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NEPAL: DYSFUNCTIONAL POLITICS EXPLODES

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Abstract

The focus on recent violence in Nepal has identified the frustrations of Generation Z as the driver in the massive wave of destruction, which produced more than 50 deaths and brought down the elected government. Though the assessment has correctly addressed the numerous internal contradictions that led to the explosive result, notably the lack of economic alternatives exacerbated by corruption and the intrusion of international actors, analysis has yet to deal with the prevalence of political violence in shaping the backdrop for individual action. Of particular salience is the reality that the left-wing has dominated Nepal's post-civil war politics, including a strong role played by the former insurgents, the Maoists. One would thus expect that the distressed masses now under examination would have had ideological champions. This has not been the case. Instead, violence has served as a key contextual variable for what has unfolded.

If one examines recent articles on Nepal, ongoing events there read like the punchline in a bad joke. Unbridled corruption, serious organised crime, communist foreign penetration and domestic political subservience, accompanied by largely unreported local political violence, the country has had it all. And now it has no elected government, parliament, or bureaucracy, either.

Framed as the revolt of Generation Z, what began as a peaceful protest against an astonishingly ham-handed government banning of 26 social media platforms – the circulation system through which the lifeblood flowed in an economy wherein 82 percent of the workforce is in informal employment, “far higher than global and regional averages,” deadpans the World Bank. Initial frustration was quickly infiltrated by the aggressive tranche who have emerged in all recent political street action. Clumsy police response – both the regular and border forces were committed – escalated to violence. With a fast-growing death toll and loss of service-grade firearms (at least 74 are known dead; 1,276 rifles and pistols lost), the tsunami of arson-driven protest that followed destroyed everything from parliament to the homes of major political party leaders. Some prominent politicians, caught in the tide, were brutalised. Facebook footage is both graphic and ubiquitous.

Ultimately, the army was called in, engaged in negotiations of sorts with a largely leaderless movement, and named a 73-year-old former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Sushila Karki, as interim prime minister. Her only qualification was that she was seen to have previously stood fast against corruption – and been forced ultimately to resign as a consequence. It was promptly announced that new parliamentary elections would be held in March 2026.

None of this made so much as a nod at following the constitution, so painfully constructed after the 1996-2006 civil war. The extent of the destruction, including the

loss of semi-automatic weapons as the police broke and fled, combined with the loss of legitimacy by the discredited, albeit elected political leadership, bodes ill for what is to come. Similar recent upheavals in Sri Lanka (July 2022) and Bangladesh (August 2024) have often been cited for comparison, but these took place, it hardly needs mention, in their own national contexts. Nepal, too, is unique.

Beyond Tourist Stereotypes

Ongoing analysis has been reasonably accurate. What has been missing is just what has been discussed in these pages, the continuing political violence, which serves as the back-story to all witnessed now. The context, in other words, all but summoned conflagration.

Known for its geographic and societal complexity, Nepal sustains itself economically with tourism and remittances. This has led, according to the World Bank, to a decline in poverty nothing short of stunning. Simultaneously, though, this development “has not translated into quality jobs, at home, reinforcing a cycle of lost opportunities and continued departure of many Nepalis abroad in search of employment.”^[1] Throw into the mix the corruption and conspicuous consumption by the elite, constant political violence at the local level, especially each time polls are held, and the demonstrations and riots make a great deal of sense.

Nepal’s democracy has thus been as much a part of the problem as the solution. A narrative of rationalisation without a way forward only reinforces frustration. Not a day goes by, for instance, without the lament from the chattering classes that a solution must be found to Nepalis being forced to go abroad to work. Little effort, though, goes into grappling with the stark reality that Nepal, like Japan, has few (to no) natural resources, only hydropower, as long as water lasts in a world of global warming. Hence, intensive human capital development is the only possible solution, and that has been sacrificed to political drift, criminality, and violence.

It is here that irony looms its perplexing head. Nepal today is a communist-dominated polity, with the prime minister’s position in their hands – at least until he resigned in response to the riots and the killings by the security forces.^[2] Hence, it might be expected that the masses would have a logical champion. Yet the various communist factions or parties, which since 2015 have often comprised two-thirds of parliamentary seats in the key House of Representatives – in the much smaller National Assembly, which represents provinces, they also have a majority – are divided by issues of ideological interpretation exacerbated by personality clashes. This causes the largest groups, when they are at odds (which is frequently), to seek tactical alliances nationally with noncommunists, of which the Nepali Congress (NC) is the largest party.^[3]

NC, however, is not only a minority within the political system but also invariably a minority within whatever communist coalition it has been asked to join for tactical

reasons driven by communist schism. The communist factional purpose in soliciting NC membership is to gain and maintain power. NC's motivation has been survival. Though the apparatus of governance and law enforcement nominally exists, in reality, little functions as associated with titles and descriptions of roles and duties.

For into this equation enters corruption. A degree of mutual complicity serves to neutralise bodies nominally charged with ensuring government integrity and to channel those investigations that do occur into actions against civil servants rather than politicians. Such corruption ensures impunity for perpetrators and non-execution of the law.

In particular, as concerns security, a legacy of Maoist domination in the present constitutional era of the Home Minister's position,[4] which controls the police, has left that force, regardless of political changes, ineffective and unwilling to intervene in instances of political violence. This, in fact, both to achieve political domination and to raise funds for the party, remains integral to the maintenance of the Maoist position.

Though officially a democracy, Nepal has steadily diverged from that term, and formal rankings do not classify it as such, with attendant implications for the rule of law and free societal processes. Elections are regularly held, but only the actual premises of polling stations are secured, with widespread terrorism continuing throughout the country. Thus, votes have remarkably little impact upon actual political processes.[5]

The state is coercive; uses the forces of public security as cover for continued local terrorism; and holds up the likes of China as a model for emulation, to which list have periodically been added others, such as Venezuela and North Korea.[6] The most important of the actors in this dynamic is China, which has leveraged both ideological affinity and corruption to establish an unprecedented degree of influence.[7] This has led to further descent of Nepali politics into so-called soft or competitive authoritarianism.[8] Neither the judiciary nor the police functions in a manner as to guarantee individual security or systemic integrity.

Currently available evaluations on the state of the Nepalese polity are negative. In mid-2021, the esteemed scholar of Nepali society and politics, Karl-Heinz Krämer, openly questioned whether Nepal could be called a democracy. Available data support his scepticism. The authoritative Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) annual democracy ratings, released in February 2025 (for 2024), place Nepal at 4.60 (of 10; metrics in report) or 96th of 167 countries. It is categorised as a "hybrid regime" and located in the third tier of four, between "flawed democracy" and "authoritarian" on the scale, and just a dozen slots above falling into "authoritarian." The highly regarded Transparency International annual corruption perceptions index, in its report issued in January 2024 (for 2023), scored Nepal at just 35 on a 100-point scale (metrics in report), which placed it 108 of 180 countries. In *Global Organized Crime Index 2023*, one of the most sophisticated attempts to measure all world countries on a wide variety of criminal

activity, that of Global Initiative (which receives official U.S. funding), Nepal scores 27th worst of 193 polities total (p.209), while simultaneously ranking 132nd of the same 193 countries in its resilience (i.e., in its ability to cope with its crime in terms of protecting the state and its citizens, p.234). Amnesty International (AI), in its most recent annual regional review of human rights, issued in early 2025, was equally negative in its assessment (Nepal section at pp.272-274). Previous, recent AI reports have been equally negative. Likewise, in November 2020, the other major international organisation devoted to human rights concerns, Human Rights Watch, issued a scathing report, the title reflecting the contents: *No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims: The Culture of Impunity in Post-Conflict Nepal*.^[9]

This process of democratic deterioration accelerated dramatically during the height of the pandemic period, which began in Nepal on 24 March 2020 with complete lockdown that has since been modified to conform with protocols generally in place globally. Local political violence continued even during the most intense periods of the pandemic. Intervention by the authorities was limited and principally for show, with nearly all those detained – publicity notwithstanding – quickly released and regular amnesties leveraged to deal with awkward cases, such as murder.

