

NEPAL'S MAOISTS: PURISTS OR PRAGMATISTS?

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NEPAL'S MAOISTS: PURISTS OR PRAGMATISTS?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nepal's Maoists have changed their strategy and tactics but not yet their goals. In 1996 they launched a "people's war" to establish a communist republic but ten years later ended it by accepting multiparty democracy; their armed struggle targeted the parliamentary system but they are now working alongside their former enemies, the mainstream parties, in an interim legislature and coalition government. Their commitment to pluralistic politics and society is far from definitive, and their future course will depend on both internal and external factors. While they have signed up to a peaceful, multiparty transition, they continue to hone alternative plans for more revolutionary change.

Maoist strategy is shaped by a tension between purity and pragmatism. Although they stick to certain established principles, they have long been willing to shift course if they identify strategic weaknesses. Their changed approach was demanded by recognition of three critical flaws in their original plan: (i) they concluded their belief in military victory had been misplaced; (ii) they acknowledged they had misread the likelihood of determined international opposition; and (iii) they woke up to the failures that caused the collapse of twentieth-century communist regimes.

Despite having an authoritarian outlook, the Maoists maintained a culture of debate within their party; key issues have been widely discussed and hotly contested. From the end of the 1990s, they have moved gradually toward a more moderate stance. They changed positions in acknowledging the 1990 democracy movement as a success (they had earlier characterised it as a "betrayal"), in abandoning the immediate goal of a Mao-style "new democracy" and, in November 2005, by aligning themselves with the mainstream parties in favour of multiparty democracy.

The Maoists have cultivated formerly hostile forces, such as the Indian government and the staunchly anti-Maoist Communist Party of India (Marxist), to the extent of alienating their foreign allies. Supporters such as the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and Indian Maoists had backed their insurgency but have been vocally critical of the compromises made in the peace process. They think their Nepali comrades have betrayed

fundamental principles and thrown away the practical advantages they had secured through their armed struggle.

For Nepal's Maoists, however, the balance sheet at the end of ten years of "people's war" is more complex. They believe they have secured some lasting advantages, from their own dramatic rise to influence (with a support base and military force hardly imaginable in 1996) to their reshaping of the national political agenda (promoting formerly taboo causes such as republicanism and federalism). But the course of the war persuaded most of their leadership that they could not go it alone and would have to be more flexible if they were to build on these gains.

The peace process has forced practical and theoretical rethinking. Leaders have tried to present a more moderate image as they balance complex equations of domestic and international support and opposition. Maoist ministers have to cooperate with colleagues from other parties and work with the bureaucracy even as they plan a possible insurrection and plot to isolate "regressive" opponents. Ideologically, they define the peace process as a transitional phase in which they can destroy the "old regime" and restructure the state. They justify this by saying their acceptance of a bourgeois "democratic republic" is only a stepping stone on the way to a true "people's republic". Leaders argue that they can create a new form of "peaceful revolution" that is true to their communist aims but reflects the reality of Nepal's politics.

It is tempting to brand the Maoists as either rigid radicals or unprincipled opportunists but neither characterisation explains the whole picture. Their threats to revert to mass insurrection satisfy traditionalists in their own movement and cannot be ignored. But leaders who have fought hard to forge a new approach will be loath to turn their backs on the hard-won advantages they have secured through compromise. They know they face internal opposition but believe they can hold the line as long as the peace process maintains momentum and allows them to achieve some of their headline goals.

Their likely behaviour as the process moves forward, therefore, will depend upon the role of other political actors

as much as their own decisions. If the mainstream parties keep up a strong commitment to the constituent assembly process, the Maoists will find it hard to back out. If this route is blocked, the Maoists may find their effort at controlled rebellion slipping into renewed conflict beyond their leaders' control. If this were to happen, the Maoists themselves would be big losers. But so would the democratic parties and, even more so, the people of Nepal.

Kathmandu/Brussels, 18 May 2007

NEPAL'S MAOISTS: PURISTS OR PRAGMATISTS?

I. INTRODUCTION

Nepal's Maoists are revising their methods and reconsidering their goals.¹ Their most significant political shift has been a conditional acceptance of multiparty democracy – a fundamental ideological concession – and they have in effect abandoned central tenets of their people's war strategy. The move towards a more pluralistic approach has taken place over several years. While the Maoists' internal debate over ends and means has been more or less continuous, three major turning points stand out:

- **The decision “to defend the achievements of 1990 mass movement” (1999–2001).**² They had earlier labelled the 1990 compromise between the palace and major political parties a “betrayal” of the people. 2001 saw the first serious review of strategy. Their second national conference analysed the problems of the international communist movement and pinpointed the challenges for their own movement, in particular the difficulty of making progress with a purely rural focus.³
- **The decision to abandon the immediate goal of “new democracy” (May 2003).** In its place they adopted “Development of Democracy in the Twenty-first Century” (DDTC), a concept that accepted political competition within a socialist

system.⁴ They laid the ground for this move away from traditional communist thinking by criticising the weaknesses of their mentors, Mao and Stalin.

- **The decision to ally with the parliamentary parties for “full democracy” (November 2005).** In their twelve-point agreement with the mainstream Seven-Party Alliance (SPA),⁵ they accepted multi-party politics and made their immediate goal the formation of a democratic republic through an elected constituent assembly (CA).⁶ This bourgeois/capitalist republic would be a stepping stone on the way to a true “people's republic” embodying the classical Maoist principles of “new democracy”.⁷

After the April 2006 mass movement, which forced the king to relinquish power, the Maoists have tried to present a moderate image. Chairman and overall leader Prachanda even assured donor agencies that they had become “rightist communists”.⁸ But the Maoists' transition to democratic politics is far from complete and the compromise stance has failed to win backing throughout the party. They retain the end goal of a people's republic from which most liberal parties would be excluded, and they have done little to change their militaristic approach to politics, in which the exercise of force is an integral part. The threats of violent insurrection are partly bluster but should the peace process stall, they are both

¹ For background on the Maoists, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°104, *Nepal's Maoists: Their Aims, Structure and Strategy*, 27 October 2005. Recent Crisis Group reporting on Nepal includes Crisis Group Asia Report N°115, *Nepal: From People Power to Peace?*, 10 May 2006; Crisis Group Asia Report N°126, *Nepal's Peace Agreement: Making it Work*, 15 December 2006; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°128, *Nepal's Constitutional Process*, 26 February 2007. As in past reports, for the sake of simplicity this paper uses the labels Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN(M)) and “Maoist” more or less interchangeably. Strictly speaking, the CPN(M) is the guiding force of three separate elements that make up the broader Maoist movement: the party, the army and the united front. For an explanation, see Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Maoists*, op. cit.

² Baburam Bhattarai, “Aitihāsik baithakko durgami mahattvabare”, *Janadesh*, 17 August 1999.

³ *Mahan agragami chhalang: itihasko apariharya avashyakta* (CPN(M) Central Publications Department, 2001).

⁴ “Present Situation And Our Historical Task”, document adopted by May 2003 CPN(M) central committee meeting, at <http://cpnm.org/new/English/worker/9issue/document.htm>.

⁵ The parliamentary parties that make up the SPA are the Nepali Congress (NC); Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist, UML); Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi, NSP (A)); Nepali Congress (Democratic, NC(D)); Janamorcha Nepal; Nepal Workers and Peasants Party (NWPP); and United Left Front (ULF).

⁶ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°106, *Nepal's New Alliance: The Mainstream Parties and the Maoists*, 28 November 2005.

⁷ For more on these terms, see below.

⁸ Prachanda made this comment at a December 2006 donors conference hosted by the World Bank. “Prachandako naya path”, *Budhabar*, 10 January 2007. Prachanda is both chairman of the CPN(M) and supreme commander of the Maoists' military wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA); when Maoists speak of “party headquarters”, in effect they mean Prachanda himself.

theoretically and practically prepared to revert to more traditional revolutionary tactics.

This report examines the Maoists' political culture and its development, drawing on detailed research in two main areas – Maoist internal politics and international linkages – to assess the movement's nature as well as possible scenarios as the peace process moves forward. Some observers have consistently warned that the Maoists will never change; others think they are ready for a trouble-free conversion to parliamentary politics along the lines of the transformation of the mainstream Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist, UML) in the early 1990s. Supporters can marshal convincing evidence but neither of these starkly opposing interpretations can accurately or adequately explain Maoist politics. The evolution of their strategy and behaviour has always been, and will continue to be, a complex process conditioned by internal debates and external conditions. It is too early to predict with confidence where this process will end. Instead, this report aims to clarify the factors and relationships that will shape it.

II. THE CHANGED MAOISTS

A. THEIR STRATEGIC WEAKNESSES

The Maoists were forced to revise their strategy because of its shortcomings. Prachanda has suggested two reasons lie behind the change in line: the unfavourable “international power balance” and the “overall economic, political and social realities of the country”.⁹ In fact, he and his colleagues slowly came to realise they had made miscalculations in three critical areas: (i) their belief that an overall military victory was possible was mistaken; (ii) their reading of the international environment had to change (especially after 9/11), and the antagonistic approach towards India was counterproductive; and (iii) their faith in previous communist systems eroded as they analysed the reasons for communist regimes' collapse.

No military victory. The major factor that forced a rethink was their realisation that military victory was impossible. During their campaign's first five years, they quickly overran the poorly armed police force and hoped to defeat the army with similar ease. They held sway over large areas of the countryside although, in line with their strategy, they focused on controlling the population, rather than winning territory. They set up parallel governments but had no permanent, protected base areas and could not capture and hold district headquarters.

This stalemate led to their first strategic rethink of the people's war approach. In 2001 they adopted a new line, Prachandapath, that added a Leninist twist of urban insurrection to the stagnating rural focus.¹⁰ However, the Maoists have never had a wide support base in Kathmandu, and the government relatively easily thwarted their efforts to build networks. Similarly, the internationally-backed Royal Nepalese Army (RNA)¹¹ proved a more stubborn foe than they had expected.¹² Thus, the twin-pronged Prachandapath plan also failed: they needed either vast

⁹ Interview with Prachanda, *The Kathmandu Post*, 7 February 2006.

¹⁰ Prachanda presented his new strategy to the CPN(M)'s second national conference in 2001, which approved it. See *Mahan agragami chhalang*, op. cit.

¹¹ After the April 2006 movement, the RNA dropped the adjective “Royal” and is now simply the Nepalese Army (NA).

¹² Prachanda said: “When we first attacked the feudal elements' royal army, we believed that we could conquer Kathmandu militarily. But later, when countries like the U.S., the UK and India started supporting the royal army militarily – against our people's war and the Nepali people's revolt – that posed some difficulties. That is why we believe that in today's world it is not possible to move forward only militarily”. Prachanda, “Naya nepalko margachitra koreko chha”, *Pratyakraman*, November 2006.

popular support or clear military superiority but they discovered they had neither. Maoist attacks within the Kathmandu valley in 2005 (Sankhu) and early 2006 (Thankot and Dadhikot) had some psychological impact but never seriously threatened the capital militarily.

Hostile international environment. The Maoists thought that their growing strength would force international players to live with them even if they did not like them. They believed domestic pre-eminence would even trump New Delhi's instinctive fears of a hard-line communist neighbour. Probably over-optimistic from the start, the prospect of international acceptance was definitively ended by the changed post-9/11 attitudes towards political violence. In 2001 the Nepali government branded the Maoists "terrorists", followed by India and the U.S.¹³

The Maoist response to the changed scenario was counter-intuitive and ultimately counter-productive: they chose to go on the offensive, breaking off talks and attacking the RNA directly to bring it onto the battlefield. This in turn invited international military aid to an army that could now portray itself as the last line of defence against a terrorist takeover. India, the U.S. and UK were happy to oblige; despite concerns about strategy and human rights violations, no outside power opposed the basic plan of defending the state against armed insurgents. The Maoists had long seen India as their greatest external threat, fearing that a military offensive to capture central power could prompt Indian intervention with U.S. support.¹⁴ They chose to test this possibility – and discovered that a hostile international environment was enough to upset their plans without any resort to direct intervention.

Shortcomings of communist models. The Maoists were initially uncompromising supporters of the five luminaries of their communist heritage: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. However, they had always recognised that a successful revolution in Nepal would have to modify classical models. This provided cover to review the weaknesses of the international communist movement, a turning point coming when the 2001 second national conference of their Communist Party Nepal (CPN(M)) accepted that Stalin had committed serious mistakes.¹⁵

The May 2003 central committee meeting¹⁶ further analysed why the Soviet and Eastern European communist regimes had collapsed and "counter-revolution" had occurred so easily.

While still underground, Prachanda had spoken publicly about this critical reassessment of classical models: "Why did the communist movement suffer such an enormous setback? Why did the Russian revolution get overcome by counter-revolution? Why did China also go down that path? This was a debate within the central committee for many years".¹⁷ The Maoists concluded that they could not simply blame a "capitalist conspiracy"; rather, the weakness lay within the communist governance system and could only be addressed by allowing a degree of political competition. This paved the way for their revised policy on multiparty pluralism.

B. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR NEW LINE

The Maoists' decision to enter mainstream politics was not unprecedented. They had experimented with the parliamentary system, emerging as the third largest party (albeit with only nine seats) in the 1991 general election.¹⁸ Throughout their armed insurgency, they maintained some relations with mainstream parties, civil society and the media, keeping an entry to open politics a viable option. But the prospect of such a radical change in strategy prompted a long intra-party debate and bitter clashes between those advocating a fresh approach and those who preferred to stick more closely to the original plan. Two senior leaders who might have played a part in these debates, Mohan Baidya (Kiran) and C.P. Gajurel (Gaurav), were out of the picture following arrest and imprisonment in India. The remaining key players were Chairman Prachanda, Baburam Bhattarai, Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal), Posta Bahadur Bogati (Diwakar) and Krishna Bahadur Mahara. While Bhattarai urged a new line, he met with scepticism and resistance from most of his colleagues.

¹³ Indian ministers, led by then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, started to brand the Maoists terrorists from 2001; the U.S. government listed the Maoists under Executive Order 13,224 for terrorist activity on 31 October 2003; see www.state.gov/documents/organization/83383.pdf.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, CPN(M) central committee member, Kathmandu, January 2007.

¹⁵ The conference concluded that one third of Stalin's thinking and actions were wrong. See *Nepal kamyunist parti (maobadi) ko aitihasik dastavejharu* (CPN(M) Mechi-Koshi Regional Bureau, 2006), p.156.

¹⁶ The central committee, which has fluctuated in size from roughly three dozen to 100 members, is the CPN(M)'s primary decision-making body. Above it stood the politburo and, above that, the standing committee; both of these were dissolved in October 2005. For the membership of these bodies immediately prior to the reorganisation, see Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Maoists*, op. cit., Appendix C.

¹⁷ Interview with Prachanda, *The Hindu*, published on 8, 9 and 10 February 2006, at www.hindu.com/thehindu/nic/maoist.htm.

¹⁸ Before starting the insurgency, the Maoists were involved in parliamentary politics through the Samyukta Janamorcha, their above-ground wing led by Baburam Bhattarai.

1. Bhattarai's battle for change

While they had been quite quick to recognise the weaknesses of the international communist movement, the Maoists hesitated to explore alternative lines. Although the CPN(M) was theoretically committed to developing policy through an ongoing debate within the party (the "two-line struggle"), in practice proponents of new ideas faced great obstacles.

The proposal for a constituent assembly, first developed for negotiations with the government in early 2001, was intertwined with the strategy debate. When it was adopted as a negotiating platform, there was little understanding of its significance in the wider party. Most of the leadership viewed it as only a tactical ploy to isolate the monarchy and use polarisation over the issue to open up the way for the long-planned "new democratic republic". However, Bhattarai and some other leaders¹⁹ had a different plan, which emerged during the 2003 negotiations alongside the shift to the DDTC concept.²⁰ Bhattarai saw the constituent assembly demand as a strategic turning point that could pave the way for a "new model of revolution".²¹ He believed that an alliance with the parliamentary forces could win Indian support and form the basis for a mass republican movement. The constituent assembly could be one point of alignment with the parties, and he also argued that the Maoists should accept competitive multiparty politics.²²

However, Bhattarai lost the argument. The August 2004 central committee meeting took the opposite line: instead of targeting the monarchy, it decided to enter the "strategic offensive" phase and considered reaching an understanding with "patriotic forces" (including the king) to counter "upcoming Indian intervention".²³ The meeting also passed a "centralisation of leadership" resolution appointing Prachanda supreme commander of the Maoist military forces as well as head of their shadow government, the United Revolutionary People's Council (URPC) – a position held by Bhattarai. Some leaders keen to reinforce their chairman's grip on the whole movement urged that Prachandapath should be developed into a more ambitious

ideology of "Prachanda Thought", implying he should stand alongside Mao in the pantheon of communist thinking.

Bhattarai disagreed with the centralised leadership and the tactical line of confronting India rather than the king.²⁴ In November 2004 he presented his reservations in a four-point letter and then in thirteen more detailed "questions for discussion" submitted to the party headquarters.²⁵ He argued that the recent decisions went against the spirit of the party's second conference and May 2003 central committee meeting that had called for the "creative development of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism".²⁶ A January 2005 politburo meeting rejected Bhattarai's arguments; after Prachanda presented a critique "on comrade Laldhoj's [Bhattarai's] letter and other activities", his colleagues concluded that Bhattarai had breached party discipline and was proposing a "rightist deviation". He was suspended from all party posts indefinitely.²⁷ Bhattarai tried to fight back, complaining that the decision went "against the accepted rules and norms of any revolutionary communist party".²⁸ But the leadership stood firm: there

²⁴ Bhattarai charged that "to exercise proletarian dictatorship in an effective manner by ensuring supervision, intervention and control of the mass over the party, the army and the state and to pave the path to communism through the means of continuous revolution, some ideas and methods were developed including that of not jumbling up...the party, the army and the state as in the past models of socialism. The recent central committee meeting has however, tended to go against those decisions". Baburam Bhattarai, "Questions for discussion", letter submitted to CPN(M) headquarters, 30 November 2006.

²⁵ His first letter was sent on 11 November 2004; his longer paper on 30 November. He had complained that "at times there appears a wrong thinking [among the party leadership], which regards feudalism as more progressive than capitalism". Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. However, the party establishment suspected Bhattarai's disagreement stemmed more from his removal as head of the URPC than from ideological differences. In an internal document presented to the politburo, Prachanda did not pull his punches: "As long as [Bhattarai] was chief of the united front he had no problem with Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Prachandapath or the development of ideology and development of democracy in the twenty-first century; but once his own position came into question he saw everything as retreat and regression". Prachanda, "On comrade Laldhoj's letter and other activities", document presented to and passed by the January 2005 CPN(M) politburo meeting.

²⁷ Disciplinary action was also taken against two other leaders: Hisila Yami, Bhattarai's wife and now a minister in the interim government, and Dinanath Sharma.

²⁸ Bhattarai cautioned: "we have to see whether we will further develop Prachandapath by stepping ahead from the ideological mile-stones of our party, like [the] historical second national conference and the 'development of democracy in the 21st century', or whether we will make a historic blunder by pursuing a regressive path knowingly or unknowingly". Baburam Bhattarai, note of dissent presented to CPN(M) headquarters, 30 January 2005.

¹⁹ Bhattarai's supporters were mainly those who, like him, had joined the Maoists in the early 1990s. They included figures such as Ram Karki, Haribol Gajurel, Hisila Yami and Dinanath Sharma (who only joined the party in 2001).

²⁰ It was also at this time that they put forward specific demands for the kind of change a constituent assembly should effect.

²¹ Baburam Bhattarai, "Royal Regression and the Question of a Democratic Republic in Nepal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 9 April 2005.

²² Crisis Group interview, CPN(M) leader close to Baburam Bhattarai, Kathmandu, November 2006.

²³ Prachanda, press statement, 1 September 2004.

would be no change in strategy and no sympathy for their comrade's deviationist tendencies.

2. A messy U-turn

The Maoists could have coped relatively comfortably with the fall-out from the dismissal of their de facto number two leader: Bhattarai did not command a wide support base in the party or military and was not in any case seeking the leadership. But significant shifts outside their movement rapidly forced a more positive reassessment of Bhattarai's case for change.

The February 2005 royal coup upset the plan to entice the palace into an anti-Indian alliance: it would have just been too hard to justify dealing with the king after such an autocratic step. Moreover, the coup also forced mainstream party leaders to recognise the weakness of their situation, that without allies they were at the mercy of both the king and the Maoists. This strengthened the hand of party activists (both NC and UML) who had been pressing their leaders to accept a constituent assembly and agree to limited cooperation with the Maoists to defeat royal rule. By May 2005 the major parties had accepted this and were privately urging the Maoists to be more flexible.

These pressures led to a quick Maoist U-turn. Prachanda decided to start talks with both the SPA and India.²⁹ He rehabilitated Bhattarai, entrusting him with the first negotiations in Delhi. This about-turn was caused largely by the lack of other good options. The Maoists realised they could not capture power single-handedly and feared that King Gyanendra might win the argument in Delhi and persuade India to put them under unbearable pressure.

After rounds of discussions with the parties and the Indian government, the CPN(M) held a central committee meeting in Chunbang (in their mid-west stronghold Rukum) in October 2005. It approved the plan of breaking the triangular stalemate with the monarchy and parliamentary parties through an alliance with the "capitalist parliamentary forces" against the "feudal monarchy".³⁰ It also passed a new program for working towards a democratic republic through a multiparty system – the line condemned as "revisionist" only a few months before.

The upshot was that Prachanda accepted Bhattarai's political line and Bhattarai accepted Prachanda's primacy. The Chunbang meeting not only resolved the internal debate and restored Bhattarai to the leadership but also placed the Maoists much more firmly on a moderate path. It paved the way for the November 2005 twelve-point agreement

with the SPA and the April 2006 mass movement. But the new line still had its critics.

3. Teething troubles

Most of the Maoist top leadership supported Prachanda's case that the changed political context demanded a change in their own line. But some were deeply suspicious of accepting the multiparty system and did not back Bhattarai's rehabilitation. Politburo member Rabindra Shrestha, who was close to Prachanda and wanted to expel Bhattarai from the party,³¹ took the dissidents' case public. He was supported by Mani Dhvaj Thapa (Anukul), who shared similar dissatisfactions, albeit for different reasons.³²

Shrestha and Thapa issued a joint statement on 13 March 2006 calling on party cadres to rebel against Prachanda and Bhattarai. Prachanda wasted no time in expelling them from the party and denouncing them as "traitors", "collaborators of the reactionaries" and "unnecessary by-product of the revolution".³³ But their rebellion pointed to the difficulties of selling the new line throughout the Maoist movement. They offered two principal critiques: that Prachanda and Bhattarai's "anti-proletarian weaknesses" had led to "emerging negative trends" within the party³⁴ and that the whole movement was being dragged into a "rightist deviation". They rejected outright the proposition that multiparty competition should be viewed as a means of preventing counter-revolution.³⁵

Shrestha and Thapa set up their own "New Cultural Revolution Group" but their call for revolt had little impact within the Maoist movement.³⁶ Only one moderately senior activist, former alternative central committee member Tulasi Ojha (Anawarat) of Dhankuta, joined them; he was in any case already under disciplinary action.³⁷ Shrestha and Thapa's charge that their party was following a rightist deviation echoes the main complaint of non-Nepali Maoists, but their lack of organised support meant they could not win the backing of international allies. Ultimately their revolt undermined the suggestion that the Maoists' new line was just a cosmetic gesture: it illustrated that however weak their commitment to multiparty politics might be,

²⁹ See Crisis Group Asia Report, *Nepal's New Alliance*, op. cit.

³⁰ Prachanda, press statement, 28 November 2005.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, CPN(M) central committee member, Kathmandu, December 2006.

³² Anukul, a long-time Bhattarai supporter who had become frustrated with Maoist party politics, believed it would be better for Bhattarai to accept his expulsion and pursue his ideas with a new party.

³³ Prachanda, press statement, 14 March 2006.

³⁴ Rabindra Shrestha and Mani Thapa, press statement, 13 March 2006.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Shrestha and Thapa published their documents in a blog, <http://maobadi.wordpress.com>.

³⁷ Anawarat, press statement, 2 May 2006.

the party's leaders were engaged in a real debate over the course of their movement and were willing to face down internal opposition.

C. THEIR CHANGED AGENDAS

The Maoists' original plan was that their people's war would achieve "new democracy" (*naulo janabad*). This was to be a form of dictatorship of the proletariat similar to that established by the Chinese communists, which would give way to socialism and ultimately communism.³⁸ In this their primary targets were the parliamentary system and the monarchy. The course of the conflict and the changing political context persuaded them to make major revisions to this initial strategy. They have adopted three significant new policies: a constituent assembly, a democratic republic and a multiparty system. The only tenet they have not abandoned is that of republicanism.

Constituent assembly. The Maoists had always demanded a new constitution but they did not initially call for a constituent assembly (CA).³⁹ In February 2001, their second national conference decided "to increase the debate about the process of drawing up a people's constitution" but implied that it would not be drafted by specially elected representatives.⁴⁰ Still, when they entered talks soon afterwards, they demanded "interim government, CA election and institutional development of the republic".⁴¹ They saw the CA proposal as a means to drive a wedge between monarchists and republicans. They dropped the republican agenda temporarily during the negotiations when it failed to gain public support but they kept the CA agenda. The fact that it was not acceptable to the

palace or mainstream parties was one reason behind the failure of both the 2001 and 2003 talks.

The February 2005 royal coup changed political calculations. It appeared to prove the weakness of the 1990 dispensation and added to grassroots pressure within the mainstream parties to endorse constitutional change. For the Maoists, the CA proposal was a means for both moving from armed insurgency into mainstream politics and for restructuring the state.⁴² For both sides it became the most attractive option to end the conflict and move forward.

Democratic republic. The October 2005 Chunbang meeting decided on the immediate goal of a multiparty democratic republic. This term is also acceptable to moderate parliamentary republicans but the concept holds a particular significance within the Maoists' longer term strategy.⁴³ Baburam Bhattarai defines it as a "transitional republic", more progressive than an Indian-style "parliamentary republic" but still a step short of a "people's republic". According to him, it is the supreme phase of "capitalist democracy", in which all elements of "formal democracy" (multiparty competition, voting rights, general elections, rule of law, press freedom and the like) will be accompanied by appropriate representation and participation of oppressed classes, castes, regions and women in state structures.⁴⁴ The Maoists would join such a multiparty competitive system in order to try to establish a people's republic peacefully through the electoral process.⁴⁵

Multiparty system. The Maoists only accepted the concept of competitive multiparty politics in May 2003, when their central committee approved a proposal for "development of democracy in [the] 21st century". While replacing the traditional concept of a one-party dictatorship of the proletariat, this only envisaged political competition among "anti-feudal" and "anti-imperialist" parties.⁴⁶ None of the major mainstream parties would meet these criteria: Prachanda has defined the NC and NC(D) as "most reactionary parties" and the UML as a "revisionist party"

³⁸ Their aim was "completing the new democratic revolution after the destruction of feudalism and imperialism, then immediately moving towards socialism, and, by way of cultural revolutions based on the theory of continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, marching to communism – the golden future of the whole humanity". "Theoretical Premises for the Historic Initiation of the People's War", in *Some Important Documents of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)* (Kathmandu, 2004). For details, see Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Maoists*, op. cit.

