



ODUMUNC 2011 Issue Brief for the Security Council

Destabilization in Nepal

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The current destabilizing situation in Nepal has many causes, some with longstanding historical roots and others that are more contemporary. Entirely surrounded by the great land masses of India and China, Nepal until about fifty years ago remained isolated. That isolation was a result not only of its challenging Himalayan geography but also because the ruling autocratic dynasties used isolationism to strengthen their grip on power. Historical poverty, underdevelopment, and corruption, mixed with prolonged lack of basic political rights, educational opportunities and social awareness stratified the Nepali society into a mass of disenchanting poor ruled by a tiny minority of elites controlling all the levers of power. That situation percolated until 1990 People's Movement when a multiparty democracy with a constitutional monarch was restored.



In the two decades since then Nepali political system has seen myriad momentous transformations which form the contemporary causes of current destabilization. A few years after 1990, a small Communist guerrilla faction sympathetic to Maoism, started an armed revolution in the countryside. That rebellion eventually led to a civil war which killed more than 13000 people. Fortunately, the Maoists were persuaded to join the mainstream political process in 2006 with the promise of abolishing the monarchy and drafting of a new constitution, which subsequently led to the elections for the Constituent Assembly. Finally, in 2008 the newly elected Assembly voted to end the monarchical system turning Nepal into a Republic.



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However, the dizzying political changes of the past five years have now led to the inertia on the remaining unresolved issues which could easily turn into a progressively destabilizing situation. The deeper issues of contention between the political parties and among the general public include: the fate of the Maoists army including whether and how to settle them into the Nepalese Army; the nature and form of the government, the type of federal structure as well as the electoral system in the new constitution; the equal and fair representation of the many minorities in the official organs of the state; the length and duration of the peace process and the drafting of the constitution. Meanwhile, as the acrimonious political debates ramble on, Nepali population is increasingly becoming restless because most development projects and economic reforms have halted due political vacuum and uncertainty.





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Yet, faced with such deep political and social challenges, the political parties are stuck on an unending power struggle to try to choose a coalition that could form an interim government until the new constitution is drafted. The biggest party in the Constituent Assembly is the Maoist Party. But they do not have the majority to be able to form a government. The other parties, distrustful of the Maoists' agenda and fearful of their People's Liberation Army (PLA), do not want to form a coalition with the Maoists until the latter renounce violence, disband the PLA, and control their increasingly militant youth activists. In such power vacuum, the work of constitution drafting has been stalled for many months and already the term of the Assembly had to be extended. Also, the caretaker government in place has no legitimacy to main law and order, produce a budget or take up development efforts.

The biggest source of conflict is the fundamental nature of the Maoist Party. As recently as six years ago the Party was engaged in an armed revolution that strove to totally capture the state and turn Nepal into a so-called "People's Republic" in the mold of Cuba or North Korea. Although they've ventured into mainstream electoral politics, their ultimate intentions are still muddy. The Maoist leaders still possess the command of a almost 20-thousand-strong army and a vigorous and militant youth wing feared by all. Given such distrust, the other political parties cannot bring themselves to rehabilitate the Maoists fighters into the national Nepalese Army en masse and would like them to be disbanded and the fighters returned to society. The Maoists on the other hand realise that their power derives specifically from their Army and do not seem eager to use that chip until absolutely necessary.

Meanwhile, the patience of international partners and donors, including India, China, United States, and United Nations, is flagging as the fledging peace-process drags on. As one of the poorest countries in the world, Nepal has always relied on international donor support to maintain its domestic development and social programs so that the influence of international bodies in Nepal is paramount. And the most important outside power is India. Being entirely dependent on India for international trade access, along with historical ties of social and cultural cross-border nature, means that India's influence in Nepal is the strongest. India, facing its own Maoist insurgency within its borders, is quite suspicious of the Nepali Maoist party's future aims and goals. So it is loathe to support that party in the current peace process.

The other large neighbor, China, also wields incredibly influential role. For China, influence in Nepal is not just limited to its policy against the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees. In a larger framework, China wants to counter-balance India's role in Nepal as well as the larger South Asia. Though the Nepali Maoists are more old-school ideologues than their modern day



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capitalistic communists counterparts of China, nonetheless, China wouldn't mind seeing the Maoists in power if that means less Indian power.

As for the larger international community, the primary player is the United Nations through its United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), which has played an integral role in the peace-process since 2007. The fact that UNMIN's term in Nepal has been extended repeatedly in six-month increments for eight times speaks to the fragile balancing role that it plays in the on-going peace process. As the trusted outside monitor and manager of the Maoists Army and their arms housed in cantonments as well as the Nepali Army, UNMIN is responsible for the current peace. However, UNMIN cannot stay in Nepal indefinitely because it serves by the invitation of the Nepali government and the Security Council resolution. As the issue of resettling Maoist Army becomes more and more contentious, UNMIN is sure to find itself angering one or the other powerful political parties of Nepal.

Finally, other important international partner states, including United States and United Kingdom, are also intimately meshed in the internal matters of current Nepali political quagmire. While their full intentions are more opaque, it can be said with certainty, that they would desire to see the resolution of the peace process, preferably with the Maoists much weakened. Since Nepal is a very important geographical buffer between China and the vast swath of the Indian sub-continent, it could be surmised that the US and the UK would like to see limited Chinese influence in Nepal, especially when compared to the more significant influence of the democratic India.

While the international pressures and demands placed on the Nepali political process are quite significant, it could be said that the eventual solution of the current destabilizing situation must come from local political will. As such the political parties, including the Maoists, need to compromise to cement the gains of the recent accomplishment and bring the peace-process to a satisfactory close by drafting a truly representative and effective constitution for the country. The Nepali people have suffered long enough from the political, economic and social instability.



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Recommended Resources

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