Insurgent Roots of Present Drift

Though it has been nearly 19 years since the restoration of “peace,” Nepal has continued to drift. Overt Maoist insurgency in Nepal, February 1996 to November 2006, involved political violence ranging from terrorism to guerrilla warfare to actual military attacks by insurgent units armed and equipped in the manner of the government forces.^[10] Mobilisation of insurgent manpower derived overwhelmingly from exploiting the numerous contradictions inherent to a small country of some 28 million (now 30 million) comprised of no less than 142 officially recognised castes and ethnic groups (2011 census), each of which had its unique and increasingly pressing needs in an economy classified as one of the world’s poorest. Maoist ranks thus reflected marginalised communities and the young (perhaps half the population was less than eighteen years of age during the conflict). By 2002-2003, the country had entered a state of civil war.^[11]

In many older sources, a figure of 13,000 dead is used, since this was the accepted tally at the time overt conflict ended. Continuing efforts to arrive at a more accurate assessment have caused this to be raised to more than 18,000. Focusing upon deaths alone seriously underestimates what occurred, because the numbers injured, tortured, and mutilated were substantially greater, approaching a hundred thousand, with equal numbers internally or internationally displaced. Significantly, casualties did not cluster by caste or community. Rather, once unleashed, violence became general.

The objective of the insurgency was to seize political power in order to institute a communist regime modelled upon the most radical period of Mao Tse-tung’s rule in

China, the Cultural Revolution.[12] The military phase of the war began with a November 2001 attack upon the army camp at Ghorahi, Dang.[13] With the army (there is but one service) slow to muster an effective response, the government and its armed local representatives, the police, had in many areas barely been able to survive the onslaught, which included widespread assassinations (with body mutilation common; e.g., cutting off heads) and attacks upon individuals perceived as rivals in organizing and mobilizing society, as well as extensive use of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in centres of settlement. Even the capital, Kathmandu, was by 2002-2003 in a state of siege, and Maoist activity within the city was extensive. At the conclusion of the conflict, an estimated 70-80 percent of the populace was in insurgent-dominated areas.

On 31 October 2003, the Maoists were placed on the U.S. State Department's Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL), which enumerates terrorist organisations for immigration purposes, and were one of the groups designated in Executive Order 13224, "Blocking and Prohibiting Transactions With Persons Who Commit, Threaten to Commit, or Support Terrorism." Among the victims of the Maoists were Nepalis employed in U.S. Embassy security. The Maoist security challenge to Nepal was identified in *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (March 2006), and Washington assisted Kathmandu throughout the conflict.[14]

As part of the effort to facilitate the peace process, the U.S. and India coordinated lifting the Maoists' blocked status in September 2012.[15] That the Maoists were not designated a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO), with consequences detailed in 18 USC §2339B, stemmed from the reality that, their embrace of terrorism notwithstanding, they consciously avoided attacking Westerners and their property, including Americans, and directed their violence against fellow Nepalis.[16]

A formal peace agreement notwithstanding, the complicated post-insurgency period has been characterised by a significant level of political violence, both to eliminate political rivals and to raise the funds necessary to engage in the Maoist political effort.[17] These Maoist actions have involved many of the same organisations as in the 1996-2006 decade. They were not disbanded; to the contrary, they have been reinforced for violent paramilitary activity.[18]

Terroristic threats and attacks occur because the November 2006 peace agreement did not bring an end to Maoist terrorism. Instead, extensive Maoist militia presence nationwide transitioned into a number of paramilitary organisations which were led by leadership personnel transferred from the Maoist regular forces, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). A Young Communist League (YCL), in conjunction with numerous other front organisations and regular party formations, acted through terroristic violence to ensure local Maoist domination and to secure funding for the party.[19]

These and other Maoist paramilitary organisations operate openly and are neither proscribed nor monitored by the police. They bill themselves as support groups, but are

far from that. They do not exercise a monopoly over Maoist violence but are central to terroristic acts against individuals and organisations, as well as to bandas, armed strikes enforced with violence by designated personnel. In recent years, though, for reasons of intra-communist competition for recruits and the imperative of increased fund-raising, terroristic acts directed against individuals have increasingly been conducted openly.

Debate on the Role of Violence

Central to the discussion is thus the reality that the insurgency period featured an *overt* effort by the Maoists to capture the state using violence, with terroristic action as a central feature, while the post-insurgency period was not an end to the first but its continuation through a *covert* approach that has shelved guerrilla warfare and military action in favor of subversion and terrorism directed against individuals and organizations who continue to resist communist domination. Debate over *how* to implement this alternative approach led to the splintering of the Maoist movement, with radicals demanding more aggressive assault upon individuals and societal structures that stood in the way of completely reshaping socio-economic-political life.

Throughout most of the early democratic era, the above-ground communists were in the parliamentary opposition, with the Unified Marxist-Leninists (UML) comprising the majority faction. Impatient at the slow pace of societal change, the most radical communist element, the Maoists, broke away from the party after 1990 and declared “people’s war” in 1996.^[20] They rejoined the communist mainstream in May 2018 through a formal union with the UML, reconstituting the legacy Nepal Communist Party (NCP), but then returned to stand-alone status in March 2021 (as did UML).

Division within communist and Maoist ranks has not affected the reality that throughout the present constitutional period (i.e., since late 2015), the communists have dominated (with the assistance of terroristic activity) both the popular and parliamentary votes. Previously, though often producing popular vote totals greater than NC or even the combined non-communist opposition, the communists had been forced into minority status due to their own division and electoral mechanics. Maintaining strategic unity even while factions remain organizationally independent (e.g., UML and the Maoists) has turned the normal communist popular majority into parliamentary and systemic domination.^[21]

The original and still largest Maoist group – referred to herein as “the mainstream” and headed throughout by Pushpa Kamal Dahal *aka* Prachanda (“Renowned,” though “Fierce One” is most common in Western media) – has remained dominant within the extreme left-wing of Nepali communism and continues to use terroristic action in local spaces *opportunistically* despite having opted to emphasize political action and subversion within the context of Nepal’s flawed democracy.

Post-insurgency splintering saw at one point, as many as ten Maoist parties in existence. When perhaps half of them returned to the fold, the mainstream altered its name yet again, becoming the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). Subsequently, on 17 May 2018, it was announced that the party's electoral alliance with the communists (but not Maoists) of the UML, led by Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli – the prime minister who has just resigned, it should be noted – had resulted in their amalgamation into the restored NCP.

In late December 2020, an intra-communist battle for control of the movement commenced. This was of particular importance because, as was the case in communist regimes during the Cold War and beyond, in Nepali communism, it is the party that is key in politics rather than the government. Major government decisions and appointments are first decided upon in party deliberations before positions are transmitted to the government, which implements them.^[22]

As a result of Dahal's efforts to seize leadership of the NCP, even as that party controlled the government, a crisis erupted, and by 7 March 2021, the UML and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) – i.e., “the Maoists” – again came into existence as legal entities, albeit continuing to cooperate behind the scenes on all major issues. Oli, a former Naxalite, or Vietnam War era Maoist, remained the head of the UML, while Dahal remained head of the mainstream Maoists.

In the aftermath of the 20 November 2022 elections, Oli offered to accept a rotating communist prime minister arrangement. As Dahal was to go first, he leapt at the opportunity, and the communists reunited, albeit the UML and the Maoists retained their separate party identities. The same discord between Dahal and Oli caused this communist reunification to temporarily collapse but not before Dahal and the Maoists had locked in leadership at the head of a 10-party coalition.^[23] The point became moot when, on 4 March 2024, Dahal and Oli reconciled yet again, with the latter's UML communists rejoining the former's Maoists to recreate the earlier “Leftist Alliance.”

The two main communist forces, with two others, easily dominated the chamber, and the Maoists maintained control with Dahal as the prime minister. Relatively rapidly, differences between Dahal and Oli again caused the UML communists to split with the Maoists, creating a situation where a new communist UML-led government was declared on 14 July 2024. For the reasons discussed immediately above, NC supported this alignment as the most viable option, speaking to its own *national* party's needs. It continues to occupy a minority position compared to the coalition communists.^[24]

This manoeuvring has not altered *local* realities as concerns terroristic violence. One of the defining characteristics of the post-conflict years has been the increasing divergence between the formal rituals of national political participation and the local politics of political domination. Leninist political forms result in a reality where obedience is

demanding by the central party organs, but decentralisation devolves tactical considerations of area domination and violence to local party entities.

Thus, deniability is created for the centre and a sense of empowerment at the local level through widespread networks of cellular action, each of which is replete with offices and the authority to act against those identified as party enemies. Little discipline is exercised through the party chain of command, with the overriding metric of performance being results – delivery of local domination and the funding necessary to support party operations. Power is the objective and just how it is achieved is decentralised to local party bodies.^[25]

Deniability remains essential to Maoist functioning above-ground, as is ensuring that Transitional Justice cases are heard only under a restricted mandate.^[26] The sheer level of atrocity unleashed in local space during the conflict has not yet been comprehended by either national, regional, or international observers. Regardless of the precise count, which is substantial, even using existing data, the Maoists claim whatever occurred is evidence of the repressive nature of the old order or was actually conducted by the state.

