





# Understanding Conflict Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Ethno-Separatist Conflicts in India and the Philippines

Voor een beter begrip van conflictodynamiek:  
een vergelijkende analyse van etnisch-  
separatistische conflicten in India en de Filippijnen

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

The initial point of departure for this project had been to examine the effectiveness of different state countermeasures in confronting terrorism and insurgency. It soon became apparent that to be able to properly analyse the effectiveness of countermeasures, it was necessary to understand what factors were driving and sustaining the conflicts. Whilst state countermeasures played a key role in affecting the direction of violence, there were numerous other dimensions to the evolution of the conflicts. Identifying these dimensions and exploring how they interacted to drive the violence became the new focus. This was a key turning point as the research shifted to understanding armed struggles as a whole and seeking to explain how and why they escalate and de-escalate. In short, the focus turned towards conflict dynamics.

The foundation of the project is a comparative historical analysis of three ethno-separatist conflicts, two in India and one in the Philippines (see below). As I immersed myself in the intricacies of each conflict, seeking to gain a deeper understanding of their nature, clarity at first seemed elusive. Each stage in the research threw up a complex web of seemingly inexplicable contradictions and paradoxes. It seemed impossible to account for and make sense of the different narratives and theories, yet taken individually many appeared to be supported by compelling evidence. It was then that I had the inspiration that was to determine the rest of the project: the realisation that the conflicts changed over time, going through many different phases, with different

factors and mechanisms driving the violence at each stage. Through breaking down the conflict into phases, it was possible to gain a greater insight into conflict dynamics.

The objective of this thesis has been to take a holistic look at conflicts across their lifespan, and to gain a more complete understanding of the factors and mechanisms that drive the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. The three conflicts are labelled as ethno-separatist in the literature, however the aim is to look beyond the labels, and focus on the dynamics of the conflicts.

## THE CASE STUDIES

The first case study, the Naga Insurgency, is one of the longest-running insurgencies in the world, taking place in the remote north-east region of India along the Indo-Burma border. Since the mid 1950s insurgents from the Naga tribes have waged an armed struggle for their own sovereign nation, after their absorption into the Indian Union following the partition of the British Indian Empire. Since 1997 the Indian state has been in a protracted peace process with the main insurgent factions, although a permanent resolution remains to be achieved.

The second case study is the Punjab Crisis: the Sikh separatist fight for an independent Sikh nation in the Indian state of Punjab along the Indo-Pakistan border. This is the shortest of the three conflicts, running from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The conflict is notable as one of the rare examples of a state successfully ending the violence permanently through the use of coercive force.

The final case study is the Moro Rebellion on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Starting in the late 1960s, the insurgents from the Muslim Moro tribes waged a long insurgency to break away from the predominantly Christian Philippines and establish an independent state in the south. Similarly to the Naga Insurgency, the conflict is currently in an enduring peace process. For full details of the case study selection see Case study selection.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

### IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

There has been a large amount of scholarly research on irregular conflicts; however, the majority of the studies are aimed at understanding either their causes or how they end (Duyvesteyn 2013). This means that there is comparatively little work dedicated to unravelling the complexities of what happens across the lifespan of the conflict. Perhaps it is because understanding these two phases is deemed the most important: understanding the causes so as to be able to prevent future conflicts, and understanding how conflicts end, in order to know best how to end other conflicts. As Louise Richardson notes ‘Only by understanding the forces leading to the emergence of terrorism – the root causes, in other words – can we hope to devise a successful long-term counterterrorist strategy’ (Richardson 2006, 1).

This focus on the beginning and end of conflicts fails to capture their full nature. A cursory glance at the literature would imply that conflicts are a phenomenon of two halves, the start (escalation) and the end (de-escalation). As a result, the middle of the conflicts are often the ‘forgotten land’ of conflict studies. There is a lack of research that carries out a systematic analysis of the escalation and de-escalation across the conflict’s lifespan. Instead, research normally focuses on a section or aspect of the conflict. However, it is important to take a holistic view to fully understand a conflict.

The inspiration for this research project came from the examination of a graph (see below) showing the variation in the number of casualties throughout the lifespan of the Punjab Crisis (which became one of the case studies of this project). The first striking thing about the graph is that the levels of violence (measured in terms of casualties) oscillate dramatically over the conflict’s lifespan. It is apparent from the graph that the Punjab Crisis is not simply a story of two halves. The conflict has a middle that is distinct from the beginning and the end, but which is integrally connected and necessary to the understanding of each part. By focusing research only on snapshots of the Crisis at each end, studies fail to gain a holistic understanding of the conflict.

across its entirety. However, it is necessary to understand the whole to fully understand any one section.

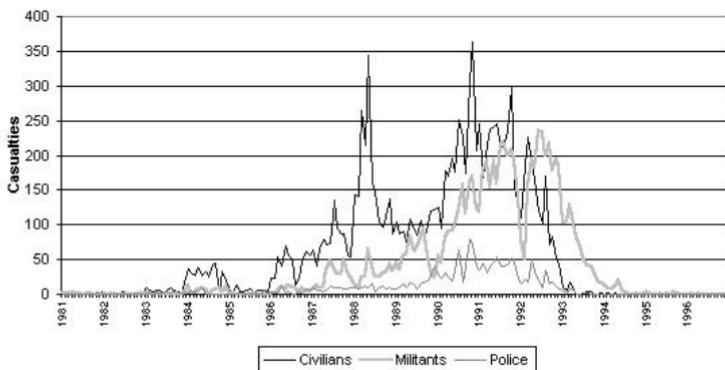


Fig 1: Civilian, police and militant casualties in the Punjab, 1981-1996 (Gill 1999a)<sup>1</sup>

## STATIC VS. DYNAMIC VIEWS OF CONFLICTS

What the graph truly reflects is how the conflicts are dynamic; in a continuous state of flux. This paints a more complicated picture of conflicts, bringing a new importance to taking a holistic view and understanding the entirety of the conflict. Similarly, this then raises the question of what explains these oscillations in the levels of violence. A glance at the graph above immediately raises questions such as: Why did it take several years for the violence to reach its peak? Why did a period of de-escalation in the middle of the conflict not lead to its ending? How was this different to the events that led to the final, permanent de-escalation?

Answering such questions raises further, deeper questions. What drives these escalations and de-escalations? Furthermore, what was happening in the Crisis at the different peaks and troughs of escalation? In short, the graph presents a view of a dynamic conflict consisting of complicated oscillation in the levels of violence.

1 <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume1/Fault1-kpstext.htm> (last accessed 7 June 2013).

## INTRODUCTION

The question of how to understand escalation and de-escalation, including the mechanisms and factors that drive these dynamics, has been largely absent from the literature, which rarely takes a holistic view across the duration of a conflict. In order to address this deficiency, this project will examine conflicts across their entire lifespan, breaking them down into a series of stages through which they will be analysed.

Focusing research on the beginning and end of conflicts has perpetuated an interpretation that conflicts are homogeneous in nature. The idea that understanding the root causes of conflicts will provide the keys to successful countermeasures rests on the notion that the nature of the conflict is static, i.e. that the forces and motivations which started the conflict are the same ones that continue to drive it. However, it is also possible that the nature of the conflict is also dynamic; that as the conflict progresses, the nature of the conflict – and hence the forces driving it – can also be transformed. By viewing the conflict as dynamic, and searching to understand the mechanisms behind these dynamics, it is possible to examine its changing nature, and as a result understand the forces that are actually driving the conflict at each stage.

## THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

The problem to be addressed in this thesis is how to understand the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation in conflicts; not simply the causes of conflicts or the countermeasures that states should enact to bring such conflicts to an end, but rather how we can account for the changing levels of violence across the lifespan of the conflict, and what the causal mechanisms are that drive these dynamics.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis aims to address the following question:

Q) How can the changing levels of violence during the course of these conflicts be explained?

## EXISTING POINTS OF VIEW: WHAT ELSE IS SAID IN THE LITERATURE?

There are a number of scholars within the literature who have produced research aimed at untangling the dynamics of the middle phase of conflicts, i.e. not just how they start and end, but attempting to understand their inner workings and aiming to offer explanations and theories for fluctuations in violence in the central phase of the conflicts.

Two notable examples are Stathis Kalyvas and Claire Metelits<sup>2</sup>. In his comprehensive book *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Kalyvas focuses on violence that is committed intentionally against noncombatants during civil wars (Kalyvas 2006, 5). He describes this phenomenon as having 'long remained off research limits because of its conceptual complexity and empirical opacity' (*ibid.* 5-6), addressing questions such as why some villages are subject to indiscriminate violence whilst neighbouring villages seem to escape unscathed. Through decoupling violence from war, he explores the causes and dynamics of violence, producing a theoretical model to explain homicidal violence against civilians (*ibid.* 6-7).

Similarly, Metelits, in her book *Inside Insurgency*, addresses the question of why some insurgent groups mistreat their host populations whilst others form strong ties with their communities and provide a desirable alternative to the existing state rule. She seeks to explain why the insurgent groups in her case studies change the way they treat their host populations, and why some insurgents propagate violence against civilians (Metelits 2010, 6-7). In the process she 'develops an explanation of insurgent behavior that gets at the micropolitics of violence and accounts for the shift from violence to nonviolence (or vice versa) at the local level' (*ibid.* 7).

Both authors are addressing the middle phase of conflicts, and seeking to explain the dynamics of the escalation and de-escalation of violence. However, the research of Kalyvas and Metelits is aimed at examining only one aspect of the conflicts: violence against civilians. Where this research project differs is that it aims to take a broader perspective and examine the escalation and de-escalation in violence across

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<sup>2</sup> Their theories are explained in more detail below in section 'How conflicts progress after they have started'.

the whole conflict. In doing so it will cover many different aspects of the conflicts, identifying the various factors that drive the violence and examining how they interact to produce escalation and de-escalation in all three case studies.

## A SURVEY OF THEORIES ON IRREGULAR CONFLICTS

The study of irregular conflicts has been a vibrant academic field over the last few decades, with a wealth of scholarly material produced and numerous new theories articulated; although, as noted above there has been a lack of suitable theoretical models proposed that aim to explain the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation over a conflict's lifespan. As such there is no one theory or theories that can be directly used to address this research question. Instead there is a wealth of theory that is aimed at explaining particular temporal points in a conflict, such as how they begin or end, and at explaining particular situations under certain conditions. This collection of theories will act as a useful toolbox for investigating and interpreting the three case studies in this project.

Below is a summary of insights from the literature that may prove useful when conducting the case study research. The literature review is structured to follow the lifespan of a conflict. It starts with the causes of violence, before moving on to theories that explain how conflicts progress once they have started, covering a variety of dimensions that may affect the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. Finally, it finishes by focusing on insights into how violence ends.

### TERRORISM OR INSURGENCY: A DEFINITION?

The first question to be addressed is the definition of terrorism and insurgency. This study uses the instrumental view of terrorism and insurgency based on strategic goals, as put forward by Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Mario Fumerton. They argue that terrorism and insurgency should be viewed as distinct strategies of irregular warfare, where their strategic differences can be seen by analysing groups across three domains,

namely political objective, organisational structure and relationship with the population (Duyvesteyn and Fumerton 2010, 28).

Firstly, terrorism and insurgency have distinct political objectives. For the former, it is to ‘achieve desired political outcomes by provoking reactions to terrorist deeds’ (*ibid.* 30) and for the latter, ‘to gain political and military control of a population and its territory’ (*ibid.* 29).

Secondly, they exhibit different organisational structures. As the strategy of terrorism relies on provoking a reaction, groups pursuing this strategy ‘place minor importance on systematic political work aimed at cultivating, mobilizing, and organizing the active population at large’ (*ibid.* 32). In contrast, for the strategy of insurgency to work, such ‘systemic political work’ is a necessity of gaining ‘political and military control of a population’. In line with these different objectives, the two strategies require distinct organisational structures and recruitment practices (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, as a consequence of their different objectives and organisational structures, groups that pursue the two strategies have very different relationships with the public. Terrorism requires secrecy and little popular support, whilst insurgency relies on the support of the people (Duyvesteyn and Fumerton 2010, 32-33). However, as Duyvesteyn and Fumerton point out, ‘acts of terror are not exclusive to the strategy of terrorism. Although terrorism and insurgency are strategies in their own right, terrorism can also be used as a tactic within the strategy of insurgency’ (*ibid.* 31). As such, insurgency invariably involves terrorism; this can further blur the division between them unless viewed strategically.

As we shall see later, applying this definition to the three case studies makes it quite clear that the groups operating in the Naga Insurgency and the Mindanao Conflict fit the profile of adopting the strategy of insurgency, as well as at times employing the tactics of terrorism. However, the situation is less clear with the Punjab Crisis, and perhaps highlights the limits of applying definitions. At no time were the groups able to hold territory, and remained clandestine organisations – there were no ‘no-go’ areas for the state. At the same time, at their height the groups paralysed the state and held sway over its institutions of governance; but through fear, not by physical control.

## CAUSES OF CONFLICTS

The first collection of useful generalisations in the literature is insights into the causes of conflicts, which aim to shed light on what drives the initial escalation to violence. A thorough understanding of how the violence starts in each of the case studies will provide a solid foundation upon which to examine how they develop. We start with insights from the field of terrorism studies.

## CAUSES OF TERRORISM

The causes of terrorism have been analysed from many different levels and perspectives. Martha Crenshaw subdivides the questions of causes into two levels: preconditions, which ‘set the stage for terrorism over the long run’ and precipitants, which are ‘specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism’ (Crenshaw 1981, 381). Tore Bjørgo further subdivides these into four layers: structural causes, facilitator causes, motivational causes and triggering causes (Bjørgo 2005, 3). An alternative approach within the literature has been to analyse the causes of terrorism across three vertical levels: the individual and group level, the societal or national level, and the international or systemic level (Brynjars and Skjølberg 2000, 8). Whatever the categorisation, it is clear that there is no one ‘cause’, but a complex interplay of different factors. The following paragraphs attempt to summarise the literature using Bjørgo’s four levels.

Structural causes are changes to the underlying structure of countries at the macro level, which affect people’s lives in ways that they may or may not comprehend but which put a new stress or strain on society (or a segment of society), that contributes to the emergence of terrorism. Examples of this include the tensions caused by increased relative deprivation or the negative impact of rapid modernisation or globalisation (Maleckova 2005; Gurr 2006; Gotchev 2006). Weinberg however, argues that sweeping explanations such as the international system and globalisation as causes are of limited value (Weinberg 2006, 55). Others point towards countries’ political structure as a possible

cause, in particular the lack of opportunity for political participation (Crenshaw 1981, 383).

The second level, facilitator causes, is the concept that certain advances in the modern world have made terrorism easier to perpetrate. It is therefore a more feasible and attractive option for potential participants to pursue – the opportunity costs are lower – without being the prime reason in the emergence of terrorism. As Martha Crenshaw sums up, ‘modernization produces an interrelated set of factors that is a significant permissive cause of terrorism, as increased complexity on all levels of society and economy creates opportunity and vulnerabilities’<sup>3</sup> (Crenshaw 1981, 381).

The third set of theories, motivational causes, generally fall into two categories: psycho-pathological and psycho-sociological (Corrado 1981, 293). The first, the concept of a terrorist ‘personality type’, has though, been roundly dismissed by leading experts (Post 2005, 54), with Crenshaw commenting that ‘the outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality’ (Crenshaw 1981, 390). The second view aims to put the psychological motivations of an individual within a societal context, as Wilkinson argues ‘it is essential to take account of the unique political, historical, and cultural context, and ideology and aims of the groups involved’ (Wilkinson 1987, ix, quoted in Brynjar and Skjølberg 2000, 10).

The final level, triggering causes, are direct events that precipitate terrorist campaigns. Usually these acts are not in isolation, but operate as the ‘spark’ that ignites pre-existing tensions. Weinberg cites examples of state action that backfire and induce acts of terrorism. He highlights the Indian government’s storming of the Golden Temple, igniting Sikh terrorism and Timothy McVeigh’s statement that the Oklahoma bombing in 1995 was a response to the Waco siege in 1993. He also points to the arrest and extrication of Kurdish PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to Turkey, and the killing of Palestinian bomb maker Radwan Ayyash by Israeli security forces as events that both sparked a wave of terrorist

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<sup>3</sup> She points out that the Narodnaya Volya (1878-1913), a social revolutionary terrorist group in Russia, could not have operated without the new Russian railways, or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (1968-) could not have pursued hijacking without the jet plane.

attacks (Weinberg 2006, 49). Crenshaw illuminates the importance of less direct events, such as when

the historical moment seems to present a unique chance. For example, the resistance group facing a colonial power recently weakened by a foreign war exploits a temporary vulnerability: the IRA against Britain after World War I, the Irgun against the British after World War II, and the FLN against France after the Indochina war. (Crenshaw 1981, 388)

Similarly, Crenshaw points out a so-called ‘contagion’ effect, where the success of one terrorist group can provide the impetus for other groups (*ibid.* 389).

In summary, there are a multitude of contextual factors that play a role in explaining the dynamics of the initial escalation. In each of the case studies, there is no one factor that is a ‘silver bullet’ of explanation; instead, a complex interplay of factors at different levels combine to drive escalation. Of particular interest are the triggering causes, as each conflict has certain key events that ignite the violence or escalate it to new levels. It is though clear from the literature that there is a shortage of theories that go beyond causes and explain escalation. However, the levels identified here may prove useful in interpreting the conflicts.

## GREED VS. GRIEVANCE – ECONOMIC THEORIES OF CONFLICTS’ CAUSES

From theories on terrorism we move on to theories of civil war. Within this field there have been a number of large-N studies focusing on the sociodemographic data of civil wars and directed at uncovering the causes of conflict. Until recently this field had been polarized by the ‘greed vs. grievance debate’ (Malone and Nitzschke 2005), which was ignited by the Collier and Hoefer ‘greed thesis’ (Collier and Hoefer 2000). They challenged the conventional view that rebellions were fought for a cause and driven by underlying grievances, and instead argue that ‘opportunities for predation (controlling primary commodity resources) cause conflict’ (Collier and Hoefer 2000).

Essentially they argued that their data showed that dependence on

natural resources was correlated with a higher risk of conflict. The interpretation they took from this was that wealth obtained through the control of resources acted as a motivation for rebels or as an opportunity to finance their military campaigns, putting forward the notion that rebels ‘can do well’ out of war as a better explanation of the cause of conflict than socio-economic grievances such as relative deprivation (Malone and Nitzschke 2005). As Collier and Hoefer articulate, ‘[t]he Greed Model postulates that the cause of initial conflict is an economic calculus of relative military advantage, the government’s ability to finance defence expenditure, the scale of primary commodity exports, and the cost of rebel recruitment’ (Collier and Hoefer 2000, 14).

In a similar vein, the work of Fearon and Laitin investigated the causes of civil wars and concluded that ‘the main factors determining... civil violence in this period are not ethnic or religious differences or broadly held grievances but rather, *conditions that favour insurgency*’ (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75 [emphasis added]). These are conditions that lower the opportunity cost for insurgency and make them more likely to succeed. These include poverty (because it marks weak states and favours rebel recruitment), political instability, rough terrain and large populations. They argue that in the right conditions it takes only a small number of rebels for a protracted civil war: ‘What matters is whether active rebels can hide from government forces and whether economic opportunities are so poor that the life of a rebel is attractive to 500 to 2,000 young men’ (*ibid.* 88). In short, what matters most is whether the opportunity costs of rebellion are sufficiently low so as not to dissuade participation.

As none of the three case studies in this project can be classed as a resource war, such theories are of limited direct use. However, the concept of an economic calculus of initial conditions giving an opportunity to do well out of war presents a possible motive that may still be applicable. However, as will be elaborated in the case studies, the financial dimensions of the conflicts appear to have developed at later stages.

## THEORIES OF ETHNICITY AND CAUSES OF CONFLICTS

The position of ethnic diversity and cleavages in the mechanisms of conflicts appears complex, but is no doubt important in conflicts that are ethno-separatist in their nature and with ethnic groups that contain numerous tribal divisions. The concept of ethnicity is itself debated: primordialists see ethnicity as a permanent element, instrumentalists see ethnicity as a tool rather than a permanent element, and constructivists present a middle ground, seeing ethnicity as changeable to a certain extent through the interaction with society (Duyvesteyn 2005, 85-86). Toft notes that in practice scholars tend to use a hybrid approach, which ‘accepts that identities are not necessarily fixed, but stresses these identities need to come from somewhere such as a shared history and common understanding of one’s place in the world’ (Toft 2012, 583). In her comparative analysis of wars in Liberia and Somalia, Duyvesteyn highlights the problem of using ethnicity as a factor in the analysis of the conflicts due to the inflexibility and changing nature of ethnic identity in those regions (Duyvesteyn 2005, 85-86).

The conventional view is that ethnic divisions are sources of tension and conflict. However, the new economic theories of Collier and Hoefer and Fearon and Laitin dispute this position, arguing findings that run against the ‘common view among journalists, policy makers, and academics, which holds “plural” societies to be especially conflict-prone due to ethnic or religious tensions and antagonisms’ (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75).

Collier and Hoefer actually view ethnic diversity as a factor that would decrease the likelihood of the outbreak of civil war, because it would make rebel armies harder to form. As they surmise,

the need for cohesion places a simple constraint upon the composition of rebel recruits: the organization cannot afford diversity. If recruitment spans ethnic and religious divides it will be more difficult to forge the resulting labor force into a cohesive fighting force. (Collier and Hoefer 2000, 8)

Their empirical results backed this up, showing no significant determinant with the outbreak of civil war (*ibid.* 25). Similarly, the research of Fearon and Laitin found that ‘[t]he estimates for the effect of ethnic and religious fractionalization are substantively and statistically insignificant’ (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 83). Collier and Hoefer’s results did, though, produce one interesting result. They showed that ethnic dominance by one group increases the risk of the onset of civil war, presumably as they argue because ‘such societies have both the power and incentive to exploit their minorities’ (Collier and Hoefer 2000, 26).

Nicholas Sambanis has criticised these studies, because they ‘do not consider if different war types have different causes’ (Sambanis 2001, 265). He suggests that ethnic civil wars have different causes to non-ethnic civil wars. By adapting for this distinction and using large-N study data, he shows that ‘ethnic heterogeneity is significantly and positively correlated with the onset of ethnic war’ (*ibid.* 280). Hence ethnic divisions are important in predicting the onset of civil war, but only for those wars that are ethnic in nature.

Later in the concluding the chapter of *Understanding Civil Wars*, an edited volume by Collier and Sambanis of case studies testing the CH model, Sambanis makes further revisions, arguing what matters most is not the level of ethnic fractionalisation across a country, but the concentration of ethnicities within a country. He points out that violence often occurs in regions that have a significant ethnic dominance within multi-ethnic countries (Sambanis 2005, 316), also pointing out the importance of recognising which ethnic cleavages are politically salient, and the degree to which identity cleavages are cross-cutting and likely to lead to the forging of alliances (*ibid.*). In addition, other authors argue that ethnicity is often used as a convenient cover for other types of violence (*ibid.* 320).

As ethno-separatist struggles, the role of ethnicity is at the heart of all three conflicts. In addition, cleavages of tribe, clan and caste make for a more complex notion of identity. The interactions of these cross-cutting loyalties, provides many points of friction that add another dimension to the violence.

## A QUESTION OF RELIGION

All three conflicts examined in this thesis are ethno-nationalist separatist conflicts in which the ethnic group trying to breakaway is of a different religion to the majority population. In the Punjab Crisis there was a Sikh minority, in the Naga Insurgency a Christian minority – both within Hindu dominated India – and in Mindanao a Muslim minority in the Christian majority Philippines. What role, if any, did religion play in the conflicts?

The role religion plays within conflicts is complex and often uncertain. Svensson and Harding point out that

[c]onventional wisdom suggests that once conflicting parties raise religious demands concerning the contested issue, then the possibilities for solutions wane. Religious appeals seem to make conflicts drag on for longer and seem to make them more difficult to settle than other types of conflict. (Svensson and Harding 2011, 133)

However, as they point out, religion also has another dimension, playing an important role in peacemaking. This dual nature of religion is summed up well by Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger: '[t]hus the question is not so much whether religious faith can influence the course of conflicts – this is without doubt – but rather when religious faith has an escalating and de-escalating effect' (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000, 673-74).

## HOW CONFLICTS PROGRESS AFTER THEY HAVE STARTED

### THEORIES ON THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE

The question is not just which factors cause or sustain conflicts, but which can account for their escalation and de-escalation. What, in essence, explains the nature of the violence?

Clausewitz provides a useful starting point for theoretical

understanding of the nature of violence. Of his many theoretical contributions, his analysis of the connection between politics and war may prove particularly insightful: ‘We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means’ (Clausewitz 1989, 87). Military action is thus a political tool that can be utilised to deliver policy and achieve political goals.

The Clausewitzian trinity of violence, chance and political purpose provides a theoretical framework for understanding the nature of war:

As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. (*ibid.* 89)

In short, to Clausewitz war should be understood as the interaction of his trinity of violence, chance and political purpose to provide the dynamics of war.

What is perhaps more useful is Clausewitz’s secondary trinity of people, military and government. It inspired Mao Tse-tung to explore the relationship of the combatants and the population at large, leading to his concept of mass mobilisation in revolutionary warfare (Heuser 2002, 55-56). As Heuser sums up,

Clausewitz’s secondary trinity can help explain phenomena such as the lack of large-scale public support for wars of ancient regime [italics in text], or for America during the Vietnam War, and the concept could usefully be devolved much further, to explain and analyse the dynamics of civil-military relations, and the relationship of government and armed forces. (*ibid.* 56)

The secondary trinity has its limitations, though, whilst the universal nature of the primary trinity allows it to be applied to all forms of war (*ibid.* 6).

In addition, Clausewitz's notion of 'friction' helps to explain why the progression of war is unpredictable: 'Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war' (Clausewitz 1989, 119). It is friction which explains the difference in reality between real war and war on paper (*ibid.*).

The issue of why patterns of insurgent violence vary so much across conflicts is investigated by Weinstein, using the in-depth case study comparative approach. He notes that in some conflicts, insurgents abuse non-combatants, while in others they protect them. In some conflicts insurgents loot, while in others they protect civilian property. Similarly, in some conflicts violence is indiscriminate and in others selective (Weinstein 2007, 6). From his case studies he postulates that there are two major types of insurgency: opportunist rebellion and activist rebellion. He argues that the initial conditions define what type of rebellion it will be, and in turn the different organisations and incentives to participation it produces, which can explain the different strategies of violence that they chose to employ. His central finding is, though,

that rebel groups that emerge in environments rich in natural resources or with external support of an outside patron tend to commit high levels of indiscriminate violence: movements that arise in resource-poor contexts perpetrate far fewer abuses and employ violence selectively and strategically. (Weinstein 2007, 7)

Metelits addresses the similar question of why local communities are victims of indiscriminate violence, again using a series of in-depth case studies. However, her research produces a different claim, 'that insurgents treat local citizens violently when they face active rivalry' (Metelits 2010, 161). The actions of insurgents are determined not by initial conditions, but by whether the insurgents face competition. As competition increases, so does violence against the local population. 'The existence of rivalry, not resources, is central to the insurgent-civilian dynamic. Rivals play a crucial role because competition threatens resources, and lack of resources in turn threatens survival' (*ibid.*).

Civilians become victims of insurgent violence as the insurgents fight for control of the population in order to gain control of the resources threatened by competition.

In his book *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Stathis Kalyvas provides a deep and enriching insight into the dynamics of civil war, ranging from micro-analysis of the Greek Civil War to comparative analysis within Greece and elsewhere. He provides a vertical analysis of civil wars examining 'how actors at the center are linked with action on the ground, and how cleavages as elocuted in national-level discourse are connected with local conflicts that often have little in common with them' (Kalyvas 2006, 364). Kalyvas argues that the key mechanism that connects centre and periphery dynamics is not an overarching cleavage but alliances (*ibid.* 365).

Understanding the factors that influence insurgents' behaviour would seem another fortuitous avenue of research, as insurgent strategies will have direct implications on conflict dynamics. The three case studies all contain aspects from the theories mentioned above, such as foreign support, insurgent rivalry and centre-periphery dynamics.

## ECONOMIC THEORIES REVISITED

Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis put their large-N study-based theories to the test in a double-volume collection of 22 in-depth case studies, *Understanding Civil Wars* (Collier and Sambanis 2005). In it they aimed to use qualitative (case study) research to complement earlier quantitative research.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the case studies showed that natural resources were neither the cause of the conflict nor the means of sustaining it, while others portrayed the use of looting as a means to sustain the conflict, but not as a motive for it (*ibid.* 309). The role of resource predation is more complex than previously thought; but significantly, research implies that it plays a role in sustaining conflicts, and thus contributes to the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation.

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<sup>4</sup> This is explained further in the Qualitative vs. Quantitative section later in this chapter.

In the book *Beyond Greed and Grievance* (Ballentine and Sherman 2003), the case study approach is similarly used to probe the credence of theories of economic motives of civil wars. The book questions the validity of framing civil wars as ‘resource wars’ driven by greed:

Economic incentives and opportunities have not been the only or even the primary cause of these armed conflicts; rather, to varying degrees, they interacted with socioeconomic and political grievances, interethnic disputes, and security dilemmas in triggering the outbreak of warfare. (Ballentine 2003, 260)

However, Ballentine does argue that ‘under certain conditions, combatant access to economic resources has been a salient factor shaping a permissive opportunity structure sustaining hostilities, and has had important effects on the duration, intensity and character of conflict’ (*ibid.*). In short, economic factors play a clear role in sustaining conflicts, and in the process shaping the nature of the violence. These factors can therefore be seen as drivers of escalation.

This notion that economic motivation may play a part both in the emergence and continuation of conflict echoes earlier work by David Keen. He argues that the economic gains achievable by the protagonist in war may provide a reason to continue:

Winning may not be desirable: the point of war may be precisely the legitimacy which it confers on actions that in peacetime would be punishable as crimes. Whereas analysts have tended to assume that war is the ‘end’ and abuse of civilians the ‘means’, it is important to consider the opposite possibility: that the end is to engage in abuse or crimes that bring rewards, while the means is war and its perpetuation. (Keen 1998, 12)

Keen identifies two forms of economic violence: ‘top down’, perpetuated by elites and entrepreneurs, and ‘bottom up’, by ordinary people (*ibid.*). Economic motives may thus prove a salient point of enquiry into the sustaining and longevity of conflicts.

Economic motives are not necessarily the primary cause of conflict; greed and grievance have a more complex interlinked relationship. The role of economic factors – whether providing the means or the motivation, and in preventing de-escalation and termination – is perhaps most relevant to this project.

## CRIMINALITY

Economic theories as a cause or driver of conflict have largely focused on the access to and control of resources, such as diamonds and precious metals. However, do economic factors play a part in conflicts in resource-poor regions? In conflicts with the absence of primary resources, it has been noted that there is often looting of other types of assets: 'Looting in resource-poor countries takes the form of small theft, looting houses and businesses, car-jackings, extortion and kidnapping. Looting, therefore, seems to be a mechanism to sustain rebellion in the absence of external support for insurgency' (Sambanis 2005, 305).

Engaging in or controlling criminal activity presents a source of wealth that may drive the motivations of terrorist or insurgent actors. Chris Dishman argues that many of today's terrorist groups have made the transformation into criminal organisations. Some groups have turned to criminal activities in order to fund their war efforts, perhaps due to a decline in state support for terrorism. However, for others criminal activity has become more than just a means of financing; it has become the 'overriding motivation' of the group (Dishman 2001, 44).

This transition to criminal behaviour is described by Audrey Cronin as a 'shift away from a primary emphasis on collecting resources as a means of pursuing political ends toward acquiring material goods and profit that becomes the ends in themselves' (Cronin 2006, 32). The impact of the transition to criminality can have far-reaching implications across terrorist organisations, and transform the aims and motives of the group leaders. Dishman adds:

Terrorist and guerrilla groups who view their cause as futile might turn their formidable assets towards crime – all the while under a bogus political banner. Other groups might turn to organized crime if their *raison d'être* evaporates in the face of negotiation or peace.  
(Dishman 2001, 56)

Although there is an absence of primary resource exploitation in the three case studies examined, there are elements of criminal activities with strong economic incentives, ranging from looting and smuggling, to collection of 'revolutionary' taxes.

### THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The main focus of the terrorism studies literature is on how states should tackle terrorism, and what their counterterrorism policy options are. Possible approaches, as Gregory Miller evaluates, 'lie along a continuum, with complete inaction on one end and the abandonment of civil rights on the other' (Miller 2007, 333). The debate in this area is between the so-called 'soft' and 'hard' approaches to counterterrorism, where 'soft' power refers to diplomacy, social and political options, and 'hard' power is the use of military and law-enforcement agencies. There is an active discussion within the literature over the soft vs. hard approaches – essentially whether coercive or conciliatory policies work best (*ibid.* 31-32). Both sides cite successful examples of their respective approaches, and failures of the other. There is limited research on why soft or hard approaches failed in one situation and succeeded in another, and on whether the two approaches are mutually exclusive or can work in combination.

Talk of soft/hard approaches is very broad-brush and hides the nuances of individual government approaches. Each side of the debate contains a wide assortment of policies and tactics. A few scholars have gone beyond the simple soft/hard division, and developed a more nuanced analytical lens through which to view counterterrorism, by roughly dividing countermeasures into separate instruments of counterterrorism: 1) military, 2) judicial and financial, 3) police and security

services and 4) social-economic and political measures (Duyvesteyn 2006, 123-4).<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, Miller views the differentiation between the soft and hard approaches as ‘an overly simplistic dichotomy’ and instead offers his own classification of five categories: 1) do nothing, 2) conciliation, 3) legal reform, 4) restriction, and 5) violence (Miller 2007, 334). The advantages of Miller’s classifications are that they separate out different types of action performed by the same instrument. Such classification allows a deeper analysis of state countermeasures.

### Different types of state action against different types of group

Another question debated in the literature is the importance of different group motivations to how terrorism ends; that the motivation/grievance behind the groups – whether ethno-separatist, religious, revolutionary or reactionary – plays a role in understanding how terrorism ends. As a USIP report sums up: ‘The nature of the grievance matters. Ethnically based terrorist campaigns can be harder to end decisively than politically based ones, because they often enjoy broader support among a population they seek to represent’ (USIP 1999, 1).

Miller goes further, examining whether different countermeasures are more effective against differently motivated groups. He argues that certain counterterrorism policies are more effective against certain groups defined by their motivations. Hence groups of different motivations should be tackled with very differently approaches. For groups with primarily ethno-nationalist motivations, he argues that a combination of concessions, legal reform and restriction are most effective; for revolutionary groups a combination of restriction and legal reform; and for reactionary groups, legal reform. However, for religiously-motivated groups he notes that they ‘seem undeterred by any policy’ (Miller 2007, 344).

Regarding religiously motivated groups, Svensson and Harding

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<sup>5</sup> Duyvesteyn considers the first three instruments above to compose the hard approach to counterterrorism and the fourth instrument, social-economic and political measures, as constituting the soft approach.

take a different position. They argue that religious conflicts do end, and importantly not just by military force but also by negotiation:

Religious aspirations, we contend, are primarily associated with conflicting parties' ultimate goals, and less concerned with the particular means of achieving such goals. They are also not the sole aspirations of parties: conflicting actors can have territorial, structural, economic or other ambitions as well. (Svensson and Harding 2011, 134)

They argue that this opens up a space for conflict resolution (*ibid.*).

As each of the case studies is an ethno-nationalist conflict, with a strong religious element, it raises the question of what role religion plays in the conflict, and whether this determines any similarities in which state actions prove effective.

### Negative impact of the state – the state as a driver of violence

The literature also recognises that the approach followed by the state can have a negative effect and increase violence. In each of the three case studies the state's initial response was a heavy-handed crackdown. As this obviously failed to end the conflicts, two questions arise: why not, and what effect did this have on the development of the conflict?

Much has been written about the dangers of repression, and the so-called 'provocation trap', where the objective of the terrorist groups can be to provoke the state into an overreaction, and, through the enforcement of a repressive crackdown, make it alienate and drive the population into the arms of rebel groups (Duyvesteyn 2008, 343). Michael Stohl sums this up: 'Repression, though often apparently successful in the short run, can serve to fill the very reservoirs of support it is designed to empty' (Stohl 2006, 65). The initial response of the British government in Northern Ireland is an often-cited example of where government action has made the situation worse (Dixon 2009). The key point is that state action is not only a means of ending conflict, but can also be a cause or an escalatory factor. As Andrew Silke puts it: 'As a driver and facilitator of terrorist campaigns, state countermeasures

can have a negative impact far greater than many of the issues which are traditionally seen as root causes of terror' (Silke 2005, 241).

In relation to the raft of new counterterrorism policy that emerged in the West following 9/11, Bob de Graaff argues that there is little real evidence that these measures have made society more secure, and points out that there are even indications that they may have had the opposite effect (de Graaff 2010, 250). He also notes that

[w]hat constitutes a victory along one line of government operations does not necessarily imply a victory along all other lines. For instance, a judicial condemnation may lead to putting one terrorist behind bars but at the same time may inspire twenty others to turn to terrorism or may lead to radicalisation processes within prisons, instigated by those convicted. (*ibid.* 251)

Implicit in all this is that the state is a dynamic player in the duration of the conflict. States' actions do not simply serve to end a conflict; instead their action plays a part in the escalation and de-escalation dynamics of the conflicts. This can happen in a number of ways, such as in the substitution effect, where state action in one area has the unintended consequence of increasing violence in another (Duyvesteyn, 2013). The central point is that state actors are a part of conflict dynamics, and understanding their role will shed light on the mechanisms of escalation and de-escalation.

The policies of the state play a central role in driving all three conflicts, both in terms of escalation and de-escalation. Exactly how and why some policies were successful, and others less so, will be examined closely.

### COIN – hearts and minds

In the wake of the successful counter-insurgency campaign in the Malayan emergency, counter-insurgency authors started to emphasise the importance of winning the 'hearts and minds' of the population (Dixon 2009). Despite the friendly sounding language of 'hearts and

minds', counter-insurgency campaigns such as those in Malaya and Kenya were in actual fact far from a soft approach (*ibid.*; Bennett 2007). At the centre of these campaigns' success was population control, based on a carrot and stick approach. The stick was physical control of the population through resource denial and regrouping of villages behind fortifications. The carrot was inducements and incentives, such as land or jobs, offered to those who supported the state.

At the centre of this approach is not the question of winning the popular support, but of convincing the population that the state is the stronger side, the one which would be in the people's best interests to support. The Malayan 'hearts and minds' strategy was often seen as a response to the success of Mao's guerrilla strategy in China (Dixon 2009, 362), which Mao's famous quote on guerrilla warfare summed up: 'The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea' (quoted in *ibid.*). In the same way, insurgent groups' strategies against the population mirror the counter-insurgency approach of gaining control of the people. In this way conflicts are fought for control of the population, for this is the key to victory. As Rupert Smith argues, '[t]hey are of and amongst the people – and it is there that the fight takes place. But this fight must be won so as to achieve the ultimate objective of capturing the will of the people' (Smith 2005, 372). Control of the population is necessary for either side to win, and as Julian Paget argues, 'to pursue Mao Tse-tung's simile of insurgents living among the populace of a country "like fish in water", the policy must be to destroy the fish by either removing the oxygen from the water or draining the pond' (Paget 1967, 168).

