Post-war armed groups in Nepal
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A number of armed groups have been active since the end of the ‘People’s War’, with ambitions often at the margins of politics and criminality. Various governments have taken softer and harder approaches, reaching deals or imposing tough security policies, and the armed groups’ ability to affect the course of the post-war transition has been limited.

The use of violence against the state has a long history in Nepal. The Rana dynasty came to an end following the successful Nepali Congress (NC) armed campaign against it in 1950–51. Following the royal takeover in 1960, the NC briefly took up arms again from bases in India. The Jhapa Movement of 1971 involved an attempted insurrection by a group of young Maoists in the south-eastern corner of Nepal, inspired by the much more brutal Naxalite movement across the border in India, and the leaders of that movement formed the core of the Communist Party of Nepal–Marxist-Leninist (CPN-ML) founded in 1978.

Khambuwan
The Khambuwan Rashtriya Morcha (KRM) was responsible for the first instance of armed violence in Nepal after the return to multi-party democracy in 1990. Active in the eastern hills, the KRM demanded an ethnic Rai homeland (Khambuwan) although its actions were limited to burning down Sanskrit schools, considered a symbol of ‘upper-caste’ oppression. Later, with the expansion of the Maoist insurgency into the east, a section of the KRM and its incipient Kirat Workers’ Party merged with the CPN-Maoist in 2003. A splinter group, the Kirat Janabadi Workers’ Party, broke with the Maoists after the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA). It experienced further fracturing, and carried out violent actions mainly aimed at extortion, surrendering its few weapons only in 2015. The faction of the KRM that did not join the Maoists maintained an independent existence, renounced violence, and even won a seat in the second Constituent Assembly (CA).

Limbuwan
In the hills even further east, adjoining Nepal’s border with India, lies the part of Nepal known as Limbuwan – home to the Janajati (indigenous) group, the Limbus. The Limbus enjoyed some limited autonomy in the pre-1951 period. Due to some strong indigenous institutions, they were among the most well-organised Janajati groups. The Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC) is the main body that claims to represent Limbu interests, although it has experienced splits and has yet to see electoral success. Factions of the FLSC have set up Limbuwan Volunteer (LV) groups for youth participation, and there are reports of LVs being involved in extortion. Paramilitary action per se has not taken place, although there is the implicit threat of violence linked to abductions and coercive practices by many associated groups that appear and disappear with regularity.

Tarai
It was the Tarai that bore the brunt of post-war armed group violence, the roots of which go back to the Maoist conflict and the establishment of the Madhesi Rastriya Mukti Morcha (MRMM – Madhesi National Liberation Front) in 2000 (along with similar ‘liberation fronts’ for some of the larger marginalised groups of Nepal). Differences with the Maoist leadership in 2004 led the head of the MRMM to part ways and form the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM – Democratic Tarai Liberation Front), with the aim of creating an independent state in the Tarai.

The JTMM has also split a number of times – reportedly into five factions by 2009 with further divisions since then. All factions have professed political objectives in terms of advancing Madhesi rights. But their activities have been characterised by criminality, including kidnappings, murders and outright extortion, and, while ostensibly aimed at the state or hill-based ‘elites’, have in fact also targeted Madhesis through their indiscriminate tactics.

The JTMM was not able to gain popular support among Madhesis. Its primary contribution has probably been in having provided the blueprint for copycat groups to emerge concurrently with the 2007 Madhes Movement [see article on social movements, p.97]. For much of the period between 2007 and 2009, large parts of the Tarai lived in fear of violence by these armed groups, which justified their existence as opposing oppression of Madhesi. The names of many of these armed groups expose their criminality or lack of competence – the Madhesi Virus Killers.
Party, the Tarai Cobra, Nag Raj [King Cobra], and even Liberation Tigers of Tarai Eelam (LTTE) and Nepal al-Qaeda World Terrorism.

**Accommodation**

Armed groups in post-war Nepal have perennially splintered, merged and dwindled and so it is impossible to know exactly how many there have been. In 2009, the government put out a list of 109 armed groups that it said were active in Nepal. The vast majority were based in the Tarai, but those claiming to fight for Janajati rights, concentrated mainly in eastern Nepal, were also well represented. Pro-Hindu/monarchy groups, such as the Nepal Defence Army, which was responsible for a bomb blast in a Catholic church in Kathmandu in early 2009 that killed two people, were listed as well.

The armed groups were able to take advantage of the fluid situation of the political transition, and a state that was both weak and focused on managing the peace process. There was also a security vacuum in the hinterland since, during the conflict, the Maoists had destroyed much of the security infrastructure after the police retreated mainly to district headquarters. A total of 768 police posts lay destroyed or damaged by the end of the Maoist conflict. In rural Tarai and other parts of Nepal where these groups were active, the main impact of the post-conflict violence was in creating an administrative void, since the secretaries in charge of the Village Development Committees fled to the district headquarters.

However, despite pervasive fears relating to the security situation, the first Constituent Assembly election was held in 2008 without disruption. With the gradual reconsolidation of the state that followed, efforts were made to begin talks with the armed groups and, starting in December 2008, the government signed agreements with some of them. The main deal at the heart of these agreements was that the government would treat members of these groups as political activists, while in return the groups would help to bring other armed groups to the negotiating table. It is instructive that many of these agreements contain no mention of any demands having been discussed.

**Hardline response**

The Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), which took over power from the Maoist-led coalition in May 2009, took a much more uncompromising approach. The UML devised the hardline ‘Special Programme for Effective Peace and Security, Ending Impunity and Protecting Human Rights 2009’ – known as the Special Security Plan (SSP). Ignoring charges of grave violations of human rights, particularly extra-judicial killings, the SSP was able to gradually control the activities of the armed groups, and by the time of the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections armed group activity had more or less ceased – although reports of attempts at extortion have continued.

Overall, post-war armed groups have not had much impact in shaping politics in the Tarai, the eastern hills, or nationally – particularly because of the existence of political parties. Apart from the JTMM’s secessionist stance, other armed groups were making nothing more than generic demands that were already being pushed by mainstream parties. The armed groups never posed any danger to the peace process. At best they were mere irritants to state and society; at worst, a menace equally feared and loathed by the very communities they claimed to be fighting for.