

Mahendra Lawoti and Anup K. Pahari (Eds.) *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

The collection of articles in this book represents a diverse, multi-disciplinary approach to the examination of the nature and growth of Nepal's Maoist insurgency, its causes and contributing factors, and its after-effects. The articles investigate the underlying forces behind the violent communist uprising in Nepal at a time when such movements have diminished worldwide.

In the introduction in Chapter 1, Lawoti explains how the Maoist insurgency took shape and progressed. He discusses the influences that were responsible for sowing the seeds of the insurgency and providing fuel to the rebellion. Among the most important elements were endemic and widespread poverty, extreme income and socio-cultural inequality, and a weak and divided state. Particularly momentous was the ability of the Maoists, with their excellent grassroots organization throughout the country, to exploit the existing disparities and contradictions to build support for their "people's war," mainly by appealing to the marginalized groups in the country.

The articles in Part II of this text deal with Maoist ideology, organization, activities, and support. In Chapter 2, Kristine Eck contends that understanding the recruitment of rebels is central to understanding conflicts because without effective recruitment, rebellions are unsustainable. While indoctrination tactics were the dominant recruitment strategy adopted by the Maoists, intimidation, extortion, the awarding of selective benefits, and the invocation of personal networks also appeared to play significant roles. The ethnographic analysis by Mottin in Chapter 3 views the Maoist revolutionary performance as an adaptation of the Marxist cultural practices of Russia and China. The close association between popular culture and politics is highlighted. The discussion details how Maoist cultural programs such as political songs, dances, and drama became political rituals. Chapter 4, by Snellinger, is based on field research with Nepali student organizations. She provides a fascinating analysis of a Maoist student organization, how it defines its political organization and frames its political identity, and how the group distinguishes itself from other organizations and their affiliated parties. The student group seeks a complete restructuring of society, politics, culture, family, and the individual. In contrast, other student organizations define their political agendas more narrowly—as a struggle for democracy, republic, or socialist economy—and their struggle does not encompass every facet of their lives. The analysis by Joshi in Chapter 5 contends that the restoration of democracy in 1990 and the subsequent introduction of economic reforms did little to improve the lives of the rural poor, who continued to be oppressed by landed elites and neglected by the state. The Maoists seized on this opportunity to gain support for an armed insurgency by promising to enact radical land reforms, redress grievances, establish a more equitable society, and realize people's expectations.

Lecomte-Tilouine's discussion in Chapter 6 is based on documents published by journalists and members of the Maoist Party. The article describes the nature of revolutionary governance in a "model village" in mid-western Nepal and the impact of the Maoist "cultural revolution" on the lives of peasants. The article concludes that the various forms of collectivization and territorial organization—with the ward as the main administrative unit—gained popularity and influence from their political neutrality and ability to create a strong sense of community among the residents.

The two chapters in Part IV emphasize the ethnic component of the Maoist insurgency. Chapter 7, by Lawoti, compares the participation of indigenous groups in insurgencies in Nepal, Peru, and India. He concludes that ethnic groups have the potential to transform the very nature of the insurgency. Specifically, as the Nepal experience demonstrates, government neglect of indigenous populations can lead such groups to support class-based insurgencies. In Chapter 8, Kantha examines the interactions between the movements of the Maoists and *Madhesi* (residents of Nepal's southern plains). His analysis illustrates how the contradictions between the positions and aspirations of these two groups pitched them against one another. Although both groups had similar demands, they were unable to come together and form a united front because of internal contradictions that served to alienate ethnic and regional groups who were seeking to exploit their own bargaining positions.

Part V includes two chapters that deal with roles of the state and the military. In Chapter 9, Mehta and Lawoti explain the reasons for the failure of the well-equipped, better trained, and much larger Nepal army to contain and defeat the poorly-trained and ill-equipped rebel army. They attribute this paradox to the largely ceremonial nature of the Nepal army, afflicted by political divisions, compared to the highly motivated and well-coordinated rebel army. In Chapter 10, Pahari attributes the success of the Maoists to their exceptional organization and draws a contrast with the mediocre organization of the *Naxalites* (Maoist communist groups) in India during the 1960s and 1970s that led to their suppression by the state. The analysis points to the importance of factors such as rebel mobilization and state counter-mobilization in determining the success or failure of insurgencies, and cautions against evoking factors such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination to explain Maoists victories in Nepal.

Chapter 11, by Upreti, describes the external dimension of the armed conflict and the different and evolving approaches used by members of the international community in an attempt to resolve the crisis. Involvement with the government included war diplomacy, such as weapons and military assistance, and peace diplomacy, directed at efforts to achieve and implement peace. The international community was also engaged with academics, professionals, international NGOs, and local organizations.

Part VII explores the causes of the conflict with the help of empirical regression models. Results from Tiwari's analysis in Chapter 12 show that the probability of conflict is determined by several economic and social factors, such as the level of overall economic development, income, poverty and malnutrition; the proportion of indigenous groups to the general population; and geographic location. In Chapter 13, Acharya's district-level analysis finds that remoteness and geography are significant in determining conflict intensity, while class, caste, and ethnic grievances are not. These findings suggest that the conflict in Nepal was, at its core, simply a shrewd scheme on the part of the Maoist rebels.

The two chapters in Part VIII explore the post-conflict direction of the Maoist movement. Chapter 14, by Lawoti, examines the reasons behind the Maoists' post-conflict electoral victory. He argues that they were successful because people yearned for change, peace, and stability; the Maoists' strong message of progress and inclusion resonated with the voters, particularly the marginalized groups. Equally significant, however, was the Maoist strategy of intimidation and brutality. In Chapter 15, Lawoti and Pahari assess the process of change initiated by the insurgency. They argue that the most significant changes have occurred on the political front. While a social transformation, particularly involving disadvantaged groups, has been introduced, it is not clear whether it will prove to be genuine or lasting. The Maoist leadership has not placed much importance on economic transformation. As such, it is not surprising that progress on the

economic front has been marginal. Only time will tell what kind of impact the changes ushered in by the rebellion will have on Nepal and its people.

Nepal's decade-long Maoist insurgency was arguably the most traumatic occurrence in its history. Clearly, the most serious cost of the conflict was the loss of an estimated 18,000 lives. As might be expected, however, there were significant economic and non-economic costs as well. The conflict exacted a severe toll in terms of lost economic output; it also resulted in a slowdown in development activities and had adverse effects on education, health, agriculture, tourism, trade, and infrastructure.¹ Especially distressing is the toll the insurgency took on children, particularly those from poor families in the remote hills, who have been among the most severely affected by the conflict. Many were killed, abducted, orphaned, or displaced, and many suffered psychological trauma caused by the cycle of violence. Although the insurgency ended in 2006, peace has not brought stability to the country. The political situation continues to be a mess of Himalayan proportions. The political parties have been unable to reach agreement on a new constitution; one of the key stumbling blocks has been the dispute with regard to the fate of 19,000 Maoist ex-fighters. The assortment of articles in the book does an effective job of shedding light on the Maoist movement in Nepal. The different viewpoints and approaches dealing with the myriad aspects of the insurgency provide the reader with a deep appreciation for its origins, characteristics, progression, and consequences.

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¹ For a discussion of some of the costs of the conflict, see Pradhan, Gyan, "Nepal's Civil War and Its Economic Costs," *Journal of International and Global Studies*, 1(1), 2009, 114-131.

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