, he was right, even though he meant it only as propaganda. Ukraine remains a puppet in the game, no longer in control of its destiny or the trajectory of the war. China as a fence sitter is having the last laugh, with the decline in US global power and status and Washington's progressive retrenchment. PLA is learning lessons and fine-tuning its possible Taiwan adventure, assessing US response capabilities and vulnerabilities. US' short-sighted

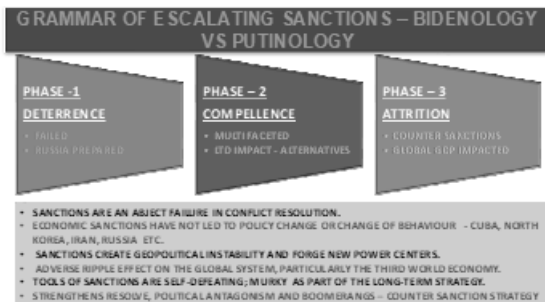
North Atlantic focus to counter Russia has created space for its principal competitor, China, in the South Pacific. China's assertive rise and global realignments are now accelerating the shift in global power from the West to the East.

While Ukrainian President Zelensky has stated that the war in Ukraine has united the West, it is also true that it has divided the West from the rest. The global south reels under its fallout. The gap between the West and the rest goes beyond the rights and wrongs of the war. The Russia-Ukraine war is not about democracy versus autocracy, as is being projected by the West. The fact is, two-thirds of the world's population lives in countries that are officially neutral or supportive of Russia. These countries do not form some kind of axis of autocracy; they include several notable and highly respected democracies, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa. The United States, 4,400 miles away across the Atlantic Ocean, has convinced almost every nation in Europe to voluntarily commit resources and arms to Ukraine and join the sanctions bandwagon against Russia. This has led to economic suicide and the destabilization of societies. The European Union (EU) had huge dependencies on Russia for its economic sustenance and livelihood. Since the EU's energy decoupling from Russia massive plants, mills, and factories have closed disrupting the European economy and bringing misery to the people.

The tragedy of the Ukrainian conflict is embedded in the historical past and geopolitical present. In particular, the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the Treaty of Versailles 1919, the Marshall Plan of 1948, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, and the US-driven unilateralism of the last three decades post-disintegration of the Soviet Union. Between 1997 and 2021, NATO expanded manifold in five tranches, to bring the threat into the Russian backyard. A clash was inevitable, when no assurances of retraction or peace found favour.

Ironically, Ukraine became the West-enticed pawn in the game and was led down the garden path in an essentially Russia – US power play. The US-led Western proxy narrative changed from saving Ukraine to weakening Russia to NATOfication, albeit through militarisation of the rest. Instead of peace and diplomacy the option exercised by the US-led West was arming and sanctions, which have substantially boomeranged. The grammar of escalating sanctions has been an abject failure, especially in pushing the conflict to an end. Moreover, it has created alternative markets for the Russians.

The conflict still raging in Ukraine has left widespread chaos, destruction and suffering in its wake – a calamity whose proportion will be known only to the war-ravaged country that has, indeed, been ‘Ukrained’ (let down by those who propped it up).<sup>15</sup>



Once again diplomacy took a backseat in preference to expanding/curtailing spheres of influence, with little concern for human miseries and catastrophic destruction. The art of conflict prevention and conflict resolution gave way to the science of conflict extension for selfish agendas. The Western narrative of Russia losing, ‘ostriches’ the realities of Russia not only gaining large vital territory but, more importantly,

15 A.B. Shivane, “Russia-Ukraine Conflict: The Great Betrayal”, *Raksha-Anirveda*, March 24, 2022, <https://raksha-anirveda.com/russia-ukraine-conflict-the-great-betrayal/>.

controlling the Ukrainian industrial heartland, its energy resources, its ports, and shores, and making it a landlocked, economically ravaged, skeleton state. The Ukraine counter offensive, a show of strength of the western war machines, has yet to measurably turn the tide and succeeds more on narratives than the battlefield.

A protracted conflict risks possible nuclear escalation or a direct Russian-NATO conflict. Ukraine's dependency as a nation-state would rest on the levers of the West which will cause budgetary challenges of reconstruction. The global economic fallout has already cast its shadows, including volatility in food and energy prices. For the US, the consequences of weakening Russia will be adverse, coming at the cost of strengthening China and creating a powerful Eurasian power bloc, which is likely to eventually challenge US primacy. Against this backdrop, the West's notion of victory as the primary fueler of this war remains debatable. Russia under Putin would look for signs of fatigue in the West but will not accept concessions over the immense gains secured at the cost of lives and resources. Nevertheless, the protraction of the conflict will increasingly turn Moscow's strategic outlook negative and impact its long-term economy. Thus, Russia too needs to define its own notion of victory or honourable exit.

#### **NO VICTORY NO VANQUISHED-THE STRATEGIC SCOREBOARD**

The reality is no one is winning the war in Ukraine. After more than 15 months of war, neither Russia nor Ukraine and its Western allies are any closer to their desired end state. Neither side has the capacity – aided or unaided – to achieve a decisive victory. The real challenge is, who will lose less? So, while both sides continue to take losses, the moot question is, who will suffer more. In this war, there is no righteous sides, nor any noble intentions. There is mistrust and unreasonable conditions for peace being offered, more so from those arming

## No Victor, No Vanquished

the war. These will never allow a cease fire to get off the starter block. Thus, negotiations remain stalled and offensive/counter-offensive seesaw battles continue. The focus remains on aiding the parties in conflict to fight, rather than facilitating peace.

RUSSIA UKRAINE CONFLICT- NO ONE WILL WIN THE WAR; IT IS WHO WILL LOSE LESS ?			
COUNTRY	GAINS	LOSSES	NOTION OF VICTORY
<b>RUSSIA</b>	RUSSIFICATION. TERRITORIAL GAINS, DEMILITISATION, DE NAZIFICATION of UKRAINE	MILITARISED EUROPE, EXPANDED NATO, CHINA DEPENDENCY- ECONOMY, HI TECH AND UNLIKELY AN INDEPENDENT POLE	GLOBAL RESPECT OR DISCREDIT? SUBDUING UKRAINE? STRATEGICALLY WEAKENING US?
<b>USA (PROXY)</b>	NATOFICATION. CONTAIN AND WEAKEN RUSSIA. ARMS, ENERGY, POST WAR CONTRACTS. EUROPE DEPENDENCY ON US	CHINA-RUSSIA-IRAN? EURASIAN AXIS? GLOBAL FINANCIAL SYSTEM, ECO COST. RETRENCHMENT. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR CHINA AND NEW WORLD ORDER.	WEAKENED RUSSIA? NATOFICATION? CREATING DEPENDENCY IN EUROPE?
<b>UKRAINE</b>	GLOBAL IMAGE- NATIONALISM	TERRITORIAL, SOVEREIGNTY, REFUGEES, ECONOMY. DEVASTATION. PAWN STATE STATUS.	RESISTANCE – US MONEY & WEAPONARY VS CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE AS A NATION?
<b>EUROPE</b>	PERCEIVED THREAT AND	ENERGY, INSTABILITY, ECO, REFUGEES, DEF EXPENDITURE, HOSTAGE TO USA? SOARING INFLATION AND LOW SUPPLIES. RECESSION?	CRACKS WITHIN – FASTER NEGOTIATIONS. STRAT GOAL? STRATEGIC COLLECTIVE SECURITY?
<b>CHINA</b>	STRATEGIC LEVERAGE – NEW POLES – COUNTER US LEVERAGE STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY. RUSSIAN DEPENDENCY AND NEW FINANCIAL ORDER?	ECO LINKAGE WITH EUROPE DISRUPTED.	WINING TIME AND DIVERTING ADVERSARY; LIMITING US GLOBAL POWER STATUS?
<b>WORLD</b>	MULTILATERALISM – MULTIENGAGEMENT	INFLATION, FOOD, ENERGY, RECESSION, GLOBAL INSTABILITY	IS THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE????

## RUSSIA

The Russian aim at the start of the war was to prevent further NATO expansion, have the alliance refrain from deploying assault weapon systems on Russian borders and, finally, roll back the bloc's military capability and infrastructure in Europe to where they were in 1997, when the NATO-Russia Founding Act<sup>16</sup> was signed. Apart from this the stated aim was to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, which seemed to be getting closer to the Western camp and NATO ambitions. Ironically, the military-economic-political aid extended to Ukraine by the West, the rise of anti-Russian opinion among the Ukrainian population, and the granting of EU candidate member status to Ukraine now makes the country's Western turn a *fait accompli* and its Western alliance even stronger. A strategic miscalculation Russia did not foresee from what was started as a quick strike, but that has transformed into a protracted, never-ending war. Instead of restricting NATO expansion, Russia today faces the reality of Finland as a new member, and Sweden on the anvil of the alliance, after years of neutrality even at the height of the Cold War. Another fallout has been the militarisation of its flanks, clearly against Russia, by NATO's European partners, in a major reversal to peaceful coexistence. Russia has thus ensured for itself long-term hostility with Europe right on its borders, as much as traditionally with the US. Russia has certainly made large territorial gains, with a high casualty rate, and financial strain, but ironically ended up with the extension of a direct land border with NATO by over 1,000 kilometres in terms of Finland. In addition, while the sanctions have had little impact and remained counterproductive in the short term, their high

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16 *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation* signed in Paris, France, May 27, 1997, [https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official\\_texts\\_25468.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm).

economic cost in the long term is yet to be seen. Ironically, Russia has also become China's junior partner, to plug gaps in the economic and technology sphere, which it historically dominated. Russia's economic, investment and technological needs were earlier being met by the advanced economies of the West, thus China's pivot becomes the default option. The reality is, from a major power with a say in the world order, Russia is now threatened with a dwindling war economy and military resource commitment, and will find it difficult to remain an independent pole in a future multipolar world.

## USA

The US aim was clearly to contain Russia and its allies and NATOfy Europe including Ukraine and territories adjacent to Russia. The subsequent deployment of NATO arms was only a matter of time. The US armament and oil industry continues to boom with orders from Europe and Ukraine, after a brief lull following the withdrawal from Afghanistan. US arms dealers and oil producers have reaped billions of dollars in the windfall from the Ukraine war price surge, recording the biggest profits in recent times. Thus, Ukraine remains a booming industry and testing ground for the West, with the further carrot of a reconstruction boom after the cessation of hostilities. Ironically business and selfish national interests of those outside fighting are calling the shots. The loss of life and mayhem of war with the continuation of hostilities is not the focus of pawns, players, and proxies in this war.

The greatest threat to the US is posed not by bleeding Russia but by a belligerent China, which is seeking to displace the US as the world's dominant power. The US may gain in arms, energy sales and post-war contracts, but the biggest strategic loss is getting Russia-China-Iran together in strategic partnership, closer than ever before. It may also be the

beginning of the US decline and quest for alternate global/localised financial systems, undermining its grip on the current global financial system.

## **UKRAINE**

After 2014, instead of rolling back, Kyiv increased its military ties to the West and became an enhanced opportunity partner of NATO in 2020, with the US continuing to affirm Ukraine's aspirations to join the alliance. The Russia-Ukraine war is a manifestation of the Russia – US rivalry, and Ukraine is the scapegoat. Ukraine has lost territorial integrity, and sovereignty, has 9.6 million refugees and a devastated country in all spheres, and is currently under Martial Law. It has played the blind puppet to the West. Ukraine's war and rising inflation have driven four million children into poverty. Several thousand soldiers and civilians have been killed and millions displaced with catastrophic damage to infrastructure and basic amenities such as shelter, food, clean water, and electricity. This has left scars for many a generation to come.

## **EUROPE**

The EU's decoupling from Russian energy will have a negative impact of soaring inflation and low supplies for households and industry, which could push the region into a recession. Such a scenario could have already started creating fissures in European unity, with France and Germany seemingly more eager for a faster-negotiated solution and accommodation of Russia within Europe. Europe, especially Germany, will lose energy, peace, and security, will have to spend more on defence, and will have sizeable refugee load, mixed in with mercenaries. There will also be a measurable loss of strategic autonomy to the USA.



## CHINA

China's response to the Russia-Ukraine War has been a careful balancing act with distance diplomacy at the core. It needs to be seen through the lens of China's geostrategic competition with the US. China has refused to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, opposed economic sanctions imposed by the West, and abstained or sided with Russia in United Nations votes on the war in Ukraine. It has pursued a policy of neutrality, adopting a superficial posture of peace making, to shape the international order. The now infamous joint declaration issued on February 4 in which President Putin and President Xi pledged their "no limits" partnership also referred to "international relations entering a new era." A protracted Russia – Ukraine war with the commitment of the US and Western resources seems to serve China's strategic interest. It provides both strategic opportunity and an understanding of US-led capabilities and vulnerabilities on the platter. It also prepares Beijing for future economic warfare and has helped China reap massive economic benefits from Russia's misadventure and US sanctions.

Further, along with Russia, Beijing aims to weaken the all-powerful US dollar as a global currency and create a new financial order with the Yuan's expanded role. The discounted oil supplies, grains and coal denominated in renminbi (RMB) rather than US dollars, have added to its strategic reserves. China is now the equal largest importer of Russian oil and has signed a new 30-year gas deal.<sup>17</sup> The termination of the war or a victory for either side would not be in China's interest. A Ukraine victory would strengthen the hegemony of the US-

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17 Stuart Coles et. al., "Seven ways Russia's war on Ukraine has changed the world", Chatham House, February 20, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/02/seven-ways-russias-war-ukraine-has-changed-world>.

led West, and would be detrimental to Beijing's 'reunification' goals. If Russia wins decisively, it will enhance its sphere of influence and possible economic integration with Europe, again would reverse Russia's increasing dependency on China. China would like to keep Russia as a dependent weaker partner and a resource asset. Thus, a lose-lose situation in the war best meets its strategic interest.

### **THE GLOBAL SOUTH AND THE REST**

The war has not only created instability in Europe, but it has also created a food and energy security crisis globally, including in the Middle East and Africa, when the world was barely recovering from the pandemic. It has divided the world opinion into Ayes, Noes and those who abstained – the last category essentially from Africa and Asia. The world has suffered inflation, food and energy insecurities, and risks of recession, as a result of this big power contestation. Non-West and many neutral countries have not joined the West in sanctioning Russia, a win-win situation for both the former categories. The US's untrustworthy past and interventionist opportunism have also cast shadows. It serves the national interest of Russia not to be isolated and secure alternate markets, while the other side benefits from cheap oil in plenty. The benefit to the Global South of not siding with the West, however, will demand both time and resources and Russia efforts to continue to expand its influence as a global power will remain a challenge.

### **INDIA AND THE UKRAINE WAR FALLOUT**

As regards India, it has played its cards well in balancing its conflicting choices. India's stand has been principled and bold. Every nation has the right to carve its foreign policy based on its national interests and make choices based on a cost-benefit

analysis.<sup>18</sup> The UN stands antiquated and defunct as a global peacemaker. India's stand is not pro-Russia or pro-US, it is pro-India, and works for the preservation and furtherance of its national interest. There are no interests but self-interests in *realpolitik*. There is nothing known as absolute strategic autonomy; strategic dependence is suicidal; so strategic balancing in pursuit of one's national interest is pragmatic. India will have to balance the trinity of US-Russia-China to meet its national interests in the short, medium, and long term. Both Russia and US need an emergent India, as much as India needs them for geopolitical balancing and meeting its technology and economic needs.