A Damaged Political System

This ongoing drumbeat of political violence has taken its toll. At heart, the issue is that stated above: Nepal, its declared political status notwithstanding, is at best a quasi-democracy. As a self-proclaimed communist state, it seeks to implement what it claims is “21st Century Marxism” or “scientific socialism.”^[27] Maoism is but one thread of this fervently embraced communism.^[28] That the Maoists reunited with the historically larger, above-ground communist movement in the 2017 elections and then formally in early 2018 resulted from the strategy of Dahal, who intended to use the united front approach to subvert the dominant UML leadership so that the Maoists would control the entire communist party (and the country).^[29]

As Oli was in poor health, Dahal, until the lapse, exercised strategic patience. Ultimately, he expected subversion (within the communist movement) and terrorism (directed at non-communist foes) to drop leadership of the combined communist forces into his lap. This would allow the Maoists to complete “the revolution” under the façade of a democratic process.^[30] In that project, the imperative was to work the Maoists into a position of control.^[31]

In recent moments of contestation, the willingness of the duelling communist sides to temporarily honour rulings by the normally ignored Supreme Court stems from their acknowledging that a standoff is at times preferable to intra-communist paramilitary battle.^[32] The temporary rotation of personalities changes little in a matrix of communist power, save to alter somewhat the distribution of benefits to placemen.

Intra-communist struggle contains another conflict which tears at the unity of the Maoists themselves: a radical challenge to the mainstream. Within the original Maoist party, a faction, headed by one of the senior figures of the movement, Mohan Baidya *aka* Kiran (“Ray of Light”), became increasingly alienated from the mainstream over issues of strategy – primarily the faction’s demand that terrorism be used *systematically* in the post-war environment rather than *opportunistically* as favored by the mainstream – and finally broke away formally in late June 2012 under the original party name, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, but using CPN-M as its acronym. It took with it perhaps one-third of the entire party.[33]

It included at that time an even more radical faction led by Netra Bikram Chand *aka* Biplav (also rendered as Biplab; “Revolt” or “Rebel”). Dissatisfied with the strategy of Baidya to prevent the November 2013 elections for the Second Constituent Assembly (CAII), the Chand *aka* Biplav group split in November 2014 to form its own party.[34] It named itself CPN(M), using the original acronym of the Maoist movement. Most of the Baidya manpower departed with Chand *aka* Biplav. The group subsequently recruited actively and grew substantially to challenge the mainstream leadership. Its own effort to prevent the 2017 electoral cycle also featured extensive violence.[35]

After 2017, the violence of the radical Maoists continued at an intense level, with numerous bombings and attacks upon individuals,[36] until the nationwide emergency created in Nepal by the pandemic forced them to revamp their strategy. The faction associated with Chand *aka* Biplav chose on 4 March 2021 to reintegrate into the above-ground communist movement.[37] The radicals were led to understand that they could pursue an “inside/outside” approach, engaging in terrorism inside the system but limiting the use of bombing and other methodologies that had the potential for a mass casualty event. This they have done. Regardless, Maoist factions do not attack each other and continue to interact closely at the local level.

On 19 June 2023, it was announced that a Socialist Front had been formed by the Maoist mainstream of Dahal, the CPN (Maoist Centre), and a number of associated left-wing parties. Committed to the “scientific socialism” that is the essence of 21st century Marxist-Leninist, the grouping brings together some of the most extreme positions in Nepali communism and appears intended to push the Maoist-led coalition to ever more radical stances.[38] It views the opposition as both a creature of global capitalism and a Western tool, particularly of the United States. The official position of the Socialist Front – for which radical leader Chand *aka* Biplav is now the leading spokesman, even as Dahal oversees its operations – is that parliamentary democracy has been a failure and must be replaced by “socialism” (defined as a dictatorship of the proletariat).[39]

Throughout September 2024, the Maoists, as the lead force in the Socialist Front, denounced the use of parliamentary majorities to effect change and threatened to launch violent street demonstrations. A party circular notifying provincial party committees to

be prepared for such an eventuality was distributed in the first week of September 2024.[40]

In particular, the Maoists demanded that the use of the word “violence” in discussions concerning their threats be stricken from the parliamentary record as “unconstitutional language.” This position, which essentially holds that the Maoists may continue to use violence to shape the polity as per their objective to achieve societal transformation, speaks volumes as to why the political system has continued to drift.

At present, with most radicals are again within the mainstream, many of their central figures have been given leadership positions within the Dahal faction. Though the very top radical figures have retained their formal estrangement, separation at the local level was never a reality, either in orientation or actions.[41] Ironically, the same debate – just where to establish the boundaries between subversion and concerted use of terroristic violence, exacerbated by disagreement on which forms of violence should be used – has now caused the expected factionalism within the reintegrated radicals. Outbidding is a reality, with rival factions engaging in one-upmanship in local terrorism in order to assert revolutionary authenticity.[42]

Mainstream Maoist terroristic acts occur alongside those of the radical Maoists, with individuals moving fluidly between factions. Terroristic activity is not interfered with by the authorities except when particularly egregious actions spark public outrage. Official response is normally cosmetic, and it is rare, even when individuals are identified to the police as assailants or perpetrators, that they are detained or prosecuted. Those detained are invariably released.

This should not surprise. The domination of the Home Ministry by communists, especially Maoists, in the constitutional era, has powerfully affected police performance of duty and has led to a culture of impunity wherein Maoist terroristic action of all factions occurs with the complicity of the state. As a result, the police remain both indifferent and ineffectual to concerns of popular security, or worse, actually in league with the communists.

Failure of Law Enforcement

Nepal Police (NP) – the main actor in the disastrous unfolding of events which prompted this article – is a unitary body of approximately 72,000 (with some 9,000 current vacancies) commanded from Kathmandu. Local authorities play no role in direction or resourcing. NP is a force long challenged in its professionalism. It is better known for its corruption than its service to or protection of the populace.[43]

Seriously mauled during the 1996-2006 civil war, the police in the post-conflict period have compiled a record of non-intervention in matters concerning the Maoists.[44] Though the dire security situation during the civil war period could be

advanced to explain police refusal or inability to provide protection to members of the public *then*, this says nothing as to the continued failure to address the requirements for individual citizen security or protection from menace, attack, or extortion is unusual if not nonexistent.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1996-2006 conflict, as the Maoists focused upon consolidating their power, the police still served as something of an obstacle. There has been a decisive shift over the past decade. Now, the police have adjusted to communist domination of the polity and can be assessed as both indifferent and ineffectual – or, as noted above, actually assisting the perpetrators of terrorism by passing information to them. Changes in national politics do not affect this dynamic. Neither does the justice system serve as a mediating factor, being also plagued by inefficiency and corruption.^[45]

Further, the reality is that in the post-conflict years, the police have regularly been directed *not* to become involved in cases that could be categorised as “political” and thus have routinely refused to commit themselves to anything involving political party action against individuals or property. If such a stance reflected widespread but unofficial police policy in the first dozen post-war years, it had become official by June 2019, albeit closely held.^[46] As the Maoists continue to be the most violent wing of Nepali communism, the result is impunity, a situation perilous for both normal life and the political activism of non-communist political individuals and organisations.^[47]

This situation has extended throughout the entire post-war period to the present. An illustration is provided by an episode that occurred during the violent period surrounding the November 2013 CAI election. In Kathmandu, one of then-Vice President Nanda Pun’s two sons, Dipesh, was supporting the party’s campaign there by leading a Maoist gang on motorcycles, who assaulted non-communist activists throughout the city using *kukris*. At least one prominent non-communist activist appealed to the police. Though the activist had been wounded, the police refused to allow the filing of a report and were determined not to become enmeshed in the politics of the matter. That the police would entertain a complaint (even of attempted murder) against the son of the vice-president (and former Maoist military commander) could be considered minimal, but the reality applies to nearly all Maoist terroristic attacks, to the present.^[48]

If one were, for the sake of argument, to assume the best intentions on the part of the police – the Maoists are not oblivious to the possibility that a victim complaint might lodge with an officer driven by integrity and professionalism – there is the physical improbability of timely and effectual response. This includes even a population centre such as Kathmandu, where, as is true throughout the country, police reaction to normal crime is woeful and response to victim needs for protection from political violence is effectively nonexistent.