### Political institutions

There is disagreement within the literature as to the role played by the political institutions of devolution and federalism. On the one side, for example, some authors argue that diffusion of power through federalism is a useful tool in managing ethnic conflicts; whilst other authors argue that it has exactly the opposite effect, 'allowing groups greater

control over institutions and resources thereby facilitating collective action' (Toft 2012, 588).

Further to this, Sambanis highlights the importance of political instability; not just of a change of regime, but also of a power transition within an existing regime, concluding that 'political instability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for violence' (Sambanis 2005, 312). However, referring to the political instability experienced within former regions of the USSR after its collapse, he notes that the difference between whether this was translated into civil war or not, in the different regions, was in part down to the strength of local institutions (*ibid.*).

In all three separatist conflicts, issues of devolution or federalism played a significant part. Questions arise about the effectiveness of the existing political institutions at mitigating the situation. At the heart of the state response in both Nagaland and Mindanao was the creation of new devolved institutions, whilst in the Punjab, the central government at times suspended the existing state government, placing the state under direct rule as they failed to tackle the crisis.

## THE POPULATION AND POPULAR SUPPORT

As COIN theory highlights, insurgency is a war amongst the people for the people; it may be a conflict between two sides, but it is fought through the people. Stathis Kalyvas described the situation succinctly when he commented that it 'involves not just two (or more) competing actors, but also civilians' (Kalyvas 2000, 5). To unravel the three conflicts, the roles of state and non-state actors must be grasped, as well as the role played by the population. This is especially important for conflicts of such long duration; the Punjab Crisis lasted just over a decade, but both Nagaland and Mindanao lasted many decades.

Iconic revolutionary writers such as Mao noted the importance of the populace, commenting that '[w]eapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive',<sup>6</sup> and Che Guevara maintained: 'The guerrillas, as an armed nucleus, are

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<sup>6</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *On Protracted War*, 134-45, <http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/PW38.html> (last accessed 27 September 2013).

the fighting vanguard of the people, and their great strength is rooted in the mass population' (Guevara 1960). On the state side, the role of popular support has played a central role in modern counter-insurgency doctrines,<sup>7</sup> and the importance of population was recognised in classics such as those by Clausewitz and Machiavelli (Clausewitz 1989; Machiavelli 2010).

In his book *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Stathis Kalyvas highlights the centrality of the relationship between armed groups and civilians:

[G]roups must maximize the support they receive from the population and minimize the support that rival groups receive from the same population – put otherwise, they must minimize defection. To achieve this goal, armed groups deploy a variety of instruments, ranging from political persuasion and the provision of public and private goods, all the way to coercion. (Kalyvas 2012, 660)

From his research Kalyvas makes three key observations: firstly, that to be effective coercion must be highly selective, otherwise it may well be counterproductive, leading the population to look to a rival group for protection; secondly, that 'indiscriminate violence is inversely related to the level of territorial control', i.e. it tends to be perpetrated by armed groups where they have very low levels of territorial control (*ibid.* 661); and thirdly, the population's collaboration flows from either side's physical control of an area, not the preferences of the population. The 'key point is that control – regardless of the "true" preferences of the population – precludes options other than collaboration by creating credible benefits for collaborators and, more importantly, sanctions for defectors' (*ibid.* 145).

The role played by popular support is a complex one. Le Blanc, in a case study comparison of social revolutionary conflicts in South America, describes a triangular relationship of the state, violent opposition and the social audience, where the violence of the two adversaries is often driven by the desire to gain the support of the social audience (Le Blanc 2012, 33).

7 See US Army Field Manual FM3-24, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf> (last accessed 27 September 2013).

Insurgent struggle, thus, involves broader social groups than the direct adversaries in the conflict; they are of a triangular nature. Once involved in the conflict the targeted social group can improve the position of one of the adversaries and influence the development and outcome of the conflict. The position larger social groups take towards the conflict becomes significant, if not decisive, for the outcome of the struggle (le Blanc 2014).

Schuurman builds on this, maintaining that popular support is a resource that is necessary for both sides, but also arguing that

public support can provide a mandate for action but that it can also set boundaries for the measures governments and their non-state adversaries can legitimately use. Fluctuations in the quantity and quality of public support for either side can expand or contract these boundaries, potentially instigating marked changes in conflict-related violence levels and affecting the efficacy of government counter-measures. (Schuurman 2013, 152)

The population and its support plays a central but complex role in the dynamics of conflicts, with both the state and non-state actors seeking to influence and control the population. However, the relationship also goes the other way; the population's position can influence the actors. As such, changes in popular support can have a direct influence on the dynamics of violence within conflicts.

## THE ROLE OF PEACE PROCESSES

In a recent review of the literature on negotiating with terrorists and insurgents, Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Bart Schuurman have identified three paradoxes. Firstly, they argue that negotiations are frequently entered into for 'darker motives' rather than to negotiate an end to the violence, for example as an opportunity for warring parties to formalise a stalemate or to gain time to recuperate or build up their forces for the next offensive. Secondly, negotiations can prompt splits

within the parties conducting them, in which hardliners may break away and promote more extreme violence and oppose any form of compromise. Finally, they argue that successful negotiations do not necessarily lead to a successful resolution of the conflict, pointing out how such negotiated settlements are often brittle and frequently lead to a resumption of violence at a later stage – noting, that military victories may offer a better chance at achieving a lasting peace (Duyvesteyn and Schuurman 2011).

Stephen Stedman's work on 'spoiler' problems in peace processes shows that it is not just economic factors that can lead actors to sabotage peace. As he points out, peacemaking is a risky business, and '[t]he greatest source of risk comes from spoilers – leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview and interests, and the use of violence to undermine attempts to achieve it' (Stedman 1997, 5). Peace will inevitably create spoilers, he argues, as it is rare that all leaders and factions will see peace as of benefit to them. Not all spoilers are the same, and understanding their aims and positions is key to any strategies for preventing spoilers from derailing the peace process. Spoilers are codified into three categories: those with limited goals, those that see the world in all-or-nothing terms and pursue total power, and those that are greedy and use a cost-benefit analysis to make reasoned decisions (*ibid.* 7). Furthermore, spoilers may lay either inside or outside the peace process; those on the inside may use strategies of stealth, while those on the outside may pursue overt violence. Another key issue is the locus or support base of the spoiler, which can determine whether they can change 'type'. Analysis of the spoilers' aims and positions is central to identifying the best strategy to tackle them, for which he suggests three: inducement, socialisation and coercion. A conflict may also often contain more than one spoiler, each requiring a different strategy. In short, an in-depth understanding of the context of the conflict is crucial.

Each of the three case studies had more than one attempt at a peace process; illuminating why they failed and why others succeeded will help explain the dynamics of the conflict and also what effect the failure of the peace processes had on the conflicts.

## THEORIES OF FOREIGN SUPPORT/INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

As Monica Toft points out, although secessionist conflicts and civil wars are normally contained within a particular geographic region, they are intimately connected to regional and global dynamics. She highlights the example of Kosovo as a conflict rooted in a domestic political fight over the political status of the region and of the rights of Serbs and Albanians living there, but with a global dimension as Russia took the side of the Serb-dominated FRY, and the United States and Nato sided with Kosovar Albanians. At the heart of this dynamic, Toft argues, is

[the] interaction of international politics and domestic politics – the right of national and ethnic minorities to self-determination versus the power of precedent and the status quo bias of the international community in favor of the territorial integrity of states – pushes these conflicts toward the center of global politics. (Toft 2012, 582)

The role of outside support, in particular the offering of ‘safe havens’, is highlighted by Daniel Byman as an important factor in helping emerging insurgent groups evolve into full-blown insurgencies: ‘[S]tate support usually makes a group more capable, enabling it to resist government counterterrorism and COIN campaigns and thus survive to conduct more attacks or engage in political mobilization’ (Byman 2008, 188). However, he also identifies that state support can be a ‘poisoned chalice’, pointing out that even the most supportive sponsors will put their own interests first and it is unlikely that they will completely embrace the group’s agenda. States can also be fair-weather friends who are happy to discard the groups to fit the needs of the moment. The acceptance of state support can correspond with a loss of freedom of action, and ‘states often act as a brake on their proxies, hoping to use them to bleed a foe or keep a conflict bubbling, but not wanting to risk greater escalation into an outright war’ (*ibid.* 190).

Sambanis highlights two mechanisms through which civil wars can develop a regional dimension. The first is contagion, when there is a direct spillover of violence across national borders. He cites among

other examples the recurrent wars of Burundi and Rwanda, which spilled over each other's borders and also into the DRC, leading to international interventions by Uganda and Zimbabwe. Also, perhaps more relevantly, Sierra Leone's civil war was sustained by the support and sanctuary provided by Liberia's Charles Taylor to the rebels, and also by the international criminal arms-for-diamonds trade (Sambanis 2005, 317). The second, diffusion, is a less direct effect, where distant events influence the situation in another country, leading to the outbreak of violence; for example, the re-ignition of the independence struggle in Ache following East Timor's referendum on independence, which served to emboldened the Achenese resistance (*ibid.*).

However, foreign assistance does not only come from state support. The importance of diaspora and the role they play in organising and financing a rebellion is also noted by Sambanis. The larger the diaspora, the greater its capacity to play such a supportive role (*ibid.* 308). Diasporas also have another very important indirect effect of lobbying and influencing the foreign policies of their host nations, particularly in developed multicultural countries. (*ibid.*).

Despite being local separatist conflicts at their core, all three case studies had international dimensions. Both the Punjab Crisis and the Naga Insurgency were caught up in India's tense relationship with her neighbours. Similarly in Mindanao, as a Muslim minority trying to secede from a Christian majority, it attracted the attention of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and specific Muslim countries. The role that these relationships play in the development of the conflict poses another potentially fruitful area of investigation.

## THEORIES ON GEOGRAPHY

Geography is another variable that is often cited within the literature as having a significant influence on the dynamics of a conflict. Regions that offer rough terrain such as jungle, forests or mountainous areas can offer insurgent groups potential advantages such as inaccessible areas that can be used as sanctuaries; from which, Byman argues, 'a group can plot, recruit, proselytize, contact supporters around the

world, raise money and – perhaps the most important – enjoy a respite from the enemy regime’s counterterrorism and COIN efforts’ (Byman 2008, 188). Geography can thus provide the necessary protection to an emerging group while making it harder for security forces to eliminate groups and helping to sustain insurgencies. Sambanis points out, though, that rough terrain is not necessary for a sanctuary, as rebel groups can often find one across an international border of a sympathetic state (Sambanis 2005, 307).

Chris Clapham argues that spacial factors play a determining role in the evolution of political violence into terrorism or insurgency: ‘Guerrilla warfare occurs when at least one of the combatants is unable to maintain permanent control over space, but does at least control the space that it occupies while it is in it’ (Clapham 2003, 14). By contrast, he argues that terrorists have to operate within a territory that is controlled by their enemies, and that the operational requirements this produces account for most of the distinctive features of terrorism (*ibid.* 15). From this he expounds that the availability of space in a given region can influence how conflicts evolve. In reference to Africa, he argues: ‘In Africa – to generalize very broadly – the ready availability of space has reduced the need for oppositional movements to adapt to the needs of operating in space they do not control, the defining characteristic of terrorism’ (*ibid.* 18).

The human geography also matters. Toft points out the importance of settlement patterns of ethnic groups. She argues that ‘those groups that are geographically concentrated are much more likely to mobilize for self-determination and engage in violence than those that are dispersed throughout the territory of the state or live largely in urbanized areas’ (Toft 2012, 590). She also highlights the importance of whether the territory of an ethnic group borders a neighbouring state: ‘Most secessionist movements emerge in peripheral regions and a separatist war is more likely to take place in regions of states’ borders than nearer to state’s capitals’ (*ibid.*). As noted above, proximity to a border can allow for easy access to sanctuaries and the flow of supplies.

Concentration of ethnic groups and easy access to international borders were common factors in all three conflicts. A major difference

exists, though, in the type of terrain: whilst the Punjab is a land of open plains, both Nagaland and Mindanao contain much remote and inaccessible territory.

## HOW VIOLENCE ENDS

### HOW TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY END

Why do terrorism and insurgency end? The first point made in the literature is that terrorism is not only ‘defeated’ by states. As Martha Crenshaw argues, terrorism declines ‘because of three factors: physical defeat of the extremist organization by the government, the group’s decision to abandon the terrorist strategy, and organizational disintegration’ (Crenshaw 1991, 70). Similarly, a large-N study by the Rand Corporation claims that terrorist groups

end for two major reasons: Members decide to adopt non-violent tactics and join the political process (43%), or local law-enforcement agencies arrest or kill key members of the group (40%). Military force has rarely been the primary reason for the end of terrorist groups (7%), and few groups since 1968 have achieved victory (10%). (Jones and Libicki 2008, 18)

For answers to permanent de-escalation, it will be necessary to look beyond state action. To this end, Audrey Cronin outlines seven ‘broad explanations for, or critical elements in, the decline and ending of terrorist groups in the modern era’ (Cronin 2006, 17), which she outlines as:

- 1) capture or killing of the leader, 2) failure to transition to the next generation, 3) achievement of the group’s aims, 4) transition to a legitimate political process, 5) undermining of popular support, 6) repression, and 7) transition from terrorism to other forms of violence [such as moving towards either criminal behaviour or conventional warfare]. (*ibid.* 17-18 and 31)

These explanations include both internal and external factors, and Cronin importantly points out that groups may end for reasons other than the actions taken against them. Nor are the factors separate or distinct, and it is often a combination of factors that explains a group's demise. Commenting on state action, Cronin notes: '[C]ounterterrorist techniques are often best used in combination, and methods can overlap: frequently more than one technique has been employed to respond to a given group at different times' (*ibid.* 18).

In her book *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*, Donatella Della Porta sets out a framework for understanding this phenomenon, based on three levels of analysis: Macro, Meso and Micro, where the Macro is the external conditions, the Meso the group dynamics of the organisations, and the Micro the individual perceptions and motivations (Porta 1995, 187). What was new and innovative about this approach was the introduction of the 'Meso' level of analysis. While previous work had analysed across international, national and individual levels, this brought in a new, important component – group level dynamics. Porta argues that in the initial stages the Macro-level is most important, but once the conflict has been ignited it is the group dynamics that play a crucial role in explaining escalation: 'Once violence had erupted and groups that acted as entrepreneurs of violence had emerged, the Meso-level (organisational dynamics) assumed the determining role, influencing in its turn developments at the Macro- and Micro-levels' (*ibid.*). The group dynamics of the Meso-level create their own momentum that drives the conflicts: Porta describes a 'vicious circle of irreversible choices, some determined less by reason and will than by chance and "necessity"' (*ibid.* 22). Towards the end of a conflict, as the number of militants drastically reduces, Della Porta argues that the micro-level becomes increasingly important (*ibid.* 187).

The Punjab Crisis stands out in contrast to the other two case studies as it was ended permanently through a kinetic counterterrorism campaign, without any political concessions. In both Mindanao and Nagaland the conflicts entered periods of sustained de-escalation via a peace process. The question remains of how different approaches worked in the different case studies, but also of how the different approaches worked in practice.

## THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

The theories outlined above are a diverse collection of insights that examine a wide array of different aspects of conflict. There are those insights which focus on the causes of conflicts; which identify the factors that lead to or predict the outbreak of violence, such as Collier and Hoefer's initial 'Greed Thesis'; or structural and facilitator causes. These theories address the circumstances from which conflicts emerge, but they provide little perspective on how the conflicts then develop. As a consequence they provide little interpretative power for the understanding of conflicts across their lifespan.

The more useful theories for this project are those that shed light on the inner workings of conflicts once they have begun. These can be separated into static and dynamic theories. Static theories address factors that do not change during the lifespan of a conflict but play a part in shaping how the conflict develops, by outlining the parameters within which the conflict can develop. This includes theories such as those about the impact of physical geography on a conflict.

The rather more interesting theories are those that address dynamic factors and mechanisms that can change across a conflict's duration and as such drive the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. Within this grouping, theories roughly fall into three separate categories. The first category contains those which address contextual issues that shape the conflict. These are theories such as ones on foreign support/international dynamics, political structures or ethnicity. The second category is made up of theories that focus on the role of the state, seeing it as a dynamic actor in the conflict whose actions are capable of both escalating and de-escalating the conflict. This includes theories about the effectiveness of different types of countermeasures and those that examine the negative impact of state action such as repression or collapsed peace processes. The third set of theories apply to non-state actors, such as those about economic motives<sup>8</sup> or criminality, as well as ones that address issues like rivalry between different factions.

The theories will be used as a guide to help illuminate the in-depth

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<sup>8</sup> Although this can also apply to state actors.

case studies, rather than using the case studies to test the theories; as Newton is reported to have said, 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the theoretical perceptions of previous scholars have provided countless insights and inspirations which have been borrowed in an ad hoc manner throughout the investigation of the case studies.

After completing research for the three case studies, and through a process of comparative analysis, a theoretical structure was constructed through which to analyse the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. The most important factors driving escalation, were identified and collated, and then divided into a trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors. The trinity was then applied for the analysis.

## FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

**CONTEXT:** Social cleavages; popular support; grievances; local politics; national politics; international politics

**STATE ACTORS:** State action – coercive force; state action – policy solution; state capacity; strong/weak government

**NON-STATE ACTORS:** Strategy of armed groups; capacity of armed groups; factionalisation; criminalisation

## THE RESEARCH MODEL

### WHY COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS?

In order to investigate the research questions the comparative historical analysis approach was selected as the most applicable mode of enquiry. This research tradition has three central characteristics: concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/movingwords/shortlist/newton.shtml> (last accessed 12 June 2013).

systemic and contextualised comparison (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2008, 10). These three characteristics recommend comparative historical analysis to the investigation of the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation in irregular conflicts.

Firstly, at the root of understanding how conflicts unfold, is the comprehension of the causal chain. Comparative historical analysis's attention to the 'explanation and identification of causal configurations that produce major outcomes of interest' (*ibid.* 11) makes it ideal for identifying and explaining the operations of the key factors driving conflict dynamics.

Secondly, investigation of conflict dynamics requires the examination of the phenomena over time, in which the sequencing and unfolding of the process over its duration is fundamental to its understanding. Comparative historical analysis locates events in time, and 'explicitly considers the effects and timing of events relative to one another' (*ibid.* 12).

Thirdly, using this approach allows 'systematic and contextualised comparisons of similar and contrasting cases' (*ibid.*). This allows the researcher to explore causal effects in different contexts through immersing themselves within the individual cases.

### SINGLE CASE STUDY VS. COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

Focusing on a single case allows the researcher to investigate and analyse a specific case intensively, leading to a deeper level of understanding and insight. The detailed level of knowledge and comprehension of a smaller area permits the consideration and exploration of a wider spectrum of variables and causal connections, enabling the researcher to see more links and make connections that might not have been possible with a more limited level of knowledge.

The comparative capability of historical case studies, though, is often overlooked due to the mistaken identification of a single case with a single observation. This ignores the temporal nature of historical research, which examines a social phenomenon over time; historical case studies are not single observations, but sets of multiple

observations over time. Single case studies present two important opportunities for comparison. Firstly, they contain many data points against which theory can be tested. Rueschemeyer argues that this approach has two significant advantages: 'it permits a much more direct and frequently repeated interplay between theoretical development and data, and it allows for a closer matching of conceptual intent and empirical evidence' (Rueschemeyer 2008, 318). Secondly, a single case study may include numerous occasions of the same type of event at different times. This often makes for good within-case comparisons: since the events take place within one case, many of the variables are automatically kept constant (i.e. controlled). In relation to case studies on irregular conflicts, a single case study may contain more than one peace process or counter-insurgency campaign, allowing these events to be compared.

Despite the benefits of in-depth single case studies, there is a limit to their analytical ability. Increasing the number of case studies opens up avenues of investigation not possible in a single case. For it is 'only by going beyond the first case does the impact of factors on the outcomes of interest come into view that does not show up in within-case analyses because these factors are – completely or largely – held constant' (*ibid.* 320). The combination of both within-case and cross-case comparison can further deepen the level of analysis that can explore more complex interaction between factors and multiple paths of causation (*ibid.* 323-24). An example of the combination of the two techniques when comparing a small number of cases would be the comparison of multiple peace processes or counter-insurgency campaigns, both within and across cases. Two points are important to consider here: firstly, the number of comparative units here is greater than the number of the cases; i.e. there may be three cases, but seven or eight separate peace processes to compare. Secondly, the use of both within and cross-case comparisons increases the analytical capability and the richness of the contextual comparison.

However, increasing the number of case studies is a double-edged sword: as the number of cases is increased, there is the tendency to lose the advantage of a single case study as the level of knowledge is diluted, a situation that Donatella Della Porta sums up well:

On the one hand, the cross-national comparisons of many national cases have generally produced poor results because most of the available indicators of political violence are unreliable and not comparable. On the other hand, case studies have produced an ideographic, noncumulative body of knowledge that is difficult to integrate into more general analyses because of the lack of a common theoretical framework. (Della Porta 2006, 15)

Della Porta advocates an intermediate approach of using a small number of case studies<sup>10</sup> that allow hypotheses arising in one instance to be tested in the other(s), whilst not at the same time losing the ‘thick description’ of the case studies.

### QUALITATIVE VS. QUANTITATIVE

The main alternative research method employed in the study of irregular conflicts has been the quantitative, or large-N, research conducted by cross-national statistical researchers. This research carries out statistical analysis on data from a large number of cases. The much greater number of cases better allows generalisations to be drawn. Statistical techniques can further strengthen their analysis, such as handling the problem of control by means of partial correlations (Lijphart 1971, 684). The flipside to the benefits of analysing a large-N of case studies is the loss of detailed knowledge of specific cases, making it difficult to ‘address questions about actors’ motives and subjectivities or to observe event sequences and causal processes’ (Ragin 1998, 106).

Particularly within the field of civil war studies, large-N statistical studies have been used to investigate the nature of modern conflicts. Until a few years ago this field had been polarised by the ‘greed vs. grievance debate’ (Malone and Nitzschke 2005), which was ignited by the Collier and Hoeffler ‘greed thesis’ (Collier and Hoeffler 2000).

There is no doubt that large-N studies have made an important contribution, but there is a limit to the powers of quantitative analysis.

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10 In her case a binary comparison of two case studies.

Firstly, they presented the probabilistic risk of a conflict starting, but were unable to say much about the conflicts once they had begun. Secondly, the studies showed correlations of factors, but are unable to dig beneath the surface to examine the exact processes of causation or how different factors interacted. Thirdly, the level of aggregation is at the national level, whilst the conflicts themselves are sub-national.

Mats Berdal argues that

[i]t is difficult to escape the conclusion... that with respect to the truly interesting questions – the interaction of greed and grievance, what triggers and sustains civil wars, how and why they mutate over time – quantitative analysis is of distinctly limited utility. (Berdal 2005, 690)

Similarly, Ballentine and Sherman maintain that

[p]ropositions regarding the high salience of economic factors – whether cast in terms of motive or opportunity – are probabilistic statements of conflict risk rather than factual descriptions of actual conflict dynamics in the specific real-world instances that preoccupy policy makers. In general, while statistical methods are a useful way of identifying key variables across a class of cases, at best they generate broad correlations that illuminate only part of the picture. (Ballentine and Sherman 2003, 5)

While quantitative research identifies correlations between factors, it uncovers little of the processes of causation and the dynamics of individual cases.

For a much deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in a conflict, both Tarrow and Berdal articulate the benefits of a return to case study research (Berdal 2005; Tarrow 2007). This is indeed a view shared by Collier, Hoeffler and Sambanis, who admit that

[e]ven if the Collier-Hoeffler (CH) model predicted all cases of civil war onset perfectly, it would still not be able to tell us much about the process through which these outcomes (war or peace) are generated. By contrast, analysing the process – the sequence of events

## INTRODUCTION

and the interaction of variables in the CH model over time – is the comparative advantage of case study designs. (Collier, Hoeffer and Sambanis 2005, 2)

This view is echoed by Sidney Tarrow, who suggests case study research can help address two key issues: firstly, how do individual incentives for violence intersect with larger political and organisational processes? Secondly, how can we go beyond static correlations between sociodemographic variables and civil war violence to study the mechanisms and processes present within insurgencies? (Tarrow 2007, 588).

Although large-N studies have produced impressive scholarly work, such qualitative methods do not present the best approach through which to investigate the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation in conflicts. For this the use of comparative historical case studies has clear advantages: firstly, in sequencing and analysing the conflict over time and establishing causal connections, and secondly, deep understanding of individual cases allows the researcher to go beyond probabilistic correlations of variables and understand how and why factors inter-act to drive escalation and de-escalation.

## EMPIRICAL CASE STUDIES VS. THEORETICAL

Within social science, researchers are faced with a decision between two different approaches to research. They can either choose to focus on the complexity of the social phenomena and conduct empirical case studies to gain a detailed understanding of a specific case, or they can seek to identify patterns and generalisations across a number of cases, with the ultimate aim of producing theory. On the empirical side, Charles Ragin argues that

[s]ocial scientists who study cases in an in-depth manner often see empirical generalizations simply as a means to another end – the interpretive understanding of cases... The rough general patterns that social scientists may be able to identify simply aid the understanding of specific cases; they are not viewed as predictive. (Ragin 1998, 105)

The fundamental goal is, rather, an interpretive understanding of the world around us and how this came to be. On theoretical case studies, Ragin comments that

those who study patterns across many cases with an eye towards formulating social scientific generalisations believe that the fundamental goal of social science is to advance general, explanatory theories that address wide expanses of social terrain... Social scientists should uncover general patterns, refine their theories, and use this abstract knowledge to advance the common good. (*ibid.*)

Empirical case studies and theory-generating research, however, can be interconnected. As Arend Lijphart explains, case studies can indirectly 'make an important contribution to the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory-building in political science' (Lijphart 1971, 691). He goes on to outline six ideal types of case study:<sup>11</sup>

- 1) Atheoretical
- 2) Interpretative
- 3) Hypothesis-generating
- 4) Theory-confirming
- 5) Theory-infirming
- 6) Deviant

Atheoretical case studies are purely descriptive, but have a wider utility for theory-building by serving as data-gathering operations. Interpretative case studies seek only to use generalisations to improve the understanding of the given case. The remaining four types of case study aim to generate theory. Hypothesis-generating case studies develop theoretical generalisations where no theory currently exists. Theory-confirming and theory-infirming case studies are used to test (and either confirm or infirm) propositions of existing generalisations. Deviant case studies are ones that are known to deviate from existing generalisations. They are examined precisely to shed greater light on

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<sup>11</sup> These are not mutually exclusive. Hence any particular case study may fit into more than one of these 'ideal types' of case study.

the reasons for the deviation, in order to identify previously unknown relevant variables or to refine the definitions of some or all of the known variables. Lijphart concludes that '[o]f the six types of case studies, the hypothesis-generating and deviant case studies have the greatest value in terms of their contribution to theory' (*ibid.* 692).

After outlining these two sides of social science research, and the relationship between empirical case studies and theory, the question remains to be addressed as to where this research project will be placed. On the one hand opportunities for theoretical research are limited, as there is a lack of theoretical work that models the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation over the lifespan of conflicts. There are no suitable theoretical models that could be tested and therefore further developed and improved.<sup>12</sup> The existing theoretical work tends to represent snippets of a conflict, focusing on explaining certain temporal points, such as predicting the outbreak of conflicts, or in explaining certain types of behaviour under certain conditions, for example Collier and Hoefer's 'greed thesis' for predicting the likelihood of the outbreak of civil war (Collier and Hoefer 2000) or Stephen Stedman's work on 'spoiler' problems in peace processes (Stedman 1997). Similarly, Metelits develops the concept of 'active rivalry' to explain why some local communities are victims of indiscriminate violence (Metelits 2010, 161). This collection of theoretical insights, although representing a rich body of research and some excellent scholarship, does not present or cannot reasonably be combined into a theoretical model for investigating the chosen research question.

On the other hand this rich body of work presents an array of generalisations that aim to explain specific incidences or situations. Collectively this provides a useful tool box of theoretical ideas that can be borrowed from to help the interpretative understanding of specific aspects of each case study. As noted, one of the weaknesses of quantitative research in this field is the failure to gain detailed insights into the conflicts. Such research relies not only on its statistical analysis, but also on its raw data, the details of each case. Hence there is a need for

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<sup>12</sup> One obvious exception to this would be Stathis N. Kalyvas's Micro-Level Control-Collaboration Model on violence against civilians during civil wars (Kalyvas 2012, 660).

more good quality empirical case studies that can serve as the future foundation of theory-generating research.

The role of the three case studies in this research project will primarily be as hypothesis-generating case studies. In an area where limited theory currently exists, they will serve to develop theoretical generalisations, which it is hoped will act as the foundation of future work on constructing theory. The research will also include elements of the deviant case study type. The inclusion of the Punjab Crisis as a case study is partly because it represents a unique situation in which a state's counterterrorism campaign completely and permanently ended a conflict, without any political concessions.

At a secondary level, the case studies will serve as a data-gathering operation, by producing detailed descriptive case studies on three relatively under-studied conflicts. Delivering the case studies focused on understanding the escalation and de-escalation, and that also covers the entire lifespan of the conflicts, rather than addressing a part of the conflict. Similarly, they may act as interpretative case studies, and utilise existing theoretical generalisations of conflicts in order to gain a deeper understanding of the specific case.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### RESEARCH METHOD

The project is a comparative study of three in-depth case studies, employing historical comparative analysis. The research takes two parts:

- 1) In-depth historical research on each of the three case studies.
- 2) Comparative analysis both within and between the case studies.

The primary aim of the comparative research is to generate hypotheses. This is further enriched by the inclusion of a deviant case (the Punjab Crisis). The secondary aim is to gather data and new material on these under-researched case studies, gaining a deeper understanding and interpretation of the individual cases.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis aims to address the following question:

Q) How can the changing levels of violence during the course of these conflicts be explained?

## DATA-GATHERING

As noted above, the research question addresses an area that has benefited from little previous research. Therefore the aim of this case-study comparison is the generation of new hypotheses that may provide the foundation for future research that will ultimately lead to the formulation of theoretical insights into the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. Hence the research was more investigative in nature, rather than testing and refining existing theory. To use a military analogy, this research was scouting the 'lay of the land'.

As an investigative process the research started without any set hypothesis to test, but with a broad question to answer. The research focused on addressing the question, but pursued many different lines of enquiry and considered multiple aspects of the conflicts in search of the factors behind the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. The theories outlined above provided a starting point; these gave ample suggestions of where to begin. As such the investigative process was shaped by the information as it was examined; for new information often brought new ideas to the fore and suggested new lines of enquiry. To this end the project used the standard tools of historical research, but also borrowed substantially from the methodology of Grounded Theory.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Grounded theory is a social science methodology that works in reverse to most traditional social science research methods. Rather than starting with a hypothesis, grounded theory begins with data-gathering, and then through a process of coding, concept formation and categorisation, theory is derived.

## THE PROCESS OF DATA-GATHERING

The research process comprised three stages.

In the first stage, a literature review was conducted into each of the case studies and also into more general theories of escalation and de-escalation, which provided a solid background to each of the cases and existing research on escalatory factors. This allowed a case history for each conflict to be compiled, in which each was broken down into a series of unique phases to aid the process of analysis. From this, two important factors were taken into account for each case study. Firstly, a list was made of factors and mechanisms that the literature suggested might be responsible for escalating and de-escalating the conflicts. Secondly, gaps in the literature were identified. Often there were either periods of time or aspects of the case studies that were poorly covered within the existing literature. The literature review focused on scholarly books and articles, as well as primary sources where possible in the form of biographies and personal accounts of the conflicts. Initially the resources available within Dutch libraries were used, but were later supplemented by research visits to use libraries in both the UK and Singapore.

In the second stage, extensive field research was carried out. The starting point of this was to examine further the mechanisms and factors driving conflicts, and to fill in the blanks identified in the first stage. However, although this was the foundation of the field research, the investigation was a dynamic process. Answering one question often brought up new questions and additional lines of enquiry. As such, the field research was an ever-developing investigative journey. The field research consisted primarily of conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups with state actors, non-state actors and civil society. In addition, archival research was conducted, particularly in newspaper archives, and locally authored books on the conflicts only available in the region – many of them first-hand accounts by actors involved – were a source.

The third and final stage consisted of a process of both within-case and between-case comparative analyses. All the factors that drove

escalation and de-escalation were identified within each case, and then compared in order to produce a generalised set of factors that explained the conflict dynamics for all three cases. This was then used to analyse each of the conflicts across all of their stages. The three conflict analyses were then compared in order to identify any patterns of generalisations in how and when the identified factors drove escalation and de-escalation. Through this process a greater insight and understanding of the conflicts' dynamics was gained.

## PHASES OF CONFLICT – AN ANALYTICAL TOOL

In order to examine the dynamics of how conflicts escalate and de-escalate over their lifespan, each of the conflicts were subdivided into a series of phases. Each phase marks a distinct stage in the conflict, and allows each stage to be analysed individually and in detail, rather than analysing the conflict as a single entity. This recognises that the conflicts are not homogeneous, and highlights the changes within the conflict, allowing the isolation and examination of sections of the conflicts. Similarly, this aids both within-case and across-case comparison, as phases can both be compared against the other phases in the same conflict, and with phases in the other two conflicts.

The conflicts are divided into phases where there is a change in the nature of the conflicts. In assessing this, a number of factors are considered. These include: changes in strategy by either the state or non-state actors; changes in the state or non-state actors, such as a change of government, split in the insurgents or emergence of a new group; major contextual changes, such as the starting or ending of foreign support; and major changes in the motivation or grievance behind the violence. There are no set criteria for what constitutes a new phase; in some situations it is clear, and in others there is more than one possibility. In the end it was a subjective choice made after extensively researching the conflicts. The construction of the phases was sometimes altered as new information and insights came to light, again reflecting the investigative nature of research.

## FIELD RESEARCH

The main focus of the field research was on conducting interviews with actors directly involved in the conflict. In addition research was conducted in local newspaper archives, and local libraries used to access locally authored (often by those directly involved) material unavailable outside the region. The newspaper archives were particularly helpful in gaining an overall picture of the dynamics of the conflicts, for they made it possible to trace the evolution of the conflict and provided a useful tool to validate the construction of phases in each conflict.<sup>14</sup>

The primary focus, however, was on conducting interviews, including:

- state actors – police, army, politicians, negotiators;
- non-state actors – insurgents, political groups, negotiators; and
- civil society – charities, NGOs, journalists, local academics and experts, civilians from conflict areas.

Attention was paid to ensuring that a balanced set of interviews were conducted: a) with representation from all state, non-state and civil society actors; b) ensuring that there was a balance of actors spoken to, such as interviewing both leaders and foot soldiers; and c) including actors involved at each of the phases of the conflicts. However, despite considerable effort, this was not always possible. Conducting the field research was not just an investigative process into the conflicts, but it was also an investigative process to find suitable interviewees.

The nature of the field research was a somewhat of an evolving process. One interview led to another in an exciting but unpredictable manner; the process represented at times more of a detective story than traditional academic research. The starting point for the interviews was a set of questions derived from the literature review; however, as each interview brought up alternative information, unearthed further

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<sup>14</sup> Newspaper archives were only examined for the Punjab and Nagaland case studies, as in Mindanao suitable archives covering the relevant time period could not be located.

questions and new leads, it moved the research in different directions. Thus a dialectic process was created in which the information found then reformed or redirected the questions to be researched; although this process was at times constrained by practical factors, such as being unable to find the necessary people to interview.

Due to the nature of the research, and to allow interviewees to speak freely, all interviews were conducted on the basis of anonymity, and their details have been withheld.<sup>15</sup> Because of this, there is unfortunately a limit to the clarity of the sources of information for the reader. Some of those interviewed have also written articles or books on the conflicts, which have also been cited. Hence some author's may play a greater role than would first appear from looking at the bibliography. However, all due care has been taken to avoid undue bias or influence when writing this thesis.

## CASE STUDY SELECTION

The case studies selected are three ethno-nationalist separatist conflicts: 1) the Naga Insurgency (1954-1997), 2) the Punjab Crisis (1978-1995) – both from India – and 3) the Moro separatist conflict in the Philippines (1968-1996).

These case studies were selected for a number of reasons:

- 1) They shared a number of similarities that made them suitable for comparison. They can all be classed as the same 'type' of conflict: all are ethno-separatist style conflicts involving a distinct ethnic group, each of which has had a long history independently of the state of which they now form a part. Similarly, in each case the ethnic group is also of a different religious faith than the majority of the country. In India, the Punjab Crisis was a Sikh-based movement and in Nagaland the Nagas are Christian, compared to a majority Hindu India. In the Philippines the Moros are a Muslim minority in a Christian majority country.

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<sup>15</sup> Checked by PhD supervisors, and available for consultation by examiners.

Furthermore, all three of the conflicts have their roots in colonisation. The Punjab and Naga territories became a part of India through British imperialism; likewise, the Moros became absorbed into the Philippines under Spanish and then American colonisation. Many of the conflicts' grievances can be traced to the results of colonisation and, importantly, the problems of de-colonisation. In addition, all of the conflicts take place over a long period, the shortest being 15 years and the longest nearly sixty years. Across their lifespan each has seen several episodes of escalation and de-escalation, providing plenty of scope for investigation and comparison.

- 2) The three case studies have a number of crucial differences that make the comparisons more insightful. They are all ethno-religious conflicts, but in each case the ethnic minority is of a different religion. Similarly, the religion of the majority is different in India and the Philippines. Each of the conflicts takes place across a different time period, and as such take place in a different context both regionally and internationally, with potentially different drivers and factors effecting escalation. The state responses in all three share some similarities, but also, many differences in strategy and tactics. Perhaps most importantly they have had very different outcomes, from an overwhelming state victory in the Punjab Crisis to the ongoing stalemate/peace process in both Nagaland and Mindanao.
- 3) There were also practical issues. In each the English language is a widely-spoken and official language. All had English-language newspapers, and local academic literature and other archive material was largely in English and could be researched. Plus, as English was widely spoken, it made interviewing easier, cutting down of the number of times interpreters were needed and generally making operating in these regions much easier.
- 4) Also significantly, all three conflicts had either ended, or had de-escalated significantly and were in ongoing peace processes. This made the option of conducting field research a realistic possibility, but also meant that interviewees would feel freer to speak their minds than perhaps if the conflict was still raging;

- plus this allowed the construction of the causal process with an end point.
- 5) Finally, in both India and the Philippines there were a number of other conflicts which could have been chosen, some better known, such as Kashmir and the Naxalites in India, or the New People's Army in the Philippines. These were not chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, the conflicts were still live, making them harder to research but also without the (final) de-escalation to examine. Secondly, one of the aims of this project was to focus on under-researched conflicts. Thirdly, they did not fit the ethno-nationalist type selected; both the Naxalites and the NPA are communist insurgencies, whilst in Kashmir the conflict is a ethno-nationalist conflict; it differs significantly from the others chosen, largely due to the role of India and Pakistan fighting over the disputed territory.