In *realpolitik*, strategic opportunism is now an acceptable norm. India is no more a swing power, but a balancing power based on its national interests. India stands at the cusp of strategic opportunity, from being a spectator to a player in the global arena. In the present geopolitical context, the world needs India more than India needs the world, because of its geostrategic location, its economic resilience and military capability, duly empowered by decisive polity and agile diplomacy. Thus, India needs to play its card well in a long-term perspective.

However, India needs to learn the lessons so far from the ongoing conflict, both from the Russian and the Ukrainian perspective. India will have to fight its battles alone. No nation will step into another's conflict zone, irrespective of strategic partnerships and projected bonhomie. Moreover, the sanctions will hurt India's energy security, economy, and military modernization plans. The huge dependency on Russian equipment will have its challenges, especially in conflict

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18 A.B. Shivane, "Diplomacy in Defining Russian-Ukraine Conflict", *Scholar Warrior*, Autumn 2022, <https://www.claws.in/publication/scholar-warrior-autumn-2022/>.

scenarios. The emergency procurement, as in the past, from a war zone in Russia, may not be pragmatic. *Atmanirbharta* (self-reliance) is a strategic necessity in the pursuance and preservation of national interest. Yet, *Atmanirbharta* is a long-term imperative; in the short and medium term, it is a tedious journey with several ambiguities and challenges. Self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and technology infusion is desirable in all spheres, particularly defence; but the reality is, we still need imports. It will take time to reduce imports and increase exports. Till then we need to make the best of both worlds without creating dependencies.

Militarily, India needs to bridge the capability deficit in the non-kinetic domain as well as the kinetic domain, which are mutually complementary as manifestly demonstrated in the Ukraine conflict. The Russia-Ukraine war has emboldened India's primary adversary China. China continues to deny border resolution and projects the new *status quo ante* as peace and tranquility. A typical 'salami slicing' approach. The trade dependency on China has only increased manifold, as also the adverse balance in trade. This gives China strategic leverage.

The voids in C5ISR, Space capabilities, cyber and IW also merit focus. The cliché 'War is not an option' is a self-inflicted injury. Conventional wars with hybrid content are here to stay and we need to prepare for them in all domains, with synergy. 'Boots and Tracks' on the ground will remain predominant. Yet the space, sky and oceans will be critical for dominating and deterring future threats. The greatest weakness lies in joint warfare capabilities, beyond just semantics of 'theaterisation'. The military needs to embed joint warfare in its foundation warfighting construct and move from jointness to joint dependencies. It requires a cultural revolution of minds and souls beyond just structures or doctrines.

Another area for military strategic and operational leadership reorientation is the need to imbibe a preemptive and proactive offensive outlook based on the 3D's – domination, dislocation, and denial. Our present deterrence and warfighting strategy remains essentially defensive and reactive with glaring recent examples of Kargil and Galwan. This has led to repeated strategic surprise and loss of lives.

India has battled well on the diplomatic front. Yet it needs to visualise the strategic future. It needs to envision the dynamic geopolitical melee and be prepared for the entire spectrum of contingencies employing all instruments of national power in symphony. Time is critical and India needs to be prepared to prevail with a sense of urgency.<sup>19</sup> Capabilities take time, while the intentions of adversaries can change overnight. Future threats will need to be envisioned and war-gamed at the national level. The ability to envision future scenarios and to be prepared for the worst case, is to be wise and forewarned. No country be it an ally or strategic partner can be depended upon in adversity. This is an era of strategic opportunism and *realpolitik*.

## CONCLUSION

Wars of the 21st century are complex, uncertain, and never-ending. At best, they result in negative peace. The trajectory of conflict and conflict resolution is no longer in the control of any one set of leaders or individuals. This is an era of hybrid wars with players, proxies, and pawns. The notion of victory or defeat in these wars is an ambiguous and complex relationship of narratives and counternarratives. The truth may be altogether different and never known. These wars are unwinnable. Thus, the competition is – who is losing more? Further, war has gone

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19 Ibid.

beyond just the battlespace and has weaponised all instruments of national power. Thus, the impact is both regional and global. Yet a strong self-reliant modernised military will be the primary instrument of deterrence for a nation, duly supported by a resilient economy and decisive polity/diplomacy. The military remains the critical instrument of statecraft for exerting national will.<sup>20</sup>

As regards the Russia-Ukraine War, the key to peace in Ukraine is addressing the roots of the war, which is Ukraine's neutrality and NATO non-enlargement, in return for Russian guarantees of Ukrainian independence and sovereignty. Some borders will have to be realigned before they expand further. This is a reality which cannot be wished away. US-led weaponry will not result in victory or end the war for Ukraine. Its protraction is also accompanied by the dangerous potential of its escalation and expansion beyond Ukraine. Ironically, Ukraine remains a victim of unreasonable and unattainable US strategic aspirations, and a mere pawn. The first step for peace negotiations to commence is to stop provocation, declare a ceasefire even if temporary and start a dialogue. The key players to stop the war will be the US and Russia. Zelensky could have an opportunity to get a good face-saving deal from the Russians, if the US backs a diplomatic solution. Yet only time will reveal the unpredictable trajectory on which this war is headed. Till then, it will be mayhem and destruction, which will set Russia, the US-led West and Ukraine back in time.

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20 B.S. Dhanoa, "Russia-Ukraine war: New face of 21st century conflict - no victor and no vanquished", *India Today*, June 1, 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/opinion-columns/story/russia-ukraine-war-decisive-victory-achievable-1957065-2022-06-01>.



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# **Counterterrorism Cooperation Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership**

**Don McLain Gill\***

The Philippines, an archipelago containing over 7,000 islands, has a complex security environment not only due to external traditional threats, but also because of various non-traditional security challenges that range from militancy to piracy and terrorism. The Southeast Asian state also faces the world's longest running communist insurgency, led by the New People's Army (NPA), that has endured for six decades. Additionally, while over 86 per cent of its population is Roman Catholic, the Philippines also faces a Muslim separatist movement in the southern island of Mindanao. This reality explains why Manila has placed a distinct focus on internal and domestic security for the longest time.

With the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, (henceforth, 9/11) restructured how states viewed and understood the dynamics and evolving nature of security threats coming from terrorism and terrorist

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activities. The catastrophic 9/11 attacks had two important lessons for states: first, the unfolding process of globalisation, the increase in the cross-border flow of people, and rapid technological advancements have provided non-state actors across the world with a conducive environment to carry out attacks, with critical international security implications; second, the 9/11 attacks also showed how the most materially powerful state in the world was unable to effectively shield itself from the disruptive forces of terrorism.

Following the United States' (US) initiation of a global war against terror under the leadership of President George W. Bush, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) also unanimously adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006, which served as a pivotal blueprint for the states to address the exacerbating, deepening, and broadening contours of terrorism through individual, multilateral, and regional frameworks.

The global attention on the need to address terrorism resonated deeply within Manila's defence establishment and policy-makers. In the initial years of the 21st century, the alliance with the US was largely utilised by the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the context of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.<sup>1</sup> In fact, to demonstrate her government's commitment to the global war against terror, the Philippines quickly agreed to take part in the US-led coalition in Iraq. However, it was not until the administration of President Benigno Aquino III that Manila began recalibrating its security perspectives towards a more

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1 Rommel Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine–American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2002, p. 294, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798598>.

external-oriented focus on territorial defence.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that the focus on territorial defence completely outweighed Manila's internal threat perception brought up by terrorism. Rather, there remains a notable focus on these issues due to the evolving nature of terrorist activities, along with advancements in technology and the increasing movement of people across borders.

Today, the Indo-Pacific has cemented its role at the forefront of international geopolitics not only because of its dynamism but also because of the deepening and broadening of various traditional and non-traditional threats. Within the region, the Philippines holds a particularly important position, given its geographical location in maritime Southeast Asia and its centrality in the brewing power competition between the US and China. Nevertheless, along with the significance of its geopolitical role, lies the continuous exacerbation of threats in the non-traditional security realm. Moreover, given that the nature of contemporary Indo-Pacific politics is largely characterised by its interconnectedness and growing interdependence among states in the realms of economics, security, and social affairs, the complexity of transnational terrorism becomes an even bigger threat for regional peace and stability.

In the Philippines' fight against terrorism, it has largely relied on the US and its 'hub and spokes network' in the Western Pacific. The US retains a dominant and influential role in providing material aid towards Manila's efforts to curb terrorist activities. Moreover, the Philippines also participates in regional counterterrorism frameworks within the Association

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2 Renato de Castro, "The Aquino Administration's Balancing Policy against an Emergent China: Its Domestic and External Dimensions", *Pacific Affairs* Volume 87, Number 1, 2014, p. 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43590820>.

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to collectively address the growing problems created by transnational terrorism. However, given that any security issue in the Indo-Pacific has direct or indirect implications for regional states in extended neighbourhoods, it is necessary for Manila to leverage its strategic position to forge and expand its cooperation on counterterrorism, even with states that are not among its traditional partners. Diversifying its strategic partnerships will allow Manila to not only enhance or broaden its capacity and knowledge but also to expand its security network in the region. In this context, the role of the emerging Philippines-India security partnership must be highlighted.

In international affairs, security cooperation is often viewed as one of the most critical areas for cooperation and collaboration between states, as it entails sensitive intelligence sharing and access to each other's defence infrastructure. Hence, notable security cooperation between states only occurs when there is mutual trust, shared interests, and common goals. Given that Philippines-India security ties have only recently strengthened, Manila and New Delhi must sustain this momentum to maximise the utility of their emerging partnership.

The Philippines and India are at the centre of this unfolding security dilemma brought about by the compounding challenges of terrorism. While both states may have different approaches towards issues of terrorism within and outside their respective borders, it is important to note that both states share common challenges in terms of the presence of factions with ties to international or regional terror groups. Therefore, this paper argues that, as the rise of the Indo-Pacific continues to link both the Philippines and India within one strategic region, it will be practical for both states to enhance their recently reinvigorated

## Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

security partnership to not only encompass traditional issues, but also non-traditional ones, with a special emphasis on their shared concerns on terrorism. Additionally, both states also have the potential to evolve their growing security partnership in both multilateral and institutional formats.

The first section provides a concise overview of the various issues of terrorism the Philippines continues to face and how Manila seeks to address them through important legislations. The second section will provide context to the traditional bilateral, institutional, and sub-regional cooperative frameworks Manila engages in to spearhead cooperation on counterterrorism. In this context, the importance of the US as a traditional security provider is highlighted, along with existing ASEAN and sub-ASEAN mechanisms. The third section points to the growing security partnership between Manila and New Delhi, which has been taking shape since 2016. The last section will provide justification for the need to strengthen and deepen the emerging Philippines-India security partnership, particularly in counterterrorism.

### **TERRORISM IN THE PHILIPPINES**

Against the backdrop of the Philippines' experience with terrorism since its independence in 1946, two specific groups have often been identified in the context of terrorist activities. The first group is composed of Mindanao-based secessionists: including the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and its offshoot, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The second group, based on communist ideology includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army.

These groups, however, are not exclusive. There have been several new strands of terrorist factions that eventually emerged in the 1990s to amplify the fight for Moro Liberation.

Such groups include the Abu Sayyaf Group and other variants, such as the Rajah Solaiman Movement and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. Among these, the Abu Sayyaf Group has consolidated its presence due to devastating attacks on the security of the Philippines. To give an example of its notoriety, Stanford University's Mapping Militants Project (MMP) highlighted how, during the 1990s, the Abu Sayyaf Group was able to swiftly attract national and international attention by engaging in mass violence through bombings, assassinations, kidnapping, and selective attacks on foreigners and Christians.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this particular group also targeted Philippine military officials as a symbol of their disdain towards the national government and the status-quo political boundaries of the state.<sup>4</sup>

Due to increasing movement of people across borders, the rise of foreign fighters and transnational terrorism continue to complicate the national security architecture of the Philippines. From 2014 to 2015, there were a series of attempts by groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Abu Sayyaf Group to demonstrate their transnational characteristics by pledging their allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>5</sup> While the nature, operationalisation, and formality of these pledges are still debated, such acts nevertheless provided significant symbolism for their cause and a boost in their morale, which catalysed more aggressive actions against the Filipino people and the order established

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3 Mapping Militant Organizations, "Abu Sayyaf Group", Stanford University, February, 2022, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/abu-sayyaf-group>.

4 Mapping Militant Organizations, op.cit.

5 Mico Galang, "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: A Direct Threat to the Philippines", *NDCP Policy Brief*, April 23, 2015, p.1, <https://ndcp.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-Islamic-State-of-Iraq-and-Syria-Part-2.pdf>.

by the national government. Furthermore, evidence of foreign terrorist fighters surfaced in the 2017 Marawi siege, albeit in small and limited numbers.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, it can also be observed that the strategies incorporated by terror groups in the Philippines towards their attacks have drastically changed from a pattern of killings, armed attacks, and kidnappings in the past, to a more noticeable focus on suicide bombings in recent years.<sup>7</sup> In fact, between mid-2018 and 2019, the Southeast Asian state witnessed six suicide bombing attacks.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, along with the more emphasised transnational characteristics of terrorism today, the Philippines continues to face not only a deepening but also a broadening of terror activities. It is in this context that that inter-state cooperation for counterterrorism becomes even more important. While Manila has passed important legal frameworks to address the evolving issue, such as the Human Security Act (HSA) of 2007 and Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, along with the formation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the limits to its material capabilities continue to create difficulties in effectively operationalising such endeavours. In fact, the concept of a ‘whole-of-nation’ approach while tackling issues of terrorism has only been recently taken into serious consideration by Manila.

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6 International Crisis Group, “Addressing Islamist Militancy in the Southern Philippines”, Report Number 323, March 18, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/addressing-islamist-militancy-southern-philippines>.

7 Ronald U. Mendoza, Rommel Jude G. Ong, Dion Lorenz L. Romano, and Bernadette Chloe P. Torno, “Counterterrorism in the Philippines”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 15, Number 1, 2022, p. 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26984797>.

8 Ibid.

### **TRADITIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION: BILATERAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND SUB-REGIONAL**

The US is the Philippines' sole treaty ally and its traditional security provider. Washington DC has also been an undeniable force in providing critical support to the Southeast Asian state, particularly in the realm of security. In this context, the role of counterterrorism figures prominently in the US-Philippines alliance.

With the rise of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the 1990s, the US was quick to recognise the perils of the former's expansion in the southern islands of the Philippines. Being one of the oldest treaty allies of the US in the Indo-Pacific, the Philippines presents its uniqueness within the 'hub and spokes system', given its geography, topography, and centrality in Western Pacific geopolitics. Hence, with the emergence and increase in activities by terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, both the US and Philippines acknowledged the need to enhance their counterterrorism cooperation given their large stakes in regional peace and stability.

The Joint United States Military Assistance Group-Philippines (JUSMAG-PHIL) is an essential component of the Philippines-US alliance to strengthen and improve military-to-military interoperability, to limit and neutralise the terrorist threats stemming from southern Philippines. As a part of the JUSMAG-PHIL Special Operations Taskforce Philippines, hundreds of American personnel are deployed to train and improve the capacity of the Philippine armed forces for counterterrorism.<sup>9</sup> The American and Philippine troops also take part in annual exercises such as the as *Balikatan* (literally

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Chalk, "U.S. Security Assistance to the Philippines", *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 1, Issue 3, 2008, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/u-s-security-assistance-to-the-philippines-a-success-story-against-terrorism/>.