³⁹ See Crisis Group Reports, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Nepal*, op. cit., pp. 24-25 and *Nepal's Constitutional Process*, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴⁰ They called for multilateral talks, an all-party conference to form an interim government and a new constitution to be made by that government. *Nepal kamyunist parti (maobadi) ko aitihasik dastavejharu*, op. cit., p. 206.

⁴¹ Following the June 2001 palace massacre, in which King Birendra and almost his entire immediate family were killed, the Maoists claimed that a republic had automatically been born and should be institutionalised. Baburam Bhattarai, *Monarchy vs. Democracy: The Epic Fight in Nepal* (New Delhi, 2005), p. 17.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁴³ The UML, Janamorcha and NWPP have signed up to the idea of a democratic republic but do not all define the term in the same way.

⁴⁴ For a detailed description of the Maoists' concept of a democratic republic, see Baburam Bhattarai, *Rajtantra ra loktantrik ganatantra* (Kathmandu, 2006).

⁴⁵ Baburam Bhattarai, "Loktantrik ganatantrako gudi", *Mulyankan*, June 2006. Prachanda also said the Maoists would "go for the goal of the people's democracy through peaceful means". Interview with *The Hindu*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ For the Maoists, royalist parties are "feudal" and pro-U.S. parties are "imperialist".

with a “very dual” role.⁴⁷ The Maoists recognise that they will not be able to restrict participation in a democratic republic but hope to implement their more narrowly defined system under a people’s republic. But they are coy when pressed on exactly how their proposed restrictions would apply to Nepal’s mainstream parties; Bhattarai only comments that “in every form of democracy there are rules on who can register as a political party – democracy does not mean freedom without limits”.⁴⁸

There are two main reasons for the Maoists’ acceptance of multiparty democracy. First, they realised that they could not overturn domestic and international insistence that political competition is synonymous with democracy. Secondly, their conclusion that earlier communist regimes had failed due to the lack of political competition (see above) provided a compelling argument within their own strategic framework. To avoid the danger of revolutionary change decaying into bureaucratic stagnation, they decided that “a situation must be created to ensure continuous proletarianisation and revolutionisation of the communist party by organizing political competition within the constitutional limits of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist democratic state”.⁴⁹

D. RESHAPING RELATIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Once they had realised that they could not win on their own, the Maoists turned their attention to relations with other power centres, particularly the mainstream parties and India. In this they were partly guided by the classical Maoist tactics of the “united front”: to “*unite with all forces that can be united with* in order to fight a common struggle against the enemy and to win in revolution and construction”.⁵⁰ This provided rationale enough for a tactical alliance with the parties, just as it could have been stretched to justify an alliance with the palace had the plan to unite on a nationalist basis materialised.

However, the bid to reshape relations with other domestic and international players was also framed with the possibility of abandoning the underground struggle in mind. Even those pushing for greater engagement with mainstream forces knew that any process of going above ground would be difficult and dangerous. Cultivating powerful allies could ease the transition and help the Maoists reposition themselves to make the most of open politics. The key domestic constituencies were the major parties and civil society groups, although they also maintained quiet contacts with the palace and the army. Maoist leaders made increasing efforts to present a new public face to the world through more moderate press interviews and to win over elements of the international community.

The main thrust, though, revolved around the volte-face on relations with India. The August 2004 decision to confront “Indian expansionism” led to a campaign to dig trenches and bunkers across the country to prepare for a supposedly imminent “intervention”. But less than a year later they were courting New Delhi and, to their Indian allies’ even greater dismay, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), which supported the Congress-led government and had long been fervently anti-Maoist.⁵¹ India had tacitly maintained contacts with the Maoists and had its own interests in reciprocating their new attention. Apart from policymakers’ increasing frustration with King Gyanendra, some security analysts suggested that the CPN(M)’s joining mainstream politics would benefit regional stability and could provide a model for their Indian counterparts.⁵²

The Maoists’ revised approach to India brought them some immediate benefits: it enabled the alliance with the SPA (whose top leaders had accepted Delhi’s informal mediation⁵³); encouraged India’s move away from the king; went a long way to neutralising steadfast U.S. opposition; brought a degree of international legitimacy; and led to the release of more than 100 activists (including senior leaders Kiran and Gaurav) from Indian prisons. They believed, perhaps correctly, that they and India could build on at least one shared interest: that their limited cooperation would reduce the U.S. influence that had raised hackles among both Maoists and Indian policy-makers.

⁴⁷ Interview with Prachanda, *Hamro Jaljala*, September 2006.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, April 2006.

⁴⁹ The CPN(M) has concluded that, “Only by institutionalising the rights of the masses to install an alternative revolutionary party or leadership on the state if the party fails to continuously revolutionise itself can counter-revolution be effectively checked”. “On the Experiences of History and Development of Democracy in the 21st Century”, document adopted by May 2003 CPN(M) central committee meeting, at <http://cpnm.org/new/english/worker/9issue/document.htm>.

⁵⁰ Kwok-Sing Li (tr. Mary Lok), *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People’s Republic of China* (Hong Kong, 1995), p. 451 [emphasis added]. See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal’s Maoists*, op. cit, pp. 10-12.

⁵¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal’s New Alliance*, op. cit.

⁵² Maoism is a growing domestic threat for the Indian authorities. On 4 November 2004, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described it as “an even greater threat to India than militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast”. According to one study, Maoist violence affects at least 165 districts across fourteen Indian states, more than one quarter of its area. See “Maoist Assessment - Year 2006”, www.satp.org/satporgt/p/countries/india/maoist/Assessment/index.html.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, SPA leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

III. CRITICAL COMRADES

The Maoists had solid backing from international allies when they launched their campaign. Organisations such as the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) came to see them as the global standard-bearer of old-fashioned Maoism. But as Nepal's Maoists moved away from their initially traditional strategy, they faced criticism from international supporters who could not accept their line of peaceful transition. They have had difficulty in selling their new line but they are ambitious: they believe that their experiment in compromise can set a new precedent for the global left.

Indian Maoists are the CPN(M)'s most immediate and influential allies, although their practical support has been low-level and not critical to sustaining the insurgency. Their sceptical stance towards the peace process is relevant insofar as it shows the distance the CPN(M) leadership has travelled from its original strategy and reflects unease that is only just starting to find a voice among Nepali Maoists themselves. Indian Maoist leader Ganapathy has warned that his comrades across the border must "either get co-opted into the system or abandon the present policy of power-sharing with the ruling classes and continue armed revolution to seize power. There is no Buddhist middle way. They cannot set the rules for a game the bourgeoisie had invented".⁵⁴ This argument has resonance across the revolutionary left – for Nepal's Maoists to succeed, they must not only overcome their parliamentary foes but win over the critics in their own camp.

A. INTERNATIONAL ALLIES

Two groups have been particularly important in providing international backing for the Maoists:

Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM). RIM sees itself as the guardian of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism's guiding principles. It was established in 1984 by groups in China wishing to protect Mao's legacy from counter-revolution following his death. Its official contact office in London is no more than a postal address but it brings out irregularly the magazine *A World to Win* and fosters contacts between Maoist groups from different countries. The CPN(M) is the only RIM member whose talk of revolution has been seriously put into practice.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Tilak Pokharel, "Indian Maoists urge CPN-M to wield arms", *The Kathmandu Post*, 16 May 2006.

⁵⁵ RIM's members are: Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist), Communist Party of Afghanistan, Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist), Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Communist Party of Peru, Communist Party of Turkey

Nepal became a shining example for other Maoists, who glorified it as a successful demonstration of contemporary revolution. Adjusting to the CPN(M)'s redefined position has been difficult.

RIM played an important role in encouraging the Maoists to go ahead with their people's war strategy. In 1993 (the year of Mao's centenary), it declared that it followed "Maoism" rather than "Mao Zedong thought", a controversial line that the CPN (Unity Centre) backed in its "Mao Memorial".⁵⁶ One faction of the Unity Centre went on to become the CPN(M), including "Maoist" in its name to show allegiance to this position.⁵⁷ (The CPN (Masal) led by Mohan Bikram Singh was also a member of RIM but it refused to accept the Maoist line and left the organisation in 1998.) RIM welcomed the start of the people's war in Nepal with a communiqué entitled "From the Andes to the Himalayas, people's war is the only way to liberation".⁵⁸ It then worked to generate international support for Nepal's Maoists by building an international profile and developing links in other countries.

According to Prachanda, there was "consistent international involvement" in the final stages of planning the people's war, "first and foremost" with the RIM Committee.⁵⁹ "There was important ideological and political exchange. From the RIM Committee, we got the experience of the PCP (Communist Party of Peru), the two-line struggle there, and also the experience in Turkey, the experience in Iran and the experience in the Philippines. We learned from the experience in Bangladesh and from some experience in Sri Lanka".⁶⁰ RIM also drove the establishment of the World People's Resistance Movement (WPRM), which aims to organise communists and non-communists against "American imperialism".⁶¹ WPRM came to focus much of its attention on Nepal, running frequent propaganda

Marxist-Leninist, Marxist-Leninist Communist Organisation of Tunisia, Maoist Communist Party [Italy], Marxist-Leninist Communist Organisation of Tunisia, Proletarian Party of Purba Bangla [Bangladesh], Revolutionary Communist Group of Colombia, Revolutionary Communist Party [U.S.] and Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist). See www.awtw.org/rim/index.htm.

⁵⁶ "Mao smarika" (CPN (Unity Centre) central office, December 1993). Even the Chinese Communist Party does not use the term "Maoism", as it does not believe that Mao's thought constitutes a complete ideology in itself.

⁵⁷ This issue was one of the disagreements leading to the CPN (Unity Centre)'s split in 1994. The faction that did not join the CPN(M) still adheres to "Mao Zedong thought" rather than "Maoism".

⁵⁸ RIM Committee, press statement, 1 May 1996.

⁵⁹ Li Onesto, "Red Flag Flying on Roof of the World" (interview with Prachanda), *Revolutionary Worker*, 20 February 2000.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See www.wprm.org.

and publicity programs in European cities.⁶² Since November 2005 it has sent three groups of foreign volunteers to work on a Maoist road-building project in Rolpa district.⁶³ WPRM also has a South Asia branch;⁶⁴ its current coordinator is CPN(M) leader Suresh Ale Magar.

Coordinating Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA). This committee was formed in July 2001 by nine Maoist outfits from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, formalising a previously loose relationship.⁶⁵ The CPN(M) was a major force behind its formation, and Nepali Maoists have played a significant role in its leadership.⁶⁶ This regional coming together helped smooth the path for the September 2004 unification of India's two major Naxalite organisations – the CPI-ML(PW) and the MCC-I – as the Communist Party of India (Maoist).⁶⁷ That merger went some way towards reuniting a movement that has been divided since Naxalite leader Charu Mazumdar's 1972 death, although the mainstream CPI-ML (Liberation) is one of a number of Naxalite groups that is resolutely opposed to the armed struggle endorsed by the CPI (Maoist).

CCOMPOSA helped the CPN(M) expand its South Asian contacts and form cooperative relationships with other like-minded groups. Nepal's Maoists had already developed a regional perspective with their February 2001 national conference resolution on "a new Soviet federation for South Asia".⁶⁸ The conference concluded that India was the major

obstacle to any regional popular revolution, so any successful insurgency would eventually have to fight with India. This justified building a stronger common front between otherwise disparate national groups, hence CCOMPOSA's twin aims of "struggling for the achievement of people's power in one's own country" and "fighting against American imperialism and Indian expansionism".⁶⁹

B. IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Most RIM and CCOMPOSA members have been very sceptical about the CPN(M)'s strategic review. Some have aired their criticisms publicly; others have expressed doubts privately. The debate is not hostile but it has sometimes been bad-tempered, and several rounds of meetings have yet to bridge differences. Nepal's Maoists insist they are viewing their international friends' objections as constructive criticism but there has been some trading of snide comments and harsh words.

The main difference between Nepal's Maoists and their international allies is over how to put ideology into practice. The CPN(M) has concluded that revolution cannot be achieved by classical strategy and tactics; Prachanda has coined a new mantra: "the repetition of revolution is impossible, only its development is possible".⁷⁰ This explains their departure from the established formulas of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism and justifies their attempt to develop a new approach suited to contemporary Nepal. Most of their international allies see this as revisionism – a harsh charge among communists.⁷¹ Indian Maoist leaders complain that the CPN(M) makes dramatic tactical shifts without consultation and employs a confusing mix of strategy and tactics.⁷² But for Nepali Maoists, their foreign comrades are "dogmatic" and do not understand

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, WPRM activists, London, Frankfurt and Brussels, January, February and October 2005.

⁶³ "Nepal: building a road into the future. Provisional report of the First International Road Building Brigade to the Magarat autonomous republic of Nepal", at www.pcr-rcpcanada.org.