Given police non-response, Nepalis can only depend upon soliciting the involvement of alternative power centres, such as party bodies or civil society. Yet, as is invariably the reality, the turning to such outside sources has no impact on altering an individual's situation as a target. That Nepalis seize upon this option stems from the reality that there simply are no other alternatives. Though neighbours or friends at times rally to cries for help, there is in Nepal no tradition of either autonomous self-defence organisations (e.g., neighbourhood watch) or government-sponsored protection (e.g., as turned the tide in Peru against the Maoist insurgency of Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), the organisation of particular inspiration to the Nepali Maoists).[49] With the system of governance itself complicit (e.g., the police), there is little if anything an individual can do to achieve security save to rely upon his own devices – but this is a problematic defence posture.

In the deeper background is the reality that the decidedly uneven quality of the police dictates, save in extreme circumstances, most citizens will go to some lengths to avoid interacting with them at all. A recent study by the well-regarded human rights NGO, Advocacy Forum, found that even now, nearly a fourth (22.8 percent) of those detained by the police reported being tortured, with the figure still higher for juveniles (23.5 percent) and residents of the *tarai*, the lowlands in southern Nepal (30.4 percent).[50]

These figures were larger during the decade of insurgency, when police indiscipline was a major factor in generating support for the Maoists, and police presence was eliminated completely in many parts of the country. Subsequently, posts were slowly restored to their pre-war posture, which is based upon small stations of approximately 13-20 personnel. These are minimally capable of responding to terroristic episodes. Though greater numbers of police are concentrated in Kathmandu, the capital, and other peri-urban centres such as Pokhara (Kaski), their strength objectively remains limited and thinly spread, contributing to the lacklustre response discussed above.

The police have minimal technical capabilities to deal with telephonic or electronic threats. Neither do they have a viable counter-intelligence effort to prevent infiltration. Radical penetration of personnel and processes is substantial. Efforts of victims to seek assistance are often reported to the perpetrators as rapidly as the individuals concerned can return to their homes.[51]

Continuing violence does not involve a battle between a committed government and those who use political violence, but rather a dispute between factions of the larger Nepali communist movement over just how revolutionary change is to be implemented and thus how terroristic action is to be used against opponents: aggressively and provocatively, regardless of accompanying negative publicity and consequences (the radical Maoist line); or cautiously and low-key, avoiding publicity and its invariable negative consequences for a country which still depends heavily upon foreign sources for aid and remains perilously exposed to possible anti-communist Indian intervention (the mainstream Maoist line).[52]

All Maoist factions, for instance, agree on the objective of transforming Nepal into a Maoist state. The mainstream Maoists see the route to complete power as occurring through publicly participating in parliamentary politics while covertly continuing to engage in terrorism against opponents and subverting their partners in their various united front arrangements. In contrast, the radical Maoists see the need to forge ahead openly and aggressively with violent societal transformation. They see not strategy but sellout in the present mainstream Maoist approach. They have publicly defended their practice of coercive fundraising.[53]

Further complicating security matters, the radical Maoist effort remains intact and active, now largely protected by the larger mainstream Maoist movement. The effort to force radical reintegration into the Maoist fold was directed at reining in voluntaristic use of terrorism, not at providing security for the public.

Reporting on the security situation is uneven in English-language media in Nepal, with detailed work increasingly limited to Nepali-language media. Nepal, generally, to include areas across the border in India, remains a dangerous environment for Nepali journalists. In the latest World Press Freedom Index, Nepal ranks 74 of 180, while India ranks 159.[54] During the period of communist unity, a systematic effort was made to neutralise the free press. Journalists remain under serious pressure today.[55]

In formal reports dealing with “terrorism,” U.S. and Western sources in general speak only to *international* terrorism and do not include the domestic variety except as it impacts their citizens. This has caused the ongoing, less sensational but no less lethal, terrorism against Nepali individuals to go largely without discussion.[56] Menace and violence have become thoroughly integrated into politics. Only when sensational acts, such as actual murder, or gang-rape of a minor, are prominently committed have the police gone through the motions of responding. Regardless of national political developments, too little has changed at the local level.

Conclusion

This context thus produced a powder keg. All that was needed was a spark, which was provided by the ill-considered social media ban. The assessment offered here veers from “a plague on both your houses,” as dominates present commentary. Though the likes of NC are hardly blameless, particularly where corruption is concerned, it is the left-wing that dominates the system and has produced little to nothing by way of mediation.

Whether governing or engaging in united front activity, the communists have focused upon ideological positioning to an extent that has caused them to ignore terroristic and criminal violence. For the nearly 19 years since the formal end of hostilities, it has been deemed by the Maoists, in particular, as more-than-acceptable that terroristic violence be used by both splinters and the mainstream, through their paramilitary capacity, to attack those assessed as enemies.

It is a refusal to move beyond a communist worldview that posits a constant struggle with enemies, which remains the Maoist norm. Neutralising rival political opposition and tapping their resources remain imperative. In biting commentary, one of Nepal's most prominent commentators, CK Lal, put Nepali political reality in this manner: "Comparable to the concept of a vegetarian fox, a non-violent Maoist isn't just an oxymoron but a ruse intended to fool its victim. In its ideology, peace is possible only by waging a 'People's War'. Thus, a non-violent Maoist is at best a utopian, often a charlatan, and mostly a cunning carnivore claiming to be a vegan."^[57]

Though spotlighting only the Maoists, the assessment accurately identifies the cancer at the heart of Nepali political realities. The ongoing crisis potentially has serious implications for Nepal's immediate neighbours. India and China both seek access and local control to the extent that their national needs are met. In their recent actions, though, they have displayed a lack of empathy and comprehension for Nepal's own expectations, thus fanning the flames of Nepali nationalism and resentment. Neither Beijing nor New Delhi appear to have given any thought, for instance, just before the present outburst, to making arrangements for an Indo-Sino trade corridor which utilised the Lipulekh Pass, which Nepal claims as its own. Likewise, China's contribution to Nepal's corruption has long since become a staple of well-informed local commentary. In present circumstances, there is the potential for Nepali resentment, directed at regional hegemonic disdain, to exacerbate the already explosive local grievances, thus to produce an even more unsettled situation.

END NOTES

[1] See "At a Glance," *The World Bank in Nepal*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nepal/overview>.

[2] *Communist-dominated polity*: In the post-insurgency period, communist factions and parties have regularly traded holding power, to include all positions of consequence, such as prime minister and Interior Minister (that controlling the police). The Nepal Communist Party (CPN) emerged after World War II amidst the democratic movement against Rana prime ministerial autocracy, but throughout its existence has been riven by a lack of unity. The majority communist group is the Unified [or United] Marxist-Leninists, while the second largest group is the Maoists (ideologically, Marxist-Leninist-Maoists). Such divisions are of consequence, with the NCP at various times in the modern era divided into as many as several dozen rival groups. The Maoists, one communist faction much covered in this periodical, have likewise constantly been split. At one point in the post-insurgency period, there were as many as ten contending Maoist factions, divided by issues of ideological issues, operational approach, and personal clashes. The major breakaway Maoist factions, though, are at present reintegrated within the mainstream.

[3] *To seek tactical alliances*: Communist domination was lessened by the November 2022 election for the House of Representatives but remains substantial, with communists holding 128 of 275 seats (46.5 percent) compared to NC's 88 seats (32.0 percent). The remaining seats are held by newly emergent alternative forces which have generally made common cause with the communists. The situation is similar in the 59-seat National Assembly, which represents the provinces (wherein parties have no independent existence but are an extension of national politics). In the most recent election for one-third of the seats, in January 2024, certain seats changed communist hands, but the CPN majority remained a substantial 38 seats to NC's 16, or 64.4 percent to 27.1 percent (*Please check data*) (the remaining seats are principally held by Madheshi civil rights parties in the tarai, or southern flatlands). These same calculations can be executed for the various coalitions now governing. Of greatest significance is that NC, which has aligned itself at present with the majority communist faction of the UML, nonetheless numbers less than half the membership of that coalition. The same would be true were it to seek an alternative arrangement, something it has attempted previously when circumstances dictated.

[4] *Maoist domination*: In the constitutional era, until the approximately one year of a caretaker government leading up to elections on 20 November 2022 – the Home Minister – the official who has charge of the police and elements of the intelligence apparatus (which is focused internally) – was for 77 percent of the time a Maoist. The current constitution, though promulgated on 15 September 2015, became effective from 18 September 2015. The first government, that of the communist UML, began its term 11 October 2015. The Home Minister, a Maoist, was named on 12 October 2015. Thereafter, until the commencement of the caretaker government's term, the Maoists held the position 1,611 days or 77 percent of the total. For incumbents and tenure (in Nepali): <https://moha.gov.np/>.

[5] *Remarkably little impact*: A useful attempt to explain this reality is Tone Bleie, "The Historical Path to Violent Destabilisation in Nepal: Elements of an Exploratory Framework," in *Human Rights in Development Yearbook 2002: Empowerment, Participation, Accountability and Non-Discrimination: Operationalising a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development*, eds. Martin Scheinin and Markku Suksi (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 373-415; revised version at https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/opsa/pdf/OPSA_10_03.pdf.