“shoulder-to-shoulder”) to hone their individual and collective skills to address the ongoing threats posed by terrorist groups. Another important point is that the Philippines continues to be largest recipient of US military assistance in Asia, receiving over USD 1.14 billion worth of armoured vehicles, planes, small arms, and other defence equipment and training from 2015 to 2022.<sup>10</sup>

While US defence assistance today is more geared towards Manila’s desire to bolster its territorial defence and maritime security, a considerable portion of this assistance has been directed to promote defence reforms tailored to logistics for counterterrorism operations. Moreover, in addition to military assistance, the US has also endeavoured to train Philippine armed forces in a holistic and multi-faceted manner. In fact, the Southeast Asian state is a top recipient of US International Military Education and Training (IMET) support. This kind of assistance encourages participants to acquire crucial understanding and skills, such as norms of engagement, human rights, and international military law (among others), which complement existing military efforts and create the right conditions for peace and stability.<sup>11</sup>

While the US remains the most crucial security partner of the Philippines, Manila also continues to coordinate and participate within ASEAN’s counterterrorism frameworks. Regional cooperation is crucial, given the fluidity of transnational terrorism in the region. Interestingly, before the 9/11 attacks, ASEAN did not delve too comprehensively into issues on terrorism. However, as the US amplified the call

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10 “U.S. grants Philippines \$100 million in foreign military financing”, *Reuters*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-grants-philippines-100-million-foreign-military-financing-2022-10-14/>.

11 US Department of State, “Military Assistance”, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/60649.pdf>.

for a global coalition against terror in 2001, ASEAN speedily mobilised and adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism in November of the same year. It is important to note that ASEAN's approach to terrorism is centred on the view that there is no correlation between a terrorist and a particular religion or race, which reflects the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious demographics of the region.<sup>12</sup>

The Bali bombings in 2002, motivated ASEAN member states to demonstrate their collective commitment more emphatically in the fight against terrorism, given the expanding implications it has for Southeast Asian security. This effort was evidenced in the ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime and the adoption of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT) in January 2007. The ACCT, in particular, serves as a key regional platform for regional states to evaluate and address the continuous spill-over of terrorist activities in the region by harnessing a more functional environment for inter-agency coordination among member states.<sup>13</sup> In addition to these initiatives, the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative (AOEI), which includes intelligence-sharing between member states, also represents the efforts of Southeast Asian states to diversify their approaches towards counterterrorism in the region.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, despite these notable developments within ASEAN, the regional bloc remains obstructed in effectively implementing

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12 US Department of State, "ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism", <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/65902.htm>.

13 ASEAN, "ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism", <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACCT.pdf>.

14 Prashanth Parameswaran, "ASEAN Our Eyes Meeting Spotlights Counterterrorism Cooperation", *The Diplomat*, March 10, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/asean-our-eyes-meeting-spotlights-counterterrorism-cooperation/>.

and operationalising these policies and frameworks at a collective level.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, most responses to terrorism in the region have either been unilateral or sub-regional in nature, due to the institutional and structural limitations of ASEAN. Examples of such attempts include the agreement between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, to establish a joint counter-terrorism framework for action in 2017, a few months after the Marawi siege in Mindanao on May 23, 2017 (in which around 300 people died), where cross-border activity by Southeast Asian militants was observed.<sup>16</sup>

This illustrates that, while traditional modes of cooperation are crucial for the Philippines, there also remain great opportunities to look towards the diversification of strategic partnerships, especially in the context of the increasingly dynamic nature of contemporary terrorism. In this context, it is worth exploring the strengthening of the security partnership between the Philippines and India, which has gained significant momentum since 2016.

#### **FROM 2016 AND BEYOND: DEEPENING PHILIPPINES-INDIA SECURITY TIES**

Despite being Asian neighbours with a shared colonial past and an adherence to democracy, the Philippines and India have maintained cordial relations at best for over two decades, since the end of the Cold War. Notwithstanding the presence of conducive structural conditions since the beginning of the 21st Century, the divergences in state perceptions between Manila

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15 Matthew Bukit, "ASEAN needs to unify its counter-terrorism strategy", *East Asia Forum*, September 22, 2018, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/09/22/asean-needs-to-unify-its-counter-terrorism-strategy/>.

16 Cliff Venzon, "Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia create counter-terrorism axis", *Nikkei Asia*, June 23, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippines-Indonesia-Malaysia-create-counter-terrorism-axis2>.

and New Delhi led to a significantly under-utilised bilateral relationship. This was in contrast with other Southeast Asian states like Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Myanmar, which were able to forge closer strategic relations with India much earlier.

However, upon the electoral victory of former President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, Philippine foreign policy achieved a notable recalibration with the prioritisation of the diversification of strategic partnerships.<sup>17</sup> This opened the door for the Philippines and India to explore, deepen, and broaden their security partnership. From regular high-level visits between both states to the enhancement of naval cooperation and the sale of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, the Philippines-India bilateral partnership witnessed significant developments particularly in the realm of defence. Moreover, the rise of the Indo-Pacific construct, which gained momentum when the US renamed its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, allowed both states to perceive each other as closer Indo-Pacific neighbours, rather than being distant neighbours in South and Southeast Asia. This led to more convergences in interests to preserve and protect the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific's security architecture. In addition, both states also share similar concerns towards a rising and belligerent China.

As President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took office in 2022, the increasing momentum in bilateral ties between Manila and New Delhi is likely to be sustained, given the acknowledgement of the current Philippine President towards the importance of

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17 Don McLain Gill, "The present and future of the Philippines-India partnership", *The Manila Times*, April 28, 2022, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/04/28/opinion/columns/the-present-and-future-of-the-philippines-india-partnership/1841507>.

strengthening Philippines-India ties further.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the potential of the much-needed strategic ice breaker in 2016 between both states must be maximized and leveraged, to expand the scope of existing security relations. Among such areas of expansion is counterterrorism.

### **THE UNDERUTILISED PHILIPPINES-INDIA COUNTER-TERRORISM PARTNERSHIP**

Like the Philippines, India has experienced the brunt of terrorism in its immediate geographic space – from ethno-nationalist terrorism, religious terrorism, and left-wing terrorism, to narco- terrorism and cross border terrorism. In fact, even prior to the 9/11 attacks, India was sounding the alarm bells for the need to amplify the international discourse on terrorism more explicitly. In fact, amid the call for a global war on terror, India was able to play a larger role as a security provider in Asia, especially in the non-traditional realm. To provide an example, in 2001 and 2002, the Indian Navy escorted US ships in the pirate-swarmed Strait of Malacca.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, upon realising India's significance to the peace and security of the continent, the US overtly endorsed the idea that India should continue to play a larger and more active role in Asian security, particularly in Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Filane Mikee Cervantes, "Marcos, India PM vow improved ties, cooperation", *Philippine News Agency*, August 6, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1180766>.

19 "Navy's escort mission to US ships", *The Times of India*, July 17, 2002, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/navys-escort-mission-to-us-ships-still-on/articleshow/16204626.cms>.

20 Sangeetha Kandavel and Joe A Scaria, "Look East, and act East, too: US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to India", *The Economic Times*, July 20, 2011, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/look-east-and-act-east-too-us-secretary-of-state-hillary-clinton-to-india/articleshow/9299669.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/look-east-and-act-east-too-us-secretary-of-state-hillary-clinton-to-india/articleshow/9299669.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst).

The Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005 and the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 accentuated the conditions for inter-state cooperation between India and the Philippines in the area of counterterrorism. More importantly, the growing international characteristics of terrorism have provided both states with common grounds for coordination in this field. The rise of the Indo-Pacific also adds momentum to the incentives to cooperate, given the region's highly vulnerable and interconnected security architecture. Accordingly, India has been providing training to Philippine security personnel and running community-based deradicalisation modules. In line with the warming of security ties between Manila and New Delhi since 2016, several important developments have taken place since then.

The first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on counterterrorism was held in April of that year. In addition, as a sign of New Delhi's overt support for the Southeast Asian state's fight against terror groups in the south, India provided the Philippines with USD 500,000 worth of aid for the rehabilitation of people affected by the Marawi siege of 2017. It must be noted that this was the first time New Delhi provided any form of financial assistance to any state with the specific purpose of combatting terrorist activities.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, as a sign of deepening bilateral security ties, it was reported on October 2022 that the Indian Armed Forces were willing to provide operational and cyber-security training to the Philippine Armed Forces.<sup>22</sup> Given the increasing weaponization of technology by

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21 Rahul Mishra, "India and the Philippines: Time to go beyond the ASEAN Framework", *RSIS*, August 1, 2019, p. 10, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/india-and-the-philippines-time-to-go-beyond-the-asean-framework/>.

22 Priam Nepomuceno, "India to train AFP on operational readiness, cyber security", *Philippine News Agency*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1185721>.

non-state actors, the importance of cyber defence cooperation will not only broaden the scope of security ties between both states but will also provide Manila the much needed platform to boost its cyber capabilities, given its current limited capacity.

The Philippines-India counterterrorism partnership also involves institutional dimensions through an India-ASEAN partnership framework. The Southeast Asian regional bloc continued to engage with its extra-regional partners on a wide array of strategic issues. Throughout the years, India has demonstrated its willingness to strengthen its coordination with ASEAN, particularly in counterterrorism cooperation. This was evident with the signing of the ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism in 2003. Additionally, both sides also agreed to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Work Plan on Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime during the 16th ARF in 2009. More recently, the 2018 Delhi Declaration also serves as a crucial milestone to expand and strengthen efforts between India and ASEAN towards the fight against terrorism. Accordingly, this document emphasised the need to “deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building” through a range of established frameworks, including the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) + India Consultation and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus Experts’ Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, in November 2022,

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23 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations”, January 25, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29386/Delhi+Declaration+of+the+ASEANIndia+Commemorative+Summit+to+mark+the+25th+Anniversary+of+ASEANIndia+Dialogue+Relations>.

ASEAN and India decided to elevate their partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership, which is the highest level of partnership ASEAN accords to its extra-regional partners. This demonstrates the growing strategic convergences between ASEAN member states and India towards the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to institutional collaborations between the Philippines and India through ASEAN, India is also a close strategic partner of Manila's traditional ally and defence partners. Under the Marcos Jr. Administration, the Southeast Asian state has deepened and broadened its security ties with the US, Japan, and Australia. Under the current Philippine government, several firsts were achieved within this multilateral framework – from the expansion of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to the establishment of the US-Philippines-Japan trilateral sea drills in the South China Sea and the potential emergence of a four-way security dialogue between the US, the Philippines, Japan, and Australia. Similarly, India was recognized as a major defence partner of the US, while India-Japan ties enjoy Special Strategic and Global Partnership status. Additionally, India and Australia share a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Furthermore, India, Australia, the US, and Japan operationalize their strong partnerships through bilateral and multilateral formats like the Quad, the Malabar, and the G20.

While the Philippines-India security partnership has strengthened, also encompassing counterterrorism cooperation, much room remains for the further maximization of security ties, given exacerbating threats posed by terrorist activities throughout the Indo-Pacific. Structural conditions remain highly conducive for both states to deepen and broaden their partnership in non-traditional security issues.



## Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

Accordingly, positive signs can be observed from the Marcos Jr. Administration, given its interest in continuing the diversification of strategic partnerships. During a meeting with newly appointed Filipino ambassadors (including a new Philippine ambassador to India), Marcos Jr. emphasized the need to enhance cooperation with like-minded non-traditional partners in the fields of trade, security and defence.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, given the conducive internal and external strategic environment, it will be beneficial for both the Philippines and India to continue bolstering their engagements consistently, to explore more critical areas of mutual interest, particularly in counterterrorism cooperation.

### CONCLUSIONS

Being Indo-Pacific neighbours with shared interests in securing the regional rules-based order and having been at the receiving end of terrorist activities, India and the Philippines are natural partners in the fight against the evolving and multi-faceted characteristics of terrorism. However, throughout most of its post-independence years, the Philippines concentrated on its counterterrorism efforts through improving its internal capacity and utilising existing cooperative frameworks with its traditional ally (and its extended alliance network in the Western Pacific) and with ASEAN member states. However, along with the recalibration of Philippine foreign policy in the latter part of the 21st century's second decade, Manila began exploring new areas of strategic cooperation with non-traditional partners such as India. Since 2016, there have been a series of new and crucial developments in the Philippines-India bilateral partnership – among them, the realm of counterterrorism.

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24 Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos, "PBBM wants 'non-traditional' partners in trade, security", *Philippine News Agency*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1203097>.

While the training of soldiers has been a general pattern since the beginning of the 21st century, the increasing convergence of interests between Manila and New Delhi resulted in the opening of new avenues to deepen counterterrorism cooperation. However, while both internal and external conditions have become quite conducive, much room remains for both states to operationalise their growing security partnership in the domain of non-traditional security cooperation. By deepening coordination in this direction, Manila will benefit not only from India's notable material resources, but also its vast experience in dealing with the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious nature of terrorism. More importantly, given the constant evolution of terrorist threats in the Indo-Pacific, it is only practical for both like-minded states to leverage their growing bilateral strategic ties for mutual benefit.



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# **Understanding the Naga Issue**

## **The Rise of Naga Sun-nationalism and the Naga Peace Process**

**Chirantan Kumar\***

The North Eastern Region (NER) of India has a long history of conflicts, and has witnessed some of the most complex and prolonged conflicts that independent India has faced. The present challenge of insurgency in the NER commenced in the 1950s, particularly with the eruption of the Naga armed rebellion against the Indian State. The Naga assertion for separate nationhood before the Government of independent India was followed by the formation of several insurgent movements that spread across the region. These various insurgent movements were stirred by a range of factors, including inter-ethnic conflicts, immigrant inflows, sub-national aspirations, secessionist demands, and the economic neglect of the region by central and provincial governments across different epochs.

The Naga insurgency is not only the first, but also the most protracted conflict that North East India has recorded so far. Most other insurgent movements of the NER not only owe their inspiration, to a great extent, to the Naga movement, but

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have also have received support from the Naga ultras from time to time.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that the Naga insurgency is referred to as the mother of all other insurgencies in the NER.<sup>2</sup> Today, more than 50 active and inactive insurgent groups exist in the region, and none of the original ‘seven sisters’, the states initially included in the region, has remained untouched by the insurgency.<sup>3</sup> [Sikkim, which was included in the NER in 1998, has remained untouched by the troubles]. Despite a significant reduction in violence in North East India in recent years, insurgency remains a continuing problem in most of these states. Many insurgent groups have been found to be running kidnapping and extortion rackets with a sense of impunity, even after signing ceasefire agreements with the government.<sup>4</sup> According to R.N. Ravi, the former Governor of Nagaland and the Centre’s interlocutor for the Naga talks, the armed gangs of Nagaland run their parallel ‘so-called governments’ and challenge the legitimacy of the state, without any resistance from the state law and order apparatus.<sup>5</sup> The impact of insurgency and related problems has been deleterious to

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1 Sinha, K.K., “Insurgency in the North-East: An Overview”, in Dipankar Sengupta and Sudhir Kumar Singh eds., *Insurgency in North-East India: The Role of Bangladesh*, Authors Press in association with SPANDAN, Delhi, 2004, p. 31.

2 Ibid.

3 Kedilezo Kikhi, “What Ails the North-East? Challenges and Responses”, *Sociological Bulletin*, Volume 58, Number 3, 2009, p. 359.

4 Pushpita Das, “Is Northeast Poised for Lasting Peace?”, *MPIDSA Issue Brief*, July 8, 2020, p. 10, <https://idsa.in/system/files/issuebrief/ib-northeast-poised-for-lasting-peace-pdas.pdf>; “Post deal, extortion by Naga rebels should end: Manipur parties seek guarantee from Centre”, *The Hindu*, November 3, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/post-deal-extortion-by-naga-rebels-should-end-manipur-parties-seek-guarantee-from-centre/article29872194.ece>.