⁶⁴ This was established by Nepali, Indian, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan representatives at a secret meeting held on 2–4 October 2002 somewhere in South Asia. Interview with "Com Munir", convenor of WPRM South Asia, at www.wprm.org/wprm_sa/wprm_sa/interview_sa.htm.

⁶⁵ Sudheer Sharma, "Deep Red in the Heartland", Himal South Asian, January 2002. CCOMPOSA's founding members were: Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (People's War) (CPI-ML(PW)), commonly known as the People's War Group or PWG), Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCC-I), Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (Maoist), Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (MLM), Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal (M-L), Purbo Bangla Sarbahara Party (CC), Purbo Bangla Sarbahara Party (MPK), Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, RIM sources, London, January 2005.

⁶⁷ Nihar Nayak, "Naxalites: A Compact of Fire", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 18 October 2004. See also "Top Naxals pledge no action during truce", *The Hindu*, 15 October 2004. "Naxalite" is the name normally given to Indian Maoists; it refers to the village of Naxalbari in India's West Bengal (on the Nepal border), which was the cradle of a late-1960s Maoist uprising.

⁶⁸ Prachanda, *Mahan agragami chhalang*, op. cit., p. 24.

⁶⁹ CCOMPOSA, press statement, 24 September 2001. The call for the creation of a new Soviet-style federation in South Asia was a controversial policy, criticised by other leftists as counterproductive and likely only to increase India's expansionist ambitions as a regional power. Interview with UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, *Dishabodh*, April 2001.

⁷⁰ "Aitihasik sambhavana ra aitihasik chunauti", *Sanshleshan*, October 2006.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁷² CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Ganapathy expressed his concerns to a CPN(M) cadre: "While it is a good thing that your party has been taking up tactics quite boldly, there is also the problem of oversimplification of some situations and, at times, taking tactics based on an overestimation of the situation such as the intensity of the contradictions between India, China and the U.S.". "South Asia is indeed becoming a storm centre of world revolution", interview with CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Ganapathy by a CPN(M) associate, mid-2006, made available to Crisis Group by email.

Nepal's reality. A senior CPN(M) leader observed: "We have reached the counter-offensive phase, while our Indian friends are still struggling on the defensive phase; how can they understand the challenges that we are facing?"⁷³

Policy wrangles with RIM date from the CPN(M)'s May 2003 adoption of DDTC.⁷⁴ Here the main clash is with the U.S. Revolutionary Communist Party, which has traditionally dominated RIM. However, differences and debates with Indian Maoists, mainly represented by the CPI (Maoist), are more significant, not least because of their geographic proximity and their decades-long bilateral relations. Indian Maoists have bridled at their Nepali counterparts' arrogance and the development of Prachandapath and its promotion as a near-sovereign ideology. CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Ganapathy offers a typical put-down: "We found that there is a certain degree of over generalisation with regard to some of the achievements of the people's war in Nepal, such as attributing universality to some things that are basically a feature of the revolution in an extremely backward country."⁷⁵

The CPI (Maoist) is the only fraternal party to have continuously and openly criticised the CPN(M)'s new line. (The relationship between Nepali and Indian Maoists has always been rocky, featuring a number of policy disagreements.⁷⁶) When Nepal's Maoists signed the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the government, CPI (Maoist) Spokesman "Comrade Azad" reacted: "We appeal to the CPN(M) once again to rethink about their current tactics which are actually changing the very strategic direction of the revolution in Nepal".⁷⁷ He warned that they ran the risk of falling into "traps laid by the ruling classes and their imperialist and expansionist masters" or falling victim to "a sudden coup and massacre of communists as witnessed in Greece, Indonesia, Chile and a number of other countries".⁷⁸

C. THE ALLIES' OBJECTIONS

The Indian Maoists' objections fall broadly into strategic and tactical categories (although a longstanding complaint is that Nepal's Maoists conflate strategy and tactics).

1. On strategy

The CPA. The hardest compromise for the Indian Maoists to digest has been the CPN(M)'s declaration, through the CPA, that it has ended its war. The CPI (Maoist) complains that "the agreement by the Maoists to become part of the interim government in Nepal cannot transform the reactionary character of the state machinery that serves the exploiting ruling classes and imperialists".⁷⁹

The CA. The CPI (Maoist) believes the CA agenda is only suitable for tactical propaganda, not for serious implementation; it publicly objected when the CPN(M) signed the twelve-point agreement with the SPA.⁸⁰ CPI (Maoist) leaders warn that accepting the CA and a multiparty system will lure the CPN(M) into parliamentary politics and make it little more than a second UML. They think it is wrong "to expect a possibility of a peaceful transition from the CA to the new democratic revolution".⁸¹ Spokesman Azad cautioned that "one may bring some reforms from above and satisfy certain deprived sections of the people but it will never solve the basic problems of the people as you cannot smash feudalism and throw out imperialism from the soil of Nepal by utilising the old state whatever embellishments one might do to give it a refurbished image".⁸²

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁷⁵ "South Asia is indeed becoming a storm centre of world revolution", op. cit.

⁷⁶ When Nepali Maoists participated in the 1991 general election and became the third largest parliamentary party, Indian Maoists accused them of rightist deviation. Crisis Group interview, Nepali Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006. When they launched their people's war they were applauded by some colleagues across the border but others warned they had misread the situation and the insurgency was doomed to failure. The CPN(M) vigorously fought its case, Prachanda complaining that India's Maoist movement had "no vision": "Some groups say guerrilla zone, guerrilla zone, guerrilla zone. For 25 years they say guerrilla zone, but there is not any perspective, real perspective". Li Onesto, "Red Flag Flying on Roof of the World", op. cit. Shortly afterwards, representatives from both sides of the border patched up their differences. "The people of both countries, led by their Maoist parties, have been heroically fighting back the state offensive, and are advancing towards genuine liberation and freedom...it is the genuine Maoist revolutionary forces who are leading the people's war for total emancipation". CPN(M) and CPI-ML(PW), joint press statement, 14 July 2000. Arguments broke out again over the CPN(M)'s willingness to engage in peace talks in 2001 and 2003. But following the return to war, the CPN(M) helped mediate the unification of India's two largest Maoist groups – the CPI-

ML(PW) and the MCC-I – as the CPI (Maoist) in September 2004.

⁷⁷ Azad (CPI (Maoist) spokesman), press statement, 13 November 2006.

⁷⁸ Interview with Azad, *People's March* (unofficial mouthpiece of CPI (Maoist)), 6 August 2006, at <http://peoplesmarch.wordpress.com>.

⁷⁹ Azad, press statement, 13 November 2006.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interview with Azad, *People's March*, op. cit.

⁸² Ibid.

Development of Democracy in Twenty-first Century (DDTC). The CPN(M)'s bold abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in favour of DDTC met with a cool reception. "What is new in the concept of 21st century democracy raised by the CPN(M) and how is it qualitatively different from the democracy of the twentieth century (communism)?", asked Azad.⁸³ Indian Maoists worry that DDTC is vague on the concept of political competition, not clarifying whether it is applicable after seizing power or during the revolutionary process. They strongly oppose a general commitment to multiparty politics. The CPI (Maoist) supports neither the new phase of democratic republic nor the idea of a people's republic diluted by political competition.

2. On tactics

Dissolving the "people's regime". Indian Maoists consider the "people's governments" and "people's courts" a major achievement and fear their dissolution will lead to "an irreversible process of losing all the revolutionary gains achieved till now".⁸⁴

Cantoning the PLA. Indian Maoists called on their Nepali comrades "to withdraw from their agreement with the government of Nepal on depositing arms of PLA [the Maoist People's Liberation Army] as this would make the people defenceless in face of attacks by the reactionaries".⁸⁵ They criticise the proposed merger of the PLA and Nepalese Army into a new national army as "even more dangerous": "By merging the people's army with the reactionary army of the ruling classes (until now the faithful servant of the king), the people will become defenceless in case of a reactionary armed offensive by the enemy".⁸⁶

Inviting in the UN. Indian Maoists objected to the UN's role in supervising the arms management process. They say it is not neutral but "essentially an instrument of imperialism and particularly American imperialism".⁸⁷

Relations with the Indian establishment. The Indian Maoists are particularly affronted by their Nepali counterparts' wooing of the Indian government and the

mainstream CPM.⁸⁸ On his first formal visit to India, in November 2006, Prachanda reassured Delhi's political elite that "India is no more a reactionary state" and declared: "We have no working relations with the Indian Maoists, but only ideological relations".⁸⁹ For their Indian comrades, the Maoists' burgeoning relations with the CPM were the hardest to swallow. The CPM, which backs the Congress-led government, has long been hostile towards Maoists, who in turn consider it a "reactionary party".

Model for Naxalites. The CPM's suggestion that Nepal's Maoists are an example of peaceful transition that their Indian counterparts should emulate met with an even frostier reaction.⁹⁰ Nepali Maoists also urged the Indian Maoists "to reconsider their revolutionary strategies and to practice multiparty democracy" and claimed "their current tactics in Nepal would be an example".⁹¹ When an interviewer asked, "to what extent do you think the logic of your line on multiparty democracy applies also to the Maoist movements in India?", Prachanda replied, "we believe it applies to them too... They have to understand this and go down this route".⁹²

3. Conflict or compromise?

These disagreements led to strained relations between Maoists on either side of the Nepal-India border. Coming on top of their other differences, the CPI (Maoist) found Prachanda's call for it to follow the CPN(M) route "even more surprising",⁹³ and it formally objected.⁹⁴ The CPN(M) responded one week later, asking their comrades to understand the difference between "theoretical-political" and "diplomatic" expressions and proposing a bilateral meeting for detailed discussion. But in a further letter, the CPI (Maoist) complained that the Nepali Maoists should have offered a public self-criticism over their "negative" and "provocative" comments on their Indian comrades.⁹⁵

⁸³ Ibid. He offers his own answer: "We are still not clear what is this new concept and qualitative leap claimed by CPN(M) except for their line of multiparty democracy and political competition, which boils down to competing peacefully with the various reactionary and revisionist parties for power in a so-called transitional multiparty democratic republic".

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Azad, press statement, 13 November 2006.

⁸⁶ Interview with Azad, *People's March*, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, Nepali Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁸⁹ Nilova Roy Chaudhury, "We have no working relation with Indian Maoists", *Hindustan Times*, 18 November 2006.

⁹⁰ CPI (Maoist) spokesperson Azad warns that "[CPI (Marxist) leader] Sitaram Yechury has particularly sought to pit the Nepal Maoists against the Indian Maoists. While the CPI (Marxist) brutally suppresses the Maoists in West Bengal, it is hypocritically speaking in praise of the Nepal Maoists". Azad, "Maoists in India, a rejoinder", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 October 2006.

⁹¹ Azad, press statement, 13 November 2006.

⁹² Interview with *The Hindu*, op. cit.

⁹³ Azad, press statement, 13 November 2006.

⁹⁴ This objection was contained in a 16 February 2006 letter sent by the CPI (Maoist)'s international department. Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

CCOMPOSA's August 2006 fourth conference, held in Nepal, offered a chance for Indian and Nepali Maoists to talk over their differences. The Indian Maoists admitted that their spokesman Azad had spoken "too much" in public interviews without consulting his Nepali comrades.⁹⁶ In an attempt to rein in the embarrassingly public war of words, the parties issued a joint press statement affirming that "all tactical questions ... being adopted in the respective countries are the sole concern of the parties operating there... We shall continue debates on ideological, political and strategic issues on which we differ in the true democratic traditions of the international communist movement. These debates and discussions will take place bilaterally and, occasionally, publicly."⁹⁷

During the bilateral meetings, Indian Maoists frequently suggested the CPN(M) consider two "revolutionary options". Ideally they should intensify work towards a mass uprising to capture central power. If that is not possible, they should consolidate their base areas and move towards Kathmandu gradually by capturing territory.⁹⁸ The CPN(M) rejected both options, arguing that they should first try for peaceful change through the CA and only if that fails revert to mass movement tactics.⁹⁹ In their rejection of the classic people's war strategy and new focus on urban demonstrations coupled with participation in government, the Nepali Maoists have clearly broken with their comrades' vision. Although they have reached a temporary truce, many of their cross-border colleagues would welcome the failure of the revised strategy and would probably use any setbacks to press for a return to the traditional line.

IV. THE END OF PEOPLE'S WAR?

The Maoists have manoeuvred themselves into a share in government. This has caused consternation among their determined opponents, who complain that they have outwitted the SPA on every front and stand poised for power. However, from the Maoist leaders' perspective things do not look so rosy. They have had to make major concessions, they worry that they may have wasted the leverage they hoped to gain from their military capacity (by going into cantonments before securing any of their objectives), they fear most other political forces (from the UML through to the NC, the palace and foreign states, including India) are working to stall real change and freeze them out of meaningful power, and they will have a tough job keeping their cadres happy and persuading them they have made the right decisions.

A. THE BALANCE SHEET

1. Gains

In 1996 the Maoists were a small, fringe party with no weapons, few active members and a support base limited to a few pockets of the remote countryside. Their ten-year armed insurgency transformed them into a powerful political force capable of standing alongside, and sometimes overshadowing, Nepal's major, established parties. Although they have joined a coalition government within the framework of the peace process, they have retained, and partially legitimised, their own armed force while expanding their openings for building urban support. In terms of their original strategy, they are still pursuing the second plan of the people's war counter-offensive phase and targeting a democratic republic as their immediate goal.