[6] *The likes of*: Countries identified are well known for their claims to be democracies while in reality being dictatorships. The number of refugees from Venezuela, for example, has reached more than seven million worldwide, with more than one million seeking asylum and the United States a leading destination (UNHCR figures available at <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/venezuela-situation>).

[7] *Most important actor*: contextualization, [Amish Raj Mulmi](#), *All Roads Lead North: China, Nepal and the Contest for the Himalayas* (London: Oxford University Press,

2022); also, [Gaurav Bhattarai](#), *Nepal Between China and India: Difficulty of Being Neutral* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). Recent in-depth treatment of Beijing's approach, Kevin Rudd, "The World According to Xi Jinping: What China's Ideologue in Chief Really Believes," *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 6 (November/December 2022), 8-21, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/world-according-xi-jinping-china-ideologue-kevin-rudd>; also, *A World Safe for the Party: China's Authoritarian Influence and the Democratic Response* (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 2021), 9-16 (Nepal section), <https://cividea.ge/en/iri-report-2021-a-world-safe-for-the-party-chinas-authoritarian-influence-and-the-democratic-response/>.

[8] *Authoritarianism*: Extensive discussion available; cf. esp. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010); with the sequel, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Revolution and Dictatorship: The Violent Origins of Durable Authoritarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022). Also, Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[9] *Available evaluation*: For assessment by Karl-Heinz Krämer, cf. his "Is Nepal Still a Democratic State?", *English.khabarhub.com*, 19 June 2021, <https://english.khabarhub.com/2021/19/191404/>. Other sources cited: For democracy, EIU, *Democracy Index 2024: What's Wrong With Representative Democracy?* (London: EIU, 2025), <https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2024/>, Nepal rankings at p.17 (in overall) and p.67 (Asia & Australasia). For corruption score and ranking, "Nepal Country Report," <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>. For criminality and resilience ranking, Global Initiative, *Global Organized Crime Index 2023* (Geneva, Switzerland: GI, 2024), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Global-organized-crime-index-2023-web-compressed-compressed.pdf>. For human rights, *The State of the World's Human Rights: April 2025* (London: Amnesty International, April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/8515/2025/en/>; also, Human Rights Watch, *No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims: The Culture of Impunity in Post-Conflict Nepal* (London: HRW, November 2020), [file:///G:/19%20Oct%202020%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/1-Downloads%20\(Nepal\)/Nepal-2020/11-Nov%202020/20%20Nov%2020-No%20Law,%20no%20Justice-HRW-nepal1120_web_1.pdf](file:///G:/19%20Oct%202020%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/1-Downloads%20(Nepal)/Nepal-2020/11-Nov%202020/20%20Nov%2020-No%20Law,%20no%20Justice-HRW-nepal1120_web_1.pdf). Useful background to the ongoing political malaise is Sambridh Ghimire, "Institutional Collapse in Nepal," *The Indian Express*, 30 May 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/institutional-collapse-in-nepal-7336977/>.

[10] *Maoist insurgency*: For discussion, to include comparison with other Maoist insurgencies, Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist People's War in Post-Vietnam Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2007), Nepal at Ch 7, 297-352. For causation, with discussion of

factors continuing to the present, Tatsuro Fujikura, "The Role of Collective Imagination in the Maoist Conflict in Nepal," *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 23, no.1 (2003), 21-

30, https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/himalaya/article/1355/&path_info=hrb_23_1_21_30_theoleofcollectiveimaginationinthemaolistconflict.pdf

[11] *Civil war*: a house divided against itself, in the standard formulation (Lincoln, 1858). That is, when internal contestation reaches a point of what in effect are two contending polities, one existing and the other challenging, a state of civil war exists. Insurgencies invariably begin as minority phenomena challenging the status quo. This state began to emerge in late 2001 and developed throughout 2002. By mid-2003, the scope of the conflict had grown to the point where most sources used insurgency and civil war interchangeably.

[12] *Modeled upon*: The Cultural Revolution was an extraordinarily violent decade, 1967-76, which was set in motion by Mao Tse-tung (or Mao Zedong using *pinyin*) to institute a process of continuing revolution through attacks upon routinization and bureaucratization created by the communist party itself. Latest research demonstrates between 1.1 and 1.6 million died during just its most intense period, with between 22 and 30 million subjected to violent political persecution. As a definitional matter, "revolution" in the social sciences is defined as the overturning of the economic, social, and political systems of social stratification. Revolution is thus an end-state, while the process of "making a revolution" is engaging in revolutionary war. Nepali Maoists conflate all facets of meaning and refer to their movement itself as "the revolution."

[13] *Attack*: After-action report of this and other major actions during the civil war are detailed in the after-action reports of the Maoist military commander and his staff; cf. Nanda Kishor Pun aka Pasang, *Red Strides of the History: Significant Military Raids of the People's War*, trans. Sushil Bhattarai (Kathmandu: Agnipariksha Janaparakashan Griha, October 2008), 112-123. For Maoist military capabilities, Sam Cowan, "Inside the People's Liberation Army," in Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, ed., *Revolution in Nepal: An Anthropological and Historical Approach to the People's War* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301-332. For particulars of counter, Thomas A. Marks, "Combating Terrorism in Nepal," in James J.F. Forest (ed.), *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century, v.3, Lessons From the Fight Against Terrorism* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security, 2007), 532-548.

[14] *Washington assisted*: U.S. country posture in Nepal has been driven overwhelmingly by aid to socio-economic development, which remains the case. Historically, aid to the security forces, even during the conflict, was limited but important.

[15] I base this statement on my fieldwork at the time, which involved confidential interviews.

[16] *Were not designated*: For detailed discussion of the issues involved, Joshua Gross, "Proscription Problems: The Practical Implications of Terrorist Lists on Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Nepal, *Praxis: The Fletcher Journal of Human Security* 26 (2011), 38-59, <https://sites.tufts.edu/praxis/volume-26-2011/>; also of relevance, though it does not discuss Nepal specifically, Lee Jarvis and Tim Legrand, eds., *The Proscription of Terrorist Organisations* (London: Routledge, 2019). Consideration of the Nepal case within its larger discussion may be found at Flavia Eichmann, "Naming Terror: Impact of Proscription on Negotiations with Non-State Armed Groups," *Journal of Public & International Affairs* 30 (May 2019), 1-20, <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/naming-terror-impact-proscription-negotiations-non-state-armed-groups>. For the security challenge posed to the United States, cf. NSS 2006, <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2006.pdf?ver=Hfo1-Y5B6CMI8yHpX4x6IA%3d%3d>. Therein, at p.15 within the section, "Objective: Work with others to defuse regional conflicts," "In Nepal, a vicious Maoist insurgency continues to terrorize the population while the government retreats from democracy." The final reference is to the declaration of royal rule in 2005, effectively a form of martial law instituted in response to the declining security situation.

[17] *Raise the funds*: Criminality is an ever-present reality because generation of party funding remains crucial. Any political group, to include those which use violence, has a funding profile driven by the context at hand. In Nepal, there are no windfall sources, such as drugs were in Colombia for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Hence, the Nepali Maoists have relied overwhelmingly upon extortion, though above-ground participation in governance also allows profit from the widespread corruption that is integral to Nepali politics and its prebendal nature. Recent political turmoil, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, has caused demands made of individuals and families to escalate dramatically. Demands of Nepali Rupees NPR 1.0 million have become common, with requirements as high as NPR 2.0 million noted (at date of article, NPR 141.18 = USD 1). It is likely that the present very large amounts sought by the Maoists (of all factions) are a result of challenges to the economy, systemic inflation, and exchange rate decline in the value of the NPR (which in May 2015 was approximately NPR 100 = USD 1.00), all of which have impacted buying power. Such scaling up of extortion is of urgency for a political movement operating in a society where nearly everything associated with modern living must be imported.

[18] *Violent paramilitary activity*: This reality has been dealt with in numerous works. Particularly important, covering the first five years after the signing of the peace accords, is Kanak Mani Dixit, *Peace Politics of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Himal Books, 2011). Also valuable, Kul Chandra Gautam, *Lost in Transition: Rebuilding Nepal From the Maoist Mayhem and Mega Earthquake*, e-book ed. (Kathmandu: nepa~laya, 2018).

[19] *Front organizations* are ostensibly independent but in reality serve to support the party and its armed effort. They conceal their subordinate role. Nepali terminology uses “sister organizations” to describe the relationship, but this does not adequately clarify the reality that these organizations take orders from the parent. Manpower moves freely between organizations, regardless of individual formal membership credentials.