5 Vijaita Singh, “Armed gangs rule Nagaland: Governor”, *The Hindu*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/nagaland-governor-slams-collapse-of-law-and-order-in-state/article31915402.ece>.

the general wellbeing of the people and development of the region. It is in this context, that the present paper endeavours to trace the history of the rise of Naga sub-nationalism and the continuing Naga peace process.

#### **NAGA ALIENATION: EMERGENCE OF NAGA SUB-NATIONALISM**

The Naga secessionist insurrection was the first instance of insurgency that was experienced by India in its NER. It was also the first armed ethnic conflict in independent India that was waged for political purposes.<sup>6</sup> The roots of the Naga insurgency however, can be traced back to the rise of Naga sub-nationalism in the pre-independence era.

It is worth mentioning here that the term ‘Naga’ has often been used in a generic sense, rather than its specific use, as, in the beginning, the Nagas seldom used this name for themselves.<sup>7</sup> There exist a number of different tribes within the umbrella nomenclature ‘Naga’, such as the Angami, Ao, Chang, Kabui, Konyak, Lhota, Reñgma, Sema, and many more, speaking not merely different dialects but different languages altogether, and their traditional costumes also differ sharply from one another.<sup>8</sup>

The Nagas, in general, are known to have maintained their distinct identity ever since they entered India. Historical evidences suggest that the Nagas, came through different routes into India, and had already established their settlements on the western side of Naga Hills, even before the advent of

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6 Namrata Goswami, *Indian National Security and Counter-Insurgency: The Use of Force vs non-violent response*, Routledge, London and New York, 2015, p. 43.

7 Robert Reid, “Assam”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Volume 92, Number 4663, 1944, p. 244.

8 Ibid.

the Ahoms.<sup>9</sup> The Ahom *Buranjis* have references to the fierce resistance at the hands of the Nagas that the Ahoms had to face while entering Assam between 1215 AD and 1228 AD.<sup>10</sup> The Ahom-Naga relations saw numerous ups and downs, with the reciprocation of violent raids upon each other, on the one hand, and mutual exchanges of favours and gratitude, on the other.<sup>11</sup> It remains a fact, however, that even after establishing their reign in Assam, the Ahoms never tried to bring the Nagas under their permanent subjugation.<sup>12</sup>

The Nagas experienced a great change in the aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, which paved the way for the entry of the British into this hitherto lesser-known land. The British entered into the Angami area of Naga Hills in the year 1832, when British employees of the East India Company were marching towards the Assam Plains from Manipur.<sup>13</sup> Due to the independent minded attitude of the Nagas and their defiant nature, the British-Naga interaction invited violent skirmishes in the beginning, after which the British decided to create a separate Naga Hills district within Assam in 1866.<sup>14</sup> One of the purposes behind the creation of this district was to ensure the safety of the 'Queen's subjects' from Naga raids.<sup>15</sup> The British implemented the Inner Line Permit system under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations of 1873; categorised the hill areas of the North East as 'Backward Tracts' under the Government of India Act, 1919; and later on, as 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas' under the Government of India

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9 Ved Prakash, *Encyclopedia of North-East India*, Volume- 1-5, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2007, p. 1904.

10 Ibid, pp. 1904-1906.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid, p. 1906.

13 Ibid, p. 1899.

14 Ibid, pp. 1899-1900.

15 Ved Prakash, op. cit., p. 1911 and Robert Reid, op. cit., p. 244.



Act, 1935.<sup>16</sup> Though these measures were apparently taken in the name of protecting tribal interests, in practice, the Inner Line Permit effectively drew a boundary of British commercial interests in the Assam plains, protecting these areas from the raids by hill tribes.<sup>17</sup> The end result of these policies was a widening of the rift between the plainsmen and the hill tribes, eventually leading to mutual distrust between them.

While referring to the hill tribes of Colonial Era Assam, the former British bureaucrat Sir Robert Reid, who also served as the Governor of Assam from 1937 to 1942, stated in a lecture that he delivered on February 11, 1944, that:

They are not Indian in any sense of the word, neither in origin, nor in language, nor in appearance, nor in habits, nor in outlook; and it is only by historical accident that they have been tacked on to an Indian Province<sup>18</sup> [Assam].

Governor Reid had, in fact, prepared a confidential note in the year 1941, outlining the need for turning the Hill areas of Assam into a British protectorate, until the tribes of these areas develop themselves on their own lines, without any external influence.<sup>19</sup> The Secretary of State for India, L.S. Amery found the idea of this ‘Crown Colony’ so impressive that he gave a

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16 Ashish Kundra, “Understanding the history of the Inner Line Permit in the Northeast”, *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/understanding-the-history-of-the-inner-line-permit-in-the-northeast/story-dvA0y8Nd6yxMprtxZAYpUM.html>; V. B. Ganesan, “The secret British plan that fell through”, *The Hindu*, May 12, 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/the-secret-british-plan-that-fell-through/article6002139.ece>.

17 Ashish Kundra, op. cit.

18 Robert Reid, op. cit., p. 247.

19 David R. Syiemlieh, “The Crown Colony Plants: The British and the Hill Areas of North - East India, 1945-46”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Volume 59, 1998, p. 693.

copy of this note to Professor Reginald Coupland, who then developed it further and used it in his famous volumes entitled, *The Constitutional Problem in India*.<sup>20</sup> The Crown Colony Plan, also referred to as Coupland Plan,<sup>21</sup> was abandoned by the year 1946 due to its ill-timing and late conception, but it left a deep impression on the imagination of those who had already started talking about separate Naga nationalism.<sup>22</sup>

### THE EARLY MANIFESTATIONS OF NAGA SUB-NATIONALISM

The idea of separate Naga nationhood started taking shape as early as 1918 with the establishment of the Naga Club.<sup>23</sup> This club was founded by 20 Nagas, who came across the ideas of nationalism while serving in the French *Labour Corps* in the European battlefields during the First World War, and felt the need for politically organising themselves on ethnic lines.<sup>24</sup> The Naga Club pushed forward the idea of a separate Naga nation and soon became a popular organisation among Nagas, drawing members from across Naga tribes, such as the Angami, Ao, Konyak, Lotha, Rengma, Sema, and Yimchunger, etc.<sup>25</sup> The expression of distinct Naga nationalism, separate from the rest of India, found place in a memorandum presented by the Naga Club to the Simon Commission in 1929.<sup>26</sup>

The Second World War had brought the peril to the doorstep of the Nagas and proved to be crucial in forging unity among various Naga tribes, who had hitherto been fighting with each other.<sup>27</sup> It was against this background that the Naga Club was

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 V. B. Ganesan, op.cit.

23 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 45.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ved Prakash, op. cit. p. 1928.

succeeded by a new political organization, the Naga National Council (NNC), in 1946.<sup>28</sup> The NNC had evolved out of the democratically elected Naga Hills District Tribal Council, but later became famous for its secessionist demands under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo.

Phizo was known for his radical stand on separate Naga nationalism. It was under his leadership that nine members of the NNC declared Naga independence on August 14, 1947, a day before India became Independent.<sup>29</sup> Phizo was successful in spreading the word about Naga independence and mobilising support for secessionism.<sup>30</sup> A number of Nagas belonging to Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland on the Indian, side as well as from the Naga dominated districts of Myanmar, continue to celebrate this day to commemorate Naga independence, till date.<sup>31</sup>

### **THE END OF BRITISH COLONIALISM: IMPACTS ON THE NAGAS**

The British did not see any wisdom in interfering in the affairs of the hill tribes beyond a point, due to several reasons. One was that these tribes were notorious for carrying out violent raids on adjacent villages and the custom of headhunting, and thus the British maintained a safe distance from them through policies such as the inner line.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the hill areas of

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28 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 45.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Jimmy Leivon, "Manipur: Nagas celebrate Independence Day, hoist 'Naga National Flag' across the state", *The Indian Express*, August 14, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/north-east-india/manipur/manipur-nagas-celebrate-independence-day-hoist-naga-national-flag-across-the-state-5905839/>; Prasanta Mazumdar, "Students to celebrate Naga I-Day on August 14, hoist own 'national flag'", *The New Indian Express*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2019/aug/13/students-to-celebrate-naga-i-day-on-august-14-hoist-own-national-flag-2018432.html>.

32 Robert Reid, op. cit., p. 244.

the North East in general, with an exception of the Jaintia Hills, were considered uneconomical and deficit areas by the British.<sup>33</sup> Thirdly, the British were satisfied with the work that the American Baptist Mission had carried out among these hill tribes in the educational and medical spheres, besides working for their general wellbeing and upliftment, and thus did not consider it urgent to modernise these tribes.<sup>34</sup> And fourthly, barring the initial skirmishes between some Naga tribes and the British, their relationship had remained mostly peaceful and the Nagas in general maintained loyalty to the British.<sup>35</sup> In fact, except for putting a ban on the practice of headhunting and inter-village squabbles, the British administration did not concern itself much about the methods and practices that were operational in the management of the internal affairs of the Nagas.<sup>36</sup>

Towards the end of the British rule in India, anxieties about the future of the Nagas led to a declaration by some leaders of the NNC in June 1947, under the Phizo's direction, that, "The Naga Hills would cease to be a part of India with the departure of the British."<sup>37</sup> Responding to this declaration, the British Indian Government reached a Nine Point Agreement with the secretary of the NNC, Theyiechüthie Sakhrie, in June 1947.<sup>38</sup> The pact was known as the Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord, after the name of the then Governor of Assam, Sir Muhammad Saleh Akbar Hydari, who represented the British Indian Government in this agreement. This accord contained provisions of giving

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33 David R. Syiemlieh, op. cit. 693.

34 Robert Reid, op. cit., p. 244.

35 Ibid, p. 244 and 247.

36 Ved Prakash, op. cit., p. 1987.

37 Dinker Rao Mankekar, *On the slippery slope in Nagaland*, Manaktalas, Bombay, 1967, p. 39, quoted in Ved Prakash, op. cit., p. 1929.

38 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 47.

extensive and autonomous legislative, executive and judicial rights to the Nagas.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, it subjected the enforcement of many central and provincial legislations to the explicit consent of the ‘Naga Council’.<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting here that while the text of the accord read “Naga Council”, the Nagas interpreted it as “Naga National Council”, which later became another bone of contention between the government and the NNC.<sup>41</sup> The agreement further stipulated that the administrative divisions ought to be modified in order to bring back into the Naga Hills District all the forests, that were transferred to the Sibsagar and Nowgong districts in the past.<sup>42</sup> Further, it called for bringing all the Nagas under one common administrative unit, whenever it becomes possible.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, the most disputed clause of this agreement stated that, at the end of a period of 10 years, the NNC will be asked whether it required this agreement to be extended further, or a new agreement forged. This provision subsequently proved to be the bone of contention between the NNC and the Government of India (GOI), because the leaders of NNC construed it as independence from India on the completion of 10 years of this agreement, whereas the Government of India, interpreted it as a mandate to draft a new agreement after 10 years, if the present one fails to address the issues surrounding

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39 “The Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord, 1947”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, 1947, [https://www.satp.org/satporgt/p/countries/india/states/nagaland/documents/papers/nagaland\\_9point.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgt/p/countries/india/states/nagaland/documents/papers/nagaland_9point.htm).

40 Ibid.

41 Rita Manchanda and Tapan Kumar Bose, “Constructing the Naga Nation”, in Rita Manchanda, Tapan Kumar Bose, and Sajal Nag eds., *Bridging State and Nation: Peace Accords in India’s Northeast*, Volume II of SAGE Series in Human Rights Audits of Peace Processes, SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 2015, p. 57.

42 “The Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord, 1947”, op. cit.

43 Ibid.

the Nagas.<sup>44</sup> While the officials of the government believed that this agreement, in no case provided for secession of the Naga areas from India, Phizo outrightly rejected this agreement on the same grounds.<sup>45</sup> It was because of these ambiguities and confusions that the Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord could not be implemented and, in contrast with the provisions of this agreement that promised self- government rights to the Nagas, a much more limited structure of autonomous councils was delivered to them under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.<sup>46</sup>

The NNC's resentment was founded on the apprehensions of those vast changes that were about to occur after the independence of India. Unlike the colonial rulers, who were content to have left the tribal areas of NER to themselves, independent India made every attempt to assimilate this entire region into its post-colonial project of nation building.<sup>47</sup> The NNC, under the leadership of Phizo, organised a Naga plebiscite in May 1951, and on its basis, claimed the support of nearly 99.9 per cent of the participating voters for the cause of Naga independence.<sup>48</sup> On the day of this plebiscite, Phizo delivered a speech in which he stressed the aim of a 'Separate Sovereign State of Nagaland', but at the same time he also said that this was to be achieved "in a democratic way through constitutional means."<sup>49</sup>

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44 Kaka D. Iralu, *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears*, Iralu, Kohima, 2000, p. 183, quoted in Rita Manchanda and Tapan Kumar Bose, op. cit., p. 57; B.G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*, Konark Publisher, 2004, p. 88, quoted in Rita Manchanda and Tapan Kumar Bose, op. cit., p. 57.

45 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 48.

46 Rita Manchanda and Tapan Kumar Bose, op. cit., p. 57.

47 Subir Bhaumik, "Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change", *East-West Center*, 2007, p. 1.

48 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 45-46.

49 Ibid, p. 46.

## THE ENTRY OF VIOLENCE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE PEACE PROCESS

The Naga movement had remained more or less peaceful in the 1940s and early 1950s, but things took a turn for the worse in 1954, when Phizo announced the establishment of the People's Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland and formed an underground Naga army.<sup>50</sup> In 1955, a meeting of the NNC was convened by Phizo in his native village, Khonoma, where the comparatively moderate leaders of the council like Theyiechüthie Sakhrie and Jasokie Zinyü *aka* John Bosco Jasokie, resigned over their differences with Phizo.<sup>51</sup> Sakhrie was assassinated in January 1956 by the extremists in NNC.<sup>52</sup> Other dissenters had to seek refuge and protection from the government.<sup>53</sup> The departure of moderate elements from NNC resulted in the rise of violence in the Naga Hills.

Amid disturbances, the government deployed the Assam Rifles in the Naga Hills and enforced the Assam Disturbed Areas Act of 1955.<sup>54</sup> Undeterred by these measures, Phizo formed an underground government in March 1956, known as Naga Federal Government (NFG) and its military wing Naga Federal Army (NFA).<sup>55</sup> In response to the worsening situation in the Naga areas, the Government of India deployed the Indian Army in the affected areas as a counter-insurgency measure, in April 1956.<sup>56</sup> The military crackdown was followed by Phizo's

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50 Ibid, p. 48.

51 Thepfulhouvi Solo, "Who convened Naga people convention?", *Nagaland Post*, 24 March, 2020, <https://www.nagalandpost.com/who-convened-naga-people-convention/213614.html>.

52 Ved Prakash, op. cit., p. 1931.

53 Ranabir Samaddar, *The Politics of Dialogue: Living Under the Geopolitical Histories of War and Peace*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, pp. 171-173.

54 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 48.

55 Pradeep Kumar Rai, *Insurgency in North-East India: A Case Study of Assam*, Ph.D Thesis, 2010, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, p. 63.

56 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 43.

escape to erstwhile East Pakistan, and from there to London.<sup>57</sup> From London he continued to support the secessionist movement in Nagaland until he died in exile on April 30, 1990.