The Maoists point to several achievements from their ten-year, people's war campaign:

Ending the old system. The major achievement has been requiring all the political forces to accept that the 1990 dispensation was defunct, and a new constitution and system were needed. So far, this victory is largely confined to paper but most major parties have made serious commitments to significant changes. The Maoists believe their movement can take credit for making republicanism a mass demand and for boosting Nepalis' political consciousness and attention to demands that had previously been sidelined. They see this "progressive awareness" as their greatest strength, not an historical achievement but a basis for future mass mobilisation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, CPN(M) leader who participated in CCOMPOSA conference, Kathmandu, November 2006.

⁹⁷ Azad and Satya (CPN(M) representative), press statement, 8 August 2006.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader involved in talks with CPI (Maoist) representatives, Kathmandu, December 2006.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, November 2006.

Political and organisational capacity. The CPN(M) has become a broad-based, active and militant organisation. In its nationwide reach, political determination and organisational capacity (not to mention its military base), it probably outshadows all other parties. It has developed into a fairly mature, cadre-based political-military party, with experience of war and open politics. Despite its internal debates, the central committee lays down an unambiguous political line and disseminates it through a well-structured network, from the central commands and regional bureaus down to district, area and cell committees. As a party, it generally enjoys clarity, discipline and dedication, characteristics that could serve it well if it does become a committed, mainstream player.

Armed force. The war's most visible achievement was the conversion of a rag-tag guerrilla force into the formidable PLA. Although its strength on paper (more than 30,000 troops in seven divisions and over twenty brigades) is exaggerated, its ability to confront a much larger state army has been well demonstrated. The Maoists have placed the PLA in cantonments under the terms of the CPA but organisationally it remains intact and accepting the UN-supervised process has earned it a form of legitimacy.

Parallel governance. As the war progressed, the Maoists became the de facto rulers of most of Nepal. They neither aimed for, nor achieved, unchallenged territorial control but made the most of the state's absence.¹⁰¹ In the vacuum left by local government's collapse or flight, they formed parallel "people's governments" from central to region, district, village and ward level. Like their "base areas", these existed more in theory than in practice: it was not such a great sacrifice to dissolve them under the CPA. But the local influence they represented is something the Maoists are determined not to throw away. They continue to pursue the ends of parallel governance through other means, using tools such as regional and ethnic liberation fronts, Young Communist League cadres and the leverage in open politics brought by their entry into government.

The Maoists have also benefited from their transition into mainstream politics. The alliance with the SPA saved them from a potentially sapping stalemate, and their coming above ground after the April 2006 movement helped them consolidate earlier achievements and extend their reach. Apart from their new legitimacy, they have a better chance of addressing some of their chronic shortcomings, such as weak urban penetration and a poor trade union base.

¹⁰¹ The Maoists announced they had created three types of "base area" (permanent, semi-permanent and temporary) but in fact they never secured any permanent base areas, as the RNA proved by entering their heartland on occasion – a provocation the Maoists met with tactical retreat rather than armed defence.

Their five cabinet ministers and six dozen lawmakers¹⁰² give them a foothold in the state alongside other political parties. Although they failed to win control of the most powerful ministries, they carefully selected their consolation prizes, choosing ministries which increase their influence in critical areas: Information and Communications Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara is now the government spokesperson; having performed the same role for his party, he can make the most of the state-owned media under his control.¹⁰³ Local Development Minister Dev Gurung directs the urban, district and village-level bodies that implement development projects and distribute budgets. Forest Minister Matrika Yadav controls a key public resource and oversees the important network of thousands of community forest users groups. Hisila Yami is in charge of housing and physical planning, while Khadga Bahadur Biswakarma oversees NGOs and INGOs – both positions which offer significant influence.¹⁰⁴

2. But no revolution

Despite these achievements, the Maoists have been forced into serious concessions. A critique from a classical communist perspective suggests they have submitted to mainstream politics without making substantial gains.¹⁰⁵ They have gone back on their original boast that they would capture central power single-handedly, and they have not even secured a leading position among the political forces after the April 2006 mass movement. As the "eighth party", they are only one partner among many in the interim legislature and in a government headed by a non-communist prime minister. Maoist leaders acknowledge they have been forced into significant compromises.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² The Maoists' 73 seats in the 329-member interim legislature puts them on a par with the UML. They were also allowed to nominate ten further members; unlike the other parties, they did not allocate these position to their own members but gave them to sympathisers who do not have to follow the CPN(M) whip. See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Constitutional Process*, op. cit.

¹⁰³ As well as regulating the independent media, the state runs its own daily newspapers, radio and TV stations. Mahara has experience in this area, gained as Maoist spokesman, as do numerous Maoist journalists and propagandists. Maheshwar Dahal, coordinator of the Revolutionary Journalists Association and former editor of Maoist mouthpiece *Janadesh*, has been appointed Mahara's media adviser; pro-Maoist writer Rishiraj Baral is the new chairman of Nepal Television. On taking office Mahara promptly appointed loyal Maoists to replace the editorial team of *Ghatna ra Bichar*, a popular Radio Nepal current affairs program.

¹⁰⁴ On the Maoists' behaviour in government, see below.

¹⁰⁵ Rabintra Shrestha, "Maoko topi, Prachandako jutta", *Jana Aastha*, 10 June 2007.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, December 2006.

They ended their war without securing either their short-term objective of an all-party roundtable or their longer-term goal of a republic. Instead of moving quickly into government, they lost months and used up much bargaining power haggling over the terms of their entry into the interim government. The interim constitution is similarly silent on many of their major aims – although it includes promises for land reform, it does not address the higher priorities of federalism and a restructured military.

Maoist leaders could earlier boast to their followers that their “new regime” had forced the “old regime” into negotiations but however much they seek to retain independent local influence, their assimilation into the state is slowly undermining their former independence. Their “people’s governments” and “people’s courts” (which were popular with many for producing rough but quick justice) have gone; in their place the Maoists have to justify efforts to reform the “old” bureaucracy, judiciary and security forces from within.

The Maoists’ original plan, reflected in the November 2005 agreement with the mainstream parties, was that their PLA and the state’s army would be of equal status and equally subject to UN supervision. However, they have had to accept that the arms management process is primarily targeted at their forces: most of the old RNA (now known as just the NA) is not under supervision,¹⁰⁷ nor has its monopoly on providing security to the state been challenged. Maoist ministers have accepted army bodyguards – a welcome sign of growing confidence but also a sign of their weakness at the negotiating table. Similarly, they did not secure the dominant role in government they had hoped for. There had been a private agreement with the SPA that they would be offered the deputy prime ministership. In the end, they were forced to be satisfied with relatively junior ministries, while NC and UML dominated the major positions. (There is some advantage in this marginal participation in government: should the interim administration become unpopular, the Maoists will find it easier to escape the blame for its failures.)

According to Prachanda, their “revolution” is at a half-way point: they have achieved almost 60 per cent of their goals; the remaining 40 per cent will be come in the near future with election of the CA.¹⁰⁸ If a republican system is not established, however, it will be hard for the Maoists to prove the decade of violence was worthwhile.

¹⁰⁷ The CPA specified only that the NA should place under supervision a number of troops and weapons similar to the Maoist total.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Prachanda, *L'espresso*, November 2006, at www.espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio/Prachanda:%20Our%20Revolution%20Won/1431107, republished in www.blog.com.np/united-we-blog/2006/11/10/.

B. NEW ROADMAP(S)

For the Maoists, the current interim period is a transitional phase to destroy the “old mechanism” and to build a new state structure through the CA constitution-making process.¹⁰⁹ If this succeeds, they will declare the “peaceful revolution” a victory for their new strategy.¹¹⁰ But if the process is derailed, they will try to lead a more traditional “revolution” in the form of a mass insurrection.¹¹¹ The one option that is not on the table is a return to full-scale insurgency. While the Maoists retain the capacity to go back to war (and could easily retrieve their weapons from UN supervision if they chose), few leaders want a return to the unproductive military stalemate they have already experienced. Most would prefer to have their cake and to eat it: to keep a foothold in government and enjoy the benefits of open politics and better relations with other forces, while also using the weapon of street pressure. This balance is difficult to envisage in theory and may be even harder to achieve in practice.

The Maoists had hoped that the April 2006 movement would establish a democratic republic immediately, leaving the CA for later, but the restoration of the old parliament blocked this plan.¹¹² To this extent, the push to establish a democratic republic through the CA is already a fallback option. The tension between negotiation and insurrection has been a feature of all policy debates within the CPN(M) since April 2006. One month after the mass movement, the central committee approved two alternative tactical plans: peace talks or revolt. They formulated a ten-point roadmap for peace talks¹¹³ but also drew up a rough plan for mass insurrection named, with a nod to Lenin, the “April thesis”.¹¹⁴ The talks roadmap was published; the thesis was a (not very well kept) secret.

Initially, the first option appeared to be working. Confident the CA would vote for a republic, the Maoists restructured their party organisation to focus on electoral

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Prachanda, *L'espresso*, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The Maoists blamed this on “a grand design of some international power centres”, arguing that parliament was restored to rescue the king. Prachanda, press statement, 25 April 2006.

¹¹³ For detail, see Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Peace Agreement*, op. cit., p.6.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist central leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006. The title “April thesis” reflects the Maoists’ ambition: it deliberately recalls Lenin’s famous “April theses” published in the build-up to the October 1917 Russian revolution. (Lenin’s article, published in *Pravda* on 7 April 1917, was titled “The tasks of the proletariat in the present revolution”; it can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm.)

constituencies.¹¹⁵ They believe they can be a strong force at the ballot box: they are a fresh face compared to the mainstream parties, have a popular agenda and an established organisational base. Prachanda has estimated they could win an outright majority.¹¹⁶ But when the peace talks lost momentum after the June 2006 eight-point agreement, another central committee meeting concluded that preparation for revolt should take priority over negotiations. The leadership managed to hold the line when the peace process again moved forward but the alternative plan for revolt is alive and well, with some of its committed supporters increasingly restive.

Whether through a peaceful constitutional process or insurrection, the Maoists are still committed to developing a new, Nepali revolutionary model and justifying their strategy in terms of their ideology. They hope to claim credit for the first successful communist revolution since the collapse of twentieth century communism and to export their “new ideology” around the world. They see a clear distinction between their commitment to respect political pluralism and the need to remodel their party on mainstream democratic lines. Despite building more cooperative relations with other parties, the Maoists have shown no interest in emulating their structure or way of working, which they still condemn as feudal and bourgeois. However much they have shifted strategy, they intend to retain ideological purity and will resist diluting their political culture.

¹¹⁵ The three central “commands” were doubled in number, and fifteen regional bureaus were set up. The new commands are: Eastern (In-Charge Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal)), Middle (Barshaman Pun (Ananta)), Western (Top Bahadur Rayamajhi), Mid-Western (Post Bahadur Bogati (Diwakar)), Far-Western (Netra Bikram Chand (Biplov)) and International (Chandra Prakash Gajurel (Gaurav)). The new regional bureaus are: Mechi (In-charge Gopal Kiranti), Koshi (Ram Karki), Sagarmatha-Janakpur (Haribol Gajurel), Mithila (Matrika Yadav), Narayani (Kul Prasad K.C.), Kathmandu valley (Hitman Shakya), Bagmati (Agni Sapkota), Dhaulagiri (Devendra Poudel), Lumbini (Pampha Bhushal), Gandaki (Hitraj Pande), Rapti (Hemanta Prakash Oli), Bheri-Karnali (Shakti Basnet), Seti (Lekhraj Bhatta), Mahakali (Narayan Prasad Sharma) and India (Hari Bhakta Kandel).

¹¹⁶ In Prachanda’s words, “I think the majority of the population will vote for us. More than 50 per cent should be for our party. In rural areas, according to our estimates, more than 80 per cent of the masses support our party. In urban areas and in the Terai there is a mixed situation. So now we are trying our best to win over population in urban areas and on the Terai’s plains. Anyway, I think that Maoist party will be supported by more than 50 percent of the country. Overall the democratic, republican, radical and left forces will gain more than 75 per cent of the vote”. Interview with Prachanda, *L’Espresso*, op. cit.

C. A PHASED REVOLUTION

The Maoists’ first goal is a democratic republic which provides space to restructure the state and move towards a people’s republic. With the establishment of a republic, they would focus on merging the NA and PLA into a new national army and implementing federalism. (Some of these goals have influenced the interim constitution, which in effect suspended the monarchy and moved away from defining Nepal as a unitary state.) Maoist leaders are confident that a democratic republican structure would help them to consolidate a powerful position.¹¹⁷ They believe they could secure the post of head of the state for themselves or an allied party; they could play to their strengths in addressing class, caste, region and gender-based issues; they could implement a federal system in line with their longstanding proposal;¹¹⁸ and they could ensure that a reformed national army would either be loyal to them or at least neutralised as a threat.¹¹⁹

According to the Maoists’ analysis, this would put them in a dominant position within the multiparty system.¹²⁰ They could then try to form a people’s republic, a Nepali version of Mao’s “new democracy”, preferably by amending the constitution or using other peaceful means, although they suspect some confrontation would be likely.¹²¹ Under this system political competition would be much more restricted (see above); the Maoists would then aim to replace the “feudal production system” with their own type of “capitalist production system”.¹²² This would entail distributing the land of large landlords among the landless poor and nationalising industries owned by the “comprador bureaucratic capitalist classes”.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Badal, *Pratyakraman*, September 2006. Federalism has become one of the defining features of the Maoists’ proposed democratic republic. Although anti-Maoist violence in the Tarai raised concerns that playing the ethnic card might be counterproductive, Maoist leaders have not abandoned their plans for federal units framed on ethnic lines and still hope to both capture and control the potentially powerful field of identity politics.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, PLA division commander, December 2006.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Maoist central committee member, Kathmandu, December 2006.