## WHY ASIA?

There appears a general bias within the literature on conflict studies and related fields towards examining western cases, largely in Europe and North America and to a lesser degree the Middle East. In the last decade there has also been an upsurge of interest in civil wars or resource wars in Africa. However, there still remains a more limited focus on Asia. The majority of research on Asian conflicts has been from a western perspective, focusing on conflicts that are part of a wider global narrative that concerns the West. As such, research has largely addressed conflicts in Asia that fit into either the wider contexts of the Cold War or, in recent years, Al-Qaeda and Pan-Islamist networks.

The underlying objective of the case study selection of this project has been to widen the 'gene pool' of conflict research. By making a foray into conflicts in an under-researched region, this will add to the overall fount of knowledge and hopefully generate new insights and hypotheses that will prove the foundation of future theories. It is to this end that the project decided to focus on the Asian region and further within this to focus on conflicts that do not fit into the western

perspective. As such, this project examines the conflicts in Asia that have been largely forgotten in the west.<sup>16</sup>

## THE THREE NARRATIVES OF ASIAN IRREGULAR CONFLICTS

Post-1945, irregular conflicts in Asia roughly fitted into three narratives of western perspectives:

- the Cold War, Communism and de-colonisation;
- Pan-Islamist networks; and
- Ethno-nationalist separatist struggles.

## THE COLD WAR, COMMUNISM AND DE-COLONISATION

The first major narrative in the western literature of post-1945 irregular warfare in Asia is that of communist insurgencies. In the West this was largely viewed through the combined lens of de-colonisation and the Cold War. These conflicts enjoyed the attention of western researchers, largely because they were seen as a wider part of the Cold War. There is extensive literature addressing western attempts at counter-insurgency, focusing in particular on the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War. These cases are famous for the overwhelming COIN successes in Malaya and the complete failure of US strategy in Vietnam. As Paul Dixon elucidates, ‘The Malayan campaign was one of the few apparently successful counter-insurgency operations of the post-war period and contrasted starkly with the US military’s subsequent debacle in Vietnam’ (Dixon 2009, 354). As such the Malayan campaign has become something of a counter-insurgency paradigm, which has returned to prominence in recent years with the western interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, this was not the only paradigm to have emerged from

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<sup>16</sup> While the conflict in Mindanao is well known in the west, the focus is largely on the later stages of the conflict with the emergence of groups with an Islamic ideology.

irregular warfare in Asia. In 1949 the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung, successfully drove the Kuomintang (KMT) from the Chinese mainland. Mao's strategy of Protracted War was not only a success, but also crucially a break from communist orthodoxy, which prescribed revolution as being led by the workers in the cities following industrialisation. Maoist strategy by contrast offered a blueprint for rural-based guerrilla warfare to lead a successful revolution. Maoist strategy has become a guerrilla paradigm that has been adhered to by countless insurgent groups around the world, including many that do not share the communist ideology.

Although the West has tended to see communist insurgencies through the lens of the Cold War, there were still many raging decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, most notably the long-running Maoist insurgencies in India (Naxalites) and the Philippines (New People's Army), both of which have lasted over forty years and are still ongoing. The Naxalite insurgency has emerged to pose 'the most serious threat to Indian security today' and affects 'forty per cent of the country's geographical area and over 30% of its population' (Marwah 2009, 93). Elsewhere the decade-long Nepali Civil War led ultimately to the elections with the Maoist forming part of the subsequent coalition government. This is not just a testament to the strength of the Maoist threat, but also shows the limited value of only viewing the conflicts through the lens of the Cold War. These conflicts have an individual local dynamic which is more important to understanding their nature.

## PAN-ISLAMIST NETWORKS

Since 9/11 the trend in terrorism and insurgency literature on the Asian region has been to focus on Islamic extremism. Much has been written about the rise of the fourth wave of religious-based terrorism (Rapoport 2001). Where previously the numerous Islamic insurgencies in Asia were viewed in isolation, they were now seen as interconnected. Carlyle Thayer has argued that 'the discourse on new terrorism in Southeast Asia became dominated by what might be termed the Al-Qaeda-centric paradigm' which 'provided

the primary framework for the analysis through which the activities of militant Islamic groups in Southeast Asia were viewed' (Thayer 2005, 53). Al-Qaeda came to play the secret hand operating behind the scenes in a variety of conflicts, much in the same way that the US and USSR were blamed for the support of proxies during the Cold War, or Pakistan in the numerous Indian insurgencies. Foreign support had now been replaced by the pan-Islamist non-state actor Al-Qaeda. It has been cited as providing support in terms of finance and training to groups in Indonesia, and Mindanao in the Philippines (Tan 2003, 124-27).

The trend to see all the conflicts through the paradigm of Al-Qaeda has somewhat been at the expense of losing sight of the internal dynamics of the conflicts. Andrew Tan explains:

Indeed, the local dynamic is perhaps more dominant, when one takes into account the fact that almost all Muslim rebel groups, including Islamist radical groups such as JI [Jemaah Islamiah], in fact predated Al-Qaeda and emerged in response to local grievances and conditions. (Tan 2008, 314)

Although it is likely Al-Qaeda has played a part in the dynamics of these conflicts, exactly to what extent is highly debated (*ibid.*). Importantly, the conflicts have their own dynamics which reference to pan-Islamism will not explain. Further, interconnection between the Muslim world and regional Asian conflicts far pre-dates Al-Qaeda. Support from the Organisation of Islamic States played an important part in the conflict between the MNLF and the Philippine state in the early 1970s.

## ETHNO-SEPARATIST CONFLICTS

The third narrative is that of ethno-separatist conflicts. Such conflicts are numerous across the diverse ethnic tapestry of South and South-East Asia, which has essentially been artificially divided by the borders of nation states largely imposed by western colonisers. In the post-1945 world this has seen the governments of many new states trying to

forge a nation out of a disparate collection of identities. Paribatra and Samudavanija remark:

In post-colonial Southeast Asia... it has been conveniently forgotten by central governments that the constructing of what is more accurately a state-nation, merely means that external or western imperialism had been replaced by an internalized one, which is potentially more brutal and enduring. (Paribatra and Samudavanija 1984, 41, quoted in Tan 2000, 271)

These conflicts tend to be examined from an ethno-centric or historical viewpoint, in which research more often than not focuses on ethnic or religious differences, issues of marginalisation or exploitation, or the historical root of the conflict. The result is that a large part of the research addresses the causes of the conflicts, rather than how they develop over time. Similarly, there is less research that looks beyond the ethnic dimension and seeks to understand the other factors, both external and internal, that drive the conflict. Part of the motivation of this research project is to examine three ethno-separatist conflicts, from a non-ethno-centric viewpoint, and to explore what other dynamics are at play in driving the conflicts.

### WHY INDIA AND THE PHILIPPINES?

Asia is a massive and diverse region, and for this project the area in consideration was narrowed down to South Asia and South-east Asia. These regions were chosen both for the complexity of the cases on offer, as well as for the practicalities of being accessible for field research. Within these areas the scope was reduced further to look at three case studies across India and the Philippines. Both countries have suffered multiple insurgencies and terrorist conflicts ranging from revolution, to separatist, to religious.

Despite the scope of opportunity for academic work, there exist relatively few comparative research projects focusing on the conflicts in India and the Philippines. Similarly, there has been even less aimed

at addressing the question of escalation. This is perhaps a gap in the literature, as many of these conflicts have lasted for decades, during which the intensity of violence has varied dramatically. The question of why stands out as being unanswered.

## ORIGINALITY CLAIM

The originality claim of this thesis is based on four arguments. Firstly, this study takes the starting point that to understand the conflict it is necessary to view it as an integral whole, examining it across its entire lifespan. It is not simply made up of two halves – the beginning and the end – but rather is an interconnected phenomenon. It is essential to understand the entirety of the conflict to properly understand any one part. Therefore this study treats the conflict as one entity whilst examining it through a series of discrete but inter-connected stages. This process allows the investigation of the causal mechanisms and processes that drive escalation and de-escalation in violence across the lifespan of the conflicts.

The second argument is methodological. Most studies on understanding conflicts fit into one of two categories: single in-depth case studies, or large-N studies of either comparative studies of multiple case studies or quantitative studies utilising socio-economic data. Each of these types of study add something new to our knowledge of conflicts, but they are all limited in their power to enlighten. This study takes a third methodological approach: that of a comparative study of a limited number of in-depth case studies. As such, it sits within a school of research thought that advocates the return to comparisons of in-depth case studies, as a means to complementing previous work and examining areas beyond their scope.

The third argument is that the study is based not only on existing secondary literature, but is also combined with field research on each conflict. This research took the form of extensive interviews with those involved in all sides of the conflict. Interviews were conducted with actors from the state, insurgent groups, civil society and the population themselves. This has given unique insights and perspectives which are not available in the existing literature.

The final argument is the choice of case studies selected. Through focussing on three under research case studies this thesis will help to increase the case study gene pool. Within the existing literature Western, African and Middle Eastern case studies dominate, and this study is deliberately focused on Asia.

## THESIS STRUCTURE

The rest of the thesis is laid out in the following way: Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are case studies of the Naga Insurgency, Punjab Crisis and Moro Rebellion respectively. Each case study starts with a chronological history of the conflict, broken down into discrete phases, so as to best demonstrate the causal dynamics across the duration of the conflict. This is followed by an analysis of the factors outlined in Chapter 1 which drive the dynamics of violence. Chapter 5 presents the comparative analysis and draws conclusions.



# 2

## THE NAGA INSURGENCY

### PART 1: THE BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The Naga Insurgency is the longest-running and bloodiest of India's internal conflicts. The causes of the conflict go back to the end of the British Indian Empire and the desire of the Naga tribes to regain their independence and to not be included within the new Union of India. Violence has raged for decades since the outbreak of violence in 1954 in the remote Northeastern region inhabited by the Naga tribes. Ceasefire agreements between the Indian state and the two main insurgent groups were signed in 1997 and 2001, and whilst this has led to de-escalation in violence, after fifteen years of talks a political solution has yet to be found. The groups remain armed and there is the constant threat that the conflict will reignite.

### SOURCES

This chapter is based on a review of secondary literature and interviews carried out by the author during 2009 with former and current insurgent leaders and cadets, retired Indian Army officers, political leaders, human rights activists, journalists and academic experts.<sup>17</sup> As in any conflict there are many sides to the Naga conflict, and everyone sees events from their own perspective. Nevertheless, given this

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17 See Appendix 3 for a list of interviews.

context, it has been possible to piece together a detailed history of the conflict based on the balance of probabilities of the facts revealed by the available sources. In contentious areas care has been taken to outline alternative accounts or interpretations. However, ultimately the account represents the author's best effort as an historian in weighing up many contradictory and competing pieces of evidence to shed some light on a complex and relatively unknown conflict.

## WHO ARE THE NAGAS?

The Nagas are a tribal people of about 4 million from the hilly frontier region along the Indo-Burmese border. Three-quarters of the Naga population is located in India, concentrated in the State of Nagaland, with sizable numbers in parts of the surrounding states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. On the Burmese side, they are located in the Somraha tract along the border. This combined area, known as 'Greater Nagaland', or 'Nagalandim', covers 120,000 square kilometres (Dwivedi 2004, 106).



FIG. 2 Nagaland State<sup>18</sup>



FIG. 3 Greater Nagaland (Nagalandim)

<sup>18</sup> Maps taken from <http://www.dailyherald.com/special/passagefromindia/nagaland.asp> (last accessed 4 May 2009).

The Nagas see themselves as one people, but there is incredible linguistic diversity across the 42 tribes that make up the Nagas (Dwivedi 2004, 107; Vashum 2000, 22). The Nagas are overwhelmingly Christian (over 90%) with Baptists making up the largest denomination (75% of the population), making Nagaland the most Baptist state in the world (Horam 1988, 166).

## THE END OF AN EMPIRE

Central to the Naga conflict is the Nagas' belief that they are not Indians – nor have they ever been a part of India – and as such should not be part of modern-day India. After the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824, the British took control Assam in 1826, and it was not long before the British were leading expeditions into the Naga Hills in an attempt to quell the Naga tribes and prevent them from launching raids into Assam. Gradually the British began to expand into the Naga Hills, and by the early 1880s, after nearly fifty years of resistance, the Naga-inhabited areas were largely absorbed into the British Indian Empire (Mullik 1972, 296; Shimray 2005, 34-42). Although technically all the Naga tribes came under British India, most of the Naga areas were lightly administered, with many areas completely unadministered. Following the separation of Burma from British India in 1937 as a separately administered colony, the Naga areas were split between these two British colonies. Prior to 1947, as B. N. Mullik<sup>19</sup> explains, the various Naga tribes were divided into four different administrative groups:

- 1) The Naga Hills District, which comprised the present Kohima and Mokokchung Districts, an 'excluded' district under Assam;
- 2) the Tuensang area, consisting of a controlled area contiguous with the eastern boundary of the Naga Hills District, directly under the Governor, and an unadministered area beyond the controlled area up to the Burma border;

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<sup>19</sup> Mullik was a former Director of the IB during the early part of the Naga Insurgency.

- 3) Ukhrul, Mao-Maram and Tamenglong Sub-Divisions in Manipur State; and
- 4) the Burmese Naga Hills District, with headquarters at Sinkaling-Hkamti.

(Mullik 1972, 295)

These areas at the edge of an empire came more under British suzerainty than sovereignty, lightly administered and many parts unadministered; under the British Government of India Act 1935, the Naga Hills had been given special status as an ‘Excluded Area’ (Sinha 2007, 51; Iralu 2009 70). It is worth noting that under British rule the situation was similar for those Naga tribes that were located on the Burmese side of the border (Sinha 2007, 15-16). Brigadier (Dr) SP Sinha<sup>20</sup> comments: ‘The similarity of administration of frontier areas on both sides of the Indo-Burma border is, therefore, significant’ (Sinha 2007, 16).

When the British left India, the Nagas felt sovereignty should return to them: ‘You [the British] are the only people who have ever conquered us and when you go, we should be as we were’ (quoted in Das 2007, 22; Sinha 2007, 51).<sup>21</sup> Instead, they found themselves under the sovereignty of the Indian Union.<sup>22</sup>

## THE BACKGROUND TO THE NAGA INSURGENCY

The Naga independence movement came into being towards the end of the British colonial period, with the movement tracing its roots back to the 4,000 Nagas who fought during the First World War alongside the British. On returning home after the war, the veterans formed the Nagas’ first political grouping, the ‘Naga Club,’ in Kohima City in 1918 (Goswami 2007, 287; Sinha 2007, 51). The Club’s members were largely

<sup>20</sup> Brigadier (Dr) SP Sinha served for 35 years in the Indian Army.

<sup>21</sup> Quote from the Naga Club’s declaration to the Simon Commission in 1929. The Naga Club was the predecessor of the NNC.

<sup>22</sup> For this reason many Naga nationalists view the Naga struggle as a struggle for sovereignty and independence and not for secession from India, as they argue the Nagas were never part of the Indian Union to secede from it (Iralu 2009, 29).

drawn from the British colonial administration and tribal headmen. Interestingly, the British were quite happy with the previously disparate Naga tribes forming a common political identity (Goswami 2007, 287). After WWII the Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed by the Deputy Commissioner for the Naga Hills District to bring together all different Naga tribes onto one platform. In 1946 it was transformed into a political organisation, becoming the National Naga Council (NNC), with T Aliba Imti as its President and T Sakhrie as the General Secretary (Sinha 2007, 52; Mullik 1972, 298-99). In its early years the NNC was the only organised political formation, dominating Naga politics; and subsequently became the political wing of Naga rebels (Sinha 2007, 52).

### THE NINE POINT AGREEMENT: THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT A POLITICAL SOLUTION

From the beginning, the Nagas and the newly independent state of India had a turbulent relationship. In the months leading up to Indian independence, on 29 June 1947 an attempt was made to resolve the Naga issue through the signing of the Nine Point Agreement between the Governor of Assam State,<sup>23</sup> Akbar Hydari, and NNC representatives from nine of the Naga tribes (Goswami 2007, 290; Rajagopalan 13, 2008; Vashum 2000, 79). The agreement recognised the NNC as the representative of the Naga people, ascribing it both legislative and executive powers. In addition it provided for the creation of a Naga court based on Naga customary law, and recognised the Nagas' right to their land and forests (Goswami 2007, 288-90). However, this was not enough for an 'extremist' faction within the NNC, led by the charismatic Angami Zapu Phizo, who rejected the Nine Point Agreement (Goswami 2009, 288). Under pressure from Phizo, the NNC declared independence on 14 August 1947, one day before India's own independence (Goswami 2007, 288; Sinha 2007, 53; Horam 1988, 44).

The agreement in many ways merely delayed an inevitable crisis, as it was not long before problems arose from the agreement's controversial 'clause 9'. The clause stated that '[t]he Governor of Assam as agent of

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<sup>23</sup> At this stage the Naga-inhabited areas were part of the Indian State of Assam.

the Government of Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at.' (D9<sup>24</sup>) The NNC read this to mean recognition of their right to self-determination, whereas the Indian government read it as allowing the Nagas to suggest administrative changes, but not to secede (Das 2007, 23). The argument over the clause's interpretation was to serve as the prelude to violence in the following decade.

## PART 2: THE PHASES OF THE NAGA INSURGENCY

The Naga conflict is best analysed by breaking it down into seven distinct phases. Each phase represents a change in the nature of the conflict and the dynamics that were driving it. Phase 1, 'A national struggle', runs from the British departure from India in 1947 until the formation of the Naga People's Convention (NPC) in 1956. In this phase the conflict was a truly national struggle, with the Nagas united in their fight for a sovereign Naga State under the Naga National Council (NNC). The second phase marks the first major cleavage in the Nagas, with the emergence of the 'overground' and 'Underground' following the formation of Nagaland State. The third phase starts in 1964 with Indo-Naga peace talks and continues through to the collapse of the talks and the ceasefire. The next phase runs from 1968 to 1975, following the return to war and the defeat of the NNC, and culminates with the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975. The fifth phase, from 1975-1988, follows the collapse of the NNC and the emergence of the new National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in the Naga territories on the Burmese side of the border. The sixth phase, from 1988 -1997, starts with the split of the NSCN into the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K), and follows the escalation of violence in India as the NSCN (IM) moved from Burma back into India. The final phase, 1997-2005, follows the rise of

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<sup>24</sup> Document 9: 'The Hydari Agreements (Nine Point Agreement)', reprinted in IWGIA Document 56, 1986, 198-200.

inter-factional violence and criminality that followed the 1997 ceasefire with the NSCN (IM) and the ceasefire with the NSCN (K) in 2001.

## PHASE 1: 1947 TO 1957 – A NATIONAL STRUGGLE

This stage sees the rise to prominence of the charismatic Naga nationalist Phizo, who takes the NNC in the direction of independence. Phizo fervently campaigns across the Naga areas, promoting the cause of Naga sovereignty and organising the people for the struggle ahead. At the same time the Indian state administration begins to move into previously unadministered areas, causing resentment among the local population. Gradually the situation escalates as a campaign of civil disobedience slides into violence on both sides. As the event spirals out of control, the Indian Army is sent in to pacify the Nagas. The Army's scorched earth policy and widespread human rights abuses play straight into the hands of the nationalists and unite the Naga people in their struggle against India.

### THE RISE OF PHIZO AND THE OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE

The years following the Nine Point Agreement saw the rise of the Naga leader Phizo and his extremist section within the NNC. Under Phizo the NNC was transformed from 'an amorphous middle-class organisation' into a militant group set on achieving an independent sovereign Nagaland (Das 2007, 23). Phizo took the NNC away from the moderate views of its first General Secretary T. Sakhrie, who had preferred a political solution within the Indian Union as he saw the Naga territories as too small politically and economically to stand by themselves, especially perched between the two huge nations of India and China (Goswami 2007, 291). As B. N. Mullik describes,

Phizo, on return<sup>25</sup> to Naga Hills district, from the very beginning tried to capture the Naga National Council and use it as an instrument

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25 Phizo had been detained in jail in Rangoon after WWII for his role in collaborating with the INA.

for forging an independent Nagaland. But many of the leaders of the Naga National Council were moderates and were satisfied with the Hydari agreement. (Mullik 1972, 299)

This led to a power struggle within the NNC, culminating in Phizo's resignation in 1949. However, as Sushil K. Pillai explains: 'He rejoined later and by a series of shrewd moves was elected by a majority of one vote as President of the NNC in December 1950' (Pillai 1999, 51). Phizo had an additional helping hand, as Lt General J R Mukherjee<sup>26</sup> points out: 'All Naga government servants who in actual fact formed the majority of the Naga intelligentsia were banned by the government from participation in the NNC, consequently Phizo's views prevailed' (Mukherjee 2006, 32).

Phizo met with Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru in 1949<sup>27</sup> and again in 1950, when he 'gave Phizo almost a blank cheque within the constitution' (Mullik 1972, 299). However, Phizo wanted a clause inserted into the terms of the Nine Point Agreement that the Nagas would have the right to secede, which Nehru was not willing to concede (*ibid.*). Later that year, on 5 December, Phizo was elected President of the NNC, and immediately afterwards the NNC set about holding a plebiscite on independence (Iralu 2009, 58). In the following months Phizo and the NNC leadership toured the Naga areas 'explaining to the people, the purpose and implications of the national plebiscite' (*ibid.* 61). At the time the Assam government did not take these events seriously, for they 'were of the view that Phizo had no influence, the divisive forces among the tribals would prevent them from coming together and Phizo was in no position to create any trouble' (Mullik 1972, 300-1).

On 16 May 1951 a plebiscite on independence was held, which resulted in Phizo declaring 99% support for Naga independence (Goswami 2007, 292; Vashum 2000, 80; D11<sup>28</sup>). The result was taken by Phizo as undeni-

26 Lt General J. R. Mukherjee served in the Indian army for 41 years, including as Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command.

27 '[A]t that time the Prime Minister got the impression that Phizo was a crank and need not be taken seriously' (Mullik 1972, 299).

28 Document 11: *A Brief Account on Nagaland*. Prepared by Federal Government of Nagaland, June 2000.

able proof of the Nagas' desire for self-determination. Copies of the result were duly dispatched to the President of India, the President of the All India Congress Party and the General Secretary of the United Nations (Iralu 2009, 61). To this day Naga factions fight over who is the heir to this result, and the legitimacy that it instils. Many have challenged the validity of the plebiscite, not least because it was held in only two districts, Kohima and Mokokchung (Dwivedi 2004, 107; Das 2007, 24).<sup>29</sup> As Pillai sums up, 'The fact, nevertheless, is that most Nagas now believe in the validity of this "plebiscite"' (Pillai 1999, 52).

### CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND THE SLIDE INTO VIOLENCE

The Nagas had not set out to lead a violent struggle for independence, notes Mullik:

Up to this time it must be said to the credit of the Nagas that they were not thinking of any violent movement. They were hoping that the result of the plebiscite would sufficiently influence the authorities to give a dispensation in their favour. (Mullik 1972, 302)

The plebiscite was then followed by a boycott of the 1952 General Election, and a campaign of civil disobedience including 'the mass resignation of school teachers, boycott of all Government of India functions and refusal to pay taxes' (Shimray 2005, 67). In March 1952, Phizo, as the President of the NNC, went to New Delhi to meet with the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, but the meeting did not go well. In a volatile discussion, Nehru is alleged to have raged 'whether heaven falls or India goes into pieces and blood runs red in the country, whether I am here or anyone else comes, Nagas will not be allowed to be independent' (Vashum 2000, 80). This was followed by comments in the Indian parliament that the Nagas' claim of self-determination was 'completely unwise, impracticable and unacceptable' (*ibid.*).

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to point out that the plebiscite was only held within the Naga Hills District, and as such did not include the Naga areas of Northern Manipur or Tuensang District (Iralu 2009, 61), or the Naga areas in Burma.

In an attempt to address the rising tide of nationalism, in the following year there was a joint programme by the Prime Ministers of India and Burma to visit the Naga territories in both India and Burma. As part of this tour a large public meeting was planned in Kohima on 30 March 1953, to which Nagas from all over had been invited. However, the situation only deteriorated further when the entire Naga audience staged a walkout in demonstration against being refused permission to read out a statement in support of political self-determination (Vashum 2000, 81; Goswami 2007, 82; Shimray 2005, 68; Mullik 1972, 303-5; Keyho, 16). More than just an act of defiance or an aimed insult, it demonstrated the hold which Phizo ‘had already acquired on the Nagas, and this incident also demonstrates the unity of the Nagas in their demand for independence’ (Mullik 1972, 305).

It was a shocking experience for Nehru; an insult he would never forget (Shimray 2005, 68; Mullik 1972, 305). Shortly afterwards arrest warrants were issued for the NNC leaders, and after raids of their houses, the leadership went underground. The Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act of 1953 was promulgated and the Naga Hills District was declared a ‘disturbed’ area, bestowing wide-ranging powers on the security forces (Iralu 2009, 65; Shimray 2005, 68). This was the start of a crackdown on the Nagas, and, as described by one former senior Naga politician, the beginning of police atrocities (C8<sup>30</sup>). According to the FGN/NNC official history, ‘in April 1953 the Indian Government resorted to political persecution of mass arrest, torture, rape and other acts of terrorism against the Nagas’ (D11).

## THE FREE NAGAS – HONGKIN GOVERNMENT

Under British Indian rule, not all of the Naga tribes had been administered. British administration had only reached as far as the south-eastern regions of Naga territory, which were included within Assam State (the Naga Hills District) and the northern parts of Manipur State. However, the north-eastern Naga areas such as the Tuensang Frontier

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30 C8: former senior Naga politician, interviewed on 22 December 2009.

Division were part of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)<sup>31</sup>, and, like other parts of the NEFA, had been left unadministered during the entire British Colonial period.<sup>32</sup> Indian troops only entered these territories in 1948 (Iralu 2009, 68; Mullik 1972, 306). The Naga areas on the Burmese side of the border were similarly classed as frontier areas, and under minimal administration during British rule (Sinha 2007, 15-16). After Indian independence in 1947, the Indian State gradually began to move into the unadministered areas within India, which caused strong resentment and reaction to the new Indian presence amongst the Nagas (Mullik 1972, 307). As Mullik points out, ‘independent Indian [sic] could not leave large bodies of its population unadministered and uncivilised and still in the stage of head-hunting’ (*ibid.* 306).

Following the crackdown, Phizo travelled widely through the ‘free Naga’ areas – both the Tuensang division within India and Naga areas across the border in Burma – spreading his message of pan-Nagaism and of a sovereign Naga state (Mullik 1972, 307; NNC2<sup>33</sup>, C3<sup>34</sup>). As Mullik comments: ‘If [sic] was easy to inflame these tribals who were already embittered against the Government and so easily succumbed to Phizo’s preaching of open defiance of the authority’ (Mullik 1972, 307). However, Mullik argues that Phizo also had an alternative motive: the NNC at this time, in contrast to Phizo, was committed to a non-violent struggle, and it would have been impossible to launch an armed struggle in the Naga Hills District, where the NNC was strong. In the Tuensang areas, however, the NNC did not at this time exert any influence, and Phizo was free to preach his campaign of violence (*ibid.* 306-7). It was in this period that Phizo first set up the political and military organisation necessary to fight for independence. As one Burmese Naga explained Phizo’s coming to the eastern side was not just a visit. It led to the ignition of the war (C3). Phizo urged the free

<sup>31</sup> Later the NEFA became the State of Arunachal Pradesh.

<sup>32</sup> ‘[T]he tribes in Tuensung were still practising head-hunting and slavery without any interference by authorities even though head-hunting had been stopped in the Naga Hills District since it had come under British rule’ (Mullik 1972, 306).

<sup>33</sup> NNC2: fourteen NNC veterans in Kohima, Nagaland on 9 December 2009.

<sup>34</sup> C3: NGO worker from eastern Naga area, interviewed in Dimapur on 15 December 2009.

Nagas to ‘join hands with us and free us’ from Indian occupation (C3). In 1954 the first Naga armed group was formed, the Naga ‘Safe Guards’.<sup>35</sup> The Hongkin Government<sup>36</sup> followed on 18 September 1954, the first pan-Naga government covering all the free Naga areas on both sides of the border (Iralu 2009, 68; NNC2; C3).

## ROAD TO VIOLENCE – DECLARATION OF WAR

By autumn 1953 the Naga population was rallying behind the NNC, and the civil administration had collapsed (Franke 2009, 92). Throughout 1954 sporadic violence spread across the Naga areas, though it remained largely a law and order problem. The epicentre of violence was the Tuensang Division, a free Naga area on the Indian side of the border. Following the ‘mounting atrocities and provocations’ across Nagaland, the Tuensang side revolted against the ‘Indian invasion’ and launched the first counter-attack from the village of Huker on 24 March 1955 (Iralu 2009, 69; Keyho, 19; Mullik 1972, 308). Violence soon spiralled out of control, with the Assam Rifles<sup>37</sup> and the Naga rebels actively engaged in open fighting. It was soon apparent that the Assam Rifles were incapable of controlling the Naga forces by themselves, and later

35 The ‘Safe Guards’ later became the ‘Home Guards’, and then the ‘Naga Federal Army’ – NFA.

36 Details on the Hongkin Government are limited. Pillai gives an interesting alternative account: ‘To the best of my knowledge a story about the Hongkin Government has not appeared in print so far, but everyone in Nagaland still chuckles about it. It bears telling to illustrate how an ethnic movement can be built up around fact and fiction. Hongkin in the Chang dialect means “Foreigner-out!” Hongkin is also the name of a Gaon Bura (headman) of the Khamniungan village of Noku. He was 62 when I first met him in 1961 and was still as alert when I met him again in 1993. He recollects the day Phizo visited his village in 1954. “He gave me a tie and a suit to wear and took photographs of me. He then told me that he was appointing me as President of a Naga State but I was not to tell this to the Indians.” Thereafter Hongkin added indignantly “He then took back the suit and didn’t even leave behind the tie!” The NNC started collecting taxes and laying ambushes in his name while Hongkin went about his life undisturbed’ (Pillai 1999, 55-56).

37 The Assam Rifles is a paramilitary force of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, functioning under the administrative and operational control of the Indian Army.

that year, in October 1955, the Indian Security Forces (ISF) were brought in to take on the insurgents. War with the Nagas had begun (Horam 1988, 81; Mullik 1972, 308). The Indian government's military apparatus operating against the Nagas soon swelled to two Army divisions and 35 battalions of the Assam Rifles, or Armed Police (Horam 1988, 80). At the same time the conflict spread out of the Tuensang division, and by 'March 1956 Phizo had extended his violent operations to the Naga Hills District' (Mullik 1972, 309). Phizo's forces continued to grow in strength; by June they even launched an attack on the capital Kohima from three different directions and succeeded in temporarily occupying the village (*ibid.* 311). In a sign of tribal infighting to come, the attack was undermined by a split in the fighting force along tribal lines<sup>38</sup> (*ibid.* 309). Nevertheless, after the Kohima debacle the Army took the Naga rebels much more seriously, and many more troops were brought in to contain the rising threat (*ibid.* 312). At the same time tensions were rising between the two factions of the NNC: 'By June 1955, a rift between Phizo's extremist group and the moderates had widened and inter-faction assassinations commenced' (Pillai 1999, 56).

As the trouble brewed and the situation began to spiral out of control, the Indian government at the 'centre' had been too preoccupied with a series of other crises to pay it much attention initially. 'India, of course, was engaged in much more serious things,' recounts Mullik,

Sheikh Abdullah had gone to prison in Kashmir; a new confrontation, though not yet unfriendly, was taking place across the Tibetan frontier; Pakistan was continuing to be extremely hostile; Goa was giving trouble; and so the Government of India had their hands full and did not mind leaving the affairs of Nagaland in the hands of the Assam Government viewing it as an internal affair of that state.

(Mullik 1972, 307-8)

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38 Mullik: 'At this time a split took place amongst the Nagas themselves. The main striking force of the Nagas consisted of the Sema tribals under the leadership of Kaito, but Phizo, an Angami, who hated the Semas and was apprehensive of their strength, had retained Thungi Chang as his Commander-in-Chief' (Mullik 1972, 311). When Phizo refused to make Kaito C.-in-C. he withdrew his forces, allowing the Indian forces to retake Kohima from a weakened Naga force (*ibid.*).

## THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF NAGALAND

In the meantime, after the completion of the 10-year period as set out in the Nine Point Agreement, Phizo and the NNC set about creating a Naga-run parallel state (Das 2007, 23). On 22 March 1956 the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) was instituted, along with a ceremonial flag-raising at Phesinyu and further completed by a constitution and a national anthem. The Federal Government was merged with the existing Hongkin government (covering the free Naga areas) to cover the entire Naga-inhabited areas (Keyho, 20; Ao 2002, 51; NNC2). The constitution set out the roles of the Parliament – comprising two houses: the Kimhao (Upper House) and the Tatar Hoho (Assembly of Representatives) – and President (Horam 1988, 62). In addition the FGN was to maintain a standing army, to be called the Federal Army (NFA) (*ibid.* 63).

There was, though, now a serious split at the top of the NNC between Phizo's supporters and those who sought a political solution with the Indian government – who were branded by the Phizo side as 'national traitors' (Keyho, 17-20; IWGIA 1986, 27). Following the formation of the FGN, the NNC passed into the background, and the tribal structure<sup>39</sup> of the FGN, with a governor in charge of each tribal area, allowed Phizo to counter the influence of the other NNC executive members that had broken away from him (Mullik 1972, 309). The Indian authorities attempted to reach out and work with those breakaway members of the NNC Executive Council, to organise a conference to dispose of Phizo as President of the NNC and to condemn the FGN and its violence (*ibid.* 310). However, when Phizo discovered the plan he

was furious, and in order to teach the defectors a lesson, he had Sakhrie, his closest associate and the brain behind the Naga movement, kidnapped from his house, tied to a tree and brutally tortured to death, so as to strike terror in the hearts of all the other defectors. (*ibid.*)

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<sup>39</sup> The NSCN would later identify this structure as the root cause of tribalism that would come to plague the conflict in later years (Shimray 2005, 150).

## THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE – SCORCHED EARTH POLICY

In an attempt to quell the rising violence, the ISF unleashed a violent campaign to stamp out the insurgents. For such a small population the Indian government committed extensive resources; according to Mullik, ‘there was nearly one security troop for every adult male Naga in the Naga Hills-Tuensang area’ (Mullik 1972, 313). The Indian Army’s ‘scorched earth’ policy saw widespread human rights abuses and wholesale burning of villages, driving the Naga people into the jungle. Keyho described the situation: ‘Almost all Naga villages were burnt down. They also destroyed and burnt down all granaries in order to force the Nagas to die of starvation beside bullets’ (Keyho, 27). From 1956 onwards a large part of the Naga population lived in the jungle, always on the move from the Indian forces (NN3; C2<sup>40</sup>). Keyho recounts: ‘The Army raped and molested women folks as they liked, so the villagers considered their jungle life to be more safe than the villages. They regarded it as the best method to escape from the Army and its tortures’ (*ibid.* 28). There were widespread allegations of the Indian Army committing torture, rape and other atrocities<sup>41</sup> (IWGIA 1986; NNC1<sup>42</sup>, D12<sup>43</sup>). Between 1955 and 1959 this ‘reign of terror’ had caused the death of 75,000 Naga men, women and children<sup>44</sup> (Ao 2002, 53).

40 C2: village elder who lived through the duration of the conflict, interviewed on 8 December 2009.

41 Iralu highlights the Indian caste system as one of the factors accentuating the level of violence perpetrated against the Nagas. In the eyes of the caste-conscious Indian soldier, the Naga tribal was still one step lower than the Sudra [the lowest caste]. As far as he was concerned, the Naga tribal was a casteless non-entity, a savage who was even lower than the animals. It was not surprising then that the average Indian soldier influenced by his religion and social beliefs and protected by his constitution ran amok amongst thousands of unarmed Naga men, women and children, raping, torturing and murdering them as non-entities (Iralu 2009, 81).

42 NNC 1: NNC officials interviewed at Peace Transit Camp, Kohima, Nagaland 6 December 2009.

43 Document 12: ‘The Fate of the Naga People’, reprinted in Document 11.

44 By 1962 this figure would rise to 100,000 (Ao 2002, 53).

To further break the Naga revolt a ‘strategic hamlet’ operation was instigated – a tactic copied from the British ‘protected villages’ policy in Malaya – which had as its objective control of the population by separating citizens from contact with the Naga Underground (Vashum 2000, 81; Mullik 1972, 313). As Mullik explains, ‘[t]he plan was to break the supply and intelligence system of the rebels, who, being a guerrilla force, depended for their supplies and information on the villagers’ (*ibid.*). Another important step was the formation of a Naga militia: ‘the ‘Village Volunteer Force’ and ‘Village Guards’ – trained and armed by the government to take on Naga nationalists’ (Shimray 2005, 252-53). Crucially they also ‘knew the ways of the hostiles’, and Sinha argues that ‘[t]he hostiles considered them a greater threat than the army columns’. These two steps together, Mullik argues, forced the rebels on to the defensive<sup>45</sup> (Mullik 1972, 313).

Ultimately, the military offensive proved to be a massive own goal for the Indian government, and played straight into the hands of Phizo and the NNC. This was perhaps not surprising, considering the lack of experience at that time of both the political leaders and the Army in fighting insurgencies (Sinha 2007, 73; Anand 1980, 245). M. Horam<sup>46</sup> succinctly summed up the impact:

It is ironic but true that the very same army which was in the Naga Hills to prevent insurgency drove so many Nagas to insurgency and rebellion... Naga nationalism, hitherto an embryonic concept, now became the obsession of almost every Naga. (quoted in Shimray 2005, 72)

By the end of 1956 the Naga Federal Army had grown spectacularly from a core of 500 to 15,000 cadets (Horam 1988, 81). Anecdotally, all of the NNC veterans I interviewed gave the atrocities committed by

<sup>45</sup> Shimray notes the importance of the Naga militias in gathering information and intelligence. Mullik also argues this policy was never fully exploited (Shimray 2005, 252-53; Mullik 1972, 313).

<sup>46</sup> There is a bit of confusion over this quote, as Shimray, in the body of the text, states it is from Horam, but the end note cites Maxell. I have so far been unable to find the original source of the quote.

the Indian forces as one of their main reasons for joining the movement (NNC1, NNC2, NNC3<sup>47</sup>, NNC4<sup>48</sup>). The intense barbarity of the Indian operations during this period only fuelled the violence, driving the Nagas into the hands of the nationalists, and ensured memories bitter enough to maintain the conflict for decades. As one villager who survived that period articulated: ‘People can be killed and buried. But stories cannot be killed or buried’ (C2).

## PHASE 2: 1957 TO 1964 – THE ROAD TO STATEHOOD AND THE FIRST DIVISIONS

Following the violence of the first phase, this phase sees an early attempt at peace with the formation of the Naga People’s Convention, which leads to the creation of Nagaland State within India. Far from ending the conflict, statehood leads to the first major divisions within the Nagas, between those supporting statehood and those determined to fight on for independence. Furthermore, it divides the Nagas geographically as it does not include all the Naga areas. The NNC continues its armed struggle, and seeks the assistance of Pakistan, which provides arms and training. Meanwhile, the 1962 Indo-China War reminds India of the strategic importance of the Northeast, and of the necessity of resolving the conflict.