Caught in the crossfire between the Indian Army and NFA, the civilians of the Naga Hills were subjected to collateral damage, unintended civilian deaths, and human rights violation at the hands of armed forces personnel, which led to local resentment, putting pressure upon the government as well as NNC to come to terms with each other.<sup>58</sup> More and more moderate Nagas came forward, willing to work out a solution, which gave birth to a non-violent Naga People's Convention (NPC).<sup>59</sup> It was largely due to the peaceful recommendations of the NPC that a separate Naga Hills-Tuensang Area District was created in 1957.<sup>60</sup> Amid the changes in the political scenario, a Sixteen Point Agreement was arrived at between the NPC and the Government of India, through which the latter conceded the demands for the formation of a full-fledged state of Nagaland within the Indian Union.<sup>61</sup> Eventually statehood was accorded to Nagaland in 1963. Meanwhile, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) of 1958 was implemented in Assam and Manipur in order to stop disturbances.

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57 Kyoko Inoue, "Integration of North-east: the state formation process", in Murayama M., Kyoko Inoue, S Hazarika eds., *Sub-Regional relations in the Eastern South Asia – with special focus on India's North Eastern region*, Research programme series No. 133, IDE-JETRO, 2005, p. 25, [https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Download/Jrp/pdf/133\\_3.pdf](https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Download/Jrp/pdf/133_3.pdf).

58 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 43, 48-49.

59 Ved Prakash, op. cit., p. 1932.

60 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 44.

61 "The Sixteen Point Agreement arrived at between the Naga Peoples' Convention and the Government of India in July, 1960", Quoted in Y.D. Gundevia, *War and Peace in Nagaland*, Palit & Palit Publishers, New Delhi, 1975, p. 223.



It is noteworthy, here, that even after the formation of Nagaland, hundreds of thousands of Nagas living in nearby states, i.e., Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, besides a sizable number of Nagas living across the international border in Myanmar, were left out.<sup>62</sup> This was why the creation of a separate state did not put an end to the Naga insurgency, even though it was followed by a ceasefire agreement between the government and the insurgents in 1964.

A Peace Mission, that was formed in 1964 to negotiate with the recalcitrant factions of NNC, had to be dissolved in 1967 when it reached a deadlock, after six rounds of talks with the insurgents.<sup>63</sup> Continuous violations of the ceasefire led to the banning of the NNC, NFG, and NFA in 1972, under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) of 1967.<sup>64</sup> The counter-insurgency measures taken by the security forces brought the insurgents again to the negotiating platform, which paved the way for the Shillong Accord of 1975, between the Indian Government and the Naga rebels.<sup>65</sup> However, Phizo himself never approved this accord, despite the fact that his own brother Kevi Yalie was one of its signatories.<sup>66</sup>

According to the terms of the Shillong Accord, the Naga rebels were required to unconditionally accept the Constitution of India, and surrender their arms.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, this accord could provide only short-term respite.<sup>68</sup> The hardliners of NNC declared this agreement a sellout and derided the moderate

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62 Rita Manchanda and Tapan Kumar Bose, op. cit., p. 58.

63 Pradeep Kumar Rai, op. cit., p. 65.

64 Ibid, p 65.

65 Ibid.

66 Shantanu Nandan Sharma, "We have never seen peace & a normal life: Adinno", *The Morung Express*, September 2, 2015, [https://issuu.com/morung\\_express/docs/september\\_2nd\\_\\_2015/5](https://issuu.com/morung_express/docs/september_2nd__2015/5).

67 Ibid.

68 K.K. Sinha, op. cit., p. 30.

NNC members as “accordists”.<sup>69</sup> Disappointed with the NNC, these hardliners formed a new underground organisation by the name of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) under the leadership of Thuingaleng Muivah, Isak Chishi Swu and S.S. Khaplang, in 1980.<sup>70</sup>

Later, sharp differences developed between Muivah and Khaplang over clan rivalries within NSCN, which led to a split in 1988, giving birth to the NSCN faction led by Isak and Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the Khaplang-led faction (NSCN-K).<sup>71</sup> NSCN-IM has been in ceasefire agreement with the Union Government since 1997, and NSCN-K followed suit in 2001.<sup>72</sup> However, violence continued in the form of fratricidal killings and clan wars, which gave birth to several other insurgent outfits with limited areas of influence.<sup>73</sup>

### THE CURRENT STATUS OF NAGA PEACE PROCESS

The Naga Peace Process reached a milestone on August 3, 2015, when Isak and Muivah signed a Framework Peace Agreement with the Indian Government, on behalf of NSCN-IM.<sup>74</sup> However, the Naga Peace Process involves several other insurgent outfits besides NSCN-IM.<sup>75</sup> One of the most influential factions of NSCN is the NSCN-K, which unilaterally

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69 Subir Bhaumik, op. cit., p. 1; Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 49, and Pradeep Kumar Rai, op. cit., p. 5.

70 Namrata Goswami, op. cit., p. 49.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid, pp. 49-50.

74 Amitabh Sinha and Praveen Swami, “PM Narendra Modi announces historic peace deal with Naga insurgents”, *The Indian Express*, August 4, 2015, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/govt-signs-peace-agreement-with-nscnim-pm-narendra-modi-says-historic/>.

75 Sudeep Chakravarti, “Rebel Muivah’s ill health and the Naga peace process”, *Livemint*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/OyMkLr87Vf4t3RvNp51LoI/Rebel-Muivahs-ill-health-and-the-Naga-peace-process.html>.

abrogated its ceasefire agreement with the government in 2015 and, unlike the IM faction, no agreement has been possible with the Khaplang faction even after the demise of S.S. Khaplang in 2017.<sup>76</sup>

In November 2017, another development took place when six different factions of NSCN and NNC came together under the banner of the Naga Nationalist Political Groups (NNPGs) and initiated negotiations with the Union Government.<sup>77</sup> The negotiations were expanded further, when another faction of the NSCN, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khango (NSCN-Khango), joined the talks in 2019.<sup>78</sup>

However, despite several rounds of negotiations, the situation in Nagaland became tense again in 2020, when a heated exchange took place between the Naga groups and the then Governor of Nagaland, R.N. Ravi, who was also acting as the interlocutor in this matter on behalf of the Union Government. This was for the first time after the peace agreement of August 3, 2015, that NSCN-IM ‘general secretary’ Muivah asserted, in August 2020, that the demand for separate a flag, separate constitution and greater Nagalim, could not be relinquished.<sup>79</sup> While the NNPGs maintained good relations with R.N. Ravi and agreed to continue their dialogue with the Union Government, NSCN-IM’s insistence on a separate flag and constitution proved to be a major stumbling block for arrival at any final solution to the Naga issue.<sup>80</sup>

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76 Ibid.

77 Pushpita Das, op. cit., p. 4.

78 Ibid.

79 “Nagaland: Shanti Warta Ko Lekar Badha Tanaw, Wartakaar Ne Rajya Sarkar Ko Fatkara”, *The Wire*, August 16, 2020, <https://thewirehindi.com/135284/nagaland-naga-peace-talks-neiphiu-rio-rn-ravi/>.

80 “No Breakthrough Likely In Naga Peace Talks Before Christmas: Rio”, *Outlook*, December 20, 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/no-breakthrough-likely-in-naga-peace-talks-before-christmas-rio-news-246461>.

Meanwhile, extortions and unlawful taxation by Naga ultras continued to disrupt the constitutional order and development process in the states affected by the Naga insurgency.<sup>81</sup>

It is noteworthy here that the Union Government has been holding two separate negotiations, with NSCN-IM since 1997, and with the NNPGs since 2017. The leadership of NSCN-IM claims to have the support of various Naga nationalist groups and Naga civil society organisations, such as the Naga Hoho, Naga Student Federation, Naga Mother's Association, Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, and the United Naga Council.<sup>82</sup> The NNPGs, on the other hand, comprise various rebel groups that have splintered from NSCN-IM.<sup>83</sup> Both, the NSCN-IM and the NNPGs have been at odds with each other, and the former believes that the formation of NNPGs gives the government an opportunity to exploit the tribal divisions already existing in the Naga community.

Following the appointment of former Intelligence Bureau (IB) Special Director Akshaya Kumar Mishra as the Union Government's interlocutor in the Naga Peace Process after the resignation of R.N. Ravi, the peace talks with NSCN-IM came back on track in 2021. Eventually, in September, 2022, when the peace talks resumed between the Union Government and the NSCN-IM, the issues of separate flag and constitution of the Nagas were discussed.<sup>84</sup> Around the same time, the NNPGs

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81 "Post deal, extortion by Naga rebels should end: Manipur parties seek guarantee from Centre", *The Hindu*, op. cit.; Pushpita Das, op. cit., p. 10.

82 Rouhin Deb and Adyasa Ananya Das, "A Tumultuous Journey of the Naga Peace Process", *Cornell Policy Review*, 2021, p.1, <https://www.cornellpolicyreview.com/a-tumultuous-journey-of-the-naga-peace-process/?pdf=5994>.

83 Ibid.

84 Wasbir Hussain, "Naga Peace Talks: NNPGs to meet interlocutor AK Mishra on Saturday", *Northeast Live*, September 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lo7j3unQ0AI&t=165s>.

also met the new interlocutor, and discussed their concerns about the peace process. They wanted that their agreed position as well as that of the NSCN-IM be merged, to form a part of the common draft of the accord that the government of India would be preparing.<sup>85</sup> While expressing satisfaction with the progress of the talks and being optimistic about the possibility of an early solution, the coordinator of the NNPGs, Alezo Venuh, stated, “on our part, we are ready to sign the agreement at any time but the situation so far has not arrived.”<sup>86</sup>

### A SHARED FUTURE?

Nearly a century has passed since the earliest manifestations of the Naga sub-nationalist aspirations. This eventful epoch has witnessed the emergence and growth of a violent Naga nationalist movement, on the one hand, and an experiment with numerous strategies by the Indian state to restore peace in the conflict-ridden states of NER, on the other. The history of the Naga peace process is marked by numerous ups and downs. Every time an agreement was reached, it generated hopes among the stakeholders for a lasting peace, be it the Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord of 1947, the Sixteen Point Agreement of 1960, the Shillong Accord of 1975, or the Indo-Naga Ceasefire Agreement of 1997. However, the past is witness to the reality that these agreements proved ill-equipped to creating a lasting solution. The case of the Peace Agreement of 2015 has been no less dramatic. In spite of several rounds of negotiations between the Union Government and the Naga representatives, no final solution has been possible so far.

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85 Ibid.

86 “NNPG leaders meet govt interlocutor, say expecting permanent solution soon”, *ETV Bharat*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.etvbharat.com/english/national/bharat/nnpg-leaders-meet-interlocutor-say-expecting-permanent-solution-soon/na20220930225022439439902>.

It is a positive sign that the NSCN-IM and the NNPGS came together in October 2022, to issue a joint statement in which they agreed to overcome their past differences with each other and to direct their endeavours towards a shared future.<sup>87</sup> The appointment of A.K. Mishra as the new interlocutor by the Union Government has also gone well within the fold of NSCN-IM, which had become vocally opposed the previous incumbent. However, past experiences suggest that any long term and fruitful conclusion of the Naga peace process requires addressing some of the more prominent obstacles on this path.

**First**, the idea of Naga nationalism is inherently problematic because of the existence of numerous divisions among the different tribes and clans within the Nagas. There are clan rivalries among many of the sub-tribes of the Nagas that are spread across Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur in India, as well as certain areas of neighbouring Myanmar. The demand for a separate “Frontier Naga Territory” by Eastern Naga People’s Organisation (ENPO) is another such issue that exhibits the divisions among the Nagas.<sup>88</sup> The differences between NSCN-IM and the NNPGs have not yet been sorted out completely. It is, therefore, difficult for any government to arrive at any such agreement that would be acceptable to all Nagas.

**Second**, it will be difficult for any government to agree to NSCN-IM’s demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas, particularly after having made changes in the

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87 “Naga peace process: NSCN (IM), NNPGs agree to move forward over past divisions”, *Hindustan Times*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/naga-peace-process-nscn-im-nnpgs-agree-to-move-forward-over-past-divisions-101666190713921.html>.

88 Karishma Hasnat, “Naga peace talks set to resume, a dive into issues surrounding one of India’s oldest insurgencies”, *The Print*, June 28, 2023, <https://theprint.in/india/naga-peace-talks-set-to-resume-a-dive-into-issues-surrounding-one-of-indias-oldest-insurgencies/1645618/>.

Constitution of India to take away such symbols from the people of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.<sup>89</sup>

**Third**, the demand for greater Nagalim, a proposed homeland for all Nagas, which not only includes parts of Nagaland, Manipur, and Assam, but also calls for carving out areas from Myanmar, has not yet been abandoned by NSCN-IM. There is no provision in the Constitution of India according to which this demand can ever be met by any government.

**Fourth**, a significant number of Nagas believe that they were never part of the Indian nation. Even the pro-peace negotiation Naga leaders have largely failed to curb such sentiments among their secessionist brethren.

And **finally**, there has been a practice of extortions and collection of illegal taxes by the cadres of NSCN-IM, which ensures them a voluminous income worth hundreds of crores of rupees. If the peace talks are successful, this illegal income will certainly come to an end. Many of the stakeholders in the Naga peace process do not want any disruption in this well-established system of illegal taxation and, therefore, they make every attempt to delay the completion of the peace process, so that they may continue taking advantages of the cloak of ceasefire for their illegal activities.

The ongoing dialogues have already suffered near-derailment in the past due to various reasons, ranging from the disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 to NSCN-IM's insistence upon a separate Naga flag and constitution. Moreover, the poorly drafted wording of the Framework Peace Agreement of 2015 has created new problems, adding

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89 Bharat Bhushan, "Will the New Year See the Dawn of Naga Peace?", *Deccan Herald*, December 9, 2022, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/will-the-new-year-see-the-dawn-of-naga-peace-1170175.html>.

to the confusion over the idea of shared sovereignty. This agreement hopes that the dialogue process “will provide for an enduring inclusive new relationship of peaceful co-existence of two entities.”<sup>90</sup> Now, the NSCN-IM interprets the term “two entities” as two sovereign entities and demands prime ministerial level talks in a third country for the resolution of the Naga issue.<sup>91</sup>

In December 2022, when Muivah was in Delhi, with the expectation that he would meet the Prime Minister, he had to return disappointed after a long wait of six weeks.<sup>92</sup> Just when things began to come back on track, the state assembly elections of Nagaland were announced for February 2023. This again put the dialogues on hold, as the major political actors from the state as well as from the centre became preoccupied with their electoral campaigns. It is noteworthy, that the state government plays the role of facilitator in the Naga peace process. While the peace process resumed in April 2023 with the holding of talks between centre’s interlocutor and the leaders of NSCN-IM, overcoming the obstacles in its path will remain as difficult as it has been in the long and convoluted history of conflict in Nagaland.

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90 Ibid.

91 Narayan Bahadur, “Nagaland Year in Review: COVID-19, Naga peace talks dominate 2020”, *The Morung Express*, December 29, 2020, <https://morungexpress.com/year-in-review-covid-19-naga-peace-talks-dominate-2020>.

92 Bharat Bhushan, op. cit.



# **‘A Professional Revolutionary’**

## **Ideological Underpinnings of the Maoist Movement in Urban Areas**

Akshay Ranade\*

The armed Maoist movement in India today appears to be waning, with a consistent decline in the level of violence in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas.<sup>1</sup> The reduction of ‘extremely affected’ LWE districts, increase in the number of those who surrendered and the reduced number of LWE incidents overall, are all encouraging signs in the country’s efforts to root out the insurgency, which was once dubbed ‘the biggest threat to internal security.’<sup>2</sup> Yet, the course the armed

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- 1 “Violence related to Left Wing Extremism down by 76% in 2022 as compared to 2010, says Amit Shah”, *The Hindu*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/violence-related-to-left-wing-extremism-down-by-76-in-2022-as-compared-to-2010-says-amit-shah/article66482957.ece>.
- 2 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had in 2009 dubbed the Left-Wing Extremism as the gravest threat to internal security. See, “Left-wing extremism gravest threat to national security: PM”, *Hindustan Times*, September 15, 2009, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/left-wing-extremism-gravest-threat-to-national-security-pm/story-oT5o6abH4zde1iSyG742hI.html>.

