



Study of Internal Conflict (SOIC) Case Studies

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Nepal 1996–2006

Executive Summary

The Nepalese civil war started in 1996 when the (Maoist) Communist Party of Nepal launched a “people’s war” adhering closely to Maoist doctrine.¹ The insurgency aimed to establish a Maoist Republic and abolish the monarchy. In the first few years, the government of Nepal conducted a counterinsurgency campaign primarily through the police forces, not the Royal Army, and the conflict war was initially limited to small-scale strikes and operations.

On June, 1, 2001, the “royal massacre of Narayanhiti” decimated the Nepali royal family when the crown prince (not connected to the insurgents) murdered King Birendra, Queen Aiswarya and seven other royal family members in line for the throne. By the middle of 2001, the insurgents controlled 22 of 75 districts, and government forces had little access to insurgent-controlled areas. In most of these districts, the general functions of the state were under insurgent control. With the security situation deteriorating, the Royal Nepali Army was finally called into action in 2001. Later that year, the Nepali government and Maoist insurgents implemented a ceasefire. From August to September 2001, the government and insurgents held peace talks, which failed, and the insurgents resumed the insurgency.² Some evidence indicates the Maoists used the ceasefire to recruit and train new guerilla forces and consolidate their hold over contested districts.

Following the failure of the negotiations, King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency and dissolved the cabinet. Shortly thereafter the king removed the prime minister and assumed executive powers. Later that year, Gyanendra appointed a new prime minister, and in January 2003, a second ceasefire was declared by the Maoist insurgents with the condition of conducting peace talks with the government. During the third round of negotiations in August 2003, government forces arrested and killed insurgents in the vicinity of Doramba, resulting in the collapse of the ceasefire and a resumption of hostilities.

In 2005, the Maoist insurgents again unilaterally declared a ceasefire and engaged in talks to abolish the monarchy with the opposition party. Government forces continued to attack the Maoist insurgents’ strongholds. In January 2006, the Maoist rebels ended the ceasefire and conducted strikes against the army. Nationwide protests against the monarchy called Jana Andolan (People’s Movement) started. After the start of Jana Andolan, the government of Nepal and Maoist rebels signed a Comprehensive Peace Accord in November 2006 that ended the civil war and paved the way for the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal democratic republic.

Assessing the Five Factors

1. Was the country at the time of the conflict a nation?

No. The majority of the Nepalese self-identify as a member of one of 18 major *jatis*, or castes.³ These castes are subdivided into 125 distinct caste groups speaking 123 languages. While people from Nepal living outside of Nepal typically self-identify as “Nepalese” (or say, “I am from Nepal,” which is not the same thing), people living inside the country establish personal identity at the subnational level.

2. Was the government perceived as legitimate by 85 percent of the population?

No. The democratically elected government was removed by the monarchy, and the installed government lacked political legitimacy from the people.⁴ While many of Nepal’s people respected the monarchy as a traditional source of legitimacy of governance, when the democratically elected government was removed, the 85 percent legitimacy metric was not present.⁵

3. Did the government maintain or achieve security control over roughly 85 percent of the country’s overall population?

No. By the end of the conflict, most of the rural areas were under the control of Maoist rebels. By 2005, the rebel group controlled 80 percent of the total territory of the country.⁶ More than 80 percent of Nepal’s population at this time was rural.⁷

4. Did the rebel movement have persistent access to external sanctuary in a neighboring country to a militarily significant degree?

Yes. A sufficient amount of evidence shows that the neighboring country, India, provided the Communist Party of Nepal with sanctuary. The rebel leadership freely operated from Delhi, and India provided a haven for the rebel group.⁸

5. Was there a government army or armed constabulary force in existence at the start of the conflict?

Yes. Civil and military armed forces existed at the start of the rebellion.

NEPAL 1996–2006	
NATIONAL IDENTITY	NO
GOVERNMENT LEGITIMACY	NO
POPULATION SECURITY	NO
EXTERNAL SANCTUARY	YES
EXISTING SECURITY FORCES	YES

Outcome

Government loss. After the end of a decade-long insurgency, the rebel group successfully brought down the government and ended the monarchy. The comprehensive peace accord was signed, resulting in the integration of the Communist Party of Nepal into the political landscape of the country. Two years after the peace accord, in 2008, the former insurgents formed a democratically elected government. The monarchy was abolished in the aftermath of the Maoist insurgency’s victory.

Endnotes

1. Human Rights Watch, *Nepal: Searching for Justice – The Fate of Detainees Arrested in the Context of the Maoist Insurgency* (Human Rights Watch, October 2004), https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/nepal1004/2.htm#_ftn6.
2. U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Nepal (02/05),” U.S. Department of State (archived content) (website), February 2005, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/nepal/47168.htm>.
3. “Nepal” in *World Factbook* (Washington, DC: CIA, continuously updated), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nepal>; and *Population Monograph of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014).
4. Michael Vurens van Es, “Nepal’s Dirty Little War: Counterinsurgency and the Fall of a Hindu King,” review of *The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal’s Maoist Revolution*, by Aditya Adhikari, War on the Rocks (website), February 23, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/02/nepals-dirty-little-war-counterinsurgency-and-the-fall-of-a-hindu-king>.
5. Michael Hutt, “King Gyanendra’s Coup and Its Implications for Nepal’s Future,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 2005): 111–23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590670>.
6. Yogesh Dongol and Roderick P. Neumann, “State Making through Conservation: The Case of Post-Conflict Nepal,” *Political Geography* 85 (March 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102327>.
7. Leander von Kameke, “Share of Rural Population in Nepal from 2013 to 2022,” Statista (website), February 28, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/761008/nepal-share-of-rural-population>.
8. Human Rights Watch, “Nepal,” 638.



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