### THE NAGA PEOPLE’S CONVENTIONS: AN EARLY SEARCH FOR PEACE

In August 1957, in the midst of the conflict, the Naga moderates convened the first of three ‘Naga People’s Conventions’ (NPCs) in Kohima under the leadership of Imkonglba Ao, in an effort to consult Naga public opinion (Rajagopalan 2008, 14; Goswami 2007, 293). A source that is knowledgeable about the initial stages of the NPC described their

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<sup>47</sup> NNC3: former NNC cadet, interviewed in Kohima, Nagaland on 6 December 2009.

<sup>48</sup> NNC4: former NNC senior officer, interviewed in Kohima on 7 December 2009.

motivation: ‘a way out had to be found in order to save our people’ (C8). However, according to Mullik the NPC was actually the brain-child of S.M. Dutt, Deputy Director of India’s Intelligence Bureau (IB) in Shillong (Mullik 1972, 315), as he explains: ‘We in the IB were also quite clear in our minds that the Naga partisan guerrillas could not be defeated by purely military action. Military action was necessary... to put pressure for the acceptance of a solution which had to be political and must go a long way to satisfy the aspirations of the Nagas’ (*ibid.* 314).

A total of 1,750 delegates turned up to discuss ways of finding a solution to their situation. The NPC resolved to seek a single autonomous Naga Hills and Tuensang district within the Indian Union, which ‘was a big setback to Phizo’s call for independence’ (Goswami 2007, 293). This was exactly the result that Dutt had set the NPC up to deliver; such a political solution had already been agreed by Prime Minister Nehru. Allegedly the NPC was created by Dutt in order to provide the solution with credibility and make it seem an organic Naga idea (Mullik 1972, 315). This is not to say that it was not genuinely supported by the Nagas, even if it was steered by the IB. As a result, on 1 December 1957 the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (NHTA) was created as an autonomous district under the Governor of Assam and the Jurisdiction of the Ministry of External Affairs (Goswami 2007, 293). Further,

[i]n order to create a proper atmosphere for the new administration to function, an amnesty was declared and in the hope that hostiles would respond, further grouping of villages was stopped and it was made known that degrouping of villages would take place as and when [sic] situation improved. (Sinha 2007, 57)

A second NPC was held in May 1958, which reviewed the situation and found that there was a large improvement to the situation following the amnesty (C8). However, this time the FGN/NNC did not attend. Initially the NPC had been supported by the Naga insurgents as a mediator between them and the Indian government, but after the first convention when ‘the NPC took it upon itself to speak on behalf of the Naga people’, they disassociated themselves with the organisation (Horam 1988, 82-83). Moves were made to reach out and include the

FGN/NNC; however, efforts to achieve this were to prove futile due to the undercurrents of Naga tribal politics. Phizo, as an Angami Naga, refused to accept the NPC under its Ao leadership<sup>49</sup> (Goswami 2007, 293). There was a widening rift between the Naga Underground and the NPC (Horam 1988, 84). The third and most significant NPC was held in October 1959, which culminated in a sixteen-point proposal. This put forward the idea of a Nagaland State within the Indian Union, in contrast to Phizo's quest for an independent Naga State.<sup>50</sup> The government was not expecting this request, but was eager to resolve the situation, especially with continued hostile relations with China and Pakistan; and so agreed to the request despite warnings that it would be too small to be a state and might set a precedent that would encourage other tribes (Mullik 1972, 329; Sinha 2007, 277-78). To sum up, '[i]t was apparent that a large part of the army could not be kept tied down for internal pacification work indefinitely' (Mullik 1972, 329).

The Union Government accepted the proposal and in July 1960 the Sixteen Point Agreement was signed, leading to the thirteenth amendment of the Indian constitution, and the creation of the State of Nagaland on 1 December 1963 (Singh 2004, 82). The new state had all the power that any other Indian state possessed, but it also received large grants from the Indian government for administration, development and welfare, which no other state got (Mullik 1972, 335). In January 1964 the first elections for the State assembly were held, and despite Underground threats to boycott the election there was a 74% turnout, with Shilu Ao becoming its first Chief Minister (Sinha 2007, 58). Sinha comments: 'The successful election was a resounding expression of people's mandate for peace. Unfortunately the hostiles saw this as a slap on their face and expressed their frustration by stepping up violent activities' (*ibid.*).

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<sup>49</sup> Under the leadership of Imkongla Ao.

<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note Mullik's comment on the outcome of the third Convention: 'The resolution demanding statehood for Nagaland like any other State of India took everybody by surprise and definitely caught the Government of India on the wrong foot. It caused us in the IB the greatest dismay, because the initiative had for the first time slipped out of our hands' (Mullik 1972, 328-29). It may have started as an idea from the IB, but the Nagas would take control of its direction.

## IMPACT OF THE CREATION OF NAGALAND STATE

The creation of Nagaland State, even with its special protections, did little to temper the convictions of Phizo and the NNC, who still rejected anything short of total independence. The NNC in turn branded the Nagaland State government a ‘Puppet State’ (Horam 1988, 93). The NNC’s response was to wage a war against the two governments, and had already assassinated Dr Imkongliba Ao, the president of the NPC, in August 1961 (Singh 2004, 77 & 89; Ao 2002, 54; Franke 2009, 78). Furthermore, the NNC refused to consider the strategy of supporting statehood as a stepping stone to sovereignty, as that would entail changing the nature of their struggle from that of fighting against Indian occupation to a secessionist movement (NNC1).

An important implication of the NPC was the creation of the first major divisions within the Nagas. ‘The NPC had, without perhaps actually realizing it, created the first noticeable cleavage among the Nagas into clearly defined groups – overground and underground’<sup>51</sup> (Horam 1988, 83). The issuing of a General Amnesty by the Indian government further deepened divisions between those that chose to stay in the jungle and fight, and those that chose to return to their villages. The FGN viewed these moves as an attempt at dividing the Nagas; as many thousands of Nagas returned home, it in turn weakened the movement (Keyho, 30). A. S. Atai Shimray<sup>52</sup> comments: ‘Although the nationalist organisation remained intact, a significant section of the NNC workers and their supporters joined the services of the new state as politicians, bureaucrats and general state employees’ (Shimray 2005, 220). Marcus Franke describes the actions of the Indian government – statehood, amnesty, calling off the Army and pouring in funds – as part of a ‘divide and rule’ policy to create a ‘collaborative class’ (Franke 2009, 77-78).

The creation of the state also consolidated the geographic division of the Nagas. From its conception, the state only covered about a third

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<sup>51</sup> As Shimray describes ‘Underground’ and ‘Overground’: ‘The latter refers to the civilians, non-combatants, and the former refers to the Naga guerrillas’ (Shimray 2005, 72).

<sup>52</sup> A. S. Atai Shimray is described as an ‘ardent nationalist’ in the brief biography in this book. This book was recommended to me by a NSCN (IM) senior officer.

of the Naga population, consisting of just the Naga Hills District and Tuensang Division areas. This left out Naga areas in northern Manipur and in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, not to mention the Naga tribes across the Burma border (Shimray 2005, 30-31; Sinha 2007, 57-58).<sup>53</sup> The creation of the State happened quickly without full consideration of the boundaries. The NPC's view at the time was that it was best to form the state and then negotiate with Assam about boundaries later, rather than delaying its creation by arguing about the boundary issues first. As such the initial boundary was not seen as the permanent boundary by the NPC (C8; C1<sup>54</sup>; D10<sup>55</sup>). The reality was that the creation of the state had created a political division amongst the Nagas between those tribes that benefited from political autonomy and those that still remained minorities in other states. Some suspect that the boundaries of Nagaland State constituted a deliberate attempt by the Indian Government to weaken the Nagas by 'divide and rule' tactics (Shimray 2005, 220-21).

Important changes were also occurring within the leadership of the NNC; in December 1956 Phizo crossed into East Pakistan, and after an extended stay of three years in Dhaka<sup>56</sup> he relocated to London in a bid to internationalise the conflict (Sinha 2007, 57; Horam 1988, 78; Shimray 2005, 74 and 318). At the same time, leadership of the Naga Underground passed from the Angami tribe to the Sema tribe. Phizo's exit had weakened the position of the Angami tribe, with the Semas now holding almost all the important offices in the federal set-up (Horam 1988, 93). The stage was now set for decades of internal strife along the dual fissures of pro-independence/pro-statehood groups, and pre-existing intertribal rivalry. The situation evolved into a 'tragedy with tribals killings tribals in the name of liberation', that still plagues the Naga cause to this day (Goswami 2007, 294).

<sup>53</sup> Shimray notes that Nagaland State covers only 16,579 sq.km., while the total area inhabited by Nagas and claimed by Naga nationalists is 100,000 sq.km. (Shimray 2005, 31).

<sup>54</sup> C1: senior Naga politician, interviewed on 5 December 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Document 10: Committee of Border Affairs of Nagaland. *A Brief Account on Historical Sequences of Nagaland Assam Border Affairs*, Third Edition. Kohima: N.V. Press.

<sup>56</sup> Formerly spelt Dacca.

## PROFESSIONALISING THE NFA – THE FIRST TRIP TO EAST PAKISTAN

The events of the NPC were to have a serious impact on the NNC and significantly weaken it (Shimray 2005, 221).

Many thousand [sic] Nagas failed to resist and gave hope to the enemy during the Amnesty in 1957-58 which led to the creation of a statehood in 1960 and left few national leaders and workers to start everything anew and re-formed all set up of the government functionaries at the brink of complete fall. (Keyho, 38)

As the FGN set about rebuilding its strength, it reached out to Pakistan for foreign assistance with its struggle against India. The first contact with the Pakistani authorities was instigated by Phizo in December 1956, with his arrival in Dhaka (Shimray 2005, 318). In April 1962 the first group of three hundred Naga soldiers marched to East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) to collect arms and ammunition and also to receive training from the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI). After the success of this trip it was followed by several more in the following years<sup>57</sup> (NNC2; Shimray 2005, 318; Iralu 2009, 201). Previously, the NFA had relied on snatching weapons from the Indian Army, or using weapons left over from WWII,<sup>58</sup> approaches that never succeeded in meeting the demand for armaments (NNC2; Sinha 2007, 272). In East Pakistan the Nagas received supplies of weapons, including light

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57 Mullik writes: 'After the Chinese invasion, it was reliably learnt that there was [sic] joint effort by Pakistan and China to train the Naga hostiles' (Mullik 1972, 334). This would make logical sense considering the geopolitical context; however, most authors agree that the Nagas did not have contact with the Chinese until 1966, when they marched uninvited to China (see next section). Furthermore, all the NNC veterans that I interviewed, including those who had been for training in Pakistan and China, corroborated this version, although it is entirely possible that China supported the Pakistani effort to train and arm the Nagas without the Nagas knowing.

58 'Large dumps of arms were left by both the British and Japanese in the Naga Hills District when the war ended and, though their locations were soon forgotten by the civil and military authorities, the Nagas knew all the locations and these subsequently became their main source of arms supply' (Mullik 1972, 297).

machine guns, medium machine guns, Thompson Sten sub-machine guns as well as two- and three- inch mortars and rocket launchers (NNC2). The Pakistani government, suggests Shimray, had three reasons to support the Naga (and Mizo<sup>59</sup>) insurgents. One, to 'disintegrate the unity of India', two, to 'strain India's economy' and three, to 'tie down a number of Mountain Divisions, of the Indian Army in these areas' (Shimray 2005, 320).

The NFA recruits returned to Nagaland a better-trained and better-armed force than before (D4<sup>60</sup>). It was not long before they were making their presence felt on the battlefield. The NFA veterans interviewed talked of a dramatic change in their effectiveness on their return as a result of their training and more sophisticated weaponry (NNC2). Mullik, though, claims the new weapons were 'not enough to make any impression on the Indian Security Forces' (Mullik 1972, 333). The ensuing period saw the NFA change tactics from defensive guerrilla actions to more offensive operations against the Indian Army (NNC4). As well as supplying the NFA with sophisticated weapons, Sinha alleges that '[t]he Pakistanis had advised them to change their tactics, not to attack Army posts as it meant more casualties for them but to attack trains and such soft targets' (Sinha 2007, 278).

## INDO-CHINA WAR OF 1962

Independent India had turbulent relations with its largest neighbour, China. In 1962 border disputes boiled over into the Sino-Indian War. The main theatres of operations were Aksai Chin<sup>61</sup> and NEFA/Arunachal Pradesh in the Indian Northeast, just north of Nagaland State and containing some Naga-inhabited areas. However, the NNC did not seek to exploit the situation. Phizo even offered to recruit 50,000 Naga youths to fight against China if India was prepared to talk with him and settle the Naga political problem (Keyho, 34). The Northeast

<sup>59</sup> The Mizos were another Northeast Indian ethnic group who by this stage were also fighting an insurgency against the Indian government.

<sup>60</sup> Document 4: *Indian Express*, 28 May 1963.

<sup>61</sup> In the northern part of Kashmir, now a part of China.

represents India's first line of defence against China, straddling the old Silk Route pass across the Himalayas. As a result, the Indian Northeast and the seven states that make up the region (including Nagaland), became of increasing strategic importance. The ever-present fear of a China-Pakistan nexus drove India to address the 'volatile internal situation' in the Northeast, which might be exploited by her enemies. Sinha cites this as one of the reasons for progressing with the formation of Nagaland State (Sinha 2007, 277-78). The rout at the hands of the Chinese exposed the inadequacies of the Indian Army, and as a consequence led to a military build-up that would pay dividends towards the end of the 1960s. Franke speculates that this might explain the Indian government's assent to the 1964 ceasefire and peace talks (see below), as 'providing a breathing space to regroup and build up its military potential and capability, in order to relaunch subsequent assaults on the stubborn *junglis* [italics in original] with even greater vigour' (Franke 2009, 67).

## PHASE 3: 1964 TO 1968 – THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

This phase begins with the first ceasefire between India and the NNC, and the start of peace talks between the two sides. Despite significant talks at the ministerial level, the negotiations ultimately collapse without agreement. Meanwhile, the NNC seeks help from India's great rival China, who joins Pakistan in providing material support to the NNC. The NNC itself goes through a period of change as it is rocked by tribal power struggles, leading to the formation of the breakaway RGN faction. As the talks collapse, the Naga regions descend back into violence.

### THE PEACE MISSION

In 1964 the Baptist Church leaders in Nagaland came together to find a path towards peace with the launch of the Peace Mission. The mission was led by Jaya Prakash Narayan, a veteran Indian freedom fighter; Bimala Prasad Chilika, the then Chief Minister of Assam; and

the Reverend Michael Scott, from the Nagaland Baptist Mission (Singh 2004, 90; Goswami 2007, 295). The inclusion of Rev. Scott was controversial in the eyes of the Indian government since he was a British national and a long-term supporter of both Phizo and an independent Nagaland (Singh 2004, 91). In contrast, the inclusion of an ‘international observer’ was a morale-booster for the NNC, believing that it would help to internationalise the conflict (Horam 1988, 106). The mission was initially successful in instigating a ceasefire and bringing the two sides together for negotiations<sup>62</sup> (Goswami 2007, 295). Some NNC veterans attribute India’s willingness to enter a ceasefire to the NFA’s increased capabilities following their support from East Pakistan, and India’s subsequent realisation that it could not defeat the Nagas militarily (NNC2; NNC4). On the other side, ‘[t]he Prime Minister was anxious that the Naga problem should be satisfactorily settled, specially [sic] when, after the inauguration of the Naga State within the Indian Union, there was little cause for the Nagas to continue their fight’ (Mullik 1972, 335).

The peace process had a precarious start, with the Naga Underground insisting that negotiations could only be about sovereignty, while the Indian government insisted that a solution had to be found within the bounds of the Indian constitution (Horam 1988, 110; Singh 2004, 93-97). The Nagas also sought to equate the FGN/NNC with the Indian government as two equal sovereign nations (Horam 1988, 106). As such the Underground refused to have the Nagaland State government (which they did not recognise) involved in the peace process. A compromise was eventually found, where Shilu Ao, the Nagaland Chief Minister, could attend as an ‘observer’ as part of the Indian delegation (*ibid.* 110).

However, the peace talks progressed well enough for both sides to agree to elevate the negotiations to the level of ministerial talks, led by the Prime Minister of India on one side and the Ato Kilonser (Prime Minister) of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) on

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62 Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru passed away while the ceasefire was being drafted. Horam commented: ‘The passing away of Pandit Nehru was a real loss to the Nagas in so far as their politics was concerned. He was the only Indian politician then who understood the Naga mind, their politics and their temperament.’ (Horam 1988, 107).

the other side. The two Prime Ministers met on six occasions over the period of February 1966 to October 1967 (*ibid.* 121). The talks reached an impasse when the FGN/ NNC leaders ruled out any solution within the Indian Constitution. Commenting on the situation, Sinha noted:

The underground delegation had lived in the jungles for a decade and had lost touch with the political forces, which had been set in motion by the creation of Nagaland as a separate state. The talks were a disaster except that the cease-fire continued to hold, which meant there were no clashes. (Sinha 2007, 59)

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi attempted to overcome this by suggesting a solution could be found; not within the constitution but instead within the framework of the Indian Union, suggesting that the Constitution itself could be amended. This was the Nagas' best chance of gaining a Bhutan like protectorate status for Nagaland (Das 2007, 28; D1<sup>63</sup>; Sinha 2007, 62). The Indian government even implied that the Naga areas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal could join Nagaland State if they gave up their demand for independence (Horam 1998, 132). However, the talks were to end abruptly in a stalemate, with the Nagas refusing to accept anything that fell short of complete independence, and the Indian government insisting on a solution within the Indian Union (Horam *ibid.* 135; Singh 2004, 111). Ultimately, the Nagas probably threw away their best opportunity to negotiate a political solution with the greatest possible autonomy within the union (Horam 1988, 132-33).

Internal divisions and infighting within the Naga Underground between the moderates (who supported a solution of the greatest possible autonomy within the Indian Union) and the extremists (who would accept nothing short of complete independence), also undermined the negotiating process (Goswami 2007, 295; Horam 1988, 135; Das 2007, 28). As Horam notes, during 1965 there were reports of the NFA trying to persuade the political wing to give up the negotiations and return to armed struggle to achieve independence: 'It was becoming increasingly difficult to be sure whether in the Underground set-up

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63 Document 1: *Statesman*, 23 December 1964.

the army was subordinate to the politicians or if it was the other way round' (Horam 1988, 122). The talks were 'rocked' at several stages by a series of bombings<sup>64</sup> on the Northeast Frontier Railway, which have been portrayed in the existing literature as orchestrated by the armed wing of the Underground in an attempt to 'derail' the talks<sup>65</sup> (*ibid.* 124).

The coherency of the situation was further undermined by the position of Phizo, still absent in London, who declined an offer to return for the talks (*ibid.* 116).

During private communications with quite a number of Underground leaders, especially those who had either never met Phizo or those who had joined the movement later, I got the impressions that Phizo's links with the rebels he has left behind were growing increasingly tenuous and it was only a small number of relations, fellow tribesmen, fellow villagers and close lieutenants who were faithfully reminding the movement at every step that the absent Phizo was still their leader. If one met the former, as also [sic] younger group, one got the impression that Phizo had served his purpose but if one met the latter and also the older group one came away with the impression that the last word was with Phizo and Phizo alone. (*ibid.* 116-17)

## 1965 INDO-PAKISTAN WAR

In September 1965, India faced a more pressing crisis as war broke out for a second time between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory of Kashmir. The conflict ended in a stalemate and a Soviet Union-brokered post-war settlement (Ganguly 2010, 3; Heimsath and

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64 According to NNC veterans, the objective of the bombing campaign was not to target the railways themselves or the public, but to target the Indian soldiers travelling on them to Nagaland. Furthermore, the reason that the NNC launched attacks against the Northeast's railways was that the ceasefire zone only covered Nagaland, so they moved their attacks into Assam, bombing the entry points into Nagaland (NNC2).

65 By now the NNC was facing internal splits along moderate/extremist and tribal lines.

Mansingh 1971, 177-79). Although the war resulted in a stalemate, the Pakistani forces, despite allegedly benefiting from superiority in modern tanks and aircraft, were driven back by what became the largest armed vehicle engagements since WWII. As a result, '[i]n an unmeasurable [sic] manner the Indian army regained the self-confidence and prestige that it had lost in the engagements in NEFA against the Chinese three years before' (Heimsath and Mansingh 1971, 178). As was the case with the previous 1962 Indo-China War, Indian troops were withdrawn from Nagaland, and it was around this time that the NFA is reported to have lobbied for a return to armed struggle (Horam 1988, 122).

### TALKING PEACE, PREPARING FOR WAR: THE MARCH TO CHINA

The NNC viewed the peace process as both a chance for a solution and as a tactical move to regroup and rearm (D5<sup>66</sup>; D6<sup>67</sup>). During the initial stages of the talks, the NNC believed a solution could emerge from the peace process. As the talks progressed, divisions developed within the movement, with a section who became less convinced of the sincerity of the Indian government feeling that their counterparts were just trying to force them into a settlement (NNC1; NNC2; NNC4). As a result, the NNC stepped up their preparations for a resumption of hostilities parallel to the peace process.

The Underground, in breach of the ceasefire, had continued to recruit and send cadres to East Pakistan for arms and training<sup>68</sup> (Sinha 2007, 60). However, the NNC now hatched plans to reach out to India's biggest rival, China, in the hope of gaining their support in a similar manner to the relationship the NNC had had with Pakistan since 1962.

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<sup>66</sup> Document 5: *Times of India* (Delhi), 26 November 1964.

<sup>67</sup> Document 6: *Times of India* (Delhi), 21 November 1964.

<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, Sinha notes that the insurgents argued that they were not breaking the ceasefire, arguing that 'the agreement did not prohibit movement of their cadres outside of Nagaland and that the agreement prohibited smuggling of arms into Nagaland during the truce but did not prohibit receiving arms from a friendly country. As no arms had been smuggled into Nagaland, and were kept in sanctuaries in Myanmar territory, no violation had technically taken place' (Sinha 2007, 60).

Despite having no prior contact with the Chinese, the Alee (Foreign) Command, under General Keyho along with Th. Muivah, set out in 1966 on a two-month trek to China accompanied by 130 men (NNC4; Shimray 2005, 77 and 309). There was some reservation amongst the Nagas about seeking assistance from China (Iralu 2009, 221), a communist country, due to the Nagas' strong Christian beliefs. General Kaito, who was Defence Minister at the time, was particularly against Chinese assistance, and was furious at the group going without his approval and at being bypassed deliberately (Shimray 2005, 85). Against the odds, the Alee command's step into the dark paid off, as the Chinese welcomed the party with open arms and happily supplied them with training and weapons. This was to mark the beginning of a decade of substantial Chinese support which would complement the continuing support from Pakistan (NNC4; Shimray 2005, 77; Iralu 2009, 221). 'The soldiers were given political and military training in secret camps in Yunnan,' Bertil Lintner notes, 'while Muivah himself was taken to Beijing where he remained as the unofficial Naga representative for four years' (Lintner 1996, 91).

Chinese support substantially strengthened the NFA's capabilities, for instance by supplying them with their first AK-47s, which dramatically increased their firepower vis-à-vis the Indian forces (NNC2; NNC4), as well as heavy weapons such as mortars, rocket launchers and mines (Sinha 2007, 280). Although they had received some explosives training in East Pakistan, it was the Chinese training that took this skill to an operationally effective level and introduced the strategies of urban warfare (NNC2; NNC3). In addition, the Chinese allegedly offered to host a Naga government in exile, an opportunity that was not taken up by the FGN. The Chinese also encouraged the Naga nationalists to 'coordinate their activities' with other ethnic groups in North-East India and Burma (Shimray 2005, 311).

### TRIBAL SPLITS IN THE UNDERGROUND

The collapse of the peace talks would ignite a period of upheaval and turmoil within the Naga Underground which 'was seriously afflicted

by factionalism within its ranks' (Das 2007, 28) with a fierce rivalry between the Sema and Angami tribe for leadership of the NNC. At the time, the power balance within the NNC lay with the Sema tribe, in particular with two brothers, FGN Prime Minister Kukhato Sukhai and Defence Minister General Kaito, and their brother-in-law Scato Swu, President of the FGN. In the events that followed the collapse of the talks, all three would be removed from their positions, and as a result 'the Sema hegemony in Naga politics was destroyed and power passed on to the Angami tribes' (Horam 1988, 140). The power returned to Phizo and his supporters (Shimray 2005, 86). General Kaito Sema quickly set up his own armed group on 22 June 1967. He was soon joined by his brother Kukhato Sukhai, who resigned as prime minister of the FGN (Vashum 2000, 91).

Following this there were further changes in the tribal balance of power within the NNC. Two key positions were given to Tangkhul Nagas from northern Manipur,<sup>69</sup> Z. Ramyo and Th. Muivah as Home Minister of the FGN and General-Secretary of the NNC respectively (Horam 1988, 141). The emergence of members of the Tangkhul tribe in senior positions was significant: certain Naga tribes had a marked dislike of the Tangkhuls, and the tribe also hailed from outside Nagaland State (*ibid.* 26-27). Horam comments that the 'Tangkhul influx close on the heels of the Angami ascendancy set the ousted Semas busy with their "new" government enterprise as they worked feverishly to retrieve the political initiative' (*ibid.* 141).

## BACK TO WAR

Even from the beginning of the ceasefire, there had never been a complete cessation of violence: 'There were frequent breaches of the spirit of the cease-fire agreement by both parties in the form of fightings [sic], raids and imposing of fines on the villages' (Horam 1988, 115). As already noted, there were reports back in 1965 of the NFA arguing for abandonment of the peace talks and a return to armed

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<sup>69</sup> The Manipur Naga Council had been formed in 1956, and merged with the NNC a year later in 1957 (Horam 1988, 84).

struggle. This was followed by reports of a fresh recruitment drive and campaigns for collection of money (*ibid.* 122). The NNC had also continued to send cadets for training and arms in Pakistan. Foreign support was extended in 1966 with the first trip to China, and similar trips soon followed (NNC2; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 77 and 318; Iralu 2009, 201 and 221). However, whilst the NNC had used the ceasefire to regroup and rearm, so had the Indian forces, who were consolidating their position. Shimray argues that '[t]he Naga nationalists were being subordinated strategically and tactically by the Indian Security Forces under the cover of cease-fire' (Shimray 2005, 86).

By the end of 1966 the NNC stepped up their activities, and violence on the ground began to increase (Horam 1988, 133). The sixth and final round of peace talks took place in October 1967 and ended quickly as there were no new proposals to discuss (*ibid.* 135). The process had come to an end, and the best chance of a political solution had been lost. The violence that had never really ceased was due to escalate. The reason the ceasefire had lasted so long might, according to Franke, be attributed to the Indian Army having to fight Pakistan in 1965 and the Mizo insurgency in 1966-67 (Franke 2009, 68).

## PHASE 4: 1968 TO 1975 – A MILITARY SOLUTION TO A POLITICAL PROBLEM

As the conflict reignites, the Naga nationalists are still beset by tribal divisions. Outside events have a dramatic impact on the NNC, with the Bangladeshi War of Independence leading to the closure of NNC bases and the cutting of supply lines for Chinese and Pakistani support. Soon afterwards India launches a renewed counter-insurgency campaign, having learnt from previous mistakes. This time the Indian Army operations bring the NNC to its knees, totally decimating the organisation. The phase ends with the signing of the Shillong Accord, in which the NNC accepts the Indian Constitution without condition.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

Following the collapse of the peace process, the tribalism engulfing the nationalist movement only worsened. On 3 August 1968 General Kaito was assassinated by ‘unknown persons’, suspected to have been on the orders of the FGN (Horam 1988, 141-42; Shimray 2005, 87). A few months before, there had been rumours circling that the General was in discussions with the Indian government about making a settlement with his faction (Horam 1988, 142). The event only poured fuel on the fire and ‘drove a wedge of hatred between the Semas and the Angamis’ (*ibid.*). The impact was immediate, with the Sema group kidnapping the FGN President and Home Minister and holding them for several months (*ibid.*; Keyho 82-83).

The Sema group went on to form the Sema-dominated Council of the Naga People (CNP) and the ‘Revolutionary Government of Nagaland’ (RGN) in November 1968 (Vashum 2000, 91; Horam 1988, 142). India’s handiwork was blamed for the split; they were accused of offering encouragement to the Sema group simply to divide the Nagas (NNC1; Rajagopalan 15, 2008). The response of the NNC and the FGN was to brand the RGN as ‘renegades and traitors’, who were working with the Indian government and its security forces (Horam 1988, 144; Vashum 2000, 92). In this way the crack that emerged in the mid-1960s inevitably developed into a ‘great divide’ of the federal government set-up (Shimray 2005, 87). By 1968 the Naga Underground was critically divided, with the Sema splinter group, the RGN, ‘joining hands with Indian security forces and sleuthing for the capture of Federal Army men’ (Horam 1988, 146). Most infamously, when a large group of 565 NNC/NFA returned from training in China in 1969, they were ambushed and captured by RGN forces (Shimray 2005, 88).

The RGN experiment turned out to be short-lived; by 1970 they had lost the confidence of the Naga people and retained the support of a few hundred Sema tribe followers. There was an attempt to ask the Indian government in 1972 for protectorate status for Nagaland, like that of Sikkim, but to no avail. The following year, after the RGN leaders met with Indira Gandhi, they chose to surrender, with 1,500 men, on 16 August 1973 on their return to Nagaland (*ibid.*). The cadets

were recruited into the Border Security Force (BSF), with two of their leaders as Commander and Deputy Commander, and Scato Swu was nominated to the Rajya Sabha<sup>70</sup> (*ibid.*).

## THE POLITICS OF NAGALAND STATE

The Underground split would in turn have a knock-on effect on the Overground and the political dynamics of the Nagaland State government. In the state there were two political parties: the ruling Naga Nationalist Organisation (NNO), which was pro-Indian Government and aligned with the national Congress Party, and the United Democratic Front (UDF) which supported the federal government (Horam 1988, 148). The state government, headed by Hokishe Sema (NNO), attempted to attract the RGN into their fold. This induced a split in the NNO, with a breakaway faction voicing concern for the FGN and eventually defecting to the UDF, which maintained a pro-FGN stance (*ibid.* 147-48). These events were a great morale-booster for the FGN, who reaffirmed their commitment to independence. The NNO, however, gradually lost popular support, and was replaced as the ruling party for the first time in the 1974 elections (*ibid.* 149):

The UDF victory, after years of patient waiting, was hailed by the Federal Government of Nagaland as their own victory. Indeed it was publicly voiced that the fortunes of the UDF were dependent to a great extent on the support extended to it by the Underground Nagas. (*ibid.* 169)

The new UDF government was viewed as being soft on the FGN, but at the same time its efforts to bring about a peaceful settlement were ‘sabotages [sic] by some powerful NNO and local officials who no doubt had vested interests in seeing that the problem lingered, as the undecided state of affairs brought much attention and benefits for these elements’ (*ibid.* 174).<sup>71</sup>

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70 The Council of States, the second chamber of the Indian parliament.

71 Horam succinctly adds, ‘I am not suggesting that these people necessarily

## 1971 BANGLADESH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The intense Indo-Pakistan rivalry had benefited the Nagas immensely, as the Pakistanis sought to fight a proxy war against India by funding groups such as the NNC (Mukherjee 2006, 77). However, the third Indo-Pakistan war – the 1971 Bangladesh War of Independence – ‘brought an abrupt end to the Naga connection with East Pakistan’ (Shimray 2005, 320). All communication and support from East Pakistan to the Nagas ended, and there was a round-up by the Indian forces of NNC senior officers who were in Dhaka at the time (NNC1; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 320; Lintner 1996, 91). As a result, foreign support from Pakistan and China dropped substantially following the creation of Bangladesh (Das 2007, 29). In the process, the Naga insurgents were ‘starved’ of arms supplies, training and sanctuaries just as India was about to launch a renewed offensive (Goswami 2007, 296; Bhaumik 2005, 202). Although the NFA still had supplies of small arms ammunition, by the end of 1971 they had nearly totally depleted their stockpiles of ammunition for mortars and rocket launchers (NNC2).

## SEPTEMBER BAN: INDIA FIGHTS BACK

Although the situation had continued to deteriorate since the collapse of the peace talks, the Indian forces had refrained from launching any major offensives. This was to change in September 1972. Hokishe Sema, Nagaland State’s Chief Minister, had been invited to the UN, where he was expected by the NNC to plead in favour of the Nagas’ pursuit of sovereignty. Instead, Sema declared that the Naga issue had been resolved with the creation of Nagaland State. On his return to Nagaland, the NNC attempted to assassinate him (Horam 1988, 161). This served to be ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’, and India responded with a renewed counter-insurgency campaign that would bring the NNC to its knees within 3 years.

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understood the dangers of the game they were playing for most of them understood but one thing well and that was to benefit themselves at the cost of others’ (Horam 1988, 174).

The Indian government's response to the attempted assassination was swift, with the so-called 'September Ban'. For the first time India enforced the Unlawful Activities Act 1967, banning all of the Naga Underground organisations. India also made it clear that above-ground supporters of pro-secessionist groups were liable for prosecution (Vashum 2000, 93; Horam 1988, 163-64). At the same time Nagaland was brought under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1972 (Goswami 2007, 296). In order to enforce this crackdown, two extra battalions of both the Assam Rifles and the armed police were sent to the state (Horam 1988, 164). From 1972 onwards the counter-insurgency operations intensified under the ISF's newly formed 'Unified Command Structure' (Goswami 2007, 296). The idea was allegedly first mooted by Nagaland Governor B.K. Nehru after consulting General Templar, who had led the British counter-insurgency campaign during the Malayan Emergency. The net result was close cooperation between the Army, civil administration, the police and the intelligence set-up (Shimray 2005, 95).

### INDIA'S NEW COUNTER-INSURGENCY CAMPAIGN

In 1973 the Indian Security Forces launched a massive counteroffensive against the NNC (Das 2007, 290). Naga jungle guides soon provided a huge boost to the ISF's ability to operate deep into the jungle (NN2). In addition, after 20 years of operating in Nagaland, the Indian forces were also now more aware of the terrain, thus eroding one of the Naga rebels' key advantages.

This offensive signalled a key change in the Indian forces' modus operandi; in past campaigns they had restricted themselves to controlling the towns and villages, only occasionally patrolling from these bases into the jungle. In 1963 the *Observer* newspaper reported that '[e]ven the Indian Press reports underline that the police and army forces deployed there are "roadbound and untrained in jungle or mountain warfare." So they cannot stray far into the thickly-wooded hills where the Naga guerrillas are at home' (D3<sup>72</sup>). A decade later, the

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72 Document 3: *The Observer*, 14 July 1963.

Indian forces were able to move into the jungle, even relocating their headquarters from the towns to there. In this manner ‘they saturated the jungles’, and as a result ‘there was just no place to hide’ (NNC2). Those areas that remained out of reach were targeted by heavy artillery fire (NNC2). The effect was to decimate the NFA’s command and control of its forces (NNC2).

Parallel to these efforts, Indian forces tightened their stranglehold on the villages in order to separate the people from the insurgents. Every village had soldiers stationed and a curfew imposed (NNC2). Restrictions were placed on the movements of villagers, preventing them from smuggling supplies; everyone was searched when they left the villages, even the women and their baskets (C2). On every house that had a family member in the NFA a red flag was hoisted. At night kerosene lamps were positioned so that insurgents could not sneak into the villages under cover of darkness (NNC2). As a result of these initiatives the NFA suffered total exhaustion due to lack of rations; as NNC veterans described, ‘we were literally eating grass’, ‘we just couldn’t fight – we just did not have the strength’ (NNC2). Slowly over the next two to three years the NFA fighters were reduced to skeletons (NNC2).

Alongside these measures, the Indian government adopted a ‘tribe-by-tribe’ approach to tackle what the NNC had framed as a pan-Naga problem (Das 2007, 29). Village headmen, public figures and insurgents’ family members were approached and offered incentives to persuade the members of the Underground they were in touch with to surrender. In tandem they were threatened with the prospect of unlimited state repression if they failed in these attempts at mediation (*ibid.*). Every household with connections to the Underground, having been identified, was offered money, government jobs or vehicles, in order to get their family members to surrender (NNC3; IM1<sup>73</sup>). Many families and villages were enticed to surrender through offers of locally tailored projects, such as the construction of roads or bridges, offers of employment, etc. ‘The whole exercise was intended to fragment and thereby decimate what was regarded as a comprehensive agenda of self-determination’ (*ibid.* 30).

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<sup>73</sup> NSCN (IM) 1: current senior officer NSCN (IM), interviewed in Dimapur, Nagaland on 12 December 2009.

## LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLITICAL CRISIS

Meanwhile a political crisis was brewing in the Nagaland State Government. The election of the UDF as the ruling party was undermined in early 1975 by the defection of 13 of its supporters to the NNO. The NNO then in turn formed a government, which was rocked again by counter-floor-crossing. In the political crisis that followed, the Assembly was suspended and President's Rule imposed (Horam 1988, 169; Sinha 2007, 64; Ao 2002, 87). Elsewhere in India a political crisis was sweeping the country which led the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, to call a nationwide State of Emergency. As a result of the 'Emergency' the ISFs were granted unprecedented powers, which they consequently used in Nagaland (Vashum 2000, 93; Horam 1988, 169). This gave the security forces the power and political will to take on and crush the NNC: 'This declaration of Emergency was instrumental in achieving what no other force had done, namely, bringing to a dramatic and abrupt halt the 30-year-old Naga insurgency. With the declaration of the Emergency, the security forces in Nagaland were given a free hand to deal with the insurgents and their sympathisers' (Horam 1988, 170).

## THE CHURCH

Since the majority of Nagas are Christian, the Church has always played a central part in Naga politics and society. It was the Church who had mobilised to organise the Peace Mission and secured the first ceasefire between the Indian government and the NNC (Shimray 2005, 88-89). Whilst the nationalists had seen the Church as playing a constructive role, this view began to change. The root issue was the Church's unease at the NNC seeking foreign assistance from China, a communist state, highlighting communism's antagonism to democracy and Christianity. The underlying accusation was that the China connection was evidence of the NNC turning to communism. As Shimray expounds, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council thought the 'seeking of military hardware from China was synonymous to flirting with Marxism and Maoism', whilst in reality 'they had merely injected the Nagas with a dose of Maoism'

vis-é-vis [sic] the tactics of guerrilla warfare to strengthen the will and determination of the fighters' (*ibid.* 91).

Shimray argues that the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB) exploited this sentiment and used the Church to undermine the nationalist movement (*ibid.* 89). According to a former NNC soldier, Church leaders were used to spread rumours that the NFA were now communists and no longer Christians since they had started going to China for training (NNC3). The impact on the nationalist struggle was indirect in that it did not affect the NFA operationally, but that 'the antagonism of the church created a situation by which the Federal Government of Nagaland became vulnerable and the public opinion grew in favour of immediate peace' (Shimray 2005, 92).