Maoist movement has taken in India hints at a possible trend where the movement witnesses a temporal decline only to revive again, with increased strength and intensity.

The apparent endurance of the movement can be attributed to the well thought out and crafted strategy for a protracted people's war (PPW) which factors in the possibility of phases of tactical retreat, to weather the response of a more powerful state. The strategy is intrinsically linked to the peculiar assessment of the Indian state as 'backward, semi-colonial and semi-feudal', and devises a curiously tailored program for ushering in the 'New Democratic Revolution' (NDR) – a state based on the premises of the 'Dictatorship of Proletariat'.<sup>3</sup> At the centre of the strategy is the consciously designed role for the 'urban spaces', which provides ideological justification to the evolution of the movement and charts the course to suit the political realities of the time.

The urban dimension of Maoism has always been a political hot potato in India, with an extremely polarized public discourse resulting into an equally polarized politics around it. But a careful study of the Maoist movement in India and its 'sources of inspiration' reveals a sense inevitability accorded to the 'urban movement'. The ideological underpinning of this 'urban necessity' can be traced to the Lenin's peculiar conceptualization of 'Professional Revolutionary'(PR) which implied the trained individuals dedicated full time to the revolution in Russia. In order to rationalize and actualize this revolution, Lenin carefully crafts a strategy for these PRs who

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3 The term dictatorship of proletariat implies an intermediate state between the revolution and the onset of the communist order. In practical terms, it implies the rule of 'the party' who led the revolution. The party is supposed to sustain the gains of the revolution, fight 'counter-revolutionary forces' i.e., those who oppose the revolutionary party and prepare the society to move towards communist order. In all practical terms, it results into creation of one-party totalitarian state.

would lead the revolution in Russia. Indian Maoists seems to have deftly adopted this concept, which has a great deal of significance in the urban context.

This paper enquires into the theoretical underpinning of the Maoist movement, with a specific focus on the contours of the urban dimension of PPW. By a careful study of the Maoist literature and program for its praxis, the paper attempts to locate the contemporary realities of the Maoist movement in the theoretical constructs of Leninism-Maoism. The paper further argues that understanding this theoretical construct and devising a way to respond to it is integral to comprehensively responding to the Maoist insurgency in India.

#### **LENIN'S PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARY**

R.P.N Singh, former Minister of State for Home Affairs in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in his statement to Lok Sabha in 2014, observed:

On occasions, during operations by security forces, the CPI(Maoist) underground cadres shift to softer areas including urban areas looking for safe hideouts. On such occasions, the overground front organizations provide safe hideouts to armed cadres. The front organizations also facilitate procurement of supplies etc. to the Maoist war machinery. They also initiate legal action on various issues to slow down the enforcement regime. They are also adept at dissemination of propaganda and disinformation to demonize the state and the security forces. Of late, it has also come to notice that members of such front organizations are mentoring 'Professional Revolutionaries' to be inducted into the underground movement.<sup>4</sup>

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4 The detailed reply of the minister can be accessed here, <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2014-pdfs/ls-180214/3838.pdf>.

This mention of the Professional Revolutionary by the Minister is significant, as it brings into central focus the core concern regarding Maoism in the urban context. This idea of the Professional Revolutionary was formulated by Lenin at a time when he dedicated himself to prepare Russian society for an armed fight against the imperial Tsars. In doing this, Lenin redefined some of the basic tenets of classical Marxism in a way that fundamentally altered the future course of the communist movements across the globe.

This paper is not an attempt to analyse the theoretical merits or demerits of Lenin's conceptual development within the Marxist tradition, nor does it seek to evaluate the necessity of his political action in Tsarist Russia. The concern of the paper is to understand the practical utility of Lenin's interpretation of Russian realities, within the Marxist prism, and its implications for the Indian context. More importantly, the focus is on the understanding Lenin's ideational and institutional intervention into the Marxist tradition that sought to bring into being a socialist political order, and the way Maoists in India put it to strategic use. Understanding Lenin's 'program of praxis', will thus help in understanding the design adopted by Maoists in India, and will put in perspective the various methods through which they have attempted to instigate the revolution.

Lenin, arguably the most important thinker and political actor after Marx and Engels within the tradition of Marxism, interestingly occasioned the first major departure from what can be considered classical Marxism. While Marx famously predicted the demise of capitalism through a revolution resulting out of the deteriorating socio-economic and political realities within capitalism, he almost hinted at a revolution that would be a 'natural' consequence of capitalism. Yet, when the advanced capitalist countries apparently 'survived' this prophesied demise and injected curious innovations into

their polity to mitigate the problems of capitalism, the debate within socialist circles got polarized around the nature as well as the necessity of the 'revolution'. An interesting trend within the socialist discourse was represented by the likes of Eduard Bernstein, who questioned the inevitability as well as the necessity of revolution as predicted by Marx.<sup>5</sup> This school of thought argued that institutions like trade unions played an important role in representing the interests of the workers in the capitalist set up. They also saw that evolving democratic institutions in the West could be effectively utilised to slowly but eventually evolve into a socialist political order. This trend of 'evolutionary socialists'<sup>6</sup> moved beyond the rhetoric of revolution and saw alternative ways of ordering economic and political systems within the socialist paradigm.

Lenin had little patience for these evolutionary ways and criticized the politics of trade unionism and similar conciliatory method as opportunistic.<sup>7</sup> Lenin saw gaining 'political power' through revolution as the 'only' way to change the political order to move towards a state premised on the logic of 'dictatorship of proletariat'. He therefore saw the moderate stance of the 'Mensheviks'<sup>8</sup> in Russia as inconsequential to the actual goal of a socialist state.

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5 Eduard Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, Schocken Books, New York, 1963.

6 The term evolutionary socialist is generally used for those who believe that 'socialism' can be established through gradual process by reforming the existing political system, unlike the orthodox Marxists who believed the revolution is a pre-condition to change the capitalist political order into socialist one.

7 For Lenin's critique on the politics and methods of trade union see "What is to be Done: The Burning Question of our Movement", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.

8 Mensheviks were faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Considered to be moderate faction of the party, Mensheviks were apprehensive of the Bolsheviks approach to the 'revolution' and had differences with Lenin as well.

Lenin's conviction in the Marxian orthodoxy on the necessity of revolution ironically also meant changing some of the basic premises of classical Marxism to suit Russian reality. Russia then, for instance, wasn't industrially an advanced economy for revolution to come through according to Marx's prescription. Moreover, Lenin had little faith in any 'spontaneous revolution' emerging from the working class since, according to him, the working class lacked the necessary 'revolutionary consciousness' to actualise the revolution. Lenin, preoccupied with the seizure of political power, thus sets out to reformulate the classical Marxist doctrine, which will guide Russian society to revolution in an influential pamphlet titled "What is to be done?" first published in 1902,<sup>9</sup> which turned out to be one of the most influential documents in the Marxist tradition.

Lenin reformulates classical Marxism primarily in three key ways – one, he argues that the revolution can happen in imperial Russia, despite the lack of an industrially advanced economy, proposing a thesis that even imperialism is a sufficient condition for the revolution to take place. Second, he saw that the industrial proletariat in urban areas would play a major role in the revolution. But since the working class lacks revolutionary consciousness, a 'Vanguard' is needed to lead society into the revolution. In the case of Russia, the Vanguard will be the Party of Bolsheviks. Third, and arguably most important for the purpose of this paper, is the need of PR (as mentioned above) to prepare the ground for the revolution and eventually lead it to its logical conclusion.

Lenin's exposition of PR is to be contextualised in his critique of the ways and methods of the moderate faction of

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9 "What is to be Done: The Burning Question of our Movement", <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.

Russian Social Democrats, which he termed as ‘economism’. By economism, Lenin meant the economic struggle by the industrial workers for better working conditions, channelized through institutions like trade-unions. For Lenin, this economic struggle alone was not sufficient to truly liberate the working class. While maintaining that this economic struggle waged by the industrial worker was important, Lenin saw its impact as limited. For true liberation, political struggle to overhaul the entire political order is necessary. This political struggle, which moves beyond the industries and captures the imagination across the country is a prerequisite for political liberation. And political struggle of this kind requires centrally organized PRs within the Vanguard party, dedicated entirely to the task of revolution because “*the struggle against the political police requires special qualities; it requires revolutionaries by profession.*”<sup>10</sup> By PR, Lenin meant dedicated workers who are trained revolutionaries equipped to wage a sustained struggle against a more powerful enemy, the imperial state in the Russian context. The PR – who could be anyone, from intellectuals, students to workers – would primarily be responsible for an ideational as well as a conspiratorial role against the state.

The ideational role implied preparing the ideological frontier for the decisive political struggle against the state by making the masses ‘conscious of the necessity of the revolution’. Arguably this ideational role was of critical importance since, according to Lenin, the working class lacked this basic prerequisite of revolutionary consciousness, thereby impeding the spontaneous ‘revolution from within’. Thus, ‘pushing from outside’ or ‘ideological instigation’ is a necessity to sufficiently

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10 Lenin as quoted in ‘Robert Mayer, “Lenin and the Concept of Professional Revolutionary”, *History of Political Thought*, Volume 14, Number 2, 1993, pp. 249-263.

prepare the working class for a sustained and decisive struggle because, according to Lenin,

...there has never been too much of such ‘pushing on from outside’; on the contrary, there has so far been all too little of it in our movement, for we have been stewing too assiduously in our own juice; we have bowed far too slavishly to the elementary ‘economic struggle of the workers against the employers and the government’. We professional revolutionaries must and will make it our business to engage in this kind of ‘pushing on’ a hundred times more forcibly than we have done hitherto.<sup>11</sup>

The economic struggle alone, for Lenin, was not equipped with the expertise – ideological and operational – to ensure the political overhaul necessary for liberation. Lenin therefore, asserted emphatically the centrality of an ‘external agency’ like the PR, to raise class consciousness on the ideational front as well as for waging a sustained armed struggle.<sup>12</sup> The role of the PR is to bring that ideological and operational preparedness, thereby raising the ‘amateur’ to the status of the ‘professional’ revolutionary.

Three implications from Lenin are extremely critical to deconstruct the idea of revolution and the necessity of the PR in it: First, the improbability of a spontaneous revolution through a supposedly organic class struggle. Second, the necessity of an ‘external’ political agency to ‘instigate’ the revolutionary struggle from ‘outside’. And third, the centrality of the

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11 “What is to be done: The Burning Question of our Movement”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> ; for the specific quote, see <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iv.htm>.

12 Robert Mayer, “Lenin and the Concept of Professional Revolutionary”, *History of Political Thought*, Volume 14, Number 2, 1993, pp. 249-263.



‘Vanguard party’ and dedicated professional revolutionaries to the attainment of the final objective of the revolution. These implications were a major departure from the classical Marxist prescription of a spontaneous revolution emerging from within the working class against the capitalist system. Lenin, who saw revolution against the state peculiarly in the terms of ‘civil-war’,<sup>13</sup> was consequently focused on preparing an army to eventually triumph in that war. Any compromise short of a war was unacceptable to Lenin and he justified the use of all available avenues to wage this ‘civil war’.

#### **LENIN AND THE INDIAN MAOISTS**

The Indian Maoist movement is generally traced back to the outbreak of violence in the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal in 1967. This sporadic violence was converted into an organised and concerted revolt with the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) (CPI-ML) in 1969, under the leadership of Charu Majumdar. Within a few years of the formation of CPI-ML, the violent movement had spread across West Bengal, along with a sizeable footprint in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, among others.<sup>14</sup> The formation of CPI-ML was premised on the idea that parliamentary, democratic ways were incapable of bringing a socialist order into being, and armed revolt against the state was, consequently, the only option. The party adopted the title ‘Marxist-Leninist’ – implying the rejection of methods other than the armed conflict, to capture political power.

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13 Israel Getzler, “Lenin’s Conception of Revolution As Civil War”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Volume 74, Number 3, 1996, pp. 464-472.

14 See Harsh V. Pant and Akshay Ranade, ‘India’s National Security Challenges and State Response’ in Michael Clarke, et. al. (eds.), ‘Palgrave Handbook of National Security’, 2022, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 187-218.

The initial momentum of the movement after the creation of CPI-ML soon fizzled out, with the arrests of prominent leaders as well as the emergence of various factions within the CPI-ML, leading to the creation of multiple splinter groups.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the movement continued – on the ideological as well as the operational front. Ideologically, the movement embraced the Leninist distrust of non-revolutionary, democratic means, but operationally gravitated more towards the military strategy of Mao Tse-Tung, who led the Communist Revolution in China.

Mao Tse-Tung's post revolution People's Republic of China (PRC) was a major experiment after Lenin, at creating a socialist state premised on the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Mao had heavily borrowed from Lenin and his concept of the Vanguard, and adopted it, with adjustments to Chinese realities. Unlike Russia, China was primarily an agrarian society, and therefore, agricultural peasants and not the industrial workers, were the primary focus of the revolution. Militarily too, Mao adopted a distinct strategy from that of Lenin. He envisioned an enduring doctrine of Protracted People's War (PPW) which projected a sustained, long-term, violent campaign against the state, beginning from countryside and led by agrarian peasants.<sup>16</sup> The PPW sought to develop a strong base in the rural areas through peasants, and progressively planned to capture the cities in the final assault. Like Lenin, Mao also departed from orthodox Marxism regarding the necessity of the capitalist system for revolution. Mao peculiarly described China as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial state and argued that a revolution was possible and necessary in China as well. He scripted a three staged PPW – strategic defensive, preparation for strategic offensive and the strategic

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15 Ibid.

16 Bernard D. Mello, "What is Maoism?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 44, 2009, pp. 39-48.

counter-offensive – to ensure a movement towards a socialist state in China.<sup>17</sup>

The evolving armed communist movement in India saw the material as well as political realities in the country resonating more with Chinese socio-economic realities. Consequently, in the operational areas, the import of Maoist ideas got entrenched in the discourse, with a call for replicating the Chinese-style revolution in India. Charu Mazumdar, who led the initial violent insurrection in West Bengal, was unapologetic in submitting the attempted ‘Indian revolution’ under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party when he declared,

...a People’s Democratic India is no longer a distant objective. The first rays of the red sun have already lit up the coasts of Andhra and will tinge the other states also before long. A radiant India bathed in the rays of this red sun will continue to shine brightly forever. Every communist must exert his entire effort and energy to bring about this glorious future. Victory certainly belongs to us because China’s Chairman is our Chairman and China’s path is our path.<sup>18</sup>

The movement got its most decisive fillip when different parties and groups subscribing to this frame of thought announced their merger in 2004 into the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist).<sup>19</sup> The CPI-Maoist (hereafter

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17 Mao Tse Tung, *On Protracted War*, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1967.

18 The full text of Charu Mazumdar’s article titled “China’s Chairman Is Our Chairman: China’s Path Is Our Path” is available here, <https://cpiml.org/library/charu-mazumdar-collected-writings/formation-of-communist-party-of-india-marxist-leninist-22-april-1969/chinas-chairman-is-our-chairman-chinas-path-is-our-path/>.

19 Anil Kumar, “PWG and MCC merge to form new party”, *The Times of India*, October 14, 2004, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/patna/pwg-and-mcc-merge-to-form-new-party/articleshow/885422.cms>.

Maoist Party) then ushered in one of the most violent phases in Indian history and continues to be the face of the Left Wing insurgency in India.