¹²¹ Prachanda, “Naya nepalko ruprekha”, *Nava Chetana*, November 2006.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid. “Comprador”, as used in Mao’s analysis and, following from it, Nepali Maoist texts, refers to subservient domestic intermediaries or partners of foreign capital and governments who encourage the subordination of the national economy.

According to the DDTC plan, one section of the party leadership will go into government “to control, monitor and intervene” in the state while others will be responsible for party functioning.¹²⁴ These groups may periodically rotate but the core leadership, including Prachanda, Baburam Bhattarai, Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) and Mohan Baidya (Kiran), would avoid involvement in day-to-day government, instead instructing and monitoring the junior leaders whom they would deputise for the task.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Prachanda has not categorically ruled out the possibility of himself or other senior leaders going into government if needed.

Like other parties, the Maoists promise a “new Nepal”. In Prachanda’s words, “with good government we can become one of the richest countries in South Asia. But we need transport, hi-tech and scientific projects, infrastructures, and a lot of courage. In ten years we’ll change the whole scenario, rebuilding this country to prosperity. In twenty years we could be similar to Switzerland”.¹²⁶ The Maoists have outlined their development priorities as: (i) improving transportation with an east-west railway line and a new east-west highway through the hill districts, with north-south links to the existing highway across the plains; (ii) boosting electricity generation with a mix of small hydro-power projects and larger schemes funded by “anti-imperialist foreign investment”; and (iii) replacing private education with a free, state education system and expanding free health care.¹²⁷ Maoists leaders say they believe in a mixed economy and will invite foreign investment under certain conditions.¹²⁸

D. LEADERS OF THE RADICAL LEFT?

Despite their quarrels, Nepal’s Maoists do not want to isolate themselves from their international allies. Rather, they want to pursue an ambitious goal of leading like-minded radical groups around the world, an objective they made clear from the beginning: “The Nepalese revolution is an integral part of the world proletarian revolution, and this will serve the world revolution. In this context our Party takes it as a serious responsibility to contribute towards the further development of RIM...and to create a New International”.¹²⁹ This is one goal that they have

not dropped: Maoist leaders now talk about establishing a “Fourth International” from Nepal.¹³⁰

In their quest to assume supremacy among revolutionary parties, they are considering two options. The first is to take over RIM’s leadership.¹³¹ They argue that this leadership should be from the “third world”, rather than being dominated by radical Western intellectuals, who have few followers and no effective organisations but still give instructions to those who are leading genuine armed struggles.¹³² They are particularly frustrated with the American Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), which projects its chairman, Bob Avakian, as Mao’s successor though he has no real experience of revolution. The Nepali Maoists think that RIM should be based in South Asia and that Prachanda has earned the right to lead it.¹³³

If they cannot win over RIM members with this argument, the CPN(M) may form a new organisation.¹³⁴ With this goal in mind, it organised a five-day international seminar on “Imperialism and Proletarian Revolution in the 21st Century” in late December 2006.¹³⁵ It was billed as part of the Nepali people’s war tenth anniversary celebrations, and it drew more than three dozen representatives from fourteen Maoist parties – perhaps the most significant gathering since the formation of RIM in 1984.¹³⁶ Nepali and Indian Maoists presented two concept papers, and the

¹²⁴ “On the Experiences of History and Development of Democracy in the 21st Century”, op. cit.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November-December 2006.

¹²⁶ Interview with Prachanda, *L’espresso*, op. cit.

¹²⁷ Prachanda, “Naya nepalko ruprekha”, op. cit.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹²⁹ “Theoretical Premises for the Historic Initiation of the People’s War”, op. cit.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, January 2007. The “first international” united communist parties in the pre-Russian revolution period; the second and third internationals were established by Lenin and Stalin respectively, following which there has been no such forum.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, Maoist international command source, Kathmandu, November 2006. (The “international command” is the CPN(M)’s foreign affairs and relations department; see below.)

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Maoist international command source, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹³⁵ The seminar took place at an unspecified location in Nepal on 26-30 December 2006.

¹³⁶ The participant parties were: the Communist Party of Afghanistan, Communist Party of Bhutan (MLM), Communist Party of India (Maoist), Communist Party of India (MLM), Communist Party of India (ML-Naxalbari), Communist Party of Iran (MLM), CPN (Maoist), Communist Party of the Philippines, Maoist Communist Party-Italy, Maoist Communist Party (Turkey and North Kurdistan), Proletarian Party of East Bengal (CC), and the Proletarian Party of East Bengal (Maoist Unity Group). The Revolutionary Communist Party, USA and the Workers’ Party of Iran were observers. See “Press communiqué of the International Seminar on Imperialism and Proletarian Revolution in the 21st Century”, A World to Win News Service, 19 February 2007.

Nepali Maoists tried to present themselves as the leaders of the international communist movement.¹³⁷

In December 2006, Nepali Maoists also hosted RIM's sixth South Asian regional conference, with seven member parties participating.¹³⁸ The other parties expressed many reservations over the CPN(M)'s "revolutionary experiment". Still, they agreed to pursue their ideological struggle in private and to launch a "Nepal campaign" across South Asia to support Nepal's Maoist movement.¹³⁹ One problem was that the CPI (Maoist) is not a RIM member and was not at the meeting.¹⁴⁰ Although CCOMPOSA is only a regional grouping, the fact that it includes the CPI (Maoist) makes it more important to the Nepali Maoists than the global RIM. Only if they win support from South Asian Maoist parties, including the CPI (Maoist), can they build an effective international network. None of these difficulties has dulled the Maoists' ambition. Prachanda declares that, "even if we are a small country in South Asia, we think that our revolution can have impact all over the world".¹⁴¹

V. COOPERATION, CONTENTION AND CONFRONTATION

While Maoist strategy documents attempt to bring coherence to their new situation, CPN(M) leaders face a complex task of balancing competing imperatives and pursuing sometimes conflicting tactics. Their headline policy is one of cooperation: maintaining the overall unity of the eight-party interim government and crafting a stronger alliance of leftist/republican forces. They have to maintain unity and discipline within their movement while managing the reshaping of their domestic and international relations. At the same time their private – and increasingly public – assessment is that the peace process will inevitably bring further confrontations, for which they are preparing.

A. THE MAOISTS ON THE THRESHOLD OF RESPECTABILITY

The Maoists are slowly becoming part of the establishment in three areas:

In parliament. Maoist members of the interim legislature are showing signs of learning how to play by the rules but are not yet ready to follow all of them. They took a constructive role in various debates and have supported amending the interim constitution to introduce federalism and revise the electoral system.¹⁴² Maoist lawmakers have a good attendance record; some have been appointed to cross-party committees.¹⁴³ They have quickly adopted the usual parliamentary tactics – such as forcing adjournments or resorting to more dramatic protests to stall proceedings¹⁴⁴ – and have pointed out that they are receiving training on proper parliamentary behaviour.¹⁴⁵ Still, taking part in the legislature is not the same as embracing democratic principles. Among the more dramatic departures from basic standards, one Maoist lawmaker claimed to have

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Maoist international command source, Kathmandu, January 2007.

¹³⁸ Participating parties were: CPN(M), Communist Party of India (MLM), Communist Party of India (ML-Naxalbari), Communist Party of Afghanistan (Maoist), Bhutan Communist Party (MLM), Bangladesher Samyobadi Dal (ML) and Purbo Banglar Sarbohara Party (CC). Dipak Sapkota, "Chautho internationalka lagi pahal", *Mulyankan*, February 2007. Two Bangladeshi Maoist leaders entered Nepal clandestinely by the eastern border crossing of Kakarbhitta. "Prachandako surakshartha bishesh dasta", *Jana Aastha*, 27 December 2006.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, December 2006.

¹⁴⁰ One of the CPI (Maoist)'s founder members, the MCC-I, was a RIM member but its other main constituent, the CPI-ML(PW), was not; the CPI (Maoist) is now an observer within RIM and applying for full membership.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Prachanda, *L'espresso*, op. cit. Elsewhere he has elaborated: "If [our revolution is] successful in Nepal, it has and will have direct impact on the one billion people of India, and it will also spill over into China. When it affects two or two and a half billion people, it means it will have impact all over the world". Interview with Prachanda, *The Kathmandu Post*, 7 February 2006.

¹⁴² For example, Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Dev Gurung spoke extensively about the role of the Maoists in bringing progressive change in the country during the inaugural session of the interim legislature. Other Maoist MPs have participated in discussions on water resources and drinking water.

¹⁴³ For example, Devi Khadka and Lokendra Bista are members of the Natural Resources Committee.

¹⁴⁴ For example, on 27 March 2007 they protested the formation of the Electoral Constituency Delineation Commission, complaining that appointments were decided unilaterally, by chanting slogans and surrounding the speaker's rostrum. In the last week of April, they disrupted the legislature again, demanding the immediate announcement of constituent assembly elections.

¹⁴⁵ The Maoists' parliamentary affairs department, headed by Baburam Bhattarai and other leaders, gave classes to their newly appointed lawmakers just before the start of the interim legislature's first session.

brought a gun into the house and threatened his opponents.¹⁴⁶ Top leaders such as Prachanda and Bhattarai have not joined the interim legislature, leaving some to question their commitment to the parliamentary system.

In government. The Maoists joined the interim government on 1 April 2007. Their ministers are behaving much like their counterparts from other parties, fulfilling their day-to-day duties while pushing their own agenda.¹⁴⁷ Their relationship with a fairly conservative bureaucracy is not straightforward; they have asked permission to transfer senior civil servants and to replace some with political appointees.¹⁴⁸ Apart from appointing sympathetic journalists as advisers, Information Minister Mahara has reportedly told the state-owned media to highlight Maoist leaders' statements.¹⁴⁹ All these trends are in keeping with patterns established by successive democratic governments, and the Maoists have been similarly pragmatic when forced to accept policies they instinctively dislike. Once in power, Mahara rapidly reversed his opposition to foreign investment in the media;¹⁵⁰ Hisila Yami backed public-private partnerships for water supply.¹⁵¹ While Maoist ministers have clashed with their cabinet colleagues, the top leadership has tried to patch up misunderstandings.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ On 26 February 2007, during an all-party meeting in the parliamentary secretariat, Lokendra Bista said he was carrying a pistol and dared other lawmakers to take action against him. After objections, Maoist deputy leader Dev Gurung apologised for the incident. "Lawmakers express objection to Maoist MP's statement on arms", nepalnews.com, 1 March 2007.

¹⁴⁷ For example, Mahara has announced that a right to information bill will soon be tabled. Forest Minister Matrika Yadav promised to crack down on smuggling of forest produce, while Minister for Planning and Physical Works Hisila Yami announced that the government will not privatise water utilities in Kathmandu.

¹⁴⁸ "Maoist ministers seek to appoint, transfer officials", ekantipur.com, 26 April 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Mahara has appointed Maheshwor Dahal, former editor of the Maoist mouthpiece *Janadesh*, as his adviser. Sachin Roka and Bishnu Prasad Sapkota, coordinators of Maoist-run FM stations, have been appointed to run two politics programs on state-owned Radio Nepal. These appointments have led to concerns among mainstream journalists that there will be a concerted squeeze on the expression of liberal, non-Maoist viewpoints; Mahara's refusal to apologise for the killing of journalists during the conflict has also added to worries about Maoist attitudes on press freedom.

¹⁵⁰ "No curb on foreign investment in media now", nepalnews.com, 2 April 2007.

¹⁵¹ "Campaign to promote household water treatment", nepalnews.com, 23 April 2007.

¹⁵² For example, in a cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Koirala, who also holds the defence portfolio, rebuked Yadav for publicly accusing the Nepal Army of felling trees and killing endangered animals. Yadav cited the right to speak on matters within his ministerial jurisdiction, leading to a brief spat with Koirala and

In dealing with the international community. The Maoists have managed to win a degree of international recognition – something that was always denied to them while underground. Maoist ministers regularly meet ambassadors and donors, most of whom have continued to support Maoist-run ministries, and have had some high-profile encounters with visiting dignitaries.¹⁵³ Their engagement with the UN has made it easier for other countries to stop considering them as untouchables, although the U.S. still considers them terrorists and does not deal with them.¹⁵⁴ A British minister who met Maoist leaders Bhattarai and Mahara was impressed by their willingness to engage with the outside world but stressed that encouragement of their role in the peace process will always be accompanied by strong messages on abandoning violence.¹⁵⁵ International actors who have pressed for action on human rights are dismayed by Maoist failure to implement many of their commitments, from demobilising underage soldiers and enabling the safe return of internally displaced people to guaranteeing fundamental rights such as press freedom.¹⁵⁶

B. A UNITED LEFT?

The Maoists and mainstream leftist parties share some common policies and may agree to a tactical alliance, especially if the NC reunites and also draws on the support of smaller parties to form a more powerful conservative bloc. But there is still an ideological gulf between the Maoists and the UML, and each party is determined to assert itself as the leader of a broader leftist front. The Maoists have used the structure of the peace process – in which they and NC are the decision-making core – to weaken the UML's position. Internal politics will play a role in determining whether a working understanding

walk-out by Maoist ministers. The issue was resolved only after Prachanda and Bhattarai visited the prime minister.