[20] *People’s war*, as an insurgent approach, builds an alternative to the existing state by challenging its legitimacy – that is, it constructs a counter-state – which ultimately is capable of fielding armed power sufficient to topple the old-order or *ancien régime*. Armed action begins by using terrorism and guerrilla warfare to establish local domination in areas where the state is weak or not present, mobilizing manpower and resources, ultimately to field guerrilla and then actual military units. Specifics, Thomas A. Marks, “Mao Tse-tung and the Search for 21st Century Counterinsurgency,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 10 (October 2009), 17-20.

[21] *Popular majority*: Normal NC parliamentary dominance after 1990 resulted from First-Past-the-Post voting (FPTP) and a divided communist movement. Tallies in fact frequently produced a communist popular majority. In the 2013 election for the Second Constituent Assembly (CAII), for example, NC dominated in seats won, but its popular tally was 2,421,252 compared to a split communist vote that if combined was 3,682,143, considering only the major communist forces (2,243,477 UML and 1,438,666 Maoist). Once the Maoists became more subtle in their violence, the UML in 2017 opted for unity grounded in ideological affinity.

[22] *Party deliberations*: Representatives may be removed for violating party discipline and have no independent existence. They are not required to reside in the electoral districts they contest. Cabinet positions are apportioned according to relative factional strength in the communist movement, with ministries also distributed as necessary to nominal outsiders co-opted through expedient alliances felt necessary to strengthen the ruling faction’s margin of governance. This maneuvering extends to provincial governance, which also is but an extension of party politics and has limited independent existence. As concerns the provinces at the national level, where they are represented in the 59-seat National Assembly, the communists hold an easy majority, with their three major parties (UML, Maoists, and CPN (Unified Socialist)) alone having 40 seats after the 2024 by-elections.

[23] *At the head of*: The term alone highlights the complexity of Nepali politics and the frequently inappropriate claim that there “has been a fundamental change of circumstances” when in reality minor movements of individuals and parties remain constant. In the case at hand, it was unclear at any given moment whether the 10-party coalition actually existed in the form implied by the name, since parties joined and withdrew as per division of Cabinet spoils. Though divided as to who would actually hold the reins of governance, the communist factions and parties invariably came

together on matters of ideological moment (e.g., transitional justice) to ensure that there was no drift from communist orthodoxy.

[24] *National party needs*: Oli, as has been the case in most of the previous tactical coalitions, promised that an appropriate time, the NC head, Deuba, will be allowed to assume the position of prime minister. This arrangement, of course, has now fallen casualty to present developments.

[25] *Delivery of local domination*: A variety of evidence – in particular, captured social media posts and visuals – illustrates the relationship between Dahal, the Maoist leader and recent prime minister, and local Maoist leadership in areas which have experienced post-conflict terrorism.

[26] *Under a restricted mandate*: This is of paramount importance to the Maoists. Transitional justice, as both a formal category and a human rights challenge, refers to the measures to be taken in the post-conflict present to address abuses committed during the conflict past. None of the 63,000 case files created (the figure goes to 66,000, when disappearances are included) have been heard, with the government (regardless of party) focusing instead upon co-opting the responsible organizations by populating them with placemen. The result has been impunity for perpetrators – overwhelmingly Maoists who remain in local spaces. Without identifying the Maoists specifically, the U.S. State Department's *2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (published August 2025), highlights the failure of transitional justice to advance, as well as noting “no change” in the lackluster state of human rights practices in the country; Nepal section at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nepal/>.

[27] *Seeks to implement*: For details of the ideological approach, Paul Thomas, *Marxism and Scientific Socialism: From Engels to Althusser* (London: Routledge, 2008). For the Chinese model and trajectory to power that the Nepali communists seek to emulate, Tony Saich, *From Rebel to Ruler: One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2021). Beyond the ideological specifics dividing the Nepali communist factions, unity is maintained in their common view of the United States as the principal source of the world's ills – this in contrast to the ostensibly benign objectives of China in particular (a position which extends to support of Beijing's backing for Moscow's current aggression in Ukraine).

[28] *Fervently embraced communism*: Maoism is central to the seeming anomaly of allowing noncommunist parties to exist at all, even as individual members are terrorized in local space. One of the key contributions of Maoism to communism was the concept of “new democracy,” which held that the contradictions of society – those structural dysfunctions which allowed exploitation for the seizure of power – rather than simply being eliminated in their human form (e.g., small businessmen or small

landowners or even rival parties), could be leveraged to gain that which was useful even as they were neutralized operationally and slowly transformed strategically. Ideally, hostile elements would slowly convert and cheer their own demise. This was viewed as less costly and consuming of effort than the normal Leninist or Stalinist process of liquidation. Debate on specifics, however, remains fierce within the Maoists, with a fundamental division within the leadership on just how aggressively to proceed. What outsiders often interpret as moderation, Maoist internal documents demonstrate, is rather a product of calculation concerning just how much violence a given strategic moment and correlation of forces can sustain. Insightful for the Maoist position, from an interview with the second figure in the Maoist hierarchy, Stephen Mikesell and Mary Des Chene, “Baburam Bhattarai: For a ‘New Nepal’,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 43, no. 19 (10-16 May 2008), <https://www.epw.in/journal/2008/19/commentary/baburam-bhattarai-new-nepal.html>.

[29] *United front* is a fundamental Leninist tactic whereby a communist party joins a more dominant rival, ostensibly to face a common foe or pressing issue. In reality, by allowing the communists into its processes and giving them access to its manpower, the rival (even if formally communist) places itself in a position such that it can be subverted from within. The united front approach historically has been a central element of Maoist people’s war, the strategy followed by the Nepali Maoists. The subject is extensively treated in my *Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), as well as my “‘The History of Our Sewage Disposal System’: Solzhenitsyn’s Conception of Stalinism as a Necessary Product of Lenin’s Thinking,” *Issues & Studies* 14, no. 5 (May 1978), 65-89. It is a central component of the discussion in Thomas A. Marks and David H. Ucko, “Gray Zone in Red: China Revisits the Past,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 32, no. 2 (March 2021), 181-204.

[30] *Under the façade of democratic process*: This strategy has become the norm for authoritarian polities in the post-Cold War political environment; e.g. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Particularly apt in illustrating the point are the book’s introductory remarks (e-book, no pagination): “Unlike single-party or military dictatorships, post-Cold War regimes...were competitive in that opposition forces used democratic institutions to contest vigorously – and, on occasion, successfully – for power. Nevertheless, they were not democratic. Electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence skewed the playing field in favour of incumbents. In other words, competition was real but unfair.”

[31] *Into a position of control*: Such battle cannot be seen as normal democratic process. As per previous discussion, Nepal is not classified as a democracy, and labelling contenders as mainstream or radicals is not unlike the choice confronting viewers of the famous film trilogy, *The Godfather* (original, Paramount, 1972). The

central mafia faction that is at the heart of the series is “good” only in the sense that it opposes drug trafficking and believes that use of violence should be discrete and targeted. In the case at hand in Nepal, the same debate on the most effective use of violence as per existing political circumstances is the issue, not a choice between violence or nonviolence. This debate takes place within a unified communist political worldview that is vociferous in opposing “capitalism,” in projecting the United States as at the root of all world-ills (to include claims that the war in Ukraine continues at American instigation), and in advancing the causes of some of the most odious dictatorships in the world (e.g., China and Venezuela) as desirable examples for societal ordering. For typical positioning, access the views of an ostensibly moderate, the current leader of the UML breakaway faction, “Madhav Kumar Nepal on Nepal’s Resistance to U.S. Imperialism,” <https://peoplesdispatch.org/tag/communist-party-nepal-unified-socialist/>. The title of the segment is that approved by Nepal, a former Nepali prime minister and a Maoist during the Vietnam War era. His printed statements have been even more extreme than featured in the interview. This judgement may be applied to any of the Maoist and communist leaders discussed herein, and Oli has been a leading defender of radical personalities and views within Maoists ranks and has placed former Maoists in key positions within UML, to include as the party secretary (effectively, chief of staff).