The formation of the Maoist Party was practically a renewal of the Maoist insurgency, which had been in troubled waters in the previous decades. The Maoist Party led the efforts to recoup the strategy to sustain its war against the Indian state, both in ideological and military terms. And this is where we see the merger of Leninist and Maoists ideas, which the Maoist Party clearly spelt out in its document, *Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution*, where it declared “the Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution should be formulated by creatively applying the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to the concrete conditions prevailing in our country”.<sup>20</sup> To justify the necessity of revolution in India, like Mao, the Maoist Party conveniently dubbed India as a “*semi-colonial, semi-feudal system under neo-colonial form of indirect rule*”<sup>21</sup> and that the targets of the Indian revolution were identified as “*imperialism, feudalism and comprador bureaucratic big bourgeoisie*”.<sup>22</sup> This politically convenient depiction of the contemporary Indian state was intended to ensure the theoretical and ideological applicability of Leninism as well as Maoism to the Indian context, and thereby to delegitimize the Indian state. The final objective was, thus, to capture political power and bring about the ‘New Democratic Revolution’ (NDR) through an “armed agrarian revolutionary war”, i.e., the Protracted

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20 The document titled “The Strategy and Tactics of Indian Revolution” (Hereafter the Strategy and Tactics Document) can be accessed from here <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/documents/papers/strategy.htm#:~:text=Thus%20the%20political%20strategy%20of,the%20backs%20of%20the%20Indian.>

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

People’s War (PPW) on the lines of the Chinese revolution where “war will be carried out by encircling the cities from the countryside and thereby finally capturing them.”<sup>23</sup> In the entire course of the PPW, the Maoist Party assumed the role of the ‘consolidated political vanguard of the Indian proletariat’ with Marxism-Leninism Maoism and its guiding ideology. The Party, the Peoples Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA), the military wing of the Maoist Party tasked with the military role, and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which consists of the proletariat, peasantry, the urban petty-bourgeoisie<sup>24</sup> and the national bourgeoisie (middle and small bourgeoisie), collectively form the ‘three magic weapons’ in the quest of the NDR.

With the applicability of Maoism in the military domain accepted by the Maoists in India, the focus on peasants in the rural area was inevitable. Yet, a peculiar trend visible, particularly after the formation of the Maoist party, was the expansion of the geographic space on the strategic radar of the Maoists to particularly include urban spaces.

The Maoist movement, since its inception, had decisively focused on the rural areas along Chinese lines, but there was a renewed interest in and focus on urban areas, which became prominent in the more recent assessments of the Maoists themselves. The urban centers which, according to the Maoists, were the strongholds of the ‘enemy’, had previously lacked deserved attention, resulting in party major strategic setbacks for the Maoist Party. As a corrective measure, the Maoist Party sought to reorient its energies and strategies to include

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23 Ibid.

24 Petty Bourgeoisie includes all those who generally fall in the middle-class incomes groups that are derived mainly from their own manual or mental labour. Eg they include small traders, to professionals like doctors, lawyers, university professors, students etc.

urban areas, with specific objectives such as building a mass movement, ensuring ideological support to the party in urban centers, infiltrating the enemy ranks and getting more recruits to the party, among others. In other words, the urban movement would focus on securing the legitimacy for the NDR through the people in urban areas and would prepare them for the final assault against the Indian state.

This is where the application of the Leninist notion of the PR becomes critical. In fact, in the strategy and tactics document, the Maoist Party categorically identify their role in urban areas when they declare that, the

...working class leadership is the indispensable condition for New Democratic revolution in India. The working class exercises its leadership in the revolution by organizing all sections of the people in anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles and by sending its advanced detachment to the rural areas.

To achieve this, the document further stresses,

...we have to free the working class from the influence of revisionist and reactionary politics. Only by organizing and arousing the working class and continuously drawing its advanced section into the party that the party can be strengthened, its class basis made firm and working-class leadership on the New Democratic Revolution be guaranteed.

And therefore, it is necessary to “concentrate on building Party cells among workers in key industries in cities and towns and develop full-time professional revolutionaries from the working class...”<sup>25</sup>

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25 Strategy and Tactics Document, op. cit.

In other words, the success of the NDR depends on the success of the urban objective and thus accords an inevitability to the urban movement, which in turn hinges on the effectiveness of the PRs.

### MAOIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA- THE URBAN INEVITABLE

“The Central Committee (CC) assessed in 2021 January that the several people’s movements going on in the country for the past five years shall develop into a countrywide ‘spate of people’s movement’”, the CPI-Maoist observed in its document, “A Message from the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) to the ranks of the Party, Revolutionary People’s organs and Revolutionary People on the Occasion of 18th Anniversary of the Party.”<sup>26</sup> The document goes on to claim that the party had successfully infiltrated the farmers’ agitation against the three Farm Laws and that this ‘militant struggle of the farmers’ with the “help of workers, students, democratic forces, the entire oppressed classes, sections and nationalities forced the Modi government to withdraw the three Agrarian laws.”<sup>27</sup> The document also boasted not just of the active participation but also of the ‘leading efforts’ in the agitation against the *Agnipath* scheme for recruitment to the Armed Forces, where several ‘Mass Organisations’ actively worked to consolidate ‘similar struggles’. Calling for the zealous celebration of 18 years of the formation of the Party, the

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26 The Document titled “A Message from the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) to the ranks of the Party, Revolutionary People’s organs and Revolutionary People on the Occasion of 18th Anniversary of the Party” was accessed from <http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/Statements-2022/2022-08-13-CC-MessageToPeopleOnSept21-18thAnniversaryOfParty-Eng-View.pdf>; Soumitra Bose, “Maoist document confirms urban focus, infiltration”, *The Times of India*, September, 19, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maoist-document-confirms-urban-focus-infiltration/articleshow/94288686.cms>.

27 Ibid.

document goes on to urge “members, sympathizers, associates, supporters and mass based open and secret committees and organizations to implement the guidelines of their apex body to guide, provoke and infiltrate ‘spate of people’s movements’ across the country.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the document appreciated and also anticipating the increased urban role for the Party in furthering the so-called ‘New Democratic Revolution’. This increased role in urban areas was a consequence of the well-crafted strategy for the urban movement which took into account the evolving socio-economic and political trends in urban areas, and integrated these with the broader paradigm of Leninism, to usher in the NDR. This strategic focus on the urban areas was one of the most distinctive developments since the formation of the CPI Maoist in 2004.

Ever since the infamous merger of various splinter groups subscribing to the ideology of armed revolution against the Indian state with CPI Maoist in 2004, the efforts to renew, sustain and expand the PPW has been institutionalized through a detailed strategy, with different kinds of organizations being delegated with different responsibilities. This is where a well thought out strategy for the urban centers was laid down and, consequently, institutional work charted out within the organization. Though the central focus of the armed movement has always been the rural areas where the peasants – who are supposed to be the main force of the revolution – dominated the demography, the strategic significance of the urban spaces was never lost on the leaders of the armed movement since the outset.

For instance, when the Naxalbari revolt first broke out from the countryside in the state of West Bengal in the late 1960s, the urban spaces were not untouched by the movement.

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28 Soumitra Bose, *op. cit.*



In fact, urban youth from elite and prestigious colleges were radicalized by the armed ideology and actively participated in the 'revolutionary struggle'.<sup>29</sup> This participation of urban youth was consciously sought by the then leadership, including the likes of Charu Mazumdar, who explicitly invited the youth to join and lead the movement.<sup>30</sup> Curiously, even the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) assessment of the first Naxalbari outburst hinted at this trend when a dispatch from the CIA, now declassified, observed:

Naxalites have thus far concentrated their efforts in two primary areas: (1) party work in the countryside to bridge the gap between urban leaders and peasant followers; and (2) organization and education of student groups. Recently, particularly in the Communist-oriented state of West Bengal, they have begun to proselytize among urban workers.<sup>31</sup>

The document, further, pointed to the deliberations of the All-India Congress of the CPI – ML in May 1970, where the leaders had specifically emphasized concentrating on urban areas.<sup>32</sup>

While it is true that the utility and necessity of the urban movement was never really ignored entirely by past Maoist-inspired groups and that the direct 'urban' angle in the Maoism is not a new phenomenon, it is equally true that the initial years

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29 For the account of the Naxalbari revolt, see for instance, Deepak K. Gupta, "The Naxalites and the Maoist Movement in India", *Democracy and Security*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2007, pp. 157-188.

30 Rajeshwari Dasgupta, "Towards the 'New Man': Revolutionary Youth and Rural Agency in the Naxalite Movement", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 41, Number 19, 2006, pp. 1920-1927.

31 The observations are from the CIA report titled, "The Naxalites: India's Extreme Left-Wing Communist", The Document can be accessed here <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00875r001100090048-5>.

32 Ibid.

of the movement decidedly focused on the rural areas, drawing heavily on Mao's experience in China, and the urban areas were accorded a secondary position in the strategic scheme of things. But with the formation of CPI Maoist in 2004 the urban dimension got an institutional fillip with a conscious role being conceived for the urban areas along with a network of different kinds of organisations drawn for this work. In the document *Our Work in Urban Areas*<sup>33</sup> published somewhere around 2007, the Maoists evaluated the trend of movement to that time with regards to the urban areas and also charted the way forward.

The document clearly laments the fact that urban areas had hitherto not been accorded the priority they deserved and observes

...throughout the past thirty years, and in most of the main areas of the Party's work there has been a disregard towards the tasks of the urban movement and Party... We have failed to grasp the dialectical relationship between the rural and urban movements. Having understood the formulation that rural work is primary and urban work is secondary in a mechanical way, we concentrated most of our leadership forces only in rural work.<sup>34</sup>

Noting the peculiarity of urbanisation in the Indian context, the document asserts:

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33 The said document was drafted by the Urban Sub-Committee of the CPI Maoist and allegedly, Kobad Ghandy *alias* Rajan played a key role in coming up with the plan. For details about the document, refer to P. V. Ramana, *Understanding India's Maoists: Select Documents*, Pentagon Press, IDSA, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 161 -225.

34 See the full document titled "Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas" at <https://www.satp.org/document/paper-acts-and-oridinances/urban-perspective---our-work-in-urban-areas> (hereafter referred as the Urban Perspective Document).

...the percentage of the working class and the urban population in India is much higher than it was at the time of the Chinese revolution, and that therefore the urban areas and the working class in India will have a relatively more important role to play in the revolution.<sup>35</sup>

The implication for the urban work then is clearly spelt out as the document declares,

...without a strong urban revolutionary movement, the ongoing people's war faces difficulties; further, without the participation of the urban masses it is impossible to achieve countrywide victory.

Quoting Mao, it adds further, "the final objective of the revolution is the capture of the cities, the enemy's main bases, and this objective cannot be achieved without adequate work in the cities."<sup>36</sup> So, while there was recognition of the necessity of the urban movement even in the earlier *avatars* of the Maoists, the Maoist Party took up the task of coherently drawing the strategy for its urban activities and appeared to consciously work in that direction. If we study the nature of the work expected in the urban areas, the direct link with the ideas of Lenin and the role ascribed by him to the 'intellectuals' in the urban areas is unmissable.

The Urban Perspective Documents identifies the following three objectives for their urban activities:<sup>37</sup>

**Mobilise and organise the basic masses and build the Party on that basis:** The task here is to focus on building a mass base for the Party. Here specific emphasis is placed on students, middle class employees and intellectuals. Specific

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35 Urban Perspective Document.

36 Ibid.

37 These main objectives are compiled from and explained in brief from the Urban Perspective Document.

target groups who are to be radicalised for the revolutionary movement are women, *Dalits*, and religious minorities.

**Building the United Front:** This implies building an alliance of the different working-class groups and radicalising them with the revolutionary ideology against the state.

**Military task:** The military task in urban areas is to complement the main military work in the rural areas by sending cadres to the countryside, infiltrating enemy ranks, organizing in key industries, sabotage actions in coordination with the rural armed struggle, logistical support, etc.

The urban areas are thus expected to contribute to both the political and military aspects of the revolution, but apparently, the Party attributes the task of organising the basic masses as primary because, “without widely mobilizing the masses it is not possible to perform any of the other tasks such as building of United Front and performing the military tasks.” The long-term objective for the urban areas therefore “is to win over the masses, including the vast majority of the workers, and to build up the enormous strength of the working class in preparation for the decisive struggle in the future.”<sup>38</sup>

Two reflections become pertinent with regard to the broader ‘urban approach’ of the Maoists. One, the urban dimension is inevitable in the comprehensive strategy to usher in the NDR. The lack of focus on the urban sector in the initial decades of the movement was sought to be corrected by the Maoist Party by emphasising the ‘dialectical urban-rural’ relationship in protracted people’s war and conceiving a definite urban role for the Party. Second, which flows from the first, is that urban activities must first focus on building a strong ‘urban vanguard’ by proliferating the Maoist ideology in different sections of the

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38 Urban perspective Document, op. cit.

urban working class. This strategy in the initial phase would complement the rural military effort and, in the long run, would help in actualising the final assault on the Indian state. Ganapathy, the former general secretary of CPI Maoist pointed this out in no uncertain terms when he remarked, “unless the urban India is drawn to the struggle for the seizure of power, our revolution will remain incomplete.”<sup>39</sup>

### **MASS ORGANISATIONS AND THE WORK IN THE URBAN AREAS**

The success of building a strong urban movement essentially depends upon the efficacy of the Party in building a strong institutional architecture in the urban spaces that will support the objectives of the Party and compliment the struggle in the rural areas. Still, a practical impediment as identified by the Maoist Party itself, is the lack of a strong and wide-spread ideological support base for the Maoists in the urban areas. Also, the urban spaces, which according to the Party are “bastions of enemy bases”, are characterised by a strong state that impedes the core functions of the Party. In circumstances like this, the fulfilment of the urban plan requires a long-term strategic outlook where the task of the Party “is to win over the masses, including the vast majority of the workers, and to build up the enormous strength of the working class in preparation for the decisive struggle in the future.”<sup>40</sup> Proliferation of Maoist ideals among the urban population and developing a positive attitude towards the Party was key to achieve this objective.

To meet this objective, an intricate network of Mass Organisations was conceived “to build the broadest mass base” and “help the Party to have wide contact with masses, so that it can work under cover for a long time and accumulate

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39 As quoted in Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India: Events, Process and Ideology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, p.155.

40 Urban Perspective Document, op. cit.

strength.”<sup>41</sup> This intricate network comprises of different variations of organisations – those that maintain direct links with the Maoist Party to those who apparently work under various thematic covers to meet the objectives designed by the Maoist Party. These thematic covers could be of caste issues, human rights concerns, worker unions, etc.

Ostensibly, the mass organisations formed out of these thematic covers use these issues as an entry point to infiltrate into the people within organisation and explore opportunities to involve them in the activities of the Maoist Party. The intellectuals like the lawyers, university professors, activists play an important role in these types of Mass Organisations to ensure the support for the Maoist objectives in the urban areas. Interestingly, Maoists employ a tactical flexibility to reach out to those organizations which may not be directly sympathetic to Maoists cause but have grievances against the state or society. This tactical unity with different organisation is then a precursor to their integration into broader revolutionary activities. The tactical outreach is primarily two pronged – one, infiltrating existing organisation or movements which may be ideologically different but are apparently against the existing ruling dispensation and two is to create organisations which are overtly for certain thematic issues but implicitly share the Maoist goal of an overhaul of the existing state. The Maoist Party therefore puts a lot of efforts in conceiving these different kinds of Mass Organisations and to support the objective of NDR.

A classification of different kinds of Mass Organisations as compiled from the Urban Perspective Document is given below. It seeks to define the roles of different Mass Organisations and contextualize these in urban areas.