## A CHANGING CONTEXT

By the mid-1970s the wider political context that the Naga insurgency was framed in was changing and there were a number of significant events across India that changed many Nagas' perspective on the conflict. First came the settlement of the protracted Kashmir problem.<sup>74</sup> Sheikh Abdullah, who was deposed by India in 1953, was now allowed back to power. This made many Nagas consider whether following a similar path was a better option than independence and sovereignty (Horam 1988, 175). The second event to undermine the quest for independence was the decision by Sikkim to change its status after a democratic vote from a protectorate of India to become an integral part of the Indian Union (*ibid.*). The world seemed to be going in the opposite direction to the Naga nationalists. In addition, the Indian Army had recovered from the humiliation of 1962, and after the wars of 1965 and 1971 had shown that it had returned to strength; and if it chose to, it could defeat the Nagas militarily. Similarly, after almost 20 years of fighting in the rugged hills of Nagaland and the surrounding areas, they were no longer strangers to the terrain and the Nagas had lost one of their key advantages.

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<sup>74</sup> In hindsight, this would not be a resolution of the Kashmir issue, but we have to consider the perspective of the time.

From India's perspective the context was also changing. After the 1962 Indo-Sino conflict, India became acutely aware of the threat that China posed bordering the north-eastern states; a situation that became more alarming with the Chinese providing foreign support to the Nagas (and also the Mizo ethnic uprising in the Northeast). The tense and delicate nature of the Indo-Sino relations gave a 'strategic importance to the Northwest Insurgents who would not otherwise matter' (*ibid.* 176). Similarly, the Indian government feared that 'if the Naga problem was prolonged any more, it could in fact spread discontented elements in sensitive regions of [sic] entire Northeast India, especially Arunachal and Manipur, as there is a sizable Naga population in these areas' (*ibid.* 180). India needed a resolution to the protracted Naga conflict.

### PEACE AT LAST? THE SHILLONG ACCORD

Under the pressure of sustained military operations that took full advantage of the declaration of emergency, the NFA was militarily defeated (NNC2). Against this backdrop, a six-man delegation from the NNC signed the Shillong Accord on 11 November 1975 (Goswami 2007, 297; Vashum 2000, 93). The Accord stated that the NNC had, by its 'own volition', accepted the Indian constitution without condition (Vashum 2000, 93). Shortly after the signing of the accord, the 'Unlawful Activities Prevention Act' was lifted. The Act had been used in 1972 to officially ban the Naga Underground groups, allowing former Underground leaders to return to public life (Horam 1988, 179; Shimray 2005, 102). In addition, the Indian government agreed to release political prisoners and to withdraw the army from Naga areas (Goswami 2007, 297; Shimray 2005, 102). The Shillong Accord brought the conflict that had ravaged the Naga Hills to an apparent end (Shimray 2005, 102), as Keyho describes: 'One immediate result of the signing of the Shillong Accord was that a peaceful atmosphere was restored' (Keyho, 228). Unfortunately, it would turn out to be more of a pause in the violence than the end.

## PHASE 5: 1975 TO 1988 – INTO THE EAST – THE RISE OF THE NSCN FROM THE ASHES OF THE NNC

As the remnants of the NNC regroup across the border in Burma, a period of infighting ensues between pro- and anti-accordist factions. Ultimately, the latter breaks away to form the NSCN and sets about rebuilding itself and gaining control of the Naga areas on the Burmese side. The new organisation analyses the mistakes of the NNC and develops a new strategic approach. Internal rivalries lead to splitting of the NSCN, with the creation of the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). In this stage a change is evident in the tribal make-up of the nationalist movement, with the insurgent groups now dominated by Naga tribes from outside Nagaland State.

### FALLOUT FROM THE SHILLONG ACCORD

Nothing has caused so much confusion and division within the Naga people as the signing of the Shillong Accord. The exact implications of the Accord were shrouded in mystery. The Accord was signed not by the NNC but by a six-man delegation as ‘representatives of the underground’. Confusion followed as to whether the Accord was officially endorsed by the NNC or not. The situation was complicated by the fact that at the time Muivah (General Secretary) and Isak Swu (Foreign Secretary) were in China as part of the Alee Command, and Phizo, still the president of the NNC, was in London. The leaders of the Alee command reacted sharply when they heard about the Accord; on 21 November 1975 Muivah and Isak, among others, condemned the accord, branding the FGN/NNC leaders traitors, and called on the Nagas to renew their fight against India (Goswami 2007, 297; Sinha 2007, 65; Shimray 2005, 103). This period would see the ascendency of Muivah and Isak. Goswami draws a parallel with the earlier rise of Phizo: ‘Very similar to Phizo’s own rise due to his disagreement with the moderate NNC leaders, who signed the Nine Point Agreement, the Shillong Accord created deep fissures within the NNC’ (Goswami 2007, 297).

The Alee Command returned to find an NNC decimated by the Indian counter-insurgency and having surrendered under the Shillong Accord. The group did not physically enter Nagaland, but set up camp across the border in Burma (Sinha 2007, 65). Whilst Muivah and Isak among others condemned the Accord, Phizo continued to remain silent, refusing to endorse or reject it<sup>75</sup> (Shimray 2005, 103-5; Goswami 2007, 297; Singh 2004, 172). However, his silence only added to the confusion, as Goswami notes: 'Phizo's silence only sharpened the existing divide within the NNC with regards to the Accord' (Goswami 2007, 297). The result was a rift that was to rip what remained of the NNC in two, between the pro- and anti-accordist wings: 'It is paradoxical that the Shillong Accord, which brought about a temporary peace in the Naga Hills, also contained the seed of another bitter conflict which is in operation till date' (Shimray 2005, 103).

Further, confusion was created by the nature of the accord itself; although consisting of only three points, it was not a clear-cut resolution to the conflict. Point three describes 'representatives of the underground organisations should have reasonable time to formulate other issues to discuss for final settlement' (Shimray 2005, 102; Horam 1988, 178). As such the wording itself implied that the accord required a final settlement, but as Singh ventures: 'Clause 3 of the Shillong Accord remained unimplemented because the undergrounds who were overseas refused to endorse the Shillong Accord and accept Indian citizenship' (Singh 2004, 171). The result was political instability, with an open rift within the NNC, pro- and anti-accordists accompanied by conspicuous silence from NNC President Phizo. It was obvious that any final settlement would not be worth the paper it was written on without the proper backing of the NNC. What followed was a power struggle for the NNC itself, with the overground politicians who wanted to deliver a final peace settlement supporting the pro-accordist wing of

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75 A delegation was even sent to London to discuss the accord with Phizo, but to no avail (Shimray 2005, 103-5; Goswami 2007, 297; Singh 2004, 172). As Singh notes: 'The reason behind Phizo's silence is not known, but appears that he was dissatisfied with the behaviours of the colleagues who had signed the Shillong Accord. It may also be that at such advance age he did not [sic] like to indulge himself physically in the Naga freedom movement, which had been weakened to a great extent by signing the Shillong Accord' (Singh 2004, 172).

the NNC and seeing the Alee Command as an impediment to peace (Shimray 2005, 112).

Meanwhile, what was left of the FGN/NFA relocated to Eastern Nagaland (Naga territories in Burma) (Horam 1988, 187). They were joined by Muivah and Isak – and the Alee Command on return from China – and by March 1975 had stabilised their base in Burma (Singh 1972, 2004). They set about gaining full control of the eastern side and reorganising the remains of the NNC (IM1). The rift over the NNC's position on the Shillong Accord remained unresolved, and in 1978 the pro-accordist wing of the NNC launched a coup against the non-accordists. Muivah and Isak were held under house arrest for the next year and a half. During this time they were completely humiliated; three times they had to dig their own graves (Shimray 2005, 113). Then in December 1979 the non-accordists launched a successful counter-coup, releasing Muivah and Isak (IM1; IM2<sup>76</sup>). The infighting at this stage escalated into a full-scale civil war: 'It was a fiery situation where Nagas were hunting Nagas and both sides suffered immensely' (*ibid.* 119).

## BIRTH OF THE NSCN

After the counter-coup, the non-accordists decided it was time to abandon the discredited NNC. In their view the NNC had become counter-revolutionary and the people had lost faith in it, necessitating the creation of a new organisation (IM1). The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed on 31 January 1980, led by Th. Muivah, Isak Swu and S.S. Khaplang. This was a dark time for Naga nationalism: 'The period leading up to the formation of the NSCN was bloody. Those who had lived and fought together were engaged in killing each other, all in the name of ideology and the future of Nagaland' (Sinha 2007, 65-66).

The NSCN then formed the Government for the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) (Shimray 2005, 123-24). The formation of the NSCN was preceded by the merger of the Eastern Naga Nationalist

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<sup>76</sup> IM2: current senior officer NSCN (IM), interviewed in Dimapur on 14 December 2009.

Council (ENNC)<sup>77</sup> with the NNC faction under the leadership of Isak and Muivah. Importantly, this signalled the merger of the two leading Naga nationalist organisations on each side of the border (*ibid.* 122-23; Goswami 2007, 298). The new organisation was led by the troika of Muivah, Isak and Khaplang.

The result of the NSCN's formation was an outbreak of inter-Naga factional violence as the two sides fought for control. NSCN sources allege that the NNC accordists, in collaboration with Indo-Burma forces, launched joint operations against them (Shimray 2005, 124). There were reports of a serious refugee problem developing in 1980 in the Tuensang area following violence between the NSCN and Khamniungan Nagas in Northern Burma (Singh 2004, 175; D14<sup>78</sup>). The NSCN has faced accusations of widespread violence against the eastern Naga population. Some NNC veterans have said about the situation that the same thing that was done to them by the Indian Army was done to them by the NSCN, asserting that the NSCN carried out a 'scorched earth' policy against those Naga communities that continued to support Phizo and the NNC, including burning of villages and killing of livestock, with many dying from subsequent starvation (NNC2). A former NSCN cadre, who joined in 1986, describes that they were taught that

[t]he NNC betrayed the nation by signing the Shillong Accord and therefore all the NNC/FGN leaders and supporters are our enemy. We were taught to finish all of them because they are thorns for us and stumbling [sic] block to achieve our goal. (D14)

However, this is a murky period and it is hard to ascertain exactly what happened, not least because the violence took place in remote areas on the Burmese side of the border. Not to mention the obvious reasons why the NSCN's opponents would seek to portray them in a negative light.

<sup>77</sup> Previously there had existed two Naga Nationalist organisations functioning in parallel: the ENNC, headed by S. S. Khaplang, and the NNC, headed by Phizo.

<sup>78</sup> Document 14: Pamphlet, *The Role of the Semas in Naga National Affairs*. March 2004. V. Phutoi Zhimomi.

Bertil Lintner, who trekked into Burma and visited the NSCN HQ camp in 1985 (the first western journalist to visit the Naga areas since the 1960s), commented:

Reading between the lines, I understood the NSCN had conquered these eastern Naga hills in Burma with brutal methods. Villages were burnt down and headmen executed as an example. And now, the NSCN was telling the people the plague raging in the area was God's punishment for their initial resistance against the Christian Nagas from the Indian side. (Lintner 1996, 87)

The arrival of the NSCN would also have a major impact on the Naga society in these remote regions, who had previously 'lived there isolated in their own world untouched by civilization' (Shimray 2005, 159). It was the presence of the NSCN that led to the Christianisation of the area, as it set about actively converting the inhabitants (*ibid.*). Although, Lintner comments, '[i]t had, in effect, been conversion at gunpoint' (Lintner 1996, 87). The NSCN had in reality brought the first administration to the area, and along with Christianity, introduced education and improvements to agriculture, such as rice terraces (Shimray 2005, 160; Lintner 1996, 88).

The NNC meanwhile continued to exist, but after the 'Shillong Accord in 1975 and the appearance of the NSCN, the voice of the NNC weakened and its strength declined' (Singh 2004, 183). Gradually the power balance transferred to the NSCN as it emerged as the strongest faction. Describing the situation during his visit, Lintner noted: 'Today, the NSCN has gained strength and is by far the bigger party' (Lintner 1996, 52), adding: 'But the rump of the old NNC still maintains a token force of about 160 soldiers, based on the Burmese side of the border across from Tuensang in Nagaland' (*ibid.*).

By the mid-1980s the NSCN had successfully established itself in Eastern Nagaland, having wrested control from both the NNC and the Burmese forces. Still predominantly based in the eastern side, its military size rose from only 1 battalion in 1984 to 2-3 battalions in 1988 (IM2). Lintner describes the NSCN's capabilities in 1985: 'Of the NSCN's full complement of 3,000 activists, we estimated no more than 500 were

armed. And of those, scarcely a man could boast a spare magazine for his rifle' (Lintner 1996, 93-94). Summing up the situation, Lintner writes:

From these relatively well-sheltered base areas in north-western Burma, safe across the border from the Indian army and remote from the central government in Rangoon, the Naga guerrillas launch periodic forays into India, to retreat back to their hide-outs after their various missions: ambushes of Indian Army convoys, political assassinations of Naga and non-Naga opponents, and the occasional bank robbery to replenish their coffers. (*ibid.* 8)<sup>79</sup>

### NSCN – CRITIQUE OF THE NNC

The emerging NSCN was very critical of the NNC, not just for accepting the Shillong Accord, but also in terms of leadership and policy. It criticised Phizo's absence and detached leadership from abroad, and also his reliance on family and close associates (Shimray 2005, 169). Significantly, the new NSCN leadership were also critical of the policy pursued by the NNC: 'one of the greatest failures (NNC) was the absence of correct tactics and strategy. The importance of a strategy

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79 Bertil Lintner's book *The Land of Jade* is an important resource on the NSCN in this period, in which he describes spending a month with the NSCN at its HQ in Burma in late 1985 on his trek to reach the Kachin rebels in Northern Burma. He was the first western journalist to visit the Naga areas since the 1960s, and the only one to have visited the NSCN areas in Burma during this period. However, it is also a controversial book, which was allegedly banned by the NSCN (IM) (Pillai 1999). The book contained an often less-than-flattering description of the NSCN's organisation and fighting ability. In particular he describes the NSCN leadership's religious fervour, and alleges that they relied on direct communication from God through three female oracles for all major decisions. Lintner quotes Isak Swu, saying: "We don't make any important decisions without asking God for guidance." Isak glanced expectantly at the women. "And God talks to us all the time. Through these three women." (Lintner 1996, 106). Further, he maintains that the NSCN HQ had a 'total absence of bunkers, trenches and other military installations normally to be found at a major rebel base' (*ibid.* 107) and the reason for this was that God had told them to set up camp there and assured them they would not have to worry about defending the place (*ibid.* 108).

in dealing with an opponent of superior power was never stressed. They simply waited impatiently for a solution' (Th. Muivah, quoted in *ibid.* 86). The NSCN would not be just another nationalist group, but it intended to learn from the mistakes of the past and to continue the struggle in a different way.

The NSCN highlighted the problem of tribalism within the Nagas causing division and weakening the movement. However, it blamed the structure of the NNC for exacerbating the problem:

[The] NNC's set-up of the administrative and military systems was purely tribe-wise. The eventual outcome was that tribal loyalty outweighed at times national allegiance. Such orientation drove, particularly, the major tribes into unhealthy parochial competition which in turn generated contradictions of national magnitude. (Th. Muivah, quoted in *ibid.* 87)

In contrast, the NSCN advocated a strongly centralised organisation (*ibid.* 150).

More important was the NSCN's critique of the NNC's military strategy, and the alternative strategic approach they would adopt. The NSCN criticised what it saw as an approach that did not take on board the asymmetric nature of the conflict between the Nagas and India, and argued that direct confrontation with a better-resourced enemy and fighting in areas in which the enemy had the advantage should be avoided (NSCN Free Nagaland Manifesto, quoted in *ibid.* 187). Instead the NSCN leadership, reflecting on their experience of three decades of conflict with India, reconceptualised the armed struggle as a protracted struggle based on guerrilla warfare.

Th. Muivah elaborates:

Our tactical line is based on Mao Ze Dung's [sic] concept of guerrilla warfare, protracted in form and revolutionary in content. I do not believe in the flashy brilliance of one or two successful encounters with the enemy which is endowed with greater resources. On this revolutionary war, we will get the chance to go on the offensive when India starts disintegrating. (Th. Muivah 1987, quoted in *ibid.* 186)

At the heart of this new strategic thinking was how to take on a superior enemy, and they drew parallels between their conflict with India and the Vietcong's struggle against the American forces (*ibid.* 188). The next key strategic change that followed on from the asymmetric analysis saw the NSCN move from the old way of fighting single-handed like a bull to the adoption of a 'United Front' strategy. This concept was borrowed from the Chinese; whilst the Chinese concept only had a national dimension, the NSCN saw it as having both national and international dimensions, and sought to forge unity with nationalist and revolutionary forces in and outside of India (*ibid.* 178). The importance of a 'United Front' was that it was 'an effective strategy for confronting the adversary of superior power' (Th. Muivah, quoted in Shimray 2005, 178). This strategy is born out of the Nagas' practical experiences, with the NSCN identifying one of the reasons for the Nagas' defeat under the NNC: they were fighting alone without any allies. The NSCN manifesto sharply refutes the NNC:

Unfaithfulness to our friends in the critical times (1962 and 1972 wars) have done much damage to mutual confidence. When war broke out between our friends and our adversary, the leadership betrayed cooperation for the wanton purpose of winning the favour of the adversary. The two faced policy of the enemy was often miscalculated. Wounds caused by such perfidy are not easily healed. Every friend is wounded; the adversary is gladdened and strengthened against us.  
(NSCN Free Nagaland Manifesto, quoted in *ibid.*, 178-79)

The underlying argument is that the NNC's relationship with its foreign backers, China and Pakistan, was weakened by the former not backing them in their confrontations with India. The NSCN would expand its 'United Front' strategy by forming relationships with other nationalist and revolutionary armed groups in India and abroad (*ibid.* 179). Recounting a conversation with Muivah in 1985, Lintner explains:

Instead of hoping for a resumption of the aid from China, he had built up a network of contacts with other underground movements in India, banking on the belief that the strong regionalism in the

Subcontinent is the divisive factor which could result in the chaos the Nagas would need to break away. He clearly realised that the only hope the Nagas had to achieve their independence would be if India itself broke up. (Lintner 1996, 94)

Further, Lintner notes that during his stay there was a contingent of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) at the NSCN's HQ camp in Burma (*ibid.*).

Perhaps the most radical change was the eschewing of foreign assistance. The NSCN rejected the foreign help approach that the NNC had pursued, arguing that it led to a dependency on Chinese and Pakistani support that had crippled the NNC in the long run (IM2), as highlighted in the NSCN Manifesto:

The most dangerous harm affecting our politics today is that right from the start the people were to believe in foreign help for their survival. This policy of letting [sic] the people on the hope of external help weakens the initiative to save themselves. (NSCN Free Nagaland Manifesto, 27, quoted in Shimray 2005, 183)<sup>80</sup>

Instead their philosophy was based on self-reliance. Initially they had to steal weapons from the Burmese Army, but as they grew they began to launch attacks against the Indian Army to snatch weapons. As they continued to grow, the NSCN increasingly committed to a guerrilla war against the Indian forces from its bases in Burma (IM2).

Another criticism of the NNC was its failure to realise the importance of establishing safe base areas, arguing that establishing bases in remote or inaccessible regions was key to survival. In this way it believed it could always retain the initiative and go on the offensive everywhere outside of the base area (Shimray 2005, 181-82). The NSCN leadership explained: 'This compelled us to have concrete examination of the enemy's weakest point. It was unquestionably the eastern side (Naga territory in Burma) where we could create

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<sup>80</sup> The NSCN is not completely rejecting foreign aid, but highlighting the problem of the false hope it can create that undermines self-reliance and initiative (Shimray 2005, 183).

safe base areas and consolidate ourselves there.' (Th. Muivah, quoted in *ibid.* 182).

## THE NSCN SPLIT

True to form in Naga politics, it was not long before there was a split in the NSCN. In an audacious move, Khaplang tried to take control by launching a surprise attack against Muivah and Isak. The attack failed to kill Muivah or Isak, but 200 cadres, including many top officials, were not so lucky (Shimray 2005, 199). The NSCN then split into two factions – the Khaplang-led NSCN (K) and the Muivah-led NSCN (IM). Muivah and Isak for their part have interpreted Khaplang's attack as being engineered by the Indian intelligence services to checkmate the NSCN (*ibid.* 200; Goswami 2007, 298), whilst Khaplang accused Muivah and Isak of 'conspiring to surrender to India' (Shimray 2005, 200).

The reasons for the split are complex and hotly disputed; one senior insurgent simply commented: 'This is something [about] which I am confused' (K1<sup>81</sup>). The trigger appears to have been a dispute on how to respond to Indian overtures in favour of negotiations (Sinha 2007, 67). Goswami argues that the real reason was differences in the Naga tribal structure, noting that '[t]he Naga militant group cadres are intensely loyal to their "tribal identities" and, at times of conflict the tribal identity supersedes the group identity' (Goswami 2007, 298). There is intense rivalry between the Tangkhul tribe to which Muivah belongs and the Konyak tribe from which Khaplang comes (*ibid.*). A factor that raised this tribal tension was that '[t]he majority of the rank and file of the undivided NSCN was from the Konyak tribe where the Tankhuls<sup>82</sup> [sic] dominated the Command structure' (Singh 2004, 179). In such a context it is entirely possible that the Indian Security Forces sought to exploit internal frictions and to engineer a split.

Following the split, according to Singh, 'both the factions became bitter enemies to each other and both engaged in fighting two fronts – one

<sup>81</sup> K1: NSCN (K) 1: two current officials, interviewed in Dimapur on 12 December 2009.

<sup>82</sup> The Tangkhuls are one of the more 'advanced' Naga tribes (Singh 2004, 180).

against the Government of India and another against their own fellow friends who had been together till yesterday' (*ibid.* 177). The split is perhaps the deepest and most painful one in the Naga conflict, and would serve to drive intra-Naga violence for decades to come.

## THE NEW GROUPS AND NAGALAND STATE

It is interesting to note that the majority of the leadership and cadres of both NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) are drawn from Naga tribes outside Nagaland. The NSCN (IM) faction contains 40% Tangkhul Nagas from Manipur and another 40% from other Naga tribes in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal; only 10-15% come from tribes within Nagaland. The NSCN (K) membership, on the other hand, is largely drawn from the 'Myanmar [Burmese] Naga tribes and the tribes located in areas that they control'<sup>83</sup> (Mukherjee 2006, 34). Mukherjee postulates that '[t]his is because the Naga tribes living outside Nagaland feel the majority communities in their home states are exploiting them and that they have been socially, economically and politically deprived' (*ibid.*). In many ways it appears that the creation of Nagaland State was successful in pacifying the 16 tribes within it, as the violence has been continued largely by tribes left outside the state – and who, as a consequence, gained none of the advantages of statehood.

## PHASE 6: 1988 TO 1997 – BACK INTO INDIA

Inter-factional fighting drives the much smaller NSCN (IM) out of Burma and into India, to the Naga areas of northern Manipur, reigniting the conflict on the India side. The NSCN (IM) masterminds a spectacular rise to strength to become the prominent faction; it puts in practice new strategies of self-reliance and 'United Front', seeing it forming

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<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that Mukherjee is describing the make-up of the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) at the time of the 1997 ceasefire. It is assumed that this is reflective of the make-up of the groups during the previous stage up until the ceasefire period.

alliances with and supporting other insurgent groups across the region. It also opens a new diplomatic front seeking to internationalise the conflict. The NSCN (IM) adopts the objective of a 'Greater Nagalim', aiming to achieve the integration of Naga areas in adjoining states into Nagaland State. As a result the Naga conflict becomes intermeshed with wider regional dynamics, and in particular destabilises the situation in northern Manipur. This phase also sees the increasing criminalisation of the insurgent groups, and their increased connection to state politics. Furthermore, changing economic and international dynamics see the Indian government develop its 'Look East Policy', increasing the strategic importance of the Northeast. The end of the phase sees a renewed counter-insurgency campaign by the Indian forces.

### INTER-FACTIONAL VIOLENCE

The split between the two NSCN factions served to ignite a new wave of inter-factional conflict and fratricidal killing that has been ongoing ever since. The conflict was fought both against the Indian state and against each other, as Singh describes: 'Once the enmity took place, it increases day-by-day making them blind to see the real purpose of their organisations. Freedom fighting became secondary to them while factional fighting got first priority' (Singh 2004, 179). This persistent enmity between the factions has become one of the major drivers of the violence.

### BACK TO THE BEGINNING: THE RISE OF THE NSCN (IM)

The NSCN (IM) was the smaller of the two factions by far, containing only 300 men; the vast majority of the NSCN's men and weaponry remained in the hands of the NSCN (K) (NNC3; IM1). Following the split, the NSCN (IM) moved out of eastern Nagaland and back into western Nagaland and India to the northern area of Manipur, home to the Tangkul tribe, to which Muivah and much of the NSCN (IM) leadership belonged. After thirteen years of exile in Burma, the Naga

insurgents, and therefore the conflict, were now based back within India. (Shimray 2005, 183 and 201-2; Ao 2002, 29; IM2)

From the beginning the NSCN (IM) faced a struggle for survival, fighting a war on two fronts against both the Indian Army and the much larger NSCN (K). However, over the following years the NSCN (IM) would stage a remarkable comeback (Sinha 2007, 67), becoming the dominant Naga insurgent group, and being able to significantly escalate its campaign against the Indian Army.

### THE NSCN (IM): THE NEW STRATEGY

Following the split, the NSCN (IM) continued to develop and put into practice the strategic analysis that they had been formulating in the previous phase. Conceptualising their armed struggle as an asymmetric conflict against a superior enemy, and utilising the Chinese Communists' approaches of 'protracted war' and 'United Front' as the starting point of their strategic response. For their inspiration they turned to what they saw as an analogous conflict – the US's war in Vietnam. They saw the Vietnamese guerrilla war against the vastly superior US forces as comparable to their own 'David and Goliath' struggle against the Indian Army, as both were conflicts fought by local insurgents against foreign occupying forces.<sup>84</sup>

The NSCN (IM) leadership had first-hand experience of the Vietnam conflict: during the period of direct Chinese support from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s, they had taken some of the (now) NSCN (IM) leadership to Vietnam in the 1970s to see how the Vietnamese were fighting and winning against the American forces (IM1). As Shimray notes, 'Muivah went to North Korea and North Vietnam where he met leaders of the respective Communist parties and observed their training programmes in sabotage, infiltration, local intelligence and guerrilla wars' (Shimray 2005, 310). They later sought to use this

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<sup>84</sup> The NSCN (IM) viewed the Indian Army as a foreign occupying force. The conflict on the far east of India's remote and underdeveloped north-east was a long way from the population and industrial centres of 'mainland' northern India.

experience as a source of inspiration, drawing a parallel between the Vietcong's struggle against the USA and their conflict with the Indian state (IM1; Shimray 2005, 188). The NSCM (IM) leaders' analysis was that America had not lost the war militarily, but rather because the cost of the war on the American people had become too great for them to bear, and this drove a change in public support for the war: arguing that the Americans were not defeated by the Vietnamese, but by their own people (IM1). Aside from the human cost in American lives, they believed that the massive daily financial cost became simply too big for the American people to shoulder. The foundation of their strategy was thus to increase the cost of the war to a level that India could not sustain, using armed struggle as a tool to bring the Indian government to the negotiating table: 'one of the ultimate objectives of the NSCN is to defeat the Government's will to fight and thereby forcing it to come to a rightful settlement of the issues' (Shimray 2005, 181).

### PROTRACTED WAR: GUERRILLA STRUGGLE

The NSCN (IM) led a classic guerrilla campaign against the Indian forces. Knowing that they were hugely outnumbered and outgunned, the NSCN (IM) sought to exploit its one advantage: surprise. All encounters with the Indian Army were to take place at a time and place of the NSCM's choosing. In the case of chance encounters, NSCN (IM) soldiers were told to run when they were not sure that they would be able to crush them, because while each bullet had a cost for the NSCN (IM), the Indian Army had plenty of supplies (IM1).

The NSCN (IM) also aimed to wear out the Indian forces by carrying out a campaign of rapid lightning attacks. Units would march long distances in a short space of time between attacks, not only to keep the initiative, but also to wear out the Indian forces (IM1). In tandem with this the NSCN (IM) expanded their 'striking radius' to the outlying areas of Nagaland, as well as Arunachal Pradesh and the North Cachar Hills in Assam (Shimray 2005, 194). Bhaumik reports: 'Muivah's men were striking at hard targets like security forces in batches of 15/20 guerrillas over a vast expanse of territory covering Nagaland, Manipur

and Assam' (Subir Bhaumik, quoted in *ibid.*). In addition, Shimray notes that the NSCN (IM) has also carried out a strategy to disrupt the economy of the Northeast in order to undermine the administration, as well as enforcing a 'vigorous population and resource control programme' (*ibid.*).

In 1993/1994 the NSCN (IM) made a key change from guerrilla warfare in the jungles and hills to urban insurgency (IM2). It brought the fight out of the hills and into the urban centres of Nagaland. The reasoning was that the fighting was taking place largely out of sight deep in the jungle, and the NSCN (IM) wanted to gain more publicity. It believed that India was happy to continue the conflict while it could contain it within the jungle, far from public scrutiny. The targets remained military; it was not in its view a move from rural insurgency to urban terrorism. Through this change it hoped to make both the Naga people and the world more aware of its fight, and in turn put more pressure on the Indian government (IM1; IM2).

### THE UNITED FRONT – THE 'MOTHER INSURGENCY'

It was in this phase that the NSCN (IM) began to fully implement its strategy of the 'United Front' by building operational links with other revolutionary and nationalist groups in the Indian Northeast and further afield, with the objective of increasing the cost of the war beyond a level that could be sustained by India. It sought to achieve this through harnessing the fermenting discontent that existed in minorities throughout India (and particularly the Northeast) by nurturing and supporting other armed groups across the Union in a campaign against the Indian state, forcing India to fight simultaneously on multiple fronts. This was not some vague sense of solidarity with other minorities; it was a calculated and deliberate strategy to organise and train other insurgent groups as a means to achieve its objectives (IM1). 'The NSCN leadership has made clear their policy and strategy of united front which emphasizes on [sic] winning friends from within and without in confronting a superior force' (Shimray 2005, 297).

Such assistance had started before the NSCN split, and was now

rejuvenated with renewed vigour, starting with insurgent groups in India's Northeast. The NSCN (IM) became pivotal in the proliferation of insurgent groups across the region, turning it into the 'cauldron of insurgency'. According to Gurinder Singh,

[t]he NSCN (IM) has spawned other small ethnic insurgent groups across the Northeast, like the All Tripura Tiger's [sic] Force in Tripura; the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Dima Halem Daoga (DHD) in Assam; in Meghalaya, a Khasi group called Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and a Garo group called Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) have grown under the wings of the NSCN (IM). (Singh 2007, 820)

Shimray adds to this list that the NSCN (IM) has operational links with the Bodo Security Force (BSF) in Assam, the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) in Manipur, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) in Tripura, Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA) in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF), as well as political links with the Council of Khalistan (COK) (Shimray 2005, 180). Lt General Mukherjee<sup>85</sup> ascertains that the NSCN (IM) has become 'the mother organisation of most of the insurgent groups in the region' (Mukherjee 2006, 34) (IM1; IM2).

The NSCN (IM) provided groups with the necessary logistical help to develop into a potent insurgent force, inviting them to come for training in NSCN (IM) safe havens in Burma, protected from Indian Army operations. The NSCN (IM) acted as an incubator, nurturing these groups through their crucial early stages. By 1994, the Self-Defence United Front of The South-East Himalayan Region (SDUF) was formed as an alliance with some of these groups (Singh 2004, 182; Shimray 2005, 180). The stated aim of this alliance was 'solidarity and better coordination among Front members on the one hand, and on the other, to resist against occupation, Indian domination, assimilation

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<sup>85</sup> Mukherjee also attributes the concept of the 'mother insurgency' to the Pakistani Intelligence agency, ISI. Although there is little doubt that Pakistan has been supportive of the Naga insurgents at different stages, there is also a tendency in India to see the hand of ISI behind everything.

and suppression'.<sup>86</sup> The NSCN (IM) has also extended the 'United Front' beyond India, establishing operational links with revolutionaries in other countries. These have included the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karen National Union (KNU) and the Chin Liberation Front (CLF) (Shimray 2005, 180). These international connections have proved particularly advantageous in procuring arms supplies from abroad (*ibid.* 181). The NSCN (K) has also made its own alliances, with the earlier formation in 1989 of the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF), which was initially made up of the 'NSCN (K), ULFA, United Liberation Front of Bodoland, Kuki National Front (KNF) (all from India) and Chin National Front (Myanmar)'.<sup>87</sup>

The net result of the 'United Front' strategy has been to act as a force multiplier, where the NSCN (IM) has harnessed and coordinated the combined strength of its allies against its common enemy, India. The logistical support gained through the alliances has also allowed the NSCN (IM) to 'greatly enhance the expanding strike radius of the Naga nationalists that has been "giving mandarins in the capital's corridors of power sleepless nights"' (Shimray 2005, 180-1).

## INTERNATIONALISING THE CONFLICT

Another weakness identified by the NSCN (IM) leadership was that, despite the bloody toll of the conflict, it had remained largely unknown to the outside world. As long as the conflict remained invisible the Indian forces would be able to operate with impunity against the Nagas, without the restraint enforced by the fear of international condemnation. Furthermore, the NSCN (IM) realised that other comparable conflicts were only resolved with the application of pressure from the international community. This pressure would never materialise as long as the conflict remained hidden to the world. To rectify this, the leadership launched a well-thought-out strategy to internationalise the conflict. (IM1; IM2; Shimray 2005, 285-97).

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Review* No. 4, Dimapur, 4 November 1997, 3.

<sup>87</sup> [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist\\_outfits/ulfa.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/ulfa.htm) (last accessed 23 December 2012).

The leadership established contact with NGOs, human rights groups and journalists in a bid to increase international awareness of the conflict. The key breakthrough came in 1993, when the NSCN (IM) succeeded in securing some international exposure through becoming a member of the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation (UNPO), which served as a springboard to highlight its case. UNPO membership was seen as a striking diplomatic victory in the face of opposition from the Indian government; it also opened up other avenues to internationalise the conflict, providing contacts to NGOs and journalists (Shimray 2005, 290-91). An NSCN (IM) pamphlet exalts that 'India fears the importance of the UNPO' (D8<sup>88</sup>, 11). In addition, it 'created a deep impact in Nagaland and helped the NSCN immensely in consolidating their strength raising their prestige' (Shimray 2005, 291). Likewise, the NSCN (IM) established contact with other international organisations, including:

- the UN Human Rights Organisation in Geneva
  - the UN Working Group on Indigenous People (UNWGIP)
  - Asian Indigenous People Pact (AIPP)
  - International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM)
  - World Baptist Alliance
  - Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD)
  - Minority Rights Group (MRG)
  - Naga Vigil Group (London)
  - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)
  - Naga International Support Centre (NISC)
  - Society for Threatened Peoples
  - Support Group for the Indigenous Peoples Foundation (KWIA)
- (ibid. 292; Singh 2004, 182; Singh 2007, 823; D17<sup>89</sup>, 13).

<sup>88</sup> Document 8: *A Rejoinder to the Indian Propaganda Stunt: 'Does Violence Get A Mandate?' by Mr Th. Muivah, General Secretary, National Socialist Council of Nagalim, 6 June 1994.*

<sup>89</sup> Document 17: NSCN (IM) Pamphlet – Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim. 8 January 2001. *The Legal Status of Naga National Armed Resistance: Right to self-determination under International law & Why and How the Nagas are*

## SELF-RELIANCE

Continuing from the last phase, the NSCN (IM) maintained its stance on avoiding over-reliance on foreign assistance. The central plank of the self-reliance policy was the NSCN's ability to raise funds to maintain its operations. In the initial stages of the conflict under the NNC, it was very much a national movement. The NNC's recruitment and funding was based on a structure where every ten households in a village would supply and provide the funds for one soldier (NNC1). As one former NNC soldier explained that originally there was a collective decision, a consensus to pay 'tax' for their fight for independence (NNC3). However this initial arrangement has not lasted. After the Shillong Accord, the nature of the movement began to change (C8)

Both NSCN factions' main source of income was the collection of revolutionary 'taxation' of the Naga communities they controlled (or, from another point of view, extortion of business and populations in the areas they control). Whereas tax collecting had always existed to some extent, it increased dramatically during the early 1990s as the NSCNs expanded and searched for sources of funding. Whereas before it was covert, it now became overt (C5<sup>90</sup>). The NSCN (IM) had established a very professional, systemic and successful tax collection operation which implemented a variety of taxes including a house tax, income tax, transport tax, enterprise tax, entertainment tax and a 'sojourning tax' on non-Nagas, among other taxes. Failure to pay taxes was met with severe consequences. Describing the situation, Shimray comments that 'one comes to the conclusion that the NSCN is running a parallel government in Nagaland State and Manipur... even the state police departments in Manipur and Nagaland pay these taxes' (Shimray 2005, 163).

In addition the NSCN (IM) raised money from a variety of 'criminal activities', such as bank raids and capturing convoys carrying bank remittances. It is also alleged that it received lucrative funds from joint raids conducted with other Northeast revolutionary groups with which it had

*not Terrorists.* Nagalim: Oking Publicity and Information Service.

90 C5: former Naga human rights activists, interviewed in Kohima on 2 December 2009.

operational links (*ibid.*). There have been consistent accusations of the NSCN (IM)'s involvement in drug smuggling, which the NSCN (IM) leadership not only vehemently denied but also pointed to their policies against social evils such as drugs<sup>91</sup> (*ibid.* 183-86; Goswami 2008, 425).

Another central plank of self-reliance was the procurement of weaponry. Initially the NSCN (IM) built up its armoury by snatching weapons from the Indian Army (IM1). As its forces continued to grow, they needed additional sources of arms. In 1991 the NSCN carried out Operations 'Red Sea' and 'Jordan' to bring in sophisticated military hardware from international sources (Shimray 2005, 191; IM1). From this beginning the NSCN (IM) has gone on to establish the 'largest network for procuring arms from Laos and Cambodia, routing it through Bangladesh and Myanmar and then selling it to different groups' (Singh 2007, 820).

This phase also marked the rise of a new dynamic within the conflict – the criminalisation of the groups. On the one hand the various 'criminal activities' that the NSCN (IM) is involved in, from extortion of taxes to smuggling, can be viewed as legitimate fund-raising for a revolutionary struggle. But it was also the beginning of a new dynamic of criminalisation, in which the profits of crime were no longer just the means to an end, but for some became the ends in themselves.

## THE INDIAN RESPONSE

Due to the renewed level of insurgent activity, the Indian government banned all factions of the NSCN and the NNC in 1991 (Singh 2004, 183) and also set up a North-East Regional Security Coordination Cell in order to facilitate a cohesive approach across the seven states to the region's political problems. 'Such security coordination is dictated

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91 An NSCN (IM) document writes: 'It is an indisputable fact that NSCN [IM] has earned distinction in their relentless campaign against drug peddling and abuses... These allegations to discredit the Nagas and tarnish the image of their organisation, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN[IM]), are absolutely false and baseless' (D7).

by the proliferation of NSCN operations covering all the North-east region' (Shimray 2005, 273).