[32] *Normally ignored*: One of the hallmarks of Nepal’s recent authoritarian streak has been the packing of the judiciary with placemen (there is no jury system) and the relegation of honest judges to irrelevance by simply ignoring verdicts, as necessary. The Supreme Court itself is treated in this manner. Of the 246 public interest litigation verdicts that were accompanied by directives in the 6 years before mid-2019, only 38 (15.4 percent) were executed by the government. For the 1,603 private interest cases, only 5 (3.1 percent) were implemented. The largest number of non-executed verdicts lodged with the Ministry of Home Affairs, the organization responsible for law and order. Cf. “Uphold the Rule of Law,” *The Himalayan Times*, 2 July 2019, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/editorial-uphold-rule-of-law-2/>; also Ram Kumar Ramat, “Only 15 pc PIL Verdicts Being Executed,” *The Himalayan Times*, 1 July 2019, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/only-15-pc-pil-verdicts-being-executed/>. For the issue of judicial integrity, Bhasa Sharma, “Complaint Filed Against More Than 200 Judges, Five Judges Face Dismissal,” *Republica*, 19 July 2022, <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/complaint-filed-against-more-than-200-judges-five-judges-face-dismissal/>. The Supreme Court itself has a fraught history, having increasingly become enmeshed in the political process, as well as being subject to charges of corruption. For background and discussion of politicization, Mara Malagodi, “Limiting Constituent Power? Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendments and Time-Bound Constitution Making in Nepal,” Ch.7 in *The Law and Politics of Unconstitutional Constitutional Amendments in Asia*, eds. Rehan Abeyratne and Ngoc Son Bui (London: Routledge, 2022), 133-150.

[33] *Perhaps one-third*: If one uses post-war vote tallies as a rough guide, total *adult* strength of the Maoists was perhaps 1.5 million. The movement, though, actively recruited and incorporated youths and children, which would increase the figure substantially. Nepal's population for the 1996-2006 period was estimated at 24 million; it is presently estimated at 28-30 million. As early as 2002, approximately half the population was 19 years of age or less.

[34] *Strategy of Baidya*: Official figures state that 54 Bombs/IEDs exploded and another 430 were defused or exploded by the authorities, with 34 instances of small arms firing; there were 3 dead and 26 wounded, with 109 vehicles torched/damaged. In reality, these figures considerably understated the level of local terrorism, examples of which fill the better part of the nearly 260-page monitoring report compiled by the Citizen's [sic] Campaign for Clean Election, working with the major cause-oriented statistical body operating in Nepal at the time, INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre). Few of the myriad cases of extortion at this time are listed.

[35] *Extensive violence*: Though no overall figures were released, it is known that the three weeks alone leading up to 7 December 2017 saw more than a hundred bombs exploded or neutralized-prior-to-detonation as the Chand *aka* Biplav faction sought to block the elections (but by targeting nearly exclusively noncommunist individuals). In reality, so numerous were Maoist bombings and attacks upon individuals that in a sense they were relegated to background noise. No source reported on them systematically. The single attempt appears to have been made by *The Record* (Kathmandu), which has a well-done interactive feature that attempts to detail the most significant IED attacks nationwide. The display, with photos, is but a fraction of the actual IED total, <https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/bomb-blasts-leading-up-to-the-polls/>. The State Department's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism 2017* (issued 19 September 2018, nearly one year after its 2017 subject date), in the section on Nepal (pp. 182-84), frames its presentation within terrorism directed at U.S. or Western targets. Westerners in fact are rarely targeted even for crime in Nepal, and the report duly notes no acts of (international) terrorism directed at Americans or Westerners. It does speak to "an increase in terrorist attacks during the year [2017]" aimed at "domestic targets" and correctly notes that at least a hundred incidents of IED uses occurred, but it fails to grapple in substantive fashion with events in the country as discussed in this declaration. For report, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2017/index.htm>).

[36] *Intense level*: cf. Thomas A. Marks, *Red on Red: Maoist Insurgency Redux*, *Mantraya* Monograph #01 (8 April 2019), <http://mantraya.org/monograph-red-on-red-in-nepal-maoist-insurgency-redux/>. This publication, in addition to extensive data, offers considerable visual evidence of the radical Maoist bombing effort, which included explosives placed in some of Kathmandu's most visible and sensitive locations.

[37] *To reintegrate*: A vaguely worded three-part Memorandum of Understanding was signed between former comrades, Chand *aka* Biplav and then-Home Minister Thapa. It stated that the radicals would conduct all their political activities through dialogue and resolve issues in the same manner, in return for which the “ban” would be lifted and those cadre who remained under arrest would be released. In the event, as discussed throughout this declaration, the terms have proved largely irrelevant to Maoist terroristic actions.

[38] *Ever more radical stances*: It was during the period under discussion that Dahal, using a strained interpretation of his powers (declared illegal by the courts but ignored), unilaterally declared as a national holiday the date when the people’s war was launched. As the communists are in power, the holiday continues to be celebrated with its attendant efforts at extortion. Further, Dahal has attempted to award considerable sums to individual Maoist combatants who were declared ineligible by the United Nations peacemaking process. This group included a large number of so-called child-soldiers. The most prominent group of these individuals (i.e., former child-soldiers) is attempting to pursue judicial action against the key figures in the Maoist leadership (to include Dahal) for their recruitment of them as minors during the conflict, a violation of international law.

[39] *Replaced by socialism*: As with their approach to terrorism, the Socialist Front members, of which the mainstream Maoists are the most prominent, are divided upon just how to do away with the parliamentary system. It is recognized that this will prompt resistance and violence. A figure such as Chand *aka* Biplav is not concerned with such an eventuality, while other Front members are – notably, Dahal. Nevertheless, the mainstream Maoists have claimed that parliamentary democracy can be described as “dog’s meat would be sold hanging goat’s head” (i.e., false promises behind which nothing changes). Useful discussion, Tika R. Pradhan, “Socialist Front Partners Divided on ‘Ways to Reach Socialism’,” *The Kathmandu Post*, 23 July 2023, <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2023/07/23/socialist-front-partners-divided-on-ways-to-reach-socialism>.

[40] *Party circular*: The document, “Subject: About the Circular,” is dated 18 August 2024 (as converted) and in Nepali. It is signed by Dahal in his capacity as president of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and by Dev Gurung, the party Secretary General. Significantly, Dahal includes at the end of his signature (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) his wartime alias, “Prachanda” (cf. ¶9b above).

[41] *Was never a reality*: This has been a theme explored in my published work. It is noteworthy, that in my interviews with radical Maoists (to include those at Politburo level), my intermediaries have normally been mainstream Maoists. The various Maoist factions are constantly in contact and even visit each other’s homes.

[42] *Outbidding*: a demonstrated phenomenon whereby political groups use violence to distinguish themselves from rivals and to promote their “brand.” Research has found that both quantity and quality of terroristic acts increase as the competitiveness of the political market increases, and this has been the experience of my own research in Nepal. Discussion of the concept, Justin Conrad and Kevin Greene, “Competition, Differentiation, and the Severity of Terrorist Attacks,” *The Journal of Politics* 77, no.2 (6 February 2015), 546-561, [file:///E:/19%20Sep%202021%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/DOT%206975%20Readings,%20Briefings-2/Case%20Study-Hamas/2023%20Hamas/conrad-greene-2015-competition-differentiation-and-the-severity-of-terrorist-attacks%20\(2015\).pdf](file:///E:/19%20Sep%202021%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/DOT%206975%20Readings,%20Briefings-2/Case%20Study-Hamas/2023%20Hamas/conrad-greene-2015-competition-differentiation-and-the-severity-of-terrorist-attacks%20(2015).pdf) .

[43] *Long challenged*: The most comprehensive and straightforward assessment of this subject available publicly is the “Nepal” country report section of the previously cited *Global Organized Crime Index 2023*, comprising six pages, available within the larger site. Though professional to a fault in its wording, it can best be characterized as scathing. It may be reiterated, as noted, that Global Initiative discloses that it receives U.S. government funding. Also of considerable interest is the reporting on corruption involving the Maoists contained in Tom Burgis, *Cuckooland: Where the Rich Own the Truth* (London: William Collins/HarperCollins, 2024).

[44] *Non-intervention*: My published work has detailed the façade of response created by announcing arrests even as the suspects were released almost immediately without publicity. Only when circumstances have conspired to produce police casualties does the situation become more problematic, and death squad activity upon the part of aggrieved officers is noted below in this discussion. Normally, matters play themselves out as related in this case.

[45] *Justice system*: Cf. the assessment in *Human Rights and the Rule of Law in a Federal Nepal: Recommendations From an ICJ High-Level Mission* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Commission of Jurists, July 2020), <https://icj2.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Nepal-High-level-mission-Publications-Reports-misson-reports-2020-ENG.pdf>.