¹⁵³ For example, Gareth Thomas, a British international development minister, met senior Maoist leaders and assured them of support to the peace process but warned there should be no intimidation in the run-up to the constituent assembly polls.

¹⁵⁴ For the list of terrorist organisations, see www.treasury.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/programs/terror/terror.pdf. The Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha, a violent Tarai outfit, has also been added to the list. "U.S. says Maoists still a terrorist organisation; JTMM added", nepalnews.com, 2 May 2007. The American ambassador has consistently stated that the U.S. will review the Maoists' status only if they completely abandon violence. Interview with Ambassador James F. Moriarty, *Dishanirdesh*, Nepal Television, 26 March 2007.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Gareth Thomas, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, London, May 2007.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Kathmandu, Brussels and London, May 2007.

can be reached: both parties have factions for and against an alliance.

The case for a working alliance appears to be strong. Leftist parties can unite around the republican agenda (though some are more fervent believers than others, and there are differences over how to achieve the republic¹⁵⁷), make a stronger stand within the legislature and government against what they see as NC heel-dragging, and maximise the left's potential at the ballot box as and when elections go ahead. Leaders of both parties stress that outright unification is impossible but a form of united front could be built.¹⁵⁸

Private feelers have given way to more public consideration of options. On 22 April 2007 (Lenin's birthday and the 57th anniversary of the original Communist Party of Nepal's establishment) the Maoists hosted a cross-party leftist leaders' gathering in Kathmandu. Most speakers wanted "to cement the absolute majority commanded by the communist forces in the parliament, the cabinet and the street".¹⁵⁹ Baburam Bhattarai said: "Let us fuse the ideologies espoused by late Pushpa Lal, late Madan Bhandari and Prachanda".¹⁶⁰ Prachanda and UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal held a follow-up meeting in which, according to Prachanda, they agreed to form a left republican alliance.¹⁶¹

This process will probably gain momentum if an election date is announced. Both the CPN(M) and UML fear that ongoing rivalry within the left could damage their individual election prospects. The Maoists, who lack an established voter base, may see advantage in a seat-sharing arrangement to avoid competing against the UML in most of the first-past-the-post constituencies. The UML might trade this off in return for assurances of support in the proportional part of the vote.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ As doubts grew over whether CA elections would happen, Prachanda demanded the interim legislature immediately declare a republic; the UML revived its proposal for a referendum on the monarchy. The Maoists said they would support the UML proposal but Prime Minister Koirala is not ready for either option.

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist and UML leaders, Kathmandu, April 2007.

¹⁵⁹ Sanjaya Dhakal, "Red Storm Rising?", nepalnews.com, 23 April 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Pushpa Lal was the Communist Party of Nepal's first leader; Madan Bhandari, who died in a road accident in 1994, was the UML's general secretary and architect of its transition into a mainstream party that accepted parliamentary democracy.

¹⁶¹ "UML, Maoists discuss left unity; bash PM", nepalnews.com, 25 April 2007.

¹⁶² The CA election system will be partly first-past-the-post constituency-based and partly list-based proportional representation. For the FPTP constituencies, a delimitation commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Arjun Bahadur Singh has proposed the hill and mountain regions should

Both Maoists and UML leaders have warned that anti-communists want to prevent the polls. In Madhav Nepal's words, "reactionaries are trying to disrupt the forthcoming CA elections as they fear a communist majority in the CA".¹⁶³ In fact, the various communist parties already command a majority in both the legislature and the cabinet but have been unable to leverage this due to their own internal differences.¹⁶⁴ This is unsurprising given the Maoists' outlook: their engagement with the UML and India's CPM is at heart contingent and instrumental. They have pressed ahead where they have seen advantage in the relationship but their priority remains to push for more radical change than mainstream communists can stomach.

C. TRANSITIONAL TENSIONS

The Maoists remain a fairly cohesive movement and are sticking to the framework of the peace process as their preferred route forward. However, their current unity and commitment to a peaceful compromise cannot be taken for granted. If the elections do not take place and a republic is not established by other means, they will revert to insurrectionary tactics. If neither route is successful, they will face serious internal tensions. As outlined above, the Maoists arrived at their current strategy after much debate; individuals and groups opposed to the policy of "peaceful revolution" will be quick to seize upon any serious stumbles.

Since October 2005 the CPN(M) has followed Baburam Bhattarai's political line and Prachanda's leadership; both top figures will have tough questions to answer if they fail to deliver. The untested CA hypothesis – which had been sold to sceptics as "an experiment in revolution"¹⁶⁵ – came under attack in the April 2007 central committee meeting. Netra Bikram Chand (Biplov), a younger generation leader who represents the Maoist stronghold of Rolpa and is currently in charge of the far-western command, won majority support for a new line which rejected the basis of the peace process.¹⁶⁶ In his words:

have 124 seats and the Tarai 116. See Madhav Dhungel, "Nirvachan kshetrako tanatan", *Nepal*, 29 April 2007.

¹⁶³ "Reactionaries fear communist majority in CA: MK Nepal", nepalnews.com, 22 April 2007.

¹⁶⁴ Five of the eight ruling parties are communist (CPN(M), UML, NWPP, ULF and Janamorcha Nepal), as are twelve of the 22 cabinet ministers. Communists have 182 of the 329 seats in the interim legislature (UML 83, CPN(M) 83, Janamorcha 9, NWPP 4 and ULF 3), including the speaker; even if NC reunites, it has only 134 seats. See www.parliament.gov.np/member/hr.htm.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders and cadres, Kathmandu, 2006.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, April 2007.

We have been constantly raising three demands: the restructuring of the state, constituent assembly elections and a federal democratic republic.... But in a way we have ended up sacrificing and undermining the basic concept and achievements of our ten-year people's war for the sake of these tactical objectives. Sadly it is now clear that following America and India's plan, Girija Prasad and the *dalal* tendency¹⁶⁷ are using our own weakness and sacrifices as weapons to advance their conspiracy to finish us off and scupper the restructuring of the state, constituent assembly elections and federal democratic republic.¹⁶⁸

Bhattarai opposed targeting India but accepted the party decision. While the new line was officially set by Prachanda, key elements were based on Biplov's arguments and senior leader Mohan Vaidya's advice. Their and Bhattarai's perspectives are quite far apart but Prachanda is attempting a middle path between them. The CPN(M) has always contained some factions and lobbies but they were largely invisible during its underground days. Some groups are based on loyalties that predate the party's formation,¹⁶⁹ some coalesce around ideological positions; there are also occasional personality clashes and rivalry between leaders, most of whom have their own coteries.

Still, there is little likelihood of an imminent split or, despite the aggressive language of certain lobbies, a return to all-out war. The ever more public display of doubts over the peace process may make Prachanda look weak but may also strengthen his hand in negotiations with the other parties – he can credibly point to the difficulty of selling the process to cadres that are becoming restive at the loss of momentum. Commanders still have control over PLA fighters but must assuage their dissatisfaction on two fronts: they are suffering from the cantonments' poor physical infrastructure, and some are starting to wonder if the party leadership will be able to deliver a satisfactory settlement, including a genuine merger of the PLA and NA.¹⁷⁰ Discipline problems appear to be growing, from lower level cadres' disrespect of party decisions to

unauthorised extortion and intimidation; a central monitoring committee led by Mohan Vaidya recommended that the party take steps to reestablish discipline.¹⁷¹

D. CLASHES TO COME

Maoist leaders believe that further political confrontation is inevitable, whether they follow the CA route or opt for revolt. In their view, the king, sections of the army and other royalist elements will try to obstruct the CA and may go so far as attempting a coup to halt the process. (The Maoists would counter this by mobilising a mass movement and making their own bid to seize power.) As always, they see deliberate polarisation as one of the best means of moving the political process forward. If their efforts to encourage a sharper polarisation between leftist and conservative political forces are successful, this may heighten the likelihood of confrontation. There are four areas where clashes are likely.

Nepali Congress. The complex relationship between the Maoist leadership and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala (who leads the NC) lies at the heart of the peace process. On one level they have built a successful working partnership: the CPN(M) and NC have been the drivers of the peace process and the key arbiters of disputes during the negotiations, often to the exclusion of other parties.¹⁷² The Maoists have devoted serious attention to studying Koirala's character and political behaviour and have exploited the fact that he relies more on personal confidants than party or government structures. Prachanda and Bhattarai have won a degree of trust with Koirala and his main gatekeepers, and this has served them well.¹⁷³ But both sides know that their relationship is fundamentally antagonistic: they share an interest in marginalising other political players only so that there is a less crowded arena for their future showdown.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ A *dalal* is literally a go-between or middleman. For the Maoists, this term covers both comprador capitalists (and their local brokers) and politicians compromised by working for outside interests (the main targets in this instance).

¹⁶⁸ Biplov, "Naya karyanitalai dhriddhatapurvak karyanvayan garaun", *Janadesh*, 17 April 2007.

¹⁶⁹ Members of the parties that joined to form the CPN(M) sometimes function as distinct lobbies within it. For example, Baburam Bhattarai represents the former CPN (Mashal), while Prachanda, Baidya and Badal were with its rival, Masal.

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, PLA source, Kathmandu, April 2007. The interviewee suggested that following the cantonment process, relations between the PLA and the party's political leadership had somewhat cooled.

¹⁷¹ Vaidya's committee organised a national training program in April 2007 that concluded the CPN(M) needed a "purification process". "Yasari hundaichha maobadi shuddhikrit", *Pahal*, 6 May 2007. Such efforts are nothing new. Maintaining discipline and political coherence is a constant challenge which has frequently demanded leaders' attention. See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Maoists*, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

¹⁷² See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Peace Agreement*, op. cit.

¹⁷³ It was Koirala's trusted emissaries, in particular his nephew Shekhar Koirala and current home minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula, who initiated the secret dialogue with the Maoists in Delhi in the spring of 2005 and did more than any other mainstream party leaders to shape the eventual November 2005 deal. See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's New Alliance*, op. cit.

¹⁷⁴ This consideration informs Maoist tactics in dealing with possible allies on the left and also underlies the NC's reluctance to drop the monarchy entirely: by holding out the chance of a ceremonial role for the king it can win the backing of moderate

This subtle relationship plays out in a strange, but not illogical, mix of cooperation and frontal assault. Each party needs the other but it also needs to keep up a barrage of charge and counter-charge, partly to shift the blame for delays in the process and partly to manoeuvre on more substantive issues. When Koirala needled the Maoists by saying he was bringing “terrorists” to the mainstream, Prachanda retorted: “Wait and see. The coming days will show who brought whom”.¹⁷⁵ Their main policy difference is over the monarchy. If the elections are delayed, the Maoists want the interim legislature to declare a republic; Koirala has generally advocated a ceremonial monarchy (while suggesting Gyanendra abdicate in favour of his grandson, Hridayendra), although if he felt the country were irrevocably heading towards republicanism, he would want to position the NC at the forefront of any change.

Other more immediate issues have already led to friction and could cause escalating tension. These include the lack of action on the Rayamajhi commission report;¹⁷⁶ failure to investigate disappearances;¹⁷⁷ and the lack of interest in implementing key elements of the CPA, from land reform to army restructuring.¹⁷⁸ Soon after joining the interim government, the Maoists upped the ante. They accused Koirala of deliberately delaying the constitutional process, and the April 2007 central committee meeting

royalists who know they cannot face off against the Maoists on their own. On NC calculations see Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Peace Agreement*, op. cit., pp. 16-18. Former royalist prime minister and Rastriya Janashakti Party Chairman Surya Bahadur Thapa has already responded to the signs of left cooperation by calling for unity among “democratic forces”, saying that “Nepali Congress, as the biggest democratic party, should take the lead, and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala should take the initiative”. *The Himalayan Times*, 29 April 2007.

¹⁷⁵ S. Chandrasekharan, “Nepal: CEC urges postponement of CA Elections”, saag.org/notes4/note378.html.

¹⁷⁶ The Rayamajhi Commission was formed to probe the royal government's use of force to suppress the April 2006 movement. Its report has not been published, and no action has been taken against any of those it criticised for their actions.

¹⁷⁷ The CPA committed both the state and the Maoists to investigate outstanding cases of forced disappearances within 60 days. Neither side has implemented this commitment; the state is responsible for many more alleged disappearances (around 1,300), some of which have been well documented, such as the four dozen supposed Maoist activists who were secretly detained, tortured and probably killed by the RNA in late 2003. See “Report of investigation into arbitrary detention, torture and disappearances at Maharajgunj RNA barracks, Kathmandu, in 2003–2004”, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Kathmandu, 2006, at <http://nepal.ohchr.org/en/index.html>.

¹⁷⁸ For example, the state has still not released all Maoists detainees, has not nationalised royal property and has not formed the national peace and rehabilitation commission specified in the CPA.

decided to target him from all fronts – the street, parliament and government.¹⁷⁹ Maoist MPs started disrupting legislature sessions and their ministers boycotted the 18 April cabinet meeting.¹⁸⁰

If there is agreement on dealing with the monarchy, the confrontation with Congress may be postponed or even avoided. For all their public griping, the Maoists have generally been happy to support Koirala as prime minister – not least because he is likely to bequeath the NC a messy succession struggle, which they hope to exploit. Still, both parties recognise that their visions of a future Nepal and its political institutions are very different. There will have to be a battle over the direction the country takes and they are determined to lead the opposing forces in it.