There had also been an attempt to neutralise the NSCN's 'United Front' strategy by striking individual accords with some of the insurgent groups affiliated with the NSCN (IM) (*ibid.* 267). However; 'This strategy of neutralising all the groups close to the NSCN and finally isolating it tactically sounds brilliant and convincing. However, such a strategy requires a long period to take effect' (*ibid.*). Similarly, he alleges that the Indian government had begun to provide support to the Kachin Independent Organisation (KIO) in Burma. The KIO has long been a host to several insurgent groups from the Indian Northeast; Indian support for the KIO was apparently conditional on them denying these groups sanctuary in their territory (*ibid.* 308).

Over the course of this phase the NSCN (IM) grew in strength. By 1995 it had consolidated its position, and with its well-armed and well-disciplined armed forces had wrested control of almost all of the districts of Nagaland (*ibid.* 206). In response to the rising threat, the Indian forces stepped up counter-insurgency operations against the group. The cycle of violence continued to escalate until in 1997 the two sides agreed a ceasefire (another ceasefire followed in 2001 with the NSCN (K)) (Goswami 2007, 299-300). Both sides paint a different picture of the events leading up to the 1997 ceasefire. The Indian Army's version is that successful counter-insurgency operations forced the NSCN (IM) to sue for peace. As Singh describes, '[f]aced with depleting strength due to relentless counter insurgency operations, NSCN (IM) offered to negotiate for a truce with the Government of India' (Singh 2007, 816). The NSCN (IM) instead claims that it was militarily strong at the time, and that the Indian government was forced to the negotiating table by their strategy (IM1; IM2). Franke describes the NSCN (IM) as the 'most powerful organisation' in the Northeast (although the NSCN (K) controlled Nagaland State), and comments that it was not accidental that the Indian government chose to negotiate with this organisation (Franke 2009, 140). It appears likely that the NSCN (IM) was under severe pressure from Indian counter-insurgency operations, whilst at the same time it seems likely that India intensified their military operations against the NSCN (IM) in response to the NSCN (IM)'s growing strength.

What had changed was the perception of the Naga conflict. Firstly, as the NSCN (IM) rose in strength there was a mood within the military establishment that there was only so much that the Army could do; that it was only able to contain the insurgency, and that any permanent resolution would require a political solution (Shimray 2005, 193). Secondly, the NSCN (IM)'s 'United Front' strategy had, in the eyes of New Delhi, made resolving the Naga conflict central to resolving the wider insurgent problem across the Northeast<sup>92</sup> (Mukherjee 2006, 117). However, at the same time some things have not changed; as the counter-insurgency operations take their toll on the NSCN (IM), they have the unintended consequence of driving the conflict, as journalist Gautam Dasgupta comments: 'Revenge hungry security men, torturing villagers, have given Muivah a steady stream of recruits from the Naga village youth. It has been the same vicious circle again and again' (quoted in Shimray 2005, 261).

#### ETHNIC VIOLENCE: GREATER NAGALIM

A key objective of the NSCN (IM) is the unification of all Naga-inhabited areas into a 'Greater Nagaland', or 'Nagaland', combining Nagaland State with the Naga areas in the adjoining Indian states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Northern Manipur, along with Eastern Nagaland in Burma. This expansionist view has set the NSCN (IM) on a collision course with other ethnic groups in these areas, most notably in Manipur. In 1992 violence erupted in northern Manipur between the NSCN (IM) and the Kuki, who are a significant ethnic group in the Naga majority areas of northern Manipur that the NSCN wants to include in a 'Greater Nagaland'. There have been repeated accusations that the Kuki militias have been funded both by the Indian government and the Manipur state government to fight against the NSCN (IM) (Vashum 2000, 101; D7<sup>93</sup>,

92 Mukherjee, though, disagreed with this analysis: 'Giving in to their demands would agonise the sensibilities of the ethnic groups of all the neighbouring states.'

93 Document 7: Pamphlet - *New Phase of Indian State Terrorism in Nagaland*, Statement of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (IM), 18 September 1993.

D17). The NSCN (IM) claims '[c]ombined [ISF and Kuki National Army (KNA)] military operations are launched against the Naga population in the name of combating against the NSCN [IM] forces' (D7). On the other side, Singh argues that since 1992 the NSCN (IM) has been engaged in a process of ethnic cleansing to gain territorial exclusivity over the disputed area (Singh 2008, 1118). Further, he maintains, the 'Kuki armed insurgency is the result of the cumulative effect of Naga insurgency and its integration discourse' (*ibid.*).

The geographic and demographic nature of Manipur State adds an extra dimension to the nature of the tensions. The Manipur Valley makes up only 10% of the state's geographic area, but contains 60% of the population, which is comprised largely of the Meiti ethnic group (*ibid.* 1116), whereas the surrounding hills are where most of the Nagas live, and make up the bulk of the territory (Baruah 2003, 322). The NSCN (IM)'s claim to the Naga Hills of northern Manipur has created significant resentment among the majority Meiti tribe. They see the hills of northern Manipur as an integral part of their ancient kingdom and modern-day state. As Baruah comments: 'Meiteis resent that Nagas are supposedly trying to "destroy" their state' and are critical of those Manipuri Nagas that identify with the NSCN (IM)' (*ibid.* 333). To further complicate matters, many of the Nagas of Nagaland do not consider the Manipuri Nagas to be true Nagas (Mukherjee 2006, 30).

## THE NSCN (K)

The situation with the NSCN (K) faction during this phase is less clear. The group started the phase as the dominant faction, much larger and better armed. Although the NSCN (IM) went on to rise to prominence, the NSCN (K) still remains a major player. The territory controlled by each faction is always in a state of flux; Shimray argues that by 1995 the NSCN (IM) had managed to take control of most of Nagaland State (Shimray 2005, 206), whilst Mukherjee maintains that pre-ceasefire in 1997 the 'NSCN (K) controlled most of Nagaland and parts of the Naga inhabited areas in the adjoining states as well' (Mukherjee 2006, 34), implying that the ISF's operations from 1995

against the NSCN (IM) allowed the NSCN (K) to regain control of most of Nagaland State.

It has been alleged that, in contrast to the NSCN (IM), the NSCN (K) did not actively campaign against the Indian forces; instead it focused on attacking its former comrades in the NSCN (IM). Shimray claims: ‘It is a well-known fact that they had never ambushed any Indian army convoy or attacked any of its camps’ (Shimray 2005, 202). In 1994 Muivah described the NSCN (K) as ‘nothing but a criminal organisation, which too is sustained by the Indian government to counter... the NSCN [IM]’ (D8, 9). The NSCN (K) for its part alleges that it is the NSCN (IM) who is in collusion with the Indian state. ‘Khaplong maintains that the group of Muivah is in close touch with the Government of India and the later [sic] finances the group to harass the Khaplong led faction’ (Singh 2004, 181). Such accusations are hard to assess, especially as these are exactly the accusations you would expect the rival factions to make: ‘Thus these are the allegations and counter-allegations which have been spread among the people to malign the image of each other. The truth has not been substantiated so far’ (*ibid.*). Indeed, there are rumours that the Indian intelligence services have manipulated the rivalry behind the two groups (*ibid.*).

However, in general much less is written about the NSCN (K) within the academic literature. The reasons for this are probably twofold. Firstly, it had been the NSCN (IM) that had been spearheading the fight against the Indian state, and unlike the NSCN (K), the NSCM (IM) made significant efforts to internationalise their struggle, reaching out to NGOs and journalists. Secondly, the NSCN (K)’s strongholds, the Tuensang district in Nagaland State and Eastern Nagaland (Burma), are the more remote and inaccessible Naga areas. (NSCN (K) leader Khaplang is from the Konyak tribe, which resides in these regions.)

## THE NNC AND THE DEATH OF PHIZO

The NNC had continued to exist in the face of the rise of the two NSCN factions, but its strength had continued to decline. The death of Phizo in 1990 would deal the movement a severe blow. Following his death,

the NNC became divided over the issue of appointing a new president. This led to the creation of two factions in 1995: the NNC-A, which is led by Phizo's daughter Adeno; and the NNC-K, led by Khodao Yanthan. The NNC-K subsequently merged with the NSCN (IM) (Singh 2004, 183; Pillai 1999; Shimray 2005, 135). Pillai comments: 'Though the NFG<sup>94</sup> [sic] and NNC factions now play a peripheral role, they cannot be ignored' (Pillai 1999, 61).<sup>95</sup>

## NAGA STATE POLITICS

It is impossible to consider Naga state politics without considering it within the wider context of the Naga nationalist struggle and the links between them. As reported in the Hindu Newspaper, 'it is a truism in Nagaland politics that hardly any politician worthy of his name can disclaim link [sic] with one or the other faction of the insurgents' (quoted in Shimray 2005, 222). Lintner, during his 1985 visit, describes how he found the relationship between the political parties and the two factions as 'profoundly confusing' (Lintner 1996, 53). He elaborates that '[f]rom our previous experience in reporting on insurgent movements in Burma and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, we were used to a clear-cut division between the government and the rebel forces. In Nagaland, it was entirely different' (*ibid.*).

There are two reasons, Shimray elucidates, why politicians are sympathetic to the insurgent factions. Firstly, those that believe in the Naga nationalists' struggle and only view statehood as a stepping stone to eventual independence. Secondly, those that are political opportunists and 'indulge in a double game in order to place themselves comfortably in a convenient position at the opportune moment' (Shimray 2005, 224).

Thus in the Naga regions, as in other areas of the Northeast, politics and insurgency are inextricably connected; they are two sides

<sup>94</sup> Same as FGN – Federal Government of Nagaland.

<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, since the death of Phizo both NNC factions have distanced themselves from the Shillong Accord. As Shimray points out, 'at present no group is left supporting or identifying with the controversial Accord' (Shimray 2005, 135).

of the same coin. The underlying issue is that there is something of a symbiotic relationship between the state politicians and the insurgent factions, with them mutually relying on each other (*ibid.* 222). There have been accusations that influential leaders of Nagaland State's ruling party have been providing shelter and support to both factions of the NSCN (*ibid.* 223). Overground politics has apparently become mired in underground rivalries, according to Sinha, who expands 'SC Jamir (former Chief Minister of Nagaland) is reported to be siding with Kaplang group whereas Rishang Keishing (former Chief Minister of Manipur) is reported to be supporting NSCN(IM) (Sinha 2007, 75)'.

Commenting on the wider problem of insurgency across the Northeast, Bethany Lacina argues that armed groups being embedded in the workings of civilian politics accounted for the endurance and influence of insurgency in the region (Lacina 2009, 333). Describing the role of insurgents in Northeastern politics, she states:

Acting like the combination of racketeer and policy lobby, an insurgent group can cut political deals and influence elections, and become enmeshed in a network of extortion and corruption that makes it difficult for politicians or bureaucrats to act independently of the rebels. (*ibid.*)<sup>96</sup>

Since 1980, successive Indian governments have made Nagaland State a haven for corruption that has allowed those in power to treat Nagaland

<sup>96</sup> The relationship between politicians and insurgents is complex with many possible dimensions, as Lacina outlines: 'To speak generically: insurgents can manipulate electoral and other politically salient outcomes (such as forcing a general strike or blocking commerce) and, in exchange for using that power to support a certain politician, party, or other political organization, they may be rewarded with monetary kickbacks or immunity for acts of racketeering and violence. Politicians and bureaucrats depend to some extent on insurgents for their career advancement, and for building their fortunes. They may also get a share of the money the rebels bring in through the black market, kidnapping and other crimes. At each stage in these transactions there is the potential for coercion as well as cooperation. For example, a rebel group might keep people away from a polling place in exchange for a bribe, but may also demand a bribe in exchange for refraining from using violence against polling places' (Lacina 2009, 336).

as a personal fiefdom (Shimray 2005, 239, C7<sup>97</sup>). The ‘Centre’ has been willing to continue pumping money into the state to keep the politicians happy and as a means of keeping a lid on the nationalist aspirations of the region. Charles Chasie sums up the situation:

Money was poured in, ostensibly for development purposes, which in fact found their way to the personal coffers of a privileged few. No investigations are ever held because the government is only interested in containing the insurgency problem. Cases of fraud and corruption have mushroomed overnight and millionaires created. Vested interests grew and became entrenched. A privileged class has been floated. (Chasie, quoted in *ibid.* 240).

This would have a wide-ranging impact on the fabric of Naga society, as Lintner discovered during his 1985 visit: ‘Nagaland’s freewheeling economy has nurtured widespread corruption and created a new class of politicians, bureaucrats and contractors with intertwined interests. As a result, social inequality, which was almost unknown in Naga society only a few decades ago, has emerged’ (Lintner 1996, 53). The reality was the emergence of a new elite whose nexus of interconnected interests created a self-perpetuating dynamic that sustained the conflict. Far from a situation in which the state government was confronting the insurgents, the political institutions were in effect ‘captured’ by the rebels, and these very institutions were sustaining the groups. Pillai notes: ‘Some members of the State Administration are nothing more than middlemen in the flow of funds to insurgent groups’ (Pillai 1999, 62).

More concerning from the perspective of ending the violence is the creation of entrenched vested interests within the ruling class that benefit from sustaining the conflict, for the continuing insurgency ensures a generous distribution of resources from the central government. ‘This policy of some state politicians and bureaucrats to keep alive the “movement” for their selfish benefits or otherwise is in tune with New Delhi’s short sighted policy’ (Shimray 2005, 239). This situation

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97 C7: Naga journalist, interviewed in Dimapur on 12 December 2009.

is summed up by an Indian newspaper article cited by Lintner: 'The tragedy is that the Nagaland elite has a vested interest in keeping the insurgency alive. There is a growing feeling that unless the rebel army holds out, the funds from the centre will not flow' (Lintner 1996, 53).

However, the deep irony of the situation is that although this approach was intended to contain the conflict, due to the symbiotic relationship of politicians and insurgents it ensures that a portion of the money poured into the region by New Delhi makes its way to the insurgent factions, helping to sustain the conflict: 'A corrupt nexus of officials, ministers and contractors siphon off funds for development. They in turn finance militants belonging to different factions. It is a vicious circle' (Sinha 2007, 68).

### THE LOOK EAST POLICY – THE CHANGING STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN NORTHEAST

This phase was also a period of change and realignment for India, as it began to postulate a new economic and foreign policy vision, orientating itself eastwards to its often overlooked South-East and East Asian neighbours. The so-called 'Look East Policy' was driven firstly by economic considerations: a 'combination of factors – the collapse of its valued economic partner, the Soviet Union, a severe financial crisis that hit India, and the ineluctable logic of globalization – compelled India to embark on its economic reforms in 1991' (Sikri 2009, 132). This new policy sought to establish greater economic and trading connections with the rising 'Asian Tiger' economies lying to its east. Secondly, the policy was a response to the 'vacuum created in Indian foreign policy with the sudden demise of the Soviet Union' (Goswami 2009, 12), as the end of the Cold War ushered in a new global strategic environment (Sikri 2009, 132).

This new policy sought to establish greater economic and trading connections with the rising 'Asian Tiger' economies lying to its east. The geographical location of India's long-forgotten Northeast ensures it a central role in this new vision. Long-term plans foresaw new highways, railroads and gas pipes connecting mainland India to

the roaring economies of China and south-east Asia, via the Northeast. Plans included a four-lane Asian highway between Delhi and Singapore, linked to Kuala Lumpur, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Phek [sic], Bangkok, Vientiane, Yangon, Mandalay, Kalemeyo, Tamu, Dhaka and Kolkata, as well as a Delhi-Hanoi rail link via Burma, Thailand and Cambodia (Goswami 2009, 8; Sikri 2009, 134). This backwater of India, previously with little economic importance, assumed a central strategic role in India's new foreign policy direction. Hence resolving the multiple insurgencies that ravish the Northeast states – with the Naga conflict at its epicentre – now becomes crucially important, with the region playing a key strategic role in India's economic and foreign policy objectives. Previously, to a certain extent one could imagine that India was prepared to 'manage' the conflicts, allowing the low-intensity violence to rumble on in the remote Northeast where it presented little cause for concern for India as a whole. As Franke notes, 'the new Look East Policy, necessitating a pacified and collaborating Northeast that could facilitate economic transport corridors is the most likely reason explaining GOI's willingness to enter into a trade-off with the Nagas to expand into SEA' (Franke 2009, 125).

## FOREIGN SUPPORT

In this stage, the decline in foreign support that the Naga nationalists had enjoyed began to be reversed. Pakistani and Chinese support had been severely undermined by the demise of East Pakistan following the Bangladeshi War of Independence. In reference to China, Lintner notes that 'the death of Mao Zedong and the subsequent political upheavals in China,'<sup>98</sup> explain why 'the Nagas' treks to China and Beijing's bounty came to an abrupt end' (Lintner 1996, 93). Similarly,

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<sup>98</sup> Whilst a recent article in the *Diplomat* suggests that 'China apparently curtailed support for Indian insurgents starting in the late 1980s following Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to China', but also questions whether China had continued to covertly support the Naga rebels ever since (D13). <http://thediplomat.com/2011/03/22/is-china-backing-indian-insurgents/> (last accessed 9 January 2013).

the Burmese government had been cooperating with India against the Naga nationalists since 1969 (Shimray 2005, 304). However, things now began to change.

Following the War of Independence, Bangladesh and India initially enjoyed good relations, but over time the relationship became more strained and unstable, buffered by issues such as illegal immigration, boundary disputes and, importantly, distribution of Ganga waters (*ibid.* 322). During this phase the NSCN (IM) was able to set up training camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, with alleged cooperation from Bangladesh. These provided vital transit bases for the transportation of arms shipments from Operations 'Red Sea' and 'Jordan' (*ibid.*). At the same time the NSCN (IM) re-established the Naga-Pakistan relationship in 1990, and the training camps in Bangladesh are alleged to be run in consultation with ISI (*ibid.*). The renewed Pakistani support was this time much more covert than before and channelled through ISI, so the extent of it is much harder to gauge. However, there are allegations that the Pakistani authorities provided 1.7 million dollars to the NSCN in three instalments to procure arms from south-east Asia (*ibid.* 321-22).

Throughout the last few phases India and Burma had carried out joint operations against the Naga nationalists; however, this relationship began to fray due to India's support for the democratic movement in Burma led by Aung San Suu Kyi. In light of these tenser relations, Burma has been accused of providing shelter and arms training to Indian insurgent groups, including the NSCN. On the flip side, the Indian government has been accused of supporting Burmese insurgent groups including the KIO – allegedly on the condition that they no longer shelter other Indian insurgent groups (*ibid.* 308).

## **PHASE 7: 1997 TO 2005 – PEACE WITH INDIA, WAR WITH BROTHERS**

This phase starts with a ceasefire between India and the NSCN (IM), which is followed by a ceasefire between India and the NSCN (K) in 2001. As the violence between India and the Nagas ends, inter-factional violence escalates dramatically, alongside a continued criminalisation

of the groups. While the ceasefire holds, there is little progression in the negotiations towards a lasting peace. The NSCN (IM)'s demand for a 'Greater Nagalim' continues to destabilise the neighbouring states, who fear any peace deal will see their states split and areas integrated into an enlarged Nagaland State.

## THE LONG ROAD TO PEACE

By 1996 the successful counter-insurgency operations were taking their toll on the NSCN (IM), forcing it out of Nagaland and into its sanctuaries across the border in Bangladesh, Burma and Thailand. At this stage most of Nagaland and the adjoining Naga areas were back under the control of the NSCN (K) (Mukherjee 2006, 34). Reduced to only a few hundred cadets, the NSCN (IM) decided to pursue a ceasefire and negotiations with the Indian government. On 31 July 1996, the NSCN (IM) offered three preconditions for talks with India:

- 1) Negotiations should focus on sovereignty
- 2) Talks should be held in a third country
- 3) A third party mediator would be included

(Singh 2007, 817)

Following peace negotiations in Zurich during February 1997, a ceasefire agreement was signed on 25 July 1997, which has been in place ever since. Later, on 28 April 2001, the NSCN (K) also entered a ceasefire with the Indian government (Goswami 2007, 299-300; Singh 2007, 817). Both ceasefires are still in effect; however, the conflict is not over, with neither faction having yet to reach a permanent solution with the Indian government. Although both factions have entered a peace process, they have far from given up the armed struggle for good:

There is a view in the security forces that the cease-fire has given the insurgents a breather to enlarge their influence in the Northeast. Despite the cease-fire both factions of the NSCN have been indulging in extortion, levying taxes and killings. (Sinha 2007, 70)

The NSCN (IM) has used the ceasefire as an opportunity to rebuild itself from a few hundred cadets to over 5,000. It has now gained by force control over virtually all of Nagaland and the adjoining Naga areas, with the NSCN (K) only in control of the north-eastern part of Nagaland (Mukherjee 2006, 35; Franke 2009, 141). Mukherjee describes the situation today with the NSCN (IM):

It calls the shots in the region, dictates terms to most other insurgent groups, runs a parallel government and administration, collects taxes from all in both Nagaland and its claimed areas of Greater Nagaland (including from government servants). The NSCN (I & M) has quite obviously prepared itself for an eventuality of the ceasefire breaking down. (Mukherjee 2006, 35)

## INTER-FACTIONAL VIOLENCE

The 1997 ceasefire marked a cessation of violence between the Indian Army and the NSCN (IM), but it was far from an end to the violence for the people of Nagaland. Just as the violence abated between the Indian Security Forces and the NSCN (IM), the violence increased between the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) (NNC3; Franke 2009, 141). Singh expounds:

Even while both factions of the NSCN are involved in a ceasefire with [sic] Government of India, they have not stopped training their guns on each other. An unending fratricidal violence between the two warring NSCN factions, fighting for territorial supremacy, has left an estimated 200 dead in the inter-factional clashes in the past five years. (Singh 2007, 822)

As part of the ceasefire rules, both factions' cadres were meant to be confined to their designated camps, but 'this rule is usually violated by the insurgents as the ceasefire monitoring mechanism is incapable of enforcement' (*ibid.* 821).

This violence could perhaps be attributed to the NSCN (IM) no

longer having to fight a war on two fronts and simply now being able to concentrate on its old foe, the NSCN (K). One may also speculate that it became paramount for the NSCN (IM) to try and establish itself as the sole representative of the Naga people by eliminating the NSCN (K) in order to strengthen its position to negotiate with the Indian government. In addition, increasing criminal activities provided other sources of conflict as the groups fought over criminal and extortion rights. However, despite an increase in inter-faction fighting, overall there has been a steep decline in violence (*ibid.* 817).

Although Nagaland is now on the road to peace, the continued differences between the NSCN (IM), NSCN (K) and the FGN/NNC remain a major hurdle to be overcome in order to arrive at a workable solution for a lasting peace (*ibid.* 822). ‘The Naga society today,’ as Singh argues, ‘stands divided with tribal alignments with different groups. Some Semas and Tangkhuls are aligned to NSCN (IM), while the Konyaks are with Khaplang whereas Angamis and Chakesangs support the FGN’ (*ibid.*).

## THE GREATER NAGALIM ISSUE

The NSCN (IM)’s demand for a Greater Nagalim – integrating Nagaland State with the adjoining Naga areas in Assam, Arunachal and Manipur – continues to be a point of tension, in particular in Manipur, where the ‘possibility of it being split during the negotiations between the Centre and the NSCN (IM) is a source of constant anxiety’ (Singh 2007, 825). The 1997 ceasefire was initially contained within the state of Nagaland; in 2001 it was ‘extended without territorial limits’ (*ibid.*). This provoked a furious backlash in the adjoining states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, who feared that this was the first step in integrating Naga-inhabited areas within their states into a ‘Greater Nagaland’. The agitation was particularly bad in the Impala Valley of Manipur, where militant groups linked to the dominant Meitei ethnic group orchestrated unprecedented levels of violence that left government buildings in the state’s capital ablaze (Das 2007, 34; Dwivedi 2004, 109). The violence was such that the Indian government was forced

to reverse its decision, deleting the controversial clause and restricting the ceasefire between the Indian government and the NSCN (IM) to the state of Nagaland (Singh 2007, 818).

The question of a greater Nagaland has now become central to any lasting resolution of the Naga conflict, whilst at the same time making it inextricably harder to solve by intertwining it with wider regional issues. Singh explains:

After having climbed down from the demand of seeking an independent homeland, the NSCN (IM) leaders have no other option except to demand Greater Nagaland. But the integration of Naga inhabited areas without the consent of the states involved is a far-fetched idea. (*ibid.* 828).

To complicate matters further, not all Naga factions are in favour of a Greater Nagalim (Baruah 2003, 331-32) perhaps because they fear that this will mean domination by the NSCN (IM), and by connection the Tangkhul Manipuri Naga tribe.

## FROM FREEDOM TO CRIMINALITY

In the wake of the 1997 NSCN (IM) ceasefire, Nagaland experienced a marked increase in criminal activities. The ceasefire in effect provided the insurgents with a free hand to run and expand their criminal activities. Whereas previously the Indian Army had provided a check on their criminal activities, the absence of Indian Security Forces due to the ceasefire had enabled the groups to extract money backed by violence unchallenged (Goswami 2008, 420). In particular, 'taxation' of local businesses and populations by the groups increased and became a much more organised affair; the ceasefire became a 'license to extort' (C8).

Under both NSCN factions (especially the NSCN (IM)) this has developed into a comprehensive tax-collecting operation, if not simply outright extortion. An NSCN (IM) pamphlet argues: 'We also levy taxes, because we are the only authentic authority of our country' (D8, 16). Taxes include a levy of between 15-25% on the payroll of all

government employees; housing tax; and import and export taxes on all goods that come in and out of the region. Tax collection is enforced with violent repercussions for those who are foolish enough to resist (Goswami 2008, 424; Singh 2007, 818). The taxation permeates every level. In Kohima even a shoeshine boy pays 1 rupee and a rickshaw driver pays 5 rupees a day in ‘tax’ (A2<sup>99</sup>). Singh comments: ‘Thus imposition of taxes, the collection and extortion of money by the underground Nagas became [sic] stable profession in the name of freedom fighting’ (Singh 2004, 180).

In addition, both the NSCN groups have branched into the more traditional criminal fields of drug trafficking and gunrunning (Jane’s 2006, 218; Goswami 2008, 425). The ‘porous’ Burma-India border provides fertile ground for smuggling operations. The multiplication of armed groups and insurgencies in the Northeast has led to a very high premium for arms supplies. The NSCN (IM) has developed the largest gunrunning operation in the region, buying weapons in Laos and Cambodia, and then bringing them in through Bangladesh and Burma (Singh 2007, 820). Other smuggling operations include timber and counterfeit currency (*ibid.*).

The NSCN (IM) spider’s web of affiliated insurgent groups also adds to the group’s illicit fundraising:

The extended linkages of the NSCN (IM) with the insurgent groups in all the states of the North-east are extremely profitable for them. The small splinter groups have no ideology; they are in [sic] business of insurgency only for extortion, the major share of the extortion goes in the kitty of NSCN (IM). (*ibid.* 70)

A tax on truck drivers has become a particularly lucrative form of extortion. There are only two roads into Manipur State, the NH 39 and NH 53, both of which pass through Naga-controlled areas. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of insurgents, business leaders and politicians working together to enforce blockades, or bandhs, and thereby creating an artificial scarcity in key commodities, which they can then sell for

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<sup>99</sup> Army Officer 2: retired senior officer who served in Nagaland, interviewed in Calcutta 26 November 2009.

highly inflated prices. The resulting profits are then shared with the insurgents – a unique form of business partnership (Singh 2008, 1120).

It is this nexus of politicians, businessmen and insurgent groups – the intermeshing of the legal and illegal – that presents the greatest challenge and also the greatest opportunities for illicit gains. A mutually beneficial working relationship has grown between some local politicians and the insurgents (*ibid.*; Singh 2007, 819), whereby

[i]n exchange for using coercion to support a certain politician or organization – which could range from tampering with elections, enforcing strikes, or threatening a political rival – these groups enjoy immunity for other crimes and claim a share in development money.  
 (Singh 2008, 1120)

In recent years the insurgency has developed into big business, with groups resembling business enterprises. The large sums of money that can be made have induced the proliferation of new groups, which are essentially just ‘freelance extortionists’ (Singh 2007, 819). The knock-on impact of the criminalisation was, as Singh describes, that the ‘[r]ivalry among different factions today is primarily over extortion rights over the area rather than on ideological differences’ (*ibid.*).

Another aspect of India’s attempts to end the Naga insurgency and the other conflicts across the Northeast has been economic development (Dwivedi 2004, 105). The Indian government has poured masses of money into the region to close the development gap in order to counter the region’s ‘perceived sense of isolation and neglect and break the vicious circle of economic stagnation and unemployment which feeds militancy and, in turn, hampers investment and harnessing of its abundant resources’ (Government of India 1997, quoted in Baruah 2007, 17). The amount of money that the Indian government pours into the Northeast is now greater than India gets from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and other multinational institutions put together (Baruah 2007, 17). However, as Sahni and George argue, ‘[m]uch of this investment, moreover, has indirectly ended up financing militancy through the enveloping economy of extortion and collusion’ (Sahni and George 2000, 52). This is the situation in Nagaland, where the

continued corruption and collusion of politicians with insurgents has ensured the diversion of funds and the indirect financing of insurgent groups by development budgets (Baruah 2007, viii; Singh 2007, 819; Sinha 2007, 68; C6<sup>100</sup>). In this way economic development has been a ‘double-edged sword’. While trying to close the development gap, the funding has inadvertently provided a source of income to maintain the groups and prolong the conflict.

#### NAGA POPULATION TIRED OF WAR, READY FOR PEACE

After enduring decades of never-ending conflict, the Naga people are tired of violence (Sinha 2007, 68). Chandrika Singh comments that

both the undergrounds and the Indian security forces have crushed the Naga people. They are fed up with the skirmishes caused by factional fights and also by the raids of the Indian security forces. The Naga people are tired of paying taxes to undergrounds and obeying their commands. (Singh 2004, 188)

Furthermore, Singh argues, that having witnessed the Naga freedom fighters engage in fratricidal killings and money-making activities, a large section of the Naga population has accepted the Indian Constitution (Singh 2004, 188-89). Gurinder Singh describes a Naga society in transition: ‘The people of Nagaland want peace. A new fast growing middle class [sic] Nagas with aspirations for a better future is determined to bring prosperity and is beginning to hold the State accountable and are distancing themselves from the NSCN (IM)’ (Singh 2007, 824).

In a speech in March 2009, Nagaland Chief Minister Shri Neiphiu Rio described the current situation:

The vexed Naga political problem has remained unresolved for six decades, claiming innumerable lives and bringing pain and tears to every Naga family. The ongoing ceasefire and political dialogue between

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<sup>100</sup> C6: NGO worker interviewed in Kohima on 9 December 2009.

the underground groups and the Government of India has been continuing for over a decade without any perceptible progress. The hope for an honourable solution and permanent peace appears to be slowly diminishing in the eyes and mind of the people. If this situation leads to [sic] breakdown of the peace process, then social upheaval, violence and turmoil will return to every part of our land. (D15<sup>101</sup>)

#### FNR: NAGA RECONCILIATION

There is currently some light at the end of the tunnel for the Naga conflict. In 2008 the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was formed under the dynamic leadership of the Rev. Wati Aier. The FNR brings together representatives from all parts of the Naga community: tribal leaders, student groups, the church, groups representing the Nagas in Burma and the states outside of Nagaland State, and most importantly representatives from both the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). The FNR represents a realisation in all parts of the Naga community that the path to peace must start with the Nagas resolving their own differences and ending the fratricidal killings that have scarred Naga society for the last 50 years. The FNR had considerable success over 2009/10 in mediating between the armed factions. This work has been mirrored by a steady decline in inter-factional violence over the past year. While interviewing members of both factions, I was struck by just how much trust and support they put into the work of the FNR. There was a real sense that the FNR was providing a workable avenue for the advancement of peace among the Nagas.

### PART 3: ANALYSIS OF THE NAGA INSURGENCY

This section will analyse the most important factors present in the conflict that have influenced the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation over its lifespan. The analytical framework that was outlined in

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101 Document 15: Keynote Address of Shri Neiphiu Rio, Chief Minister, during the Naga Consultative Meet on 5 March 2009 at Hotel Japfu.

Chapter One will be applied to the Naga Insurgency for this analysis. The framework was constructed through a process of comparative research of the three conflicts in this project, and is now being applied retrospectively to each of the three conflicts.

The analytical framework is divided into a trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors, with each containing a series of key factors:

**CONTEXT:** Social cleavages; popular support; grievances; local politics; national politics; international politics

**STATE ACTORS:** State action – coercive force; state action – policy solution; state capacity; strong/weak government

**NON-STATE ACTORS:** Strategy of armed groups; capacity of armed groups; factionalisation; criminalisation

## CONTEXT

### Social cleavages

The question of Naga identity is a complex issue. On the one side Naga nationalists argue that ‘the Nagas’ have a long history as a ‘Nation’ (Iralu 2009, 27). On the other side, many of those who support the Nagas’ integration within India question the historical existence of an independent Naga nation. In a 2000 pamphlet called the ‘Bedrock of Naga Society’, published by Nagaland State Congress Party and allegedly the brainchild of Nagaland Chief Minister S. C. Jamir (Baruah 2003, 330), it was asserted that ‘[t]he stark and inescapable truth is that neither did we have a definite and unified political structure and nor did we exist as a nation’ (D18<sup>102</sup>) There is no doubt that the concept of the Naga nation is a driving force behind the nationalist struggle, and all identities are ultimately constructions, but there is a question

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102 Document 18: ‘Bedrock of Naga Society’, Published by the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee

<http://www.nenanews.com/ng10.htm> (last accessed 2 December 2012).

of causality, and how much the Naga nationalism is a product of the nationalist struggle itself.<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the duration of the conflict the Nagas have been continually divided along tribal lines. Major cracks began to emerge with the formation of the NPC and the creation of statehood, with the situation evolving into a tragedy of tribal killings under the cloak of nationalism (Goswami 2007, 294). Soon the Sema/Angami struggle for hegemony within the NNC was replaced by the Tangkhul/Konyak struggle within the NSCN, leading to the split in the two factions (Horam 1988, 140-41; Goswami 2007, 298). Naga tribal rivalries are complicated further by loyalty to clan and village. Today the main Naga groups – the NSCN (IM), the NSCN (K) and the NNC factions – are still largely formed along tribal lines (Sinha 2007, 67-68; Singh 2007, 822).

Shimray argues that '[t]he Nagas by tradition did not experience tribalism, it emerged only after modernisation stepped in. For instance, a Naga's first attachment is [sic] his village and not the tribe' (Shimray 2005, 152). One of the NSCN's major criticisms of the NNC was that it was its structure, based on devolved tribal formation, with each tribe forming its own fighting units, that fermented tribal tensions. Muivah expounded that 'tribalism, the most malignant bacteria that corroded the solidarity of the Naga people started emanating from NNC policy' (quoted in *ibid.* 150). The NSCN's central structure was an apparent attempt to rectify the problem; however, it was not long before the NSCN was wracked by its own tribal divisions, leading to the division of the group.

The issue is further complicated by contention over which tribes are to be considered Naga (Baruah 2003, 321)). In particular '[w]hether a large segment of the tribes of Manipur are Nagas has become a highly charged issue' (*ibid.* 323). This is due to the NSCN (IM)'s 'Greater Nagalim' policy of integrating all Naga areas. Other Naga factions are against this concept, arguing that solving the Naga political problem

<sup>103</sup> In this context it is interesting to reflect on an extract of Bertil Lintner's conversation with Isak Swu in the NSCN's HQ in Burma during 1985: "When we first came, the eastern Nagas didn't understand our struggle for independence," Isak explained during one of our many talks. "Most of them hadn't even heard the word 'Naga' – they just knew the name of their own village cluster."

should be up to the Nagas of Nagaland alone, describing the mainly Thangkhul NSCN (IM) leadership as outsiders (*ibid.* 331-32). As Mukherjee sums up,

many of the Nagas of Nagaland do not consider the present day Manipuri Nagas to be true Nagas, despite the fact it is the Manipuri Nagas who form the preponderance of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim – Muivah (NSCN (I&M)), which in turn controls most of Nagaland. The Manipuri Nagas too do not consider many of the Myanmar Nagas to be true Nagas. (Mukherjee 2006, 30)

To further complicate the issue, the NSCN (IM) has been engaged in a fierce conflict with the Kukis of northern Manipur, who today are not considered Nagas (Pillai 1999, 41; Mukherjee 2006, 30). However, as Pillai points out, '[t]he Kukis were once considered Nagas. Indeed, a Kuki was a signatory to the Memorandum submitted in 1929 to the Simon Commission by the Naga Club' (Pillai 1999, 41).

The formation of Nagaland State divided the Nagas and was instrumental in creating new social cleavages, with the emergence of moderate versus hard-core nationalists (Shimray 2005, 255). These divisions were deepened as the institutions of state came into being and moderates chose to run for elected office or work in the government bureaucracy. Worse, it divided the Nagas geographically, restricting the benefits of statehood to only a portion of the Nagas, excluding those who resided in Assam, Arunachal and Manipur (*ibid.*). It is striking that both factions of the NSCN recruit the majority of their forces from the Nagas outside Nagaland State. These Naga tribes living outside Nagaland gain none of the advantages that statehood brings, while still suffering the discrimination of minority status in their homelands in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and across the border in Burma (Mukherjee 2006, 34).

Alongside the horizontal divisions of tribe, Naga society has increasingly experienced vertical stratification. The introduction of party politics into Naga life, followed by capitalism and corruption, has led to the creation of a new rich political elite in the previously egalitarian society. The result has been a transformation of traditional Naga social

structure, with many of the new elite the products of the nexus of corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, contractors and the insurgents (Shimray 2005, 239-40; Lintner 1996, 53; Pillai 1999, 62).

### Popular support

In the initial stages of the conflict, public opinion was united behind the NNC; it was a national struggle. As one village elder commented, everybody was NNC (C2). In the absence of detailed public opinion surveys covering the duration of the conflict, it is impossible to comment definitively. However, anecdotally the trend is clear. Support for Naga nationalism has remained constant. Today, if you ask any Naga they will tell you without prompting that they are a Naga and not an Indian. What has changed is the level of support for the means and the priorities. Since the formation of the NPC there has been increasing division within Naga society on how to achieve this – through political means or through armed conflict – and also between autonomy within the Indian Union or independence.

However, more importantly, the population is tired of war. As Sinha recounts, the '[p]eople of Nagaland are disillusioned and are fed up with violence and bloodshed. Fifty years of strife has taken its toll' (Sinha 2007, 68). The divisions within the armed groups and the ongoing fratricidal killings have done much to erode the support for the groups and for armed conflict as being the best course of action to solve the Naga problem. Furthermore, as the years of conflict dragged on, peace increasingly became the priority over independence.

There have been two important factors in recent decades that have influenced public support for the armed struggle. Firstly, Naga public opinion has become increasingly organised and influential as the conflict has progressed. At the beginning, the NNC was the sole voice of the Naga people. The formation of the state saw the entrance of a multi-party democracy, providing platforms for different viewpoints. From the 1960s onwards the Naga people developed an increasingly powerful civil society. Today there is a plethora of NGOs representing different aspects of Naga society, such as the Naga Hoho (representing

the Naga tribes), Naga Mothers Association and student and human rights organisations, which ‘are exerting great moral force on the polity of Nagaland today’ (Sinha 2007, 77). In addition there is now a growing independent media able to provide a wider perspective. ‘In recent years,’ according to Singh, ‘the media in Nagaland has played a crucial role by putting the spotlight on the senseless killings by insurgent groups and have boldly refused to publish insurgent-sponsored articles’ (Singh 2007, 825). As Naga civil society grew in strength, it was increasingly able to exert pressure on the groups to end their armed struggle. Its strength has grown to a level that the groups feel they can no longer ignore it, and must now engage with it.