[46] *Closely held*: Though previously a matter of practice in the constitutional era, during which period the Maoists and communists have dominated both the Prime Minister and Home Minister positions, origin of formal direction that police not become involved in “political matters” appears to stem from the intense debate within the Maoists that surfaced when one of their own, Ram Bahadur Thapa *aka* Badal (“Cloud”), was Home Minister and engaged in a pointed exchange with a leading Maoist and former Home Minister himself, Janadarshan Sharma *aka* Prabhakar, during a 24 June 2019 meeting of the State Administration and Governance Committee in parliament. The Maoists were a part of the ruling communist coalition, but terroristic action by a member of the Maoist Biplav faction, Kumar Paudel, which included violent collection of “donations” and land seizures, had precipitated a confrontation in which Paudel was

killed under contested circumstances. In supporting continued revolutionary action, Sharma *aka* Prabhakar asserted, “The problem of revolutionary groups [i.e., those breaking party discipline] should not be addressed by the police administration but by the political leadership.” It is not yet established how actual instructions were transmitted, but the results were immediately apparent. As documented in my own work, using police records obtained through confidential sources (cf. sources cited previously), cosmetic application of law enforcement ensued, with the most violent acts leading to public detention but private (and nearly simultaneous) release, even as complaints from the general public were universally rejected as “political.”

[47] *Impunity*: A report from more than a decade ago speaks to these same issues and could just as easily have been written now: *Held to Account: Making the Law Work to Fight Impunity in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Advocacy Forum Nepal and London: REDRESS, December 2011), [file:///E:/19%20Sep%202021%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/00-Downloads%20\(Nepal\)/Nepal-2011/Nepal%20Impunity%20Report%20\(2011\).pdf](file:///E:/19%20Sep%202021%20backup-ACTUAL%20FILES/00-Downloads%20(Nepal)/Nepal-2011/Nepal%20Impunity%20Report%20(2011).pdf). Cf. especially p.15, which even at this early post-war date singles out the major obstacle posed by police refusal to file First Information Reports (FIR) or to deal with crimes from the civil war period by resorting to a claim that they are “political” and thus beyond police responsibility.

[48] *In Kathmandu*: Information provided by confidential source. The then-vice president commanded the Maoist military forces in the post-conflict years while they continued to commit terroristic acts nationwide, to include kidnapping, torture, and murder. They acted in particular from the main Maoist regroupment cantonment at Shakti Khor in Chitwan district. Brief wartime bio of Pun at Kiyoko Ogura, “Meeting Pasang in Rolpa: Rare Interview With a Reclusive Maoist Commander,” *Nepali Times*, 7 July 2006, <https://archive.nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=12129#.X0Ec4MgzblU>.

[49] *Autonomous self-defense organizations*: For discussion of this alternative, cf. Thomas A. Marks and David Scott Palmer, “At the Frontlines of the GWOT: Lessons From Peru,” *Journal of Counterterrorism & Homeland Security International* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 18-25; also, Orin Starn, *Nightwatch: The Politics of Protest in the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), *passim*.

[50] Cf. *Rise of Torture in 2018* (Kathmandu: Advocacy Forum, 2019), <http://www.advocacyforum.org/publications/torture.php>. These figures are confirmed in the extensive documentation contained in Hemang Sharma, “Right to Freedom From Torture in Nepal,” PhD dissertation, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, 2016, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/211498848.pdf>. Recent torture of some specific groups has been so noteworthy as to produce its own human rights interventions. Cf. e.g. *Nepal: Torture and Coerced Confessions – Human Rights Violations of Indigenous Tharus After the August 2015 Police Killings in Kailali* (London: Amnesty International, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA3144562016ENGLISH.pdf>

Rohej; also, Rohej Khatiwada, “Serial Deaths in Police Custody in Terai Raise Alarm,” *CIJ: Centre for Investigative Journalism Investigation*, 26 January 2023, <https://cijnepal.org.np/serial-deaths-in-police-custody-in-terai-raise-alarm/>.

[51] There is at present no official agency or civil society body compiling aggregate data. Useful primary data often exists in local police records (in Nepali) but must be accessed and aggregated in such manner as to support analysis.

[52] *Between factions*: Regardless of faction, the ongoing division is invariably framed (by them) within the classic “two-line struggle” approach of Mao Tse-tung. That is, just as a communist party is required to lead the masses to an understanding of their true interests – because the party has the best grasp of societal realities and necessary Marxist-Leninist redress – so within the party itself there will constantly be struggles over which group is to lead, because it has the correct strategy for seizing power and implementing communism. As per the theory, these contending lines are a necessary dialectical clash that will result in a correct “mass line” or way forward to achieve popular mobilization. Reality, of course, has proved considerably less obvious, with regular (often violent) purges in global communist movements, such as the Chinese. At one point in Nepali Maoism, during the war years, the losing side in strategic debate (which included the second most powerful figure in the party) was imprisoned and escaped an end more final only because of intervening variables. In the case under discussion, contending lines have come to a head. Yet the current rival “lines” agree in their assessment of Nepal’s flawed societal realities and the nature of the enemy (embodied most prominently in the non-communist political parties and various “imperialist forces,” especially the United States). For general discussion of the Maoist “two lines,” Graham Young, “On the Mass Line,” *Modern China* 6, no. 2 (April 1980), 225-240, https://www.jstor.org/stable/189074?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents; for discussion that occurred within the context of Peruvian Maoist defeat, KJA [“a contributor to *A World to Win* (Summer 1995)”, “An Initial Reply to Arce Borja, On the Maoist Conception of Two-Line Struggle,” *A World to Win*, no. 22 (1996), http://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1996-22/on_the_maoist_conception_22_eng.htm.

[53] *Coercive fundraising* is justified through disingenuous verbiage, as expressed by Chand aka Biplav: “Now we have asked our industrialist friends [to make donations to the party] ... not force, but cooperation. Our policy is not a policy of asking for donations, it is a policy of moving forward with cooperation.” Cf. (in Nepali as translated) “Biplav Says – ‘Asking for Donations is Student’s Obligation’,” *Rato Pati*, 23 April 2023, <https://www.ratopati.com/story/359005/biplab?fbclid=IwAR2aRuXhWpECumW46OMjnVR48r5F6f8dazMveJWldMnlBipcptEecDdZO-k>. Police refuse to intervene in countering such politically driven extortion.

[54] *Ranks*: Reporters Without Borders, *2024 World Press Freedom Index*, <https://rsf.org/en/index>. *Nepali journalists*: Nepali media resorts largely to self-censorship to avoid repression by the state. Those who resist, such as Dixit, who for a period detailed continued Maoist terrorism, have found their lives and property threatened, thus compelling silence and even flight. After one such episode in 2016, Nepal's leading political journal, *Himal Southasian* (<https://www.himalmag.com/>), of which Dixit was the publisher, was forced to relocate its editorial offices to Colombo, Sri Lanka. Most recently, on 21 May 2024, the chairman of the Kantipur Media Group, possibly Nepal's most influential source of news, was arrested and held for two weeks. Kantipur had attempted to report on corruption within the then-Maoist government.

[55] *Under serious pressure today*: A particularly revealing illustration of this reality occurred in March 2022, when the spectacularly successful music video by Prakash Saput – which spotlighted the painful gap between the situation of Maoist leadership and former combatants – was withdrawn by the artist after numerous Maoist threats and pressure from the Maoist YCL (cf. ¶13 above). It was reposted only after its component most critical of Maoist leadership was removed. Within some 72 hours, the video was reported to have registered an unparalleled (for Nepal) 5.3 million views. For discussion, Anup Ojha, “A Song That Took the Country by Storm,” *The Kathmandu Post*, 15 March 2022, <https://kathmandupost.com/2/2022/03/15/a-song-that-took-the-country-by-storm>.

[56] In the extensive rationalisation and revision of the criminal and civil code completed in August 2018, there was no effort to address the aforementioned issues. Whether terrorism or torture, provisions dealing with political violence remain of note only through their absence.[56] Angling for political position has routinely and systematically led to state release of previously convicted Maoist figures, creating an atmosphere and reality of impunity.

[57] See e.g. CK Lal, “The Maoist Cul-de-sac,” *Republica*, 18 March 2019, <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/the-maoist-cul-de-sac/?categoryId=blog>.

(Dr. Thomas A. Marks, a member of the advisory board of MISS, has done extensive field work in Nepal. The views expressed are personal academic views and should not be construed as views of MISS. This Special Report is a part of the ongoing “Fragility, Conflict & Peace Building” and “Mapping Terror and Insurgent Networks” projects executed by MISS.)

Suggested additional Readings:

Thomas A. Marks: [Nepal: The Political Labyrinth](#)

Thomas A. Marks: [Enduring Dilemmas: Nepali Insurgency Redux](#)
Thomas A. Marks: [Red on Red in Nepal: Maoist Insurgency Redux](#)

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