The monarchy. Despite their past dalliance with the palace, ending the monarchy is a core issue for the Maoists. They have always assumed that a transition towards a republic could only come about through a decisive final confrontation. The November 2005 Chunbang meeting concluded that “the party should never, and will never, fall prey to the fantasy that monarchy can be easily ended through the CA and a republic will appear just like that”.¹⁸¹ This conclusion has not changed. According to Maoist leader Badal, they have only destroyed the enemy's outer periphery; the inner circle (i.e., the monarchy) is yet to break.¹⁸²

The king has been quiet but not passive. In the face of cuts to his status and privileges, he has dug in his heels with a mix of truculence and defiance. When the government brought the royal palace service under the civil service and ordered the dismissal of key officials, Gyanendra extended their tenure and promoted them.¹⁸³ He refused to answer the Rayamajhi Commission's queries about his role in suppressing the April 2006 movement and justified his 2005 coup in a “democracy day message” on 19 February 2007.¹⁸⁴ On the anniversary of his surrender of power, he made a very public, army-escorted temple visit,

¹⁷⁹ “Khulyo morcha sangharshko” *Janadesh*, 1 May 2007.

¹⁸⁰ The Maoists were also disappointed when Koirala formally invited the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) for talks, granting it recognition despite the fact that its activists killed 30 Maoists in Gaur on 21 March 2007, when they clashed while organising rival meetings. Police raids on Maoist Young Communist League offices in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur on 15 April 2007, reportedly on the prime minister's orders, added to tensions.

¹⁸¹ See *Nepal kamyunist parti (maobadi) ko aitihashik dastavejharu*, op. cit., p. 314.

¹⁸² Badal, “Jatiya mukti aandolan ra baigyanik karyadishako prashna”, *Hamro Jaljala*, September 2006.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interview, government official, Kathmandu, April 2007.

¹⁸⁴ See Crisis Group Report, *Nepal's Peace Agreement*, op. cit., p. 21.

received a 21-gun salute from the NA and had the old, abolished, national anthem played – none of which seemed in keeping with the letter or spirit of the interim constitution.¹⁸⁵ Gyanendra still has some support from small political parties,¹⁸⁶ a few international sympathisers, a section of the army and his 3,000-strong palace guard.

The Nepalese Army. There is likely to be increased friction with the NA over its unwillingness to countenance substantive reform and continuing resistance to democratic control. The army's traditional loyalty to the palace has theoretically been severed, and some generals say they have no desire to burn their fingers by serving the king's ambitions once again.¹⁸⁷ Still, they will take "strong steps" to protect their institutional interests, which could extend to stepping in if the country faces serious instability.¹⁸⁸ They will also hold out against merging Maoist fighters into a reformed force, citing reasons of professionalism and political neutrality but privately determined that as a militarily undefeated force, they should not have unpalatable reforms imposed on them.

Resolving these questions will be difficult even if a republic is smoothly established. The Maoists' and army's mutual distrust is understandable: each has good reason to question the other's intentions. Maoists leaders fear a serious attempt at army restructuring could prompt an army revolt backed by foreign powers opposed to the emergence of the radical left.¹⁸⁹ The army suspects that Maoist talk of merging the two forces is thin cover for a plan to take it over from within and disable the last bulwark against full Maoist control. The only peaceful way out of this deadlock is a process of security sector reform that leaves the army less likely to play politics but also prevents the security forces becoming the tools of any one political grouping. Unfortunately, no mainstream party is interested in pursuing this agenda. The timid are still too scared of the army

to demand action; the confident are too tempted by the idea of trying to turn it into their own instrument.

India. Nepal's most influential neighbour prompts deep ambivalence among the Maoists. India looked favourably on them in the early years of the insurgency, and they long saw it as a fairly safe refuge. But as Delhi adopted a tougher line, the Maoists in turn played on latent anti-Indian sentiment among their supporters. They accepted Indian facilitation of the November 2005 deal with the SPA partly out of necessity and partly on the understanding that Delhi would drop its longstanding support for constitutional monarchy. The Maoists did not imagine India would remain sympathetic indefinitely, so they planned to keep it at arms length until a republic was established and then review relations.¹⁹⁰ For a year after the April 2006 movement, they behaved cautiously and diplomatically, reining in anti-Indian rhetoric and recognising the need for constructive engagement.¹⁹¹

However, the strains are showing. The 2007 central committee meeting concluded that India had not dropped its twin-pillar policy and was trying to preserve a ceremonial monarchy. The Maoists also allege that Indian intelligence agencies are waging a covert war against them through regional armed groups such as the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha.¹⁹² This has led to a slight backtracking: the Maoists have decided to give priority to "nationality" alongside republicanism, implying that they once again see Delhi as a serious threat to the nation. Their leaders say they will only restore warmer relations if India supports republicanism.¹⁹³ They are aware that they cannot afford to anger their neighbour, that "no government can survive here without some support from New Delhi".¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, this relationship will experience further tensions.

United Nations. The Maoists called early and consistently for UN involvement in a peace process. However, they have always been suspicious of the UN (tending to view it as subordinate to Western/imperialist interests) and sought its engagement for a clearly limited function. They realised that bringing in the UN could help them effect the transition into open politics safely and with recognition, especially for the PLA. But if the UN-led arms management process

¹⁸⁵ The interim constitution, promulgated on 15 January 2007, in effect suspended the monarchy and left the prime minister to assume the head of state's duties. Prime Minister Koirala received the credentials of a new ambassador for the first time in April 2007, a role that previously was performed by the king. "PM Koirala receives credentials of Chinese ambassador", nepalnews.com, 19 April 2007.

¹⁸⁶ A handful of small royalist parties have applied for registration with the Election Commission: the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (Nepal), Nepal Sadbhavana Party, Samajbadi Party and Janamukti Party. "Four pro-monarchy parties registered with EC", nepalnews.com, 20 April 2007.

¹⁸⁷ The interim constitution and amended Army Act place the army under the direct control of the government.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interviews, security and political sources, Kathmandu, November-December 2006.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, November 2006.

¹⁹¹ On his first formal visit to India in November 2006, Prachanda met former prime ministers and expressed thanks for India's support for the democratic movement. See "Visit To The South", *Spotlight*, 24 November 2006.

¹⁹² Sudheer Sharma, "Maobadima pheriko bharat-rananiti", *Kantipur*, 23 April 2007.

¹⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, April 2007.

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Baburam Bhattarai, April 2007.

cannot deliver a deal on the longer term merging of their fighters into a new national army, there will be further criticism of the original decision. Prachanda has followed the example of other Maoist leaders in publicly criticising the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ian Martin.¹⁹⁵ Although plenty of politicians from other parties have also been happy to use the UN as a convenient scapegoat, the Maoists are willing to stall a key element of the arms process – the verification of their combatants – to demand faster progress from other parties and to remind the international community that they do not feel obliged to fulfil their part of the deal if others hold back on their own commitments.

E. PLAN B

The Maoists have from the outset warned that they will keep other revolutionary options open if the peace process fails. Such warnings are partly bravado and brinkmanship (for example, the “October revolution” that they threatened in 2006 was never a realistic option) but also reflect serious fallback plans. Maoist strategists are having second thoughts about the constituent assembly: they fear that delays may strengthen the palace’s hand and that even if the CA declares a republic, the king will not accept its decision without a fight.¹⁹⁶

Prachanda has long threatened revolt if the elections are not held on time;¹⁹⁷ when a delay became inevitable, Maoist leaders made a show of blaming Prime Minister Koirala’s “grand conspiracy”.¹⁹⁸ Prachanda announced the end of unity with the SPA and warned that agreement on declaring a republic through the interim legislature can be the only base for its renewal.¹⁹⁹ The April 2007 central committee meeting also approved a plan to launch a mass movement, suggesting the start of more serious confrontation. Initially, the Maoists are collecting signatures for a republican

petition but they also have plans to surround Singha Durbar, the seat of government, to take their protest to the top.²⁰⁰ The first goal is to pressure Prime Minister Koirala into concessions; failing this they will experiment with their mass movement plan.²⁰¹

The Maoists, like most other parties, were rarely as enthusiastic about the elections in private as they made out in public. They were neither convinced the CA could deliver revolutionary change nor as sure of their electoral prospects as they would have liked. The delay in the polls is a convenient opportunity to push for more rapid change and to placate growing unrest in their party.

The likelihood of a further confrontation was the main rationale for reorganisation of the Maoists’ militant wing, the Young Communist League (YCL). The YCL was first formed in the early 1990s, during the initial preparations for people’s war. It was then converted into the guerrilla squads which were the forerunners of the PLA and in December 2006 relaunched by the CPN(M)’s December 2006 central committee meeting.²⁰² Although its members are largely unarmed youths, in keeping with its military origins it is led by PLA commanders who did not go into the cantonments. Former PLA fourth division commander Rashmi (Ganeshman Pun of Rukum) is the chairman of its 25-member central committee.

Semi-underground YCL committees have been formed from central to regional, district and village level. Groups of members are based in Kathmandu and other urban areas, while former militia members make up the bulk of its presence in villages. NC leader Sujata Koirala (the prime minister’s daughter) has alleged that the YCL is training its cadres in “booth capturing” for the CA election.²⁰³ YCL units have been openly carrying out extra-legal activities in Kathmandu like a parallel police force;²⁰⁴ in April 2007 the state police started to take action against them but it is not clear if this will significantly limit their capacity.²⁰⁵ Some of their actions are calculated to win sympathy (they have helped with traffic management, embarked on city clean-up campaigns and seized illegally imported goods to hand over to the police) but this only adds to the consternation of mainstream parties, who fear the combination of populism backed by intimidation.

¹⁹⁵ Prachanda criticised Martin’s assertion that the Maoists had imposed preconditions for cooperating in the second stage of PLA verification. See “Prachanda criticises Martin, says no preconditions have been set for verification”, nepalnews.com, 3 May 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Maoist leaders, Kathmandu, May 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Prachanda, *Sanshleshan*, December 2006.

¹⁹⁸ Biplov, “Naya karyanitalai dhridhatapurvak karyanvayan garaun”, *Janadesh*, 17 April 2007. The government has not officially announced that it cannot meet the proposed June date but on 12 April 2007 Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokhrel wrote to the prime minister saying he would need at least 110 days to prepare for polls, in effect pushing back the likely election date to November, after the monsoon and festival season.

¹⁹⁹ “Ekatako naya adhar sojhai ganatantra”, *Janadesh*, 17 April 2007.

²⁰⁰ “Lakhaun janatale singhdarbar gherne”, *Pahal*, 6 May 2007.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, Maoist leader, Kathmandu, April 2007.

²⁰² This meeting was held on 12-20 December 2006 in Bhaktapur.

²⁰³ “Sujata accuses YCL of training on booth capturing”, nepalnews.com, 17 April 2007.

²⁰⁴ YCL cadres also seized royal land in Sallaghari, Bhaktapur on 22 April 2007.

²⁰⁵ Police raided YCL offices on 15 April 2007; six days later they arrested seven YCL cadres from Kapan.

In case of a violent confrontation, the YCL will be mobilised as the Maoists' primary frontline force but the PLA is also standing by in reserve.²⁰⁶ Prachanda has said, "if reactionaries take action against the consensus, then a revolt will take place in Nepal and we will lead it. There will be no alternative but for the PLA to come out of the cantonments to join the revolt alongside millions of people".²⁰⁷ Although most of their fighters and weapons are confined in the UN-supervised cantonments, Maoists leaders view this arrangement as valid only for enabling the CA elections. If the process falls apart, they will readily consider remobilising the PLA and calling it out with its weapons.²⁰⁸ Frequent demonstrations by cantoned PLA troops outside their camps are meant to remind their political rivals that they still have other options and may not be afraid to use them.

VI. CONCLUSION

Nepal's Maoists have been driven by ideological purism but managed to sustain their long insurgency and enter a peace process thanks to their pragmatism. The tension between these opposing impulses lies at the heart of their evolving approach to strategy and tactics. Their commitment to the peace process is not hollow but it is conditional: progress (which, for them, would have to include some radical reforms) would strengthen the hand of more moderate leaders who have argued the case for compromise. If the process stalls, those who prefer a return to confrontation will feel emboldened – as will those who are still hoping the peace deal will fall apart.

Kathmandu/Brussels, 18 May 2007

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, YCL source, Kathmandu, January 2007.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Prachanda, *Sansheleshan*, op. cit.

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, PLA deputy commander, Kathmandu, December 2006.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF NEPAL



APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CA	constituent assembly
CCOMPOSA	Coordinating Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPI (Maoist)	Communist Party of India (Maoist)
CPI-ML (Liberation)	Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (Liberation)
CPI-ML(PW)	Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (People's War)
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPN(M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN (Unity Centre)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre)
DDTC	Development of Democracy in the Twenty-first Century
MCC-I	Maoist Communist Centre of India
NA/RNA	(Royal) Nepalese Army
NC	Nepali Congress
NC(D)	Nepali Congress (Democratic)
NSP(A)	Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi)
NWPP	Nepal Workers and Peasants' Party
PLA	People's Liberation Army (Maoist)
PWG	People's War Group, see CPI-ML(PW)
RIM	Revolutionary Internationalist Movement
SPA	Seven-Party Alliance
ULF	United Left Front
UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
URPC	United Revolutionary People's Council
WPRM	World People's Resistance Movement
YCL	Young Communist League

APPENDIX C

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since January 2000 has been former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

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