The second factor has been a generational change. The younger Naga generation is not scarred by the events of the Indian invasion of 1956-64. Although their sense of Naga identity is undiminished, they are more pragmatic in their outlook and desire for peace. They have grown up under the Indian Union, and are more accepting of the practical implications of remaining within it. As Naga society increasingly moves away from a village society to modernity, there is an acceptance that Indian support is needed for development. A view common among the Naga youth, many of whom are working or studying in other parts of India or abroad.

### Grievances

The Naga case is unique in that the root cause of the conflict was entirely political; a dispute over where sovereignty of the Naga territories resides. This differs from most other separatist conflicts in that the Nagas’ quest for self-determination did not stem from misgovernance by the sovereign power, in this case India. Self-determination was the root cause, not the symptom of or proposed solution to government abuses. In this way it reduced the options available to the Indian government to resolve the conflict: ‘[s]ince the Naga quest for self-determination did not originally stem from Indian misgovernance, it was not plausible to remove the cause of the insurgency’ (Rajagopalan 2008, 15).

Unlike in many other separatist conflicts, the Naga struggle did not

emerge from any socio-economic grievances; questions of economic marginalisation and the need for development came later. Nor did nationalism evolve from misrule or abuse by India. The Indian government did not lose their legitimacy to rule; rather, in the eyes of the Nagas, they never had any legitimacy to rule. The Nagas had been largely left alone and unadministered by the British before their sovereignty was passed to India. It was this political action that ignited the nationalist struggle; the reverse of many separatist struggles in which grievances come first, and nationalism is its product, with independence as the proposed solution.

This is not to say that there are no grievances that drive the conflict; but that these grievances have been generated as a process of the conflict. Naga society has experienced a traumatic and bloody history over the last sixty years, leaving deep and lasting scars on the national psyche. The events of the Indian counter-insurgency operations during 1956-64, in particular, have traumatised a generation, leaving deep wounds that will never heal. The Indian Army burnt almost every Naga village, some two or three times, driving almost the entire population to live in the jungle. As one senior peace advocate explained, 'quite a few of my generation were born in the jungle... What the Indian soldiers did to the Nagas left a permanent scar' (C4<sup>104</sup>). A former NNC soldier summed the situation up: 'I should tell the Indian Generals, yes you have changed, you are trying to understand our problem now.... But I cannot forget. You came with a policy of kill all, burn all, loot all. Nothing was spared' (NNC3). The weight of the memories of the Indian atrocities is so great that the Naga people cannot forget. Furthermore, the stories are passed from one generation to the next, and thus vividly kept alive (C2).

The scars are not just left from the Indian actions; some of the deepest are those that the Nagas inflicted on each other. They go back to the first political assassinations, such as that of the moderate NNC leader T. Sakhrie, allegedly on Phizo's orders. The real injury was the Shillong Accord, which divided the Naga movement like nothing before it or since. It remains a real political issue today, thirty-eight

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<sup>104</sup> C4: Naga peace and reconciliation worker, interviewed in Dimapur on 15 December 2009.

years later – the peace camps<sup>105</sup> that it created are still in existence. More than the signing of the Accord, it was the fratricidal killings that it induced – ‘one of the saddest periods’ – like brother hunting brother (NNC3). The violence and assassinations were to continue over the subsequent decades. Similarly, the 1988 NSCN split induced a cycle of violence that still continues (A1; Sinha 2007, 67; Goswami 2007, 298). The events of 1988 are one of the main drivers of inter-Naga violence: ‘[t]he wound was still very fresh. It starts bleeding every time. It was not taken care of.’ (C4). There are, however, countless other acts of violence, division or betrayal that have torn Naga society, and which keep the cycles of violence in motion.

### Local politics

In the early stages of the conflict the Nagas suffered from a political vacuum; the NNC existed as the only political organisation of which all Nagas were automatically members (Sinha 2007, 52). Whilst this meant that there was no direct political competition, it also denied the Nagas a political forum in which to discuss their future direction and prevented emergence of alternative positions. There were, however, power struggles within the NNC between those that wanted independence and those that preferred some accommodation within India (Mullik 1972, 299).

It was the advent of the NPC and the subsequent creation of Nagaland State that brought political divisions into the conflict, as Shimray contends: ‘The creation of statehood led to the first major division among the Nagas’ (Shimray 2005, 220). This saw the Nagas split between the overground and Underground. But it was not until the formation of Nagaland State that party politics came to play a role in the dynamics of the Naga conflict. State politics and the insurgency are inextricably linked, in a situation in which all of the elected officials are alleged to be connected to one faction or another (Sinha 2007, 68; Shimray 2005, 222): ‘Nagaland State politics is unthinkable without linking in to the

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<sup>105</sup> As part of the agreement, ‘peace camps’ were created for the demobilisation of the NNC cadets.

Naga political struggle' (Shimray 2005, 225). However, it has developed into more than the traditional model of an overground political wing of an armed group that is seen in separatist struggles the world over. Instead, the politicians and insurgents have formed a symbiotic relationship that plays a central role in sustaining the conflict:

There now exists a unique political-insurgent nexus in which both sides depend on each other and in turn ensure the continuation of the conflict. Politicians rely on their connections to the armed factions for their coercive power to help maintain their power bases, and in return the groups receive political protection and financial gain siphoned off from development projects. The irony of the situation is that the extensive amounts of development money that are poured into the region to tackle the economic deprivation that is believed to underlie the insurgency are used to fund that very insurgency, creating a vicious circle. (Sinha 2007, 68)

Interestingly, Lacina argues that traditional counter-insurgency is based on separating the insurgents from their support base, whilst in 'classic treatments of guerrilla war this base is presumed to be the peasantry; in the Northeast, as we have seen, support comes through a web of political elites' (Lacina 2009, 339).

### National politics

Small and remote, the Naga territories have not played an important role in Indian politics in the way that the Punjab did (see next chapter). The conflict has not been explicitly exacerbated by decisions taken at the 'centre' for reasons of political expediency. Nevertheless, the conflict has been affected by the wider politics of the Indian Union.

The scars of the 1947 partition of British India into Pakistan and India, in which millions were made refugees, run very deep in India (Mukherjee 2006, 73), so much so that it would be considered electoral suicide by an Indian political party to advocate any further partition or secession of any part of India. The net result is that Naga independence

is seen as a poison chalice that no Indian government will consider. In reality, India's approach to the Naga problem is constrained by the electoral fortunes of India's governing parties. There is also a real concern over the perceived knock-on effect of Naga independence on the numerous other separatist struggles ongoing throughout the Indian Union. The creation of Nagaland State has already set an unwanted precedent, with numerous other minorities agitating for and some succeeding in achieving statehood. There is a fear that acquiescing to the Nagas' claims will lead to the disintegration of India (Ao 2002, 347).

Significant national political events elsewhere in India have at times had indirect effects on the situation in the Naga conflict. The national state of emergency called by Indira Gandhi in 1975, which was fuelled by events elsewhere in India, played a key role in the defeat of the NNC by giving the security forces a free hand to deal with the insurgents and their supporters (Vashum 2000, 93; Horam 1988, 169-70). As Sinha articulates, '[t]he imposition of internal emergency by Smt Indira Gandhi in 1975 gave a free hand to the security forces to flush out the insurgents from their jungle hideouts' (Sinha 2007, 64). Similarly, the apparent progress made with the Kashmir problem and the accession of Sikkim to the Indian Union in the 1970s appeared to undermine the argument for independence and reinforced the opposing view of a settlement within the Indian Union (Horam 1988, 175). Ao also speculates over the impact on the conflict of the premature death in office of four Indian Prime Ministers – Nehru, Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi – whilst they were attempting to resolve the Naga issue (Ao 2002, 82).

The NSCN (IM)'s objective of the creation of a 'Greater Nagalim' has intertwined the Naga political question with the greater regional political situation, as 'Greater Nagalim' would include Naga areas that currently are in the neighbouring states of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur. Any action taken by the Indian government to address the Naga conflict must also take into consideration the adjoining states. Ironically, progress towards peace in the Naga insurgency has had a destabilising effect on the neighbouring states – in particular Manipur – due to anxiety that any final agreement on the Naga conflict will see its territory ceded to a greater Nagaland state. As Singh comments, '[i]

t is almost impossible to reach any negotiated settlement of the Naga imbroglio without addressing the sensitivities of Manipur which itself is fully embroiled in a multi-ethnic insurgency' (Singh 2008, 1121).

Nagaland's geographic position makes it of significant strategic importance to India's defence and security (Ao 2002, 289). This has played a role in defining how the 'Centre' has viewed the conflict, as its strategic position made it a key element in national policies. Following the conflict with China, resolving the instability in the Northeast became of crucial importance to national foreign policy, influencing decisions such the creation of a Nagaland State (Sinha 2007, 277). Similarly, the adoption of the 'Look East Policy' brought a renewed importance to the Northeast and Nagaland.

### International politics

Despite its remote and landlocked location, international events and, particularly, direct foreign support would have a significant influence on both the direction and duration of the Naga insurgency. Most significant was the direct support that the NNC received from 1962 from Pakistan and from 1966 from China. This provided the NNC with the crucial resources to be able to escalate and sustain the conflict. Previously they had relied on forgotten WWII arms dumps left by the British and Japanese, and also on capturing weapons from the Indian Security Forces (NNC2; Sinha 2007, 272; Mullik 1972, 297). Now their foreign patrons provided them with both sophisticated modern weapons and also, importantly, military training, which in turn shaped the strategies and tactics they pursued (NNC2; NNC3; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 309 and 318; Iralu 2009, 201 and 221; Sinha 2007, 60-63 and 278; Mullik 1972, 333).

The genus of the NNC's foreign support had its roots in India's hostile relations with its two large neighbours, Pakistan and China. Both countries supported the Naga insurgents and other groups as a foreign policy tool to exert pressure on India. India and Pakistan's relationship had always been tense since the violence of partition, and continues to be driven by the enduring conflict over Kashmir. Brigadier

Sinha describes the Naga insurgency as a ‘Godsend for Pakistan’, who supported the insurgency as a means of tying down the maximum amount of Indian troops in the Northeast (Sinha 2007, 206). China and India’s tense relations had their origin partly in India providing support and sanctuary to Tibetan dissidents following China’s invasion, and partly in long-running border disputes; in the Northeast, China claims territory that occupies most of the state of Arunachal Pradesh, which it calls South Tibet<sup>106</sup> (where there are sizable Naga areas) (Mukherjee 2006, 74). Following the outbreak of the 1962 Sino-Indian War over the disputed border, Pakistan seized its opportunity and settled its border disputes with China, with the two countries becoming allies. ‘China from then on has used Pakistan to keep India in its place and to act as its proxy to aid insurgency in India, initially and primarily through East Pakistan for the north-east’ (*ibid.* 75).

These tense relationships were further driven by the dynamics of the Cold War. As China and the Soviet Union’s relationship deteriorated, this would have implications for India, who had allied herself with the USSR. This increased China’s antipathy towards India, which was already compounded by border disputes and India’s war with China’s ally, Pakistan (*ibid.*). India was drawn in deeper to Cold War dynamics when the USA, already allied with Pakistan, began a rapprochement with China, ‘who then joined hands to defeat [sic] USSR and its allies’ (*ibid.* 76).

When in 1962 war broke out between India and China, and in 1965 and 1971 between India and Pakistan, it forced the removal of Indian troops from Naga areas on each occasion in order to tackle the immediate emergency. Each time this gave the NNC the opportunity to regroup (Anand 1980, 248). However, in each case the Nagas chose not to exploit the situation and not to side with India’s enemy, even in the case of the 1962 Sino-India War when Chinese troops drove deep into Arunachal Pradesh (Keyho, 34; Horam 1988, 95), a decision that was later criticised by second-generation Naga group the NSCN (Shimray 2005, 178-79). However, the two wars did bring home to the Indian

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<sup>106</sup> [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-08-30/india/33498447\\_1\\_defence-exchanges-defence-ties-km-of-indian-territory](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-08-30/india/33498447_1_defence-exchanges-defence-ties-km-of-indian-territory) (last accessed 27 September 2013).

government the strategic importance of the remote Northeast region bordering both China and (at that time) East Pakistan. As Brigadier Sinha comments: ‘The fear of a possible China-Pak nexus was ever present and it was considered prudent to tackle the volatile internal situation at the earliest’ (Sinha 2007, 278). This spurred on Indian efforts to deliver a political solution with the creation of Nagaland State – despite objections that the state was too small and set a dangerous precedent for other tribal areas (*ibid.* 277).

The subsequent Indian intervention in the Bangladeshi War of Independence in 1971, leading to the demise of East Pakistan and the emergence of the new state of Bangladesh, dealt a ‘grievous blow’ to the insurgents, as they lost their bases in East Pakistan (*ibid.* 64; Shimray 2005, 320). The direct impact was that foreign support from Pakistan and China dropped substantially following the creation of Bangladesh (Das 2007, 29). The cutting of the Bangladesh-Indian supply lines happened at a key moment, starving the NNC of the necessary arms and ammunition to fight the Indian forces during the 1973-75 offensive (Goswami 2007, 296; Bhaumik 2005, 202; NNC2). A former senior Indian Army officer estimates that the end of foreign support to the NNC accounted for 40% of the reason that it was defeated (A1). However, later relationships were strained, future Bangladeshi governments were not so pro-Indian, and in the 1990s the NSCN (IM) re-established camps in Bangladesh and links with Pakistan (Shimray 2005, 322).

Another key international dimension was the situation with Burma. From the very beginning, the Naga rebels were able to establish camps there, safe from the Indian Army. Unlike their later camps in East Pakistan/Bangladesh this was not due to government sponsorship, but rather because of the government’s inability ‘to adequately administer the border areas or deal effectively with the hostile activities of the Indian insurgents’ (Sinha 2007, 204). Following a meeting of Indira Gandhi and General Ne Win in 1969 there was better coordination between India and Burma, with the two countries carrying out joint operations together against the Naga rebels (Shimray 2005, 304; Sinha 2007, 210). However, the relationship was strained during the 1990s following Indian support for the Burmese democracy movement, with the Burmese allegedly providing support to Indian insurgent groups (Shimray 2005, 308).

The NSCN (IM)'s 'United Front' strategy brought a new level of complexity to the international context of the Naga conflict with the group's spider's web of operational links to other insurgent groups across India and the wider region. These links helped the group to procure arms and to widen its radius of operation, playing a crucial role in its ability to escalate the conflict. It also raised the spectre of state sponsorship of insurgent groups being replaced by the NSCN (IM) acting as the 'mother group', setting up and sponsoring other insurgent groups. Fundamentally, it also changed the nature of the conflict, a change which some commentators attribute to the influence of foreign support. Mukherjee argues:

There were also changes in the pattern of the insurgency. NSCN (I & M)'s Pakistani mentors managed to convince its members that success was feasible only if they operated conjointly with other insurgent groups and that their philosophy needed to change to secession of the entire north-east! (Mukherjee 2006, 33-34)

On the other side, the NSCN (IM) launched a diplomatic offensive in an attempt to internationalise the conflict, in the hope of utilising international pressure on the Indian government (Shimray 2005, 286-97).

The collapse of the USSR, one of India's key allies, and the subsequent end of the Cold War would have major ramifications for India. In an attempt to address the vacuum that this left in India's foreign policy, India developed the 'Look East Policy' as it sought to re-orientate itself towards the 'Asian Tiger' economies to its east (Goswami 12, 2009). This in turn enhanced the strategic importance of the Indian Northeast, as it is the 'surface bridge to south east Asian markets' (Pillai 1999, 73). It would seem impractical for India to deliver on proposed road, rail and gas pipe connections through the Northeast until the insurgencies gripping the region are resolved.

In short, the international context had many direct effects on this remote conflict. India's international relations played a part in determining the strategic value of the Northeast, in the process influencing India's response to the regional insurgencies. Furthermore, the receiving of foreign support by the Naga insurgents was a product of international

context. Foreign support in itself provided the means to escalate and sustain the conflict, and also influenced the direction of insurgent strategy.

## STATE ACTORS

State action – coercive force

How and when the Indian state has sought to use its coercive power has had different impacts on the dynamics of the conflict.

The decision to send in the Indian Security Forces to quell the rising violence in 1955 was perhaps the greatest policy failure. The Indian Army Chief of Staff General K. S. Thimayya allegedly told Nehru at the time ‘that it required political wisdom rather than military might to solve the Naga issue’ (Shimray 2005, 251). The net result was to ensnare the Indian forces into a classic provocation trap and dramatically escalate the conflict. Over the next eight years the Indian Army embarked on a massive military operation in order to pacify the Nagas. It was for all intents and purposes the invasion of Nagaland. The scale and violence of the campaign was unprecedented. For such a small population, the Indian Army sent two Army divisions and 35 battalions of the Assam Rifles (or armed police) in total, equating to nearly one security personnel for each adult male Naga (Horam 1988, 80; Mullik 1972, 313-14).

The Army’s ‘scorched earth’ policy was of unprecedented brutality: Naga sources put the death toll at nearly 100,000 (IWGIA 1986, 114; D2<sup>107</sup>; D7<sup>108</sup>). The campaign saw the wholesale burning of Naga villages, driving a large portion of the Naga population to live in the jungle and resulting in thousands dying from starvation and disease. The human rights abuses of the Indian forces have been well documented, and make shocking reading, with widespread rape, torture and other atrocities inflicted on the Naga population. As a foreign force, the Indian Army knew neither the terrain nor the population. Starved of intelligence, they found themselves fighting a faceless enemy, leading to the many

<sup>107</sup> Document 2: *Pakistan Times*, 4 June 1963.

<sup>108</sup> This NSCN (IM) document places the number of Nagas killed at 150,000 between 1954 and 1964.

atrocities committed by the Army. This only further alienated the people (C5; Franke 2009, 74 and 98).

The offensive was a massive own goal for the Indian government, and played straight into the hands of Phizo and the NNC. The appalling state violence and atrocities of the Indian forces united the Naga people against India. It became a national struggle against an invading force. Those who had been ambivalent about independence before soon sided with the nationalists. The violence of the Indian Army became the driving factor of the nationalists' struggle, and in the process succeeded in turning the views of Phizo into the Naga mainstream. In the face of the Indian Army's harsh measures, even those Nagas who had preferred a peaceful settlement were turned towards independence (Sinha 2007, 73). Furthermore, the violence would scar an entire generation of Nagas, creating a national psychosis that would remain and would make attempts at peace virtually impossible (NNC3; C2; C4).

Long-term, the Indian Army faced all the problems of being perceived as a foreign army of occupation (Franke 2009, 98). Firstly, they were fighting in unfamiliar terrain where they had little connection to the local population, against an insurgent group that knew the topography intimately and enjoyed the support of the people. Secondly, it presented an appealing narrative for the Naga insurgents to exploit, framing the conflict as an 'us against them' conflict, of Naga nationalists fighting off the Indian invader. Similarly, the Army's long-term military operations were perhaps undermined by the withdrawal of troops to fight wars in 1962, 1965 and 1971, allowing the insurgents precious time to regroup (Anand 1980, 248).

In comparison, the next major offensive in the early 1970s was almost a textbook example of a coordinated campaign to militarily defeat an insurgency. It started with the 'September Ban', which allowed the Indian forces to clamp down on the above-ground supporters of the NNC who supplied it with resources and intelligence. After isolating the NNC from the Naga over ground, the Indian forces moved in using a multi-pronged attack. First, the ISF completely saturated the jungle and wrested control from the NNC, leaving it without sanctuary. Secondly, they cut off all supply lines to the NNC fighters, and slowly starved them into submission. Thirdly, whilst putting the NNC under severe

military pressure, the Indian forces used the ‘tribe-by-tribe’ strategy backed up with development resources to divide the Nagas and break down support for the NNC (Das 2007, 29).

The result was the military defeat of the NNC (NNC2). The victory was, however, short-lived, as the campaign aimed to provide a military solution to a conflict that needed a political solution. Whilst the NNC was crushed, all of the factors that had driven the conflict remained unresolved. The end result was that the Shillong Accord only gained a temporary respite before the Nagas could regroup and reorganise. By the 1980s the NSCN had risen to take the NNC’s position, and the conflict continued. Whilst Indians had been encouraged by their victory in the Bangladeshi War of Independence, perhaps, as Keyho suggests, ‘[t]he Indians misread the lessons of their campaign in East Pakistan/Bangladesh: they should have learned from the failure of the Pakistan army to crush Bengali resistance, rather than from their own success in defeating the Pakistanis’ (Keyho, 43).

#### State action – policy solution

The Indian government’s non-violent strategies roughly fall into three categories: ceasefires and negotiations; political concessions; and economic development.

In 1964 the Indian government entered the first ceasefire and negotiations with the NNC. After four years of negotiation and six meetings at the prime ministerial level, the peace talks ultimately failed to lead to a lasting political solution. Despite discussions of amending the constitution, hinting at the possibility of a Bhutan-like protectorate status for Nagaland, it was not enough to convince the NNC (Das 2007, 28; D1; Sinha 2007, 62). In reality the talks were doomed to fail as the NNC leadership at the time would not settle for anything less than independence, which India was never prepared to give. The ceasefire did, however, induce a successful de-escalation in the levels of violence, even if it was not completely observed by both sides. It also provided the NNC with breathing space to reorganise themselves; they continued to send men to Pakistan for arms and training, and to reach out to

China (NNC2; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 77 and 318; Iralu 2009, 201 and 221). However, as some authors point out, the Indian security forces also took the opportunity to consolidate their position (Shimray 2005, 86). When the time came in the early 1970s for a renewed offensive, this time they were ready.

In 1997 the Indian government entered a ceasefire with the NSCN (IM) and in 2001 with the NSCN (K). So far the ceasefires have held by and large, and in recent years real progress has been made towards reaching a lasting peace; but a political solution still looks a long way off. While the ceasefires de-escalated the conflict between the Naga insurgents and the Indian Security Forces, it induced continued fratricidal killings between the factions as they fought for ‘territorial supremacy’ (Singh 2007, 822; Sinha 2007, 70; Mukherjee 2006, 35). The ceasefire has to a certain degree surrendered the state to the insurgent groups, who have been able to consolidate their positions and their control over the population and political institutions of the state. The agreements only reinforce the collusive political-insurgent nexus that has sustained the conflict in recent phases. Furthermore, if the ceasefire breaks down, the Indian Security Forces now face strengthened insurgent groups.

Another element of ceasefire is the question over how the ‘Centre’ will resolve the NSCN (IM) demand for a ‘Greater Nagalim’. This has been a cause for great concern in neighbouring Manipur, where there is much anxiety that Manipur’s territorial integrity may be sacrificed behind their backs in secret negotiations between the Indian government and the NSCN (IM) (Baruah 2003, 332). The net result has been that the Indian government reaching a ceasefire in Nagaland has had the effect of destabilising Manipur.

The creation of Nagaland State was the most significant step that the Indian government has taken to resolve the enduring Naga political struggle. The creation of the state has to some degree been a considerable success. It presented a compromise, with more autonomy than any other Indian state, which has been sufficient to win over the Naga moderates. It successfully undermined the NNC’s monopoly over Naga politics and opened up a political space for the moderates. It also created a vehicle through which the Indian state could funnel development money into the Naga areas, and show the benefits of being

part of the Indian Union. Or, as others would argue, it has introduced corruption to Nagaland and allowed the creation of an elite dependent on New Delhi for its wealth and power. Fundamentally, statehood failed to end the conflict. As Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio describes, '[t]he statehood did not end the violent insurgency movement, primarily because the 16 point agreement<sup>109</sup> was signed by the Govt [sic] of India with the overground leaders, and not with the undergrounds' (D16<sup>110</sup>).

The creation of Nagaland State has also had some negative implications on achieving peace, the most serious of which has been the geographical division of the Nagas between those who are in and those who are outside the state. Those who are outside the state have enjoyed none of the benefits of statehood and still remain minorities in their respective states (Mukherjee 2006, 34). It is noticeable that after the creation of the state, leadership of the Naga insurgents passed largely to those Nagas excluded from it. In this way, what was envisioned as a political solution to the Naga problem has become a central dynamic in sustaining the conflict. In the current peace process, the question of if and how to integrate the adjoining Naga areas into Nagaland State has become the major sticking point. As a result, resolving the Naga political question is now embroiled in a wider regional dilemma, where resolution of the Naga situation is likely to destabilise and ignite violence in neighbouring states.

Another strand of the Indian government's attempts to end the Naga insurgency and the other conflicts across the Northeast has been economic development (Dwivedi 2004, 105). While large amounts of money have been pumped into development in Nagaland, only a small amount of it actually gets through to deliver development on the ground. Corruption has become endemic in Nagaland, as funds are funnelled off by the nexus of corrupt politicians and insurgents. In this way economic development has been a 'double-edged sword'. While trying to close the development gap, the funding has

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<sup>109</sup> The 16 Point Agreement led to the creation of the new Indian state of Nagaland.

<sup>110</sup> Document 16: Lecture delivered by Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, 'Governance in troubled times – the Nagaland experience' at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi on 18 February 2006.

inadvertently provided a source of income to maintain the groups and prolong the conflict (Baruah 2007, viii; C6; Singh 2008, 1120; Singh 2007, 819).

### State capacity

The Indo-Naga struggle is a David-and-Goliath-like conflict, with the might of the Indian Union pitched against a small hill tribe in a remote region. In such a context it would be hard to imagine that at any time India lacked the capacity to tackle the Naga threat; and indeed they have poured significant resources into the conflict. However, it is not just a question of resources; capacity is also having the institutions and structures, as well as the ability necessary, to govern a region effectively.

The Naga Insurgency is the story of a conflict that took place in a region where the state did not have the capacity to govern. Preceding the outbreak of violence, the Naga areas had received little or no administration. They were largely ungoverned spaces beyond the control of the central state. Following partition, the Indian state started to creep into these areas; on the one hand it created resentment (Mullik 1972, 306-7), while on the other hand India was not strong enough to govern them properly. As violence began to escalate in the early 1950s the state simply did not have the capacity in the Naga areas to contain the emerging revolt. It neither had the security apparatus needed to contain the revolt, nor the political-administrative capacity to fully understand the situation and to resolve the issues. Instead it made a number of key mistakes that allowed Phizo to successfully push his nationalist agenda (Pillai 1999, 49-50). The administrative apparatus was further undermined by successive changes in the leadership of the local administration which did not allow the development or maintenance of the necessary knowledge and experience of the area (Anand 1980, 231; Mullik 1972, 322).

In the end the government had no option but to bring in the Army to regain control (Horam 1988, 81). The Army was a blunt instrument, and the atrocities it committed only further aggravated the situation (Shimray 2005, 72). However, the situation should never have deteriorated

to this level if the Indian state had had the sufficient capacity to govern in these regions. Furthermore, once the Army was brought into the fray it did not have the necessary capabilities to adequately tackle the insurgent threat; at the time neither the Army nor the political leadership had any experience of fighting an insurgency (Sinha 2007, 73; Anand 1980, 245). In the end it would take almost twenty years for the Indian Army to learn the lessons and skills necessary to successfully take on and militarily defeat the insurgents. Further, the 1962 brief war with China showed the inadequacies of the Indian Army, leading to a period of military build-up that would produce a more capable armed force (Franke 2009, 67).

Although since then the Indian government's administration and control of the Naga areas has increased significantly, there is still a lack of state capacity. The state is still not in complete control of the territory. As Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio articulates,

[o]ne of the major casualties of such a long and intense insurgency of more than five decades had obviously been 'good governance', especially in the remote rural areas, where a sort of parallel governance exists, leading to the weakening of the traditional village authorities, as well as the writ of the State. (D16)

In fact, within this tiny state there are several 'governments' operating: those of the state and those of the different insurgent factions (Ao 2002, 91).

The state's inability to completely curtail the insurgents' ability to operate – particularly over such a protracted period – only serves to undermine its legitimacy highlighted by the insurgents' ability to extort and collect revolutionary taxes. However, the deeper problem is the symbiotic relationship between local politicians and insurgent groups. This corrupt nexus ensures the perversion of the institutions of government and undermines the rule of law. It is an ironic situation when the institutions of government that should be used to counter the insurgency and establish the state's authority have in effect been captured by the insurgents, and fund and sustain the conflict. Corrupt politicians and institutions ensure that the rule of law never touches

the armed groups, and the siphoning of development funds and other forms of collusion finance the insurgency. The recent ceasefire agreements have only further surrendered the state to the insurgents.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

### Strategy of armed groups

Throughout the conflict, changes in the strategy adopted by the Naga insurgents have directly affected the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. The NNC's response to the formation of the NPC and the subsequent creation of the State of Nagaland was to lead an escalation in the conflict. In an attempt to strangle the new state government at birth, the NNC increased its attacks as part of its war on two governments (Singh 2004, 77 and 89). This not only increased the intensity of the conflict, but also its scope, as Naga moderates that supported the new state now became targets, alongside the Indian government. However, perhaps the most important change in strategy was the decision to seek foreign support from first Pakistan and then China (NNC2; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 309 and 318; Iralu 2009, 201 and 221). The foreign backers provided the NNC with access to new and sophisticated weaponry, whereas before they had relied on weapons left over from WWII or from capturing them from the enemy (NNC2; Sinha 2007, 272; Mullik 1972, 297). Alongside this the military training that they received allowed them to professionalise their armed struggle and, in addition to the weapons supplies, become a more potent force. The gaining of outside support also provided a significant morale boost.

The emergence of the NSCN would bring a revolution in strategic thinking for the Naga nationalists, as they sought to learn from the mistakes of the NNC and devise a strategic approach that could realistically lead to victory in the face of a superior adversary. Accepting that they would never be able to militarily defeat the Indian government and physically drive them out of the Naga territory, the NSCN adopted a strategy of using guerrilla warfare to defeat the Indian government's will to fight, thereby forcing them to the negotiating table (Shimray

2005, 177-81).

In order to pursue this it reconfigured its guerrilla strategy, notably to expand the radius of operation far beyond the Naga areas and across the Northeast (*ibid.* 194). Following this the group made the key decision to move from operating in the countryside to urban insurgency, bringing a conflict that had been largely fought in remote jungle into the region's population centres (IM2). However, perhaps the most important strategic change was that of adopting the 'United Front' approach, forming a spider's web of alliances with other insurgent groups across India and beyond. This not only helped the NSCN (IM) to expand its radius of operation with logistical support from other groups, it also acted as a force multiplier. The NSCN (IM) used the strategy to nurture and fan the flames of insurgency until the whole Northeast was engulfed in dozens of insurgencies. Like Che Guevara, it sought to start more prairie fires than the Indian government could put out (*ibid.* 181).

The 'United Front' strategy also had a complementary role in helping to achieve another new strategy – self-reliance. The NSCN was critical of what it saw as the NNC's overreliance on foreign backers, and emphasised the necessity of one's own effort in the struggle (IM2; Shimray 2005, 183). The NSCN (IM)'s network of other insurgent groups played a crucial logistical role in its efforts to procure arms from South East Asia and smuggle them into India. The policy of self-reliance ensured that the group was well financed and well-armed. But more importantly, it was not dependent on foreign support for this.

By securing its foundations and adapting a new strategic approach, the NSCN (IM) had learnt from the mistakes of the NNC and was now a much more formidable insurgent organisation. Also, through its strategy of a 'United Front', it had become the 'mother insurgency' propagating its war against India through a network of proxies. It was the spider at the centre of the web of insurgency (Muhkerjee 2006, 24; Shimray 2005, 18). The once highly localised conflict had now become intertwined in a much larger web of regional conflicts.

Furthermore, through adopting the strategy of internationalising the Naga struggle, the NSCN (IM) had escalated the conflict by opening up a new (albeit non-violent) front: the diplomatic front (Shimray 2005,

285-97). By reaching out to and engaging with NGOs and journalists, the NSCN (IM) hoped to gain greater international recognition of its struggle, and in turn to be able to bring international pressure to bear on the Indian government.

### Capacity of armed groups

Throughout the lifespan of the conflict, the capacity of the insurgent groups or their ability to wage an armed struggle has had a direct impact on the levels of escalation.

The NPC of 1957 and the subsequent amnesty weakened the movement, as many accepted the amnesty and chose to return from the jungle to their villages. The NNC still remained strong, and rebuilt and reorganised itself (Keyho, 30; Shimray 2005, 220-21), most importantly by seeking foreign support first from Pakistan in 1962 and then from China in 1966. This support allowed the NNC to professionalise and to re-escalate its attacks on the Indian forces and the new state government (NNC2; NNC4; Shimray 2005, 309 and 318; Iralu 2009, 201 and 221). Conversely, the severing of supply lines following the Bangladeshi War of Independence severely weakened the NNC's capacity just when it needed it most (Goswami 2007, 296; Bhaumik 2005, 202). In addition, the recent split of the RGN had further eroded the NNC's fighting strength.

Following the Shillong Accord there was a long period of de-escalation of violence between the Naga groups and the Indian government. After the punishing counter-insurgency operations in the lead-up to the Shillong Accord, the NNC had lost its capacity to maintain an armed struggle. In the years following, the internal struggles between the pro- and anti-accordists, then between the NNC and NSCN – and then the split within the NSCN – reduced its ability to fight against the Indian government.

It is notable that the next major escalation of violence against the Indian state followed the emergence of the NSCN (IM) once it had had a chance to grow its capacity. Through its policies of self-reliance and 'United Front' it managed to rebuild its finances and to procure weapons

from Southeast Asia (Shimray 2005, 180-83). This also coincided with the return of foreign support from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma (Shimray 2005, 307-8 and 321-23). The NSCN (IM) once again had the capacity to propagate an armed struggle against India.

### Factionalisation

Despite starting off as a united front, over the sixty years of conflict the Naga movement has experienced numerous fractures. These divisions have in turn impacted on the cycle of violence. The formation of the NPC, and its successful proposal for the formation of Nagaland State, triggered a wave of inter-Naga violence, as the NNC targeted those whom it viewed as collaborating with the Indian state. The NNC's response to the formation of Nagaland State was to escalate the violence, propagating a war on two governments simultaneously against the Indian and state governments, attempting to paralyse the fledgling state administration (Singh 2004, 77 and 89).

By late 1968 the first factional split had emerged in the armed struggle, with the breakaway Sema-dominated RGN (Vashum 2000, 91; Horam 1988, 142). Later, the signing of the Shillong Accord induced a bloody battle between the pro-accordist and anti-accordist wings of the NNC, ultimately leading to the emergence of the NSCN and a continued struggle of supremacy between the two groups (Sinha 2007, 65-66; Shimray 2005, 109-25). Then in 1988 the NSCN split into the NSCM-IM and NSCN (K), and these have been engaged ever since in a never-ending spiral of fratricidal killings (Mukherjee 2006, 33; Sinha 2007, 67). The result has been that throughout the decades of the conflict, violence has been driven not just by war against India, but also by conflict amongst the Nagas.

The continued factionalisation of the movement has had four key implications. Firstly, every time there is a split leading to a new faction it weakens the movement. This is not just in the sense of splitting resources, but also in terms of having to waste resources on competing with each other. In the case of the RGN, in the end they collaborated with the Indian Security Forces against the NNC (Horam 1988, 146).

Similarly, the divisions and inter-factional violence have worked to undermine popular support for the movement.

Secondly, each time a new faction emerges it sets off a wave of inter-factional violence, escalating the conflict along a different axis. The Naga insurgency has been scarred by violence across two fronts: Indian Security Forces vs. Naga nationalists, and inter-factional violence between different Naga groups. Even after both factions of the NSCN had signed ceasefires with the Indian government, accompanied by a marked de-escalation in violence across that front, there was a rise of inter-factional violence as the conflict escalated across the Naga vs. Naga front (NNC3; Franke 2009).

Thirdly, the emergence of new factions provided the opportunity for reassessment and innovation. The NSCN was not just a new breakaway faction; it criticised the strategy and leadership of the NNC and was determined to learn from what it saw as its mistakes. This led it to develop a new analysis of the situation and to develop new strategies with which to propagate the struggle, in particular adopting and adapting the strategies of protracted war, 'United Front', self-reliance and internationalisation (Shimray 2005, 168-99). In the end the NSCN, in particular the NSCN (IM), emerged a much more formidable insurgent organisation.

Finally, factionalisation has had a deeply negative effect on the chances of peace, for it has made achieving a lasting political solution much harder. Instead of having to negotiate with one insurgent organisation (or representative of Naga nationalism), all groups need to be included in the solution, making a complex situation even more complex. Whilst insurgent infighting might benefit the security forces at a tactical level, long-term it only makes the search for a lasting peace ever more elusive (Sinha 2007, 75). Also, due to the intense rivalry between the factions, an agreement with one group is likely to antagonise the other.

## Criminalisation

The demise of the NNC and the rise of the NSCN saw the increasing criminalisation of the movement.<sup>111</sup> What started as a means to finance the groups has come to be a defining characteristic of the insurgent movement. The situation is summed up succinctly by Sinha: ‘The commitment to the cause, which illuminated the movement in the fifties and sixties, is now absent. Today, militancy is a way to make easy money. Extortion, kidnapping and killings of innocent civilians have replaced the guerrilla warfare’ (Sinha 2007, 68). One retired general who served in the Northeast put it to me that ‘it is an industry, not an insurgency’ (A2).

Criminalisation is a crucially important dynamic for two reasons. Firstly, criminal activity provided the means for the conflict to continue. While previously the groups were reliant on outside support – either from the population or foreign donors – criminal activity provided an internal means of funding, through which the groups became self-sustaining.

Secondly, the increasing criminalisation of the groups changed their nature and the nature of the conflict. The vast sums of money that the groups can earn from their ‘taxation’, gunrunning and drug smuggling operations has changed the role of criminal activity from a ‘means to an end’ to an ‘end’ in itself. The main insurgent groups have metamorphosed into mafia organisations where profit-making has become the priority. The result is that criminalisation has become an impediment to peace, as too many people are making too much money – all hidden under the cloak of insurgency. This has spiralled to new heights with the collaboration of insurgents and businessmen to create artificial shortages of goods in order to inflate prices (Singh 2008, 1120; Singh 2007, 819).

In addition, criminalisation has served to instigate increased violence as groups fight over criminal rights. The increase in inter-factional violence post-1997 was largely driven by fights to control territory and the lucrative criminal activities these contained. Similarly, Sinha points out

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<sup>111</sup> Despite the obvious criminal activity, what is harder to decipher is how much of this is directed from the top, or area commanders acting on their own initiative.

that analysts proscribe the ‘violent clashes between Kukis and Nagas to control Moreh, a trading centre on [sic] Indo-Myanmar border, as a life and death struggle to control the trade in narcotics’ (Sinha 2007, 239).