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41 Urban Perspective Document, op. cit.

‘A Professional Revolutionary’

<b>Secret Revolutionary Mass Organisations</b>	<b>Open &amp; Semi Open Revolutionary Mass Organisations</b>	<b>Legal Mass Organisations</b>
More significance in the rural areas	Significance in rural as well as urban areas	Extremely significant for urban areas
Remain underground – maintain direct link with the Maoist Party	Openly propagate the politics of NDR	Formed on an explicit political basis- Maintain legal existence – Ensure No link to the party at all
Focused primarily on instigating armed revolt	Use of the available legal opportunities to carry on revolutionary propaganda	Provide various other support to the Party cadre and activities
Develop secret organisational structure to carry the message of the party elsewhere	Cannot be a permanent form of mass organisation in the urban areas.	Take form of trade unions, student bodies, women’s fronts, caste organizations, writers’ associations, teachers’ associations, cultural bodies, etc.

The immediate role of Mass Organisations in the urban areas is, therefore, to provide the ideological fodder for radicalisation of urban spaces to the compliment the efforts of the revolutionary war. The urban areas are supposed to ideologically lead the movement and bring about the

consciousness needed to prepare for the final assault on the state and therefore are extremely critical to the final objective of NDR and thus reflects the centrality of the PRs in achieving those objectives.

Considering the specific strategic roadmap outlined for the urban areas and conception of a complex institutional architecture to initiate, sustain, and expand the Maoist urban network with the long-term objective, the effort to increase Maoist presence and influence in the urban spaces is not really surprising. Though the movement was never untouched from the urban angle, concerns became alarming with an emerging pattern where Maoists infiltrated segments in urban areas where, hitherto, they had limited presence. The issue came to a national limelight in 2006, when heavy arms were recovered in the urban areas in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, police also detected an elaborate network the Maoists had built to manufacture rocket parts in Chennai and transport them to different parts of the country.<sup>43</sup> Similar arms manufacturing units of the Maoist party, which manufactured improvised hand grenades and rocket propelled grenades, were also found to be active in the stronghold areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar.<sup>44</sup>

While this was primarily on the military front, a more pronounced and arguably more concerning trend was the

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42 “600 Rocket Launchers seized in Andhra”, *Hindustan Times*, September 8, 2006, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/600-rocket-launchers-seized-in-andhra/story-EHQisBO00pZRKSKNSyQj2I.html>.

43 Sanjay Behera, “Maoists turn to net for making rocket launchers”, *The Times of India*, November 9, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maoists-turn-to-net-for-making-rocket-launchers/articleshow/2552997.cms>.

44 In 2013, the R.P.N Singh, then the Minister of State for Home Affairs informed this to the Lok Sabha. See the response of the Minister dated May 7, 2013, here <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2013-pdfs/ls-070513/6533.pdf>.



infiltration of Maoist influence in sectors like industry, social and cultural organisations, organisations explicitly based on caste, gender, religion, etc., which were formed to address individual grievances within the state and society. The main objective of this infiltration was to exploit these existing fault lines and influence a peculiar political action premised on the logic of class struggle with the ‘ruling class’, and to prepare grounds for the PPW against the state. Maoist ‘Front Organisations’<sup>45</sup> – which maintained a separate legal existence from the Maoist Party, but worked to garner support for it – became extremely handy in exploiting these fault lines. Intelligence agencies had earlier warned about “several frontal organisations of CPI-Maoist that have penetrated into unions, workers groups and organisations working in the social sector.”<sup>46</sup> Maoists themselves boasted about their role in the anti-farm laws and anti-*Agnipath* scheme protests.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, there are front organisations masquerading as human rights groups, *Dalit* and other caste-based groups, womens’ rights advocacy groups, cultural organisations, etc., whose primary task is to use these social-political issues in the urban areas, and to appropriate and radicalise their movement to prepare for a violent clash against the state. Increasing numbers of

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45 A kind of Mass organisations, the Front Organizations are the off-shoots CPI Maoist. They maintain separate existence and profess distinct ideology to escape the legal scrutiny. Ministry of Home Affairs in one of its responses to Lok Sabha on February 18, 2014, submitted a list 74 identified Front Organizations in different states. The response and the list can be accessed here <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2014-pdfs/lis-180214/3838.pdf>.

46 Abhishek Bhalla, “Exclusive: Maoists becoming part of labour unions in Delhi-NCR, say intelligence agencies”, *India Today*, July 3, 2013, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/maoists-at-the-gate-red-ultras-infiltrating-labour-unions-and-workers-groups-in-delhi-168930-2013-07-03>.

47 Soumitra Bose, op. cit.

individuals have been arrested for direct or indirect links with the Party from the urban, areas point to this trend.

Amongst the targeted sectors, the more vulnerable section is educational institutions, such as colleges and universities, where the increasing Maoist influence is indicating troubling trends. Young college students have always been a target of radical Maoist propaganda since the onset of the first Naxalbari outburst. Ideologues like Charu Mazumdar had consciously focused on this demography to radicalise and initiate them into this violent movement. The trend continues even today, with new zeal and finesse. The *Urban Perspective Document* itself repeatedly urges a focus on the youth and students, to enlist them into the movement. Consequently, there have been instances where students have joined the movement directly from universities and colleges, at times under the influence of their teachers.<sup>48</sup> Various avenues, such as student politics, socio-cultural groups espousing peculiar socio-political causes, camps, etc., are apparently used to ensure this enlisting. For instance, the Democratic Students Union (DSU), which was once an active students' association in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been identified as a front organisation. DSU and its later splinter group, the Bhagat Singh Ambedkar Student Association (BASO) both maintained an ideological affinity with Maoism<sup>49</sup> and, interestingly, it was the same

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48 There are several cases where college students were found to have been part of the underground Maoist activities. For more recent account of this activities, see Sidharth Rai, "Maharashtra Police reveals JNU, DU's dark Maoist secret", *India Today*, February 23, 2016, <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/maharashtra-police-reveals-jnu-dus-dark-maoist-secret-310022-2016-02-22>.

49 For a more detailed understanding of the ideology and politics of DSU and BASO, see Jean Thomas Martelli, "The Politics of Our Selves: Left self-fashioning and the production of representative claims in everyday Indian campus politics", *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 55, Number 6, 2021, pp. 1972-2045.

DSU which had organised the ‘cultural evening’ that allegedly celebrated the convicted terrorist Afzal Guru.<sup>50</sup>

The peculiar case of Kabir Kala Manch (KKM), which came under scrutiny during the ongoing Bhima-Koregaon controversy, is another case in point. KKM, which apparently maintains that it is a cultural organisation speaking on the issues of caste atrocities, has again been alleged to be a front organisation and has been under the intelligence radar for its Maoist links. In 2011, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) had arrested members of KKM for their alleged links with the Maoist Party. Investigations revealed that some KKM members were present at a 15-day “study camp” held in the Khed area in Pune district, which was attended by the slain Maoist Milind Baburao Teltumbde, sometime around 2010. The camp was projected as a training programme for teachers, but was used to propagate the Maoist ideology and seek their participation in the movement.<sup>51</sup> In 2012, R.R. Patil, the then Home Minister of Maharashtra had submitted to the Legislative Assembly that there was evidence of such camps being held around Pune.<sup>52</sup> Two former students of the University of Hyderabad were arrested for plotting to kill Appa Rao, the Vice Chancellor of the University in 2018. The two students, Ankala Prudviraj and Chandan Kumar Mishra,

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50 Aranya Shankar, “JNU students clash over event on Afzal Guru”, *The Indian Express*, February 10, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/jnu-students-clash-over-event-on-afzal-guru/>.

51 Chandan Haygunde, “Slain Maoist leader Milind Teltumbde’s Pune links include ‘organising Naxal camp’, Elgaar Parishad case”, *The Indian Express*, November 16, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/maoist-leader-milind-teltumbde-pune-elgaar-parishad-7623382/>.

52 Chandan Haygunde, “Evidence of Naxal training camp in Pune”, NCP leader R R Patil in Assembly in 2012”, *The Indian Express*, February 3, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/evidence-of-naxal-training-camp-in-pune-ncp-leader-r-r-patil-in-assembly-in-2012-6248048/>.

were influenced by the Maoist-Leninist ideology and were in touch with the Maoists after the suicide of Rohith Vemula. The students had an earlier history of links with the banned outfit and the assassination was apparently planned by Maoists.<sup>53</sup>

The ongoing complex Bhima-Koregaon case is another interesting instance where the complicated dynamics of Maoism and urban civil society groups is being explored as the case progresses. While the final verdict is yet to come in the case, the profile of the prominent individuals accused and arrested hints at a probable influence of the Maoist mechanism. The following is a compilation<sup>54</sup> of affiliations of the accused in the Bhima-Koregaon case, with identified Maoist Front Organisations.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nature of Activity</b>	<b>Association with any front organisation</b>
Surendra Gadling	Lawyer and Dalit Rights Activities	Indian Association of People's Lawyers
Rona Wilson	Human Rights Activist	Committee for Release of Political Prisoners
Arun Ferriera	Human Rights Activist	Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights and the Indian Association of People's Lawyers.
Sagar Gorkhe	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch

53 "Arrest of two ex-students foiled plot to kill Hyderabad Central University V-C, say police", *The Indian Express*, April 2, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/plot-to-kill-hyderabad-central-university-v-c-podile-apparao-foiled-two-maoists-arrested-5119324/>.

54 This compilation is done by sourcing information various reports, judgements available of the accused.

## ‘A Professional Revolutionary’

Ramesh Gaichor	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch
Jyoti Jagtap	Anti-caste activist	Kabir Kala Manch
Varavara Rao	Writer, Poet, Human Rights Activist	Revolutionary Writer’s Association; was previously an active member of the People’s War Group

It is to be noted that a multiplicity of cases against these individuals are still under trial and it may well turn out that they are not guilty of the several crimes they have been accused of. However, their association with Maoist front organisations raises some concerns which cannot be ignored entirely, especially when seen in the context of the role of front organisations in urban areas.

This trend of exploiting the problems within the civil society for their ideological purposes will remain a major concern for state agencies. In fact, a recent document recovered from the CPI Maoists urges cadres to “infiltrate every strata of urban society, ranging from housing societies, puja pandals, sports clubs, slum committees, factories, educational institutions, political and government institutions, to even security and intelligence agencies.”<sup>55</sup> The document unapologetically elaborates on the strategy adopted by the Maoists for their struggle in urban spaces. Such influence in the civil society is a major risk, primarily because, unlike the possession, transfer and use of arms, which is an obvious act of violence,

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55 For the report on the document, see Soumitra Bose, “Maharashtra: Maoists now plan to infiltrate forces, Durga mandals, slums”, *The Times of India*, September 21, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/maharashtra-maoists-now-plan-to-infiltrate-forces-durga-mandals-slums/article94338644.cms>.

such radicalisation is rather subtle and extremely difficult to legally substantiate, even as it creates a conducive ecosystem to instigate the politics of violence against the state.

An affidavit submitted by United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to the Supreme Court in 2013 succinctly summarized the gravity of the threat the Maoists pose in urban areas

*...ideologues and supporters of the CPI (Maoist) party in cities and towns have undertaken a concerted and systematic propaganda against the State to project the State in poor light and also malign it through disinformation. In fact, it is these ideologues who have kept the Maoist movement alive and are in many ways more dangerous than the cadres of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army.*<sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The fact that Maoism constitutes a major internal security threat is incontrovertible. It may appear to be waning now but the nature of the Maoist movement suggests that this is a tactical phase of retreat, to recoup and regroup, to revise their strategies, endure the temporary setback, and come back with increased strength. This classic ‘one step forward, four steps back’, strategy of the Maoists is integral to their strategy to face the might of the ‘strong Indian state’. The movement may appear to be waning ‘materially’ but it continues to fight on the ‘ideological’ front, to keep the movement alive.

At the core of this ideological plan is to persistently work towards delegitimising the Indian state in the eyes of the

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56 “Maoist ideologues more dangerous than Naxals, UPA regime had told SC”, *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, August 31, 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/maoist-ideologues-more-dangerous-than-naxals-upa-regime-had-told-sc/story-MtmKrWgn6E2oECtzlsUWPL.html>.

common masses. As Varavara Rao once unapologetically proclaimed, “the parliamentary system does not suit our country. The only solution to it is to follow the path of Naxalbari and free ourselves from these semi-Fascist, semi-colonial forces, paving the way to a real democracy. You can’t fight it without taking arms in your hands.”<sup>57</sup>

The Maoists have consistently adopted this line and have sought an armed struggle to replace the Indian state with a totalitarian system. But as the armed struggle from the rural areas faced several challenges, Maoists have reconsidered their strategies and priorities to meet the contemporary realities of India. The focus on the urban spaces and directly targeting civil society has attained renewed focus in this revaluation. The current nature of Maoism, as noted by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is a classic case of fourth generation warfare “a warfare where the enemy is invisible and the battle is for the control of civil society – through coercion, controlling the hearts and minds of the people or delivering results by redressing grievances of the people.”<sup>58</sup> The urban areas are targeted to infiltrate various civil social structures and exploit their grievances to radicalise them against the state. The radicalisation is premised on the ideas of revolution, which reflects an unbroken ideological chain of thought, going back up to Lenin.

Lenin’s notion of Professional Revolutionaries, i.e., individuals fully dedicated to the task of revolution and guiding the struggle to create a new state, has been innovatively reconceived by the Indian Maoists with a military as well as

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57 The quote is taken from an interview of Dr. Varavara Rao given to Rediff in 1997. The full text of the interview is available here. <https://m.rediff.com/news/jul/05naxal.htm>.

58 Ajit Doval, “Left Wing Extremism – The Threat and Response”, Vivekanand International Foundation, May 21, 2010, <https://www.vifindia.org/print/348>.

ideological role. Given the fact that the final military task in the long-drawn battle for the NDR is currently a distant goal, the immediate objective of the urban movement is to build a strong ideological base, sympathetic to the cause of the armed revolt. The PRs in the Indian context are therefore working through various mass organisations to use existing fault lines in the state and society to their ideological advantage. Consequently, we see these Maoists camouflaging themselves as various ‘civil society’ groups to exploit the democratic rights and liberties accorded by the Indian Constitution in their struggle for NDR.

The Maoists are also increasingly tapping into socio-political and economic movements, such as the protests against the farm laws, the anti-*Agnipath* scheme protests and anti-CAA protests, to use this mass momentum for their violent agenda.

This is not to discredit the genuine, constitutionally acceptable forms of protests. In fact, the robustness of democracy depends on the space available for people to constitutionally protest for their rights and demands. But it is important to make a reasoned distinction between the ‘protest within Indian democracy’ and ‘protest against Indian democracy’. This distinction is, however, extremely blurred, making it difficult to identify miscreants from genuine protestors. As a consequence, the state is often accused of using its power to quell dissent in the name of fighting Maoism. While it is not inconceivable that the state uses force to quell inconvenient protests, it is equally important to be conscious of the fact that Maoists have been using this thin line to their strategic advantage as well.

The study of Maoist documents and their contextualization within the broader Leninist and Maoist theoretical and conceptual underpinnings reveals that the urban movement is part of larger plan to wage an armed war against the Indian



state, with the objective of overthrowing it. That there certainly are problems within the Indian state and society only works to the advantage of the Maoists. The Maoists have been exploiting these issues to keep the movement alive, despite several setback in recent times. The focus on urban areas is to keep the ideological momentum alive and expand it, to support the Maoist Party's work in rural areas. To effectively counter Maoism in India requires an acceptance of this reality and a long-term political plan to respond to the propaganda and violence of the Maoists.