However, as Sahni and George point out (in reference to the Northeast in general), ‘extortion and outright criminal activities are not the only problem. The deeper problem is the inter-meshing of the legal with the illegal’ (Sahni and George 2000, 60). At the heart of this is the political insurgent nexus that has institutionalised extortion and corruption, and has provided the armed groups with protection from the law. The net result is that this symbiotic relationship has perverted democratic institutions and undermined the rule of law, as well as challenging the state’s monopoly of force. This relationship on the one hand creates a self-sustaining dynamic perpetuating the conflict, and on the other undermines the very legitimacy of the government fighting the insurgents.

# 3

## THE PUNJAB CRISIS: THE FIGHT FOR KHALISTAN

### INTRODUCTION

The crisis that gripped the Indian state of the Punjab through the 1980s and early 1990s was one of the most dramatic and bloody of recent times in India. Between 1981 and 1993, a total of 21,469 people were killed in the conflict, including 8,009 ‘terrorists’ (Mahadevan 2008, 1). The roots of the conflict lay in the Khalistan movement’s campaign for an independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan. It was therefore both a separatist and religious-fundamentalist-inspired conflict.

The conflict experienced many periods of escalation and de-escalation. During its five phases, the state pursued a variety of counterterrorism approaches across the spectrum of both hard and soft policies, ranging from brutal repression of the population, through capitulation and concession to the militants’<sup>112</sup> demands, to intelligence-led kinetic counterterrorism campaigns. Notably, both repression and the quest for a political solution led to an escalation in violence.

The end of the conflict was remarkable not just for the speed with which it came about, but that the militant groups were comprehensively

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112 Within the literature on the Punjab the terms ‘militant’ and ‘terrorist’ tend to be used interchangeable. For consistency I have opted to use ‘militant’ throughout (except in direct quotes), and also because it avoids using the politically loaded label of terrorism.

defeated rather than simply being contained. Its resolution of the conflict also flew in the face of conventional wisdom that such conflicts always need a political solution. There was no political solution; no concessions and no root causes were addressed.

## SOURCES

This chapter is based on a review of secondary literature and interviews carried out by the author during 2009 with members of the Punjab police, former militant leaders, political activists, journalists and academic experts. As in any conflict, there are two sides to the story, and this is very evident from the literature on the Punjab Crisis. The conflict is polarised between on the one side those who sympathised with the Khalistan movement and saw the security force's response as excessively violent and a motivating factor in the conflict; and on the other side those who see the security forces' response as proportionate and deny widespread violation of human rights. Also, as was to be expected, memories were rather selective in many cases. For example, when interviewing former militants it was always 'other' groups that were involved in criminality or random violence. Similarly, while former security officials would concede the role of extrajudicial killings, the details remained elusive. However, both sides were remarkably frank and prepared to go into considerable detail about their respective experiences of the conflict.

## PART 1: THE BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

### THE BIRTH OF THE INDIAN PUNJAB – THE TRAUMA OF PARTITION

It was a traumatic birth that created the modern Indian state of Punjab, leaving deep scars on the Sikh consciousness that remained unhealed, and which would contribute to the rise in militancy decades later. In 1947 the British Raj came to an end. In the ensuing independence process, the British province of Punjab was divided along religious lines, with the Muslim majority of West Punjab joining Pakistan and the Hindu and

Sikh majority of East Punjab becoming a state within an independent India. The Sikh population, 80% of whom lived in pre-partition Punjab, found themselves roughly divided into two halves (Dhillon 1990, 200; Marwah 2009, 251). The partition also left pockets of Muslims in East Punjab and Hindus in West Punjab. It was not long before extremely violent communal riots broke out in India and Pakistan, causing a mass exodus of refugees in both directions across the new frontier. In the chaos and violence of partition perhaps as much as 500,000 people lost their lives, and in the process Muslims all but disappeared from East Punjab and Sikhs and Hindus from West Punjab (Tully and Jacob 2009, 35). As Dhillon describes, '[i]n the Punjab some 10 million people left their hearths and homes and moved across the newly demarcated border to make a fresh start in an alien land. It was perhaps the biggest transfer of population in history' (Dhillon 1990, 200).

In the new Indian state of Punjab the Sikh community was still a minority, and the trauma of partition had left them with a sense of "homelessness" and a powerful sense of alienation from the mainstream' (Dhillon 1990, 201). The Punjab's new demographic composition was 35 per cent Sikh and 62 per cent Hindu (Chima 2002, 27). Many within the community were angry at what they saw as a denial of a Sikh homeland by the departing British power (Dhillon 1990, 201). Sikhs had enjoyed a disproportionately powerful position in society, but under the new democracy their small numerical size ensured a dramatic shift of power away from this proud and hard-working community. As Dhillon points out,

[t]hey formed almost 23 per cent of the British Indian army, though they were less than 2 per cent of the Indian population, [and] contributed 40 per cent to the provincial exchequer in the Punjab in land revenue and irrigation tax. They had the highest rate of literacy and managed 400 self-financed educational institutions. Almost 80 per cent of Indians who took part in the freedom struggle, and ended up in British jails or on the gallows were Sikh. (Dhillon 2006, 18)

Many felt that the historic importance of the community should accord it a greater share of power than their numerically small numbers

delivered under the new democratic system. Moreover, many feared a loss of identity and status in an India in which they only constituted 2%.

Partition had not just divided their homeland, but also fundamentally altered the position that Sikhs had enjoyed within Indian society. In the new India the Sikh community was experiencing a crisis of identity. This was exacerbated by a fear from some parts of the Sikh community that Sikhism would be absorbed into Hinduism, and that the Sikhs would become a part of the Hindu social system; not an unfounded fear, as Hinduism had shown a remarkable ability to absorb other faiths, such as Buddhism and Jainism (Marwah 2009, 253; Tully and Jacob 2009, 37).



FIG. 4 The modern Indian state of Punjab.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>113</sup> [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/special/passagefromindia/images/side\\_punjab\\_map.gif](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/special/passagefromindia/images/side_punjab_map.gif) (last accessed 4 May 2009)

## PUNJABI POLITICS

In the years after partition, members of the Sikh community worked extremely hard to rebuild their lives. Through their hard work and determination the Punjab was rebuilt, and the Sikhs ‘became the most prosperous of the major communities, raising Punjab’s per capita income to the highest in the country’ (Tully and Jacob 2009, 36). At the heart of the rising prosperity was the so-called ‘Green Revolution’, which was soon to turn the Punjab into a net exporter and the breadbasket of India. By 1980, 73% of all the grain bought by the central government for its grain reserves came from the region (Pettigrew 1995, 5).

As a result of partition the political landscape in the new state of Punjab also changed: ‘The tussle for political power between the Muslims and the Hindu-Sikh minorities had now shifted to a tussle between the Hindus and the Sikhs’ (Marwah 2009, 252). Sikh politics continued to be dominated by two institutions. The first, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which is responsible for managing all the Gurdwaras<sup>114</sup> in the Punjab, has developed into a kind of Sikh parliament. The second is the Akali Dal, the Sikh religious political party, which in turn is backed by the SGPC, which through its control of the Gurdwaras’ revenues has the financial resources to fund the political activities of Akali Dal (Tully and Jacob 2009, 31). In post-partition India the Akali leaders saw it as ‘their task to win rights and privileges for Sikhs which would safeguard their religion in independent India’ (Tully and Jacob 2009, 35).

Despite the consolidation of the Sikh community in the new Indian state of Punjab, the Sikhs still constituted a minority in the state. The electoral arithmetic further conspired against the Akali Dal’s chances of being the governing party, for Sikhs were not voting along communal lines, and hence not all Sikhs chose to vote for the Sikh religious party. The secular Congress Party

had little difficulty in defeating the Akali party in state elections, because it did not claim to represent only the Sikhs. While it got

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114 A Gurdwara is a Sikh place of worship.

an overwhelming support of the Hindu voter against the Akalis, it also managed to get some support from the Sikhs. (Marwah 2009, 252)

Despite being a religion that had rejected the caste system of Hinduism, Sikh society is nevertheless divided along caste lines<sup>115</sup> (Tully and Jacob 2009, 27 and 37; Marwah 2009, 253). The only section of the Sikh community that consistently supported the Akali Dal was the Jat caste of peasant farmers; as such it became first and foremost the party representing peasant farmers (Tully and Jacob 2009, 42 and 47). According to Joyce Pettigrew, '[t]he movement for independence represents the politics of small farmers' (Pettigrew 1995, 4).

The Akali Dal sought to position itself as the 'militant political party fighting for the Sikh cause' (Marwah 2009, 252), and soon the party began to agitate for a Sikh homeland, believing that 'unless the Sikhs had their own state based on Sikhism, their faith and identity could not be safeguarded' (Nandi 1996, 183). In 1953 Prime Minister Nehru set up the States Reorganisation Committee in order to consider demands from across India for state boundaries to be redrawn along linguistic lines. Nehru, however, rejected the Akalis' demand for a Punjabi-speaking state, convinced that their demand was communal rather than linguistic. In response the Akalis launched an agitation for a Punjabi Suba.<sup>116</sup> Nehru would remain steadfastly against it, but his daughter Indira Gandhi acceded to the demand once she had become prime minister in 1966<sup>117</sup> (Tully and Jacob 2009, 39-42; Brar 2008, 12-14).

The result was the creation of a truncated Punjab state, through ceding Hindu majority areas to create the new states of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. In an awkward compromise, Chandigarh, the capital of the undivided state, was to be the joint capital of both Punjab

<sup>115</sup> According to Tully and Jacob, outcaste Hindus whose forefathers had converted to Sikhism had still not been fully accepted by other Sikhs (Tully and Jacob 2009, 37).

<sup>116</sup> A Punjabi-speaking state.

<sup>117</sup> Tully and Jacob note that 'Mrs Gandhi was undoubtedly influenced by the gallant role of Sikh troops and the mainly Sikh rural population of the border areas of Punjab in the war with Pakistan in 1965' (Tully and Jacob 2009, 42).

and Haryana. The new smaller Punjab was still only nominally a Sikh majority state, with 56% of the population Sikh (Tully and Jacob 2009, 43-44; Nandi 1996, 183). It would be a hollow victory; as the Sikh vote was split, the Akalis would still not become the natural party of government in the Punjab, and were only able to govern in coalition with the Hindu Jan Sangh party. Such coalitions were tried after the elections in 1967 and 1969, but proved hopelessly unstable (Tully and Jacob 2009, 43): '[T]he Akalis had their homeland but could not govern it' and as a result, '[i]n order to maintain their support while out of office they had to revive a sense of grievance among the Sikhs – by returning to agitational politics' (*ibid.*).

The years that followed were to see a series of Akali agitations for the control of Chandigarh, which in the end Mrs Gandhi acquiesced to. She agreed to the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab in return for two small areas going to Haryana (the award, however, would never be implemented). The subsequent years would be a dismal time politically for the Akalis. Following the 1971 defeat of Pakistan and 'liberation' of Bangladesh, Mrs Gandhi was at her height in popularity, and Congress triumphed in the 1972 state elections. Furthermore, the new Chief Minister of Punjab Giani Zail Singh<sup>118</sup> positioning as a religious Sikh would undercut the Akalis' positioning as he did everything in his power to placate Sikh religious sentiments (*ibid.*).

In response, the Akali Dal was to push its demands further with the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1974: 'To protect their position the Akali Dal decided to draw up a list of grievances which they hoped would convince Sikhs that even Zail Singh was not going to meet their "legitimate" demands' (*ibid.*). The core of the resolution centred on protection of the Sikh identity, including the creation of a 'Sikh Autonomous Region' and changing the Indian constitution to ensure that the 'Sikhs enjoy special rights as a nation' (Nandi 1996, 183; Major 1987, 46). Many of the demands were of a political nature, such as Chandigarh becoming the capital of the Punjab alone, greater

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<sup>118</sup> Giani Zail Singh would later become the first Sikh President of India, but also played a prominent role in the rise to power of the Sikh fundamentalist preacher Bhindranwale (Tully and Jacob 2009, 45).

allocation of river waters and a greater amount of regional autonomy for the states.<sup>119</sup> Other demands were of a distinctly religious nature, including making Amritsar a ‘holy city’, allowing Sikhs to carry their kirpan (sword) while flying on Indian Airlines, three hours of recitation of Sikh scriptures on the government-operated radio every day, and the banning of tobacco products, alcohol and meat near the holy shrine in the Golden Temple. The government conceded to the last three of these demands; however, the creation of a holy city clearly contravened the secular nature of the Indian state (Nandi 1996, 184). The demands of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution pushed for such extensive regional autonomy that it threatened the unity of India so much that its terms were unlikely to ever be accepted by an Indian prime minister. At the same time, it was so specific in its demands that it limited the prospects of reaching a compromise (Tully and Jacob 2009, 46).

However, the full implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution would remain a rallying call for the Sikh militants, and the failure to implement it taken as evidence of discrimination against Sikhs. The Akalis succeeded in mixing both economic and religious grievances into a potent form of fundamentalism. By the 1970s the ‘Green Revolution’ was beginning to run out of steam, leading to rising economic difficulties and unemployment among the Jat Sikh farmers. The subsequent surge in unemployed and educated young Sikhs would prove fertile ground for revolutionary talk (*ibid.* 49).

Important changes were also taking place within the Akali Dal. Ascending to a party of government, no matter how factious, would alter the party’s internal dynamics. There were now three centres of power: President of the SGPC, President of the Akali Dal and the Chief Ministership of Punjab. There had always been factions within the Akali

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<sup>119</sup> As the party representing Jat Sikh peasant farmers, the resolution was invariably biased towards farmers rather than traders and industrialists. It is for this reason why a ‘fair’ division of river waters was such an important issue, as it resonated strongly with the farmers (Tully and Jacob 2009, 47). The issue of river waters would develop a communal dimension, as the farmers in the western regions of the Punjab were largely Jat Sikh, whilst the Hindus were mostly involved in trade and business, and so cared little about an issue that hardly affected them (Dhillon 2006, 61-62).

Dal, but previously one of the factions had managed to control all the centres of power. From the 1960s, Chima argues,

no single Akali leader or faction was able to gain decisive control of the SGPC and party organization as was earlier the case. During the 1980s, a three-way split developed and each faction tried to use the other for its own political advantage. (Chima 2002, 26)

## THE REALPOLITIK OF INDIRA GANDHI

The rule of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was a relatively secure affair, but this situation changed dramatically after his death when his daughter Indira Gandhi became prime minister. Nehru's rule was characterised by a relatively 'hands-off' approach that generally allowed district and state politics to remain fairly independent from central intervention (Chima 2002, 25).

The ascendance of Indira Gandhi to prime minister in 1966 saw a dramatic change in circumstances, as her position as head of the Congress party and prime minister was, unlike her father's, never fully secure. She was chosen as prime minister not via the ballot box, but by a collection of elderly politicians known as 'the syndicate' who each had dominated politics in their home state under Nehru. They selected Mrs Gandhi as they could not decide who amongst their group should succeed to prime minister after the premature death of his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1965. Mistakenly they believed that they would be able to make the inexperienced Mrs Gandhi their puppet. In order to survive she realised that she needed to break away from the syndicate, and to wrestle control of the party machine. In the 1967 elections the Congress Party lost power in half the Indian states. In 1969, the party then split, with a number of Nehru-era, state-level party bosses forming a separate Congress Party. However, following the victory of the 1971 war, Mrs Gandhi triumphed in the following elections. In order to retain her position of power Indira Gandhi pursued four distinct policies: firstly, centralising power nationally; secondly, dismissing popularly elected state governments; thirdly, using demagogic rhetoric

to nationalise local issues for partisan advantages; and finally, destroying autonomous party leadership and organisation in the districts (*ibid.*; Tully and Jacob 2009, 43).

These strategies would put Mrs Gandhi on a collision course with the Akali Dal. Firstly, the centralising agenda of Mrs Gandhi was in opposition to the decentralised vision of the Akali Dal. While they were calling for greater devolution of power to the states, the prime minister was working to shift power in the opposite direction. Secondly, the new electoral arithmetic led her to pursue a strategy aimed at attracting the Hindu-nationalist voting bloc for electoral victory (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 145). In her last period in office she would attempt to move the Congress Party away from their traditional support base of untouchables and Muslims to instead forge the Hindu majority into an electoral bloc which had previously been divided along caste lines. In doing so, she moved the party from secular to Hindu politics (Tully and Jacob 2009, 11-12; Chima 2002, 20-21) and in aid of this agenda, it is suggested that the rise of Sikh-Hindu tensions in the face of Sikh extremism were twisted to gain electoral advantage within the Hindu population (Dhillon 1990, 205; Chima 2002, 28; Major 1987, 52).

In the meantime, Mrs Gandhi's rule was to come into a crisis of its own that led to the declaration of a state of emergency in 1975. Following a court ruling that found her guilty of corrupt electoral practices (although most agreed the charges were not much more than a technicality), Mrs Gandhi declared an emergency to protect her own position. Giving her the power to muzzle Parliament, the courts and the press, and to arrest her opponents – during the course of the almost two-year emergency nearly 100,000 political opponents would be imprisoned<sup>120</sup> (Tully and Jacob 2009, 13). The post-emergency 1977 elections were an unparalleled disaster for Congress, who did not even win a single seat in northern India. In Punjab, defeated Congress chief minister Zail Singh was replaced by an Akali Dal and Janata party coalition (Tully and Jacob 2009, 56-57).

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<sup>120</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12641776> (last accessed 17 June 2013).

## PART 2: THE PHASES OF THE CONFLICT

The conflict can be broken down into five distinct phases. Each phase corresponds to a change of government and a change in the approach pursued towards the militants. In turn, each phase is marked by a significant escalation or de-escalation in the conflict. The changing levels of violence in the conflict can be seen in fig. 1

The first phase (1984) covers the rise of the Sikh militancy, culminating in the ill-fated Operation Blue Star to remove the militants from the Golden Temple complex. The second phase (1985-87) marks the change to seeking a political solution under the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which saw a further escalation in the conflict. The third phase (1987-89) sees the dismissal of the state government, and the Punjab state again coming under direct rule from the Centre. The search for a political solution is abandoned and a comprehensive counterterrorism campaign is launched by K. P. S. Gill, Director of the Punjab Police, leading to the first period of de-escalation. The fourth phase (1989-91) is a period of national instability under the leadership of Prime Ministers Singh and then Chandrasekhar. The counterterrorism campaign flounders and the government returns to seeking a political solution, resulting in the most dramatic escalation of the conflict. The final phase (1991-94) sees the election of Prime Minister Rao and the return of K. P. S. Gill to instigate a comprehensive joint police and military counterterrorism plan that successfully eliminates the Khalistan militants.

### PHASE 1: OUT OF THE FRYING PAN, INTO THE FIRE (1978-1984)

This stage sees the further destabilisation of Punjabi politics in the wake of the rise of radical Sikh preacher Sant Bhindranwale. While initially covertly backed by Congress to undermine the Akali Dal, Bhindranwale soon turns on his former backers, leading the militancy. As the Sikh militancy descends into violence under Bhindranwale, and he and his followers take control of the Golden Temple Complex, Mrs Gandhi is forced to act, sending in the Army in Operation Blue Star. The operation is a disaster, and combined with the subsequent anti-Sikh riots

following Mrs Gandhi's assassination, serves to alienate the population and drive them straight into the hands of the extremists.

### THE RISE OF SANT BHINDRANWALE: THE DECLINE INTO VIOLENCE

The rise of violent Sikh militancy is closely connected to the rise to prominence of the fundamentalist Sikh preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale – a rise that was by many attributed to the covert support of Mrs Gandhi as a means of weakening the Akali Dal (Dhillon 1990, 205; Chima 2002, 28; Major 1987, 52). It is alleged that in the wake of the 1977 elections, former Congress Chief Minister Zail Singh and Mrs Gandhi's son Sanjay devised a plan to win back control of the Punjab from the Akali Dal. The crux of the strategy was to identify and then promote a new Sikh religious leader who could discredit and undermine the Akali leadership, and help split the Sikh religious vote, allowing the Congress Party to return to power (Tully and Jacob 2009, 57). Sant Bhindranwale was the religious figure they chose; however, this was in many ways like letting the 'genie out of the bottle'. When he became too powerful, Mrs Gandhi was forced to act against him, but the ill-fated Operation Blue Star that followed only served to ignite the conflict and escalated it into a full-blown crisis.

Sant Bhindranwale held a key position within the Sikh community as the head of the Damdami Taksal, an important Sikh missionary school and seat of theocratic learning in the Punjab. It was here that children, largely from the rural peasant communities, were sent for education based on Sikh scriptures and rituals (Jha 1990, 136; Tully and Jacob 2009, 54). As such he had a respected and important position within the Sikh community from which to preach his fundamentalist views, as described by Rajan Jha:

To the rich youngmen [sic] Bhindranwale gave a dream of [sic] promised land of Khalistan. To the rural folk the re-establishment of Sikh traditions and rituals and to the marginalized unemployed youths a zeal for fighting for the honour of Sikh Khalsa tradition and money which they needed. (Jha 1990, 139)

Having selected Bhindranwale, all they needed now was a cause, which they found soon enough in a campaign against the Nirankaris, a heterodox and (in his opinion) an heretical Sikh sect (Tully and Jacob 2009, 58; Chima 1997, 7). The beginning of the Bhindranwale-associated violence can be traced back to 13 April in 1978, Baisakhi Day,<sup>121</sup> on which followers of Bhindranwale clashed with a group of Nirankaris<sup>122</sup> and left 16 people dead, 13 of whom were followers of the Bhindranwale (Pettigrew 1995, 33; Sohata 1993, 29). This put the Akali government in a bind: as defenders of Sikh orthodoxy they could not disassociate themselves from a campaign against a heretical sect, but as the party of government they could not support open lawlessness (Tully and Jacob 2009, 59). When the subsequent court case that prosecuted (among others) the head of the Nirankari sect collapsed, this caused great resentment among the Sant and his followers (Dhillon 2006, 69). It was from these beginnings that the Sikh militancy would emerge and engulf the Punjab: ‘This religious revivalism and intra-Sikh conflict later turned into fundamentalism and religious violence also directed toward the Hindu community and central state’ (Chima 1997, 7).

In the meantime Zail Singh wasted no time in building up the following of Bhindranwale, even helping to set up a new party, Dal Khalsa, to harass the Akalis. The Sant never openly associated with Dal Khalsa, maintaining he was a man of religion and not a politician, but it was always known as Bhindranwale’s party (Tully and Jacob 2009, 59). However, his religiosity apparently was not to be a barrier to the Sant actively campaigning for Congress in the run-up to the January 1980 general election (*ibid.*). The election would see Congress returned to power in the Centre, and Zail Singh was rewarded with a promotion to the position of Home Minister in Indira Gandhi’s new cabinet. Later in that year Congress also returned to power in the Punjab State assembly, with Zail Singh’s arch rival Darbara Singh becoming Chief Minister. It is alleged that Mrs Gandhi selected Zail Singh’s rival in the

121 Baisakhi Day is one of the most important Sikh festivals, celebrating the creation of the Khalsa in 1699.

122 The Nirankaris are a breakaway sect of Sikhism formed in 1929. They are considered heretical by many mainstream Sikhs, especially for their devotion to a living Guru.

Punjab because he would undermine Zail Singh's own support base at the state level in Punjab. It was Mrs Gandhi's governing style to prevent politicians from becoming too powerful and being able to wield independent influence. This was an example of internal Congress divide and rule, and demonstrates why Zail Singh would seek to undermine his rival in order to protect his political power base (*ibid.* 63; Chima 2002, 26; Dhillon 2006, 67-68). The two rivals were poles apart, with the new Chief Minister returning to the traditional secularism of the Congress Party, and aspersing Zail Singh's accommodation of religious communalism (Tully and Jacob 2009, 63-65). As the Punjab descended into chaos and violence over the next four years, the situation was further agitated by this political rivalry: 'The rivalry between two Congress Sikh leaders from the Punjab, Giani Zail Singh and Darbara Singh, did not help matters... In the power game that was being played in Delhi and Chandigarh Bhindranwale emerged as a clear winner' (Marwah 2009, 258).

The return of Congress to power would be scarred by a series of murders and a slide towards violence. In May 1980, the head of the Nirankaris, Baba Gurcharan Singh, was shot dead, allegedly by supporters of Bhindranwale. As suspicion fell on the Sant, he sought refuge in one of the Golden Temples hostels until his political godfather Zail Singh told the Indian parliament he had nothing to do with the murder. It was followed in September by a second prominent murder, the victim being Lala Jagat Narain, the proprietor of a chain of newspapers. His influential daily *Punjab Kesari* had been a bitter critic of Bhindranwale and sided with the Nirankaris. This was the beginning of Sikh terrorism in the Punjab. (Dhillon 1990, 207; Bhatnager 1998, 27; Tully and Jacob 2009, 65-66).

After Narain's murder, Darbara Singh decided to act and sought to arrest Bhindranwale. Following a stand-off at the Gurdwara at Mehta Chowk, the Sant surrendered to the police (Tully and Jacob 2009, 68-69). The Sant's arrest sparked off a chain of violence that would ultimately lead to the collapse of the state government and Operation Blue Star. In the days afterwards Sikh gunmen would open fire on Hindus in markets in Jalandhar and Taran Taran. This was followed by attempts to derail trains and the successful hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight to

Lahore. A more ominous sign of what was to come was an attempted bomb attack against the Deputy Inspector-General of the police in Patiala, one of the officers sent to arrest Bhindranwale. This was the start of targeting police officers that dared to take any action against Bhindranwale and his followers, a tactic that was to have a paralysing effect on the Punjab police force (*ibid.* 69).

However, less than a month later he would be released from prison after Zail Singh had told the Delhi parliament that there was no evidence that Bhindranwale was involved in the murder. The decision to release him was taken by the government and was not a judicial verdict (*ibid.*). This was the turning point in his career as he now returned a hero; as he himself said, '[t]he government has done more for me in one week than I could have achieved in years' (quoted in *ibid.* 71). By now Bhindranwale had fallen out of love with Congress, but apparently Congress had not fallen out of love with him. Zail Singh had allegedly supported his release as he believed he could still use him to bring down his old rival, while Mrs Gandhi believed it would help her maintain her control over the Delhi Sikhs. 'By surrendering justice to petty political gains the government itself created the ogre' (Tully and Jacob 2009, 71). However, Zail Singh's prodigy now turned against Congress: 'A Frankenstein had been created and the government did not know how to cope with the deteriorating situation' (Marwah 2009, 257).

Meanwhile the Akali Dal leadership saw a political opportunity, and embraced Bhindranwale to shore up their own political standing (Tully and Jacob 2009, 73). The political opportunism was also internal, as the different factions within the Akali Dal sought to exploit the situation for their own internal power struggles (Chima 2002, 26). This however would create a race to the bottom, as the Akalis felt the need to match Bhindranwale's extremism. In August 1982, Akali Dal joined forces with Bhindranwale and announced a 'Dharam Yudh' (religious war) agitation for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and for the release of some of the Sant's close associates (Tully and Jacob 2009, 82; Chima 2002, 28). However, the Akalis would soon pay for their political opportunism as they lost control of the situation to Bhindramwale; the Resolution would provide 'Bhindranwale with a weapon to seize control of the agitation from the Akali Dal leaders'

(Tully and Jacob 2009, 46). The Akali leaders would attempt a negotiated compromise, but the Sant would demand nothing less than its full implementation, undermining their support (*ibid.* 47).

It was in this increasingly militant atmosphere that the concept of Khalistan began to gain traction. Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, a future militant leader, describes the situation: 'It is only when the *morcha* [mass demonstration] started in '82 that talk of Khalistan started among younger people, while the older people in the Akali Dal were still only thinking of the Anandpur Sahib resolution' (quoted in Pettigrew 1995, 145). However, it is interesting to note that Bhindranwale was not an advocate of the ideology of Khalistan, but rather of 'Sikh rights'. On the question of Khalistan, all Bhindranwale would say was, 'I am neither for independence nor against it, but if I am offered I will not refuse it' (quoted in Tully and Jacob 2009, 129). The Khalistan ideology had previously been largely the preserve of a few radicals in the Sikh diaspora abroad, such as Jagjit Singh Chauhan, based in London, who campaigned for an independent state of Khalistan from the early 1970s (Bhatnager 1998, 25)

## THE SLIDE INTO VIOLENCE

Once the violence started it began to spread across the Punjab, and as the government failed to act for fear of losing support amongst the Sikh masses, it only served to strengthen Bhindranwale. The violence seemed to have two prongs. The first was aimed at anyone and everyone who dared to stand in Bhindranwale's way, whether politician, religious leader, journalist or police officer. The second was to inflame Hindu-Sikh communal tensions: Bhindranwale's strategy was not just to drive the Hindus out of Punjab, but to provoke a Hindu backlash across the country that would drive Sikhs outside of the state back to Punjab in search of safety. As part of this plan to incite the Hindu population, cows' heads and other parts were thrown into temples, for which Dal Khalsa claimed responsibility (Tully and Jacob 2009, 80).

Soon Bhindranwale and his associates relocated to the Golden Temple complex, which was in practice out of bounds for the local police. The

complex became in effect a ‘safe house’ out of which militant groups operating under the direction of Bhindranwale could work, carrying out attacks against those on his ‘hit list’. He soon ‘emerged as an alternative centre of power in the state, with all kinds of petitioners approaching him for redress of their grievances’ (Dhillon 2006, 113; Tully and Jacob 2009, 101). The complex was gradually turned into a fortress, with stockpiles of weapons, and extremists were trained and drilled to defend their positions in the event of an attack (Dhillon 1990, 207; D33<sup>123</sup>). The situation deteriorated to such an extent that when Deputy Inspector-General A. S. Atwal, head of the Amritsar police, was killed at the gates to the Golden Temple and the perpetrators took sanctuary inside, the police were powerless to apprehend them (Tully and Jacob 2009, 96-97; Dhillon 1990, 207; Bhatnager 1998, 27). The situation continued to worsen; several bodies of persons tortured to death inside the temple were found simply discarded in open drains near the complex (Bhatnager 1998, 27). When six Hindu bus passengers were singled out and shot dead in October 1983, Mrs Gandhi was compelled to act, and dismissed the state government and imposed direct presidential rule from Delhi (Chima 2002, 27; Dhillon 1990, 27). Darbara Singh had been one of the few Congress leaders who had been prepared to stand up to Bhindranwale; he had wanted to send in the police to arrest Bhindranwale but had allegedly been prevented from doing so by the Centre (Tully and Jacob 2009, 105). The end result was that ‘Zail Singh’s goal of castrating Darbara Singh had been achieved, but Bhindranwale had now become an independent force in the Punjab’ (Chima 2002, 29).

By this stage the security apparatus in the state had all but collapsed. The Punjab police were demoralised and paralysed by Bhindramwale’s policy of targeting any police officers that dared to take action against any of his supporters. A senior official in the Punjab government at the time explained that ‘the Punjab police are demoralised. So many of their colleagues have been killed by Bhindranwale’s men that they have no faith in our ability to protect them’ (Tully and Jacob 2009, 108-9). Furthermore, the action that was taken by those segments of the police

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123 Document 33: *Indian Express*, 14 June 1984.

that were prepared to act often proved counterproductive as it included utilising harsh measures, and there were allegations of extrajudicial killings (*ibid.* 105-6; Marwah 2009, 261; Dhillon 2006, 139). As the Punjab police lost control of the situation, the Centre brought in paramilitary forces to contain the violence. ‘As the state police was so demoralised’, Marwah explains, ‘the Central forces had no option but to virtually take over the job of policing the state’ (Marwah 2009, 263). However, the paramilitaries unfamiliar with the land and people were unable to effectively fill this role, and in the process they sometimes committed human rights abuses which only further inflamed the situation (*ibid.*; Tully and Jacob 2009, 109). In addition, it brought a communal element into the security forces, with the Hindu population not trusting the largely Jat Sikh police force, and the Sikhs not trusting the largely Hindu paramilitary forces (Dhillon 2006, 109; Tully and Jacob 2009, 109 and 120).

It is against this backdrop that Mrs Gandhi faced a dramatically escalating situation in Punjab. The transition to president’s rule was marked by several attempts and failures to reach a negotiated resolution to the Bhindranwale and Akali demands. However, politics would again prevent the delivering of a solution. On the one hand, any agreement on implementing the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was complicated by the fact that it would also affect neighbouring states. Some have suggested that Mrs Gandhi was more concerned about the impact any agreement would have on Hindu voters, particularly in neighbouring Haryana, if it was seen as a ‘sell-out’ to the Sikhs (Tully and Jacob 2009, 118). On the other hand, the Akali leadership, having got into bed with Bhindranwale, had been dragged to the extreme, from which it was impossible to step back without losing face and surrendering leadership to the Sant. In the end, the ‘Sikh political leaders realised the appalling risk they had taken by trying to play Bhindranwale off against the government – but it was too late’ (*ibid.* 131). A virtual civil war had by now broken out within the Golden Temple complex, with Longowal being protected from Bhindranwale’s supporters by a rival Sikh militant group, the Babbar Khalsa<sup>124</sup> (*ibid.* 110 and 131).

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124 The Babbar Khalsa, led by Jathedar Sukhdev Singh, was one of the many splinter groups that emerged as part of the movement against the Nirankaris. However, they were strongly against the killing of Hindus and the violence that

As the situation continued to deteriorate and with the population beginning to lose faith in Mrs Gandhi's ability to act, the prime minister was forced into action. Having allowed the situation to have escalated to this point, for fear that any action would have further inflamed it, Mrs Gandhi was forced to pursue the only option left to her – to send in the Army to clear the militants out of the Golden Temple. Over the last 22 months, Bhindranwale's militants had killed 165 Hindus and Nirankiris, as well as 39 Sikhs that had opposed the Sant (*ibid.* 147). On 5 June 1984, Indira Gandhi sent the Army into the Golden Temple complex in the ill-conceived Operation Blue Star. This served as the match that lit the fuse of the powder keg that was the Punjab. In turn, this set off a chain of events that would cost Mrs Gandhi her life, alienate the Sikh community and drive them into the open arms of the militants.

## OPERATION BLUE STAR

It was a hastily organised and, some argue, ill-thought-through operation to clear out the Golden Temple complex of Sikh militants. The operation soon spiralled out of control, with the Army forced to bring in tanks and artillery to subdue the well-entrenched militants. In the process the Golden Temple complex was severely damaged and the Akal Takht,<sup>125</sup> within which Bhindranwale was based, was virtually destroyed. As one Punjab police officer commented, the army was trained to fight the enemy, not its own people and therefore when it went into the Golden Temple, it fought like it was fighting the enemy (PO6<sup>126</sup>). After several days of fighting, often in hand to hand combat, the security forces gained control of the complex. The number of casualties was large, but is highly disputed. According to official government figures, security forces suffered 83 fatalities and 248 wounded; 'Terrorist and other Casualties' amounted to 492 fatalities and 86 wounded (Brar 2008, 124). Other estimates of the death

Bhindranwale had unleashed across the Punjab (Tully and Jacob 2009, 110).  
125 Sikh holy building within the Golden Temple complex.

126 Punjab Police Officer 6: interviewed in Mumbai on 21 December 2009.

toll have varied from 2,000 to as high as 5,000, including 700 army soldiers (Pettigrew 1995, 35). A detailed analysis of the validity of the official figures, by Tully and Jacob, accepts the figures for security forces casualties but questions the civilian figures. As the police made no attempt to identify the bodies, and just cremated them en masse, this left plenty of scope for rumours and conspiracy theories (Tully and Jacob 2009, 184-85). However, allegedly the majority of militants' followers escaped (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 142; Dhillon 1990, 208; Sahni 2006, 36; Nandi 1996, 186).

The exact events of Operation Blue Star have been shrouded in mystery and conspiracy theories. What actually happened and why is disputed. There are those who maintain that it was a justified proportional response given the circumstances, and others who accuse the Army of deliberate atrocities and human rights abuses. With the events taking place behind a media blackout and the Punjab virtually sealed off from the outside world during the operation, and not to mention the many vested interests on all sides that have much to gain from projecting their own interpretation of the events, it will be hard to ever really know what happened. What is beyond doubt, though, is that the operation was a complete public relations disaster that only served to drive the conflict.

Perhaps two points should be made that may explain (if not justify) the Army's actions. Firstly, it believed that it needed to act quickly to neutralise Bhindranwale, and with time being of the essence, it could not carry out a siege operation but was forced to launch an assault. It was believed that Bhindranwale's strategy was to be able to hold out against the security forces long enough for news of the assault to provoke a revolt in the Punjab countryside, predicting that it would lead to tens of thousands of Sikhs marching on Amritsar to protect the temple. The Army also claimed to have intelligence that Bhindranwale had given orders for the mass killings of Hindus to start shortly (Tully and Jacob 2009, 148 and 188-89; Brar 2008, 30-31).

Secondly, due to bad intelligence, the Army was not prepared for the level of preparation and the fierce resistance of the militants. Major-General Shahbeg Singh, hero of the Bangladesh War of Independence, had joined Bhindranwale's followers and masterminded the fortification

and defence of the Golden Temple complex. It was only once the assault had begun, and the death toll started to rise, that the Army began to appreciate the formidable enemy it was up against, forcing it to bring in tanks to support its men (Tully and Jacob 2009, 126 and 185-88; Brar 2008, 27 and 39 and 84-103).

## THE REACTION

The reaction of the Sikh community was complete outrage; Mrs Gandhi had totally underestimated the significance of launching such an attack on the Sikh holiest of holy shrines. Even the British, in two hundred years of rule, never dared to enter the Golden Temple for fear of the reaction it would provoke (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 147). Nonetheless, it has been suggested that she agreed to the attack in order to benefit her party in upcoming elections in Hindu-dominated states in northern India. Sahota and Sahota describe it as 'a malafide exercise to win the elections by giving a punch on the nose of the Sikhs' (*ibid.*). On top of the loss of life, the operation inflicted incalculable psychological damage on the larger Sikh community, compounding their feelings of alienation from central government (Sahni 2006, 36).

Without going into details of the operation we can say without reservation, that it was really [sic] very sad and callous and tragic action which moved the heart and soul of all non-committed and non-partisan Sikhs and Hindus of India. (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 142)

In the wake of the operation there were a number of mutinies of Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army<sup>127</sup> (Dhillon 1990, 208; Nandi 1996, 186). As one former soldier who became a guerrilla articulated, '[w]e felt there was no use our remaining in the regiment. We had joined for the service of the country. If the same country attacks our home, it is

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<sup>127</sup> Although serious in themselves, the mutinies need to be placed in context; only 3% of Sikh soldiers mutinied, and many were raw recruits (Tully and Jacob 2009, 196-97).

a very bad thing' (quoted in Pettigrew 1995, 36). A nineteen-year-old student at the time, who would later become a leading Babbar Khalsa militant, commented that 'Operation Blue Star was the starting point for me and many others like me' (D19<sup>128</sup>). Dhillon sums up the effect of Operation Blue Star as

[a] watershed in accelerating Sikh alienation and the spread of terrorism. From now onwards, the Sikh extremist-terrorist [sic] rapidly gained respectability in the Sikh community as a whole. The damage to the holy shrine, death of large numbers of innocent Sikhs and detention of those found at the place of action and their long incarceration provided further incitement to the Sikh youth to take to terrorist activities more extensively. (Dhillon 1990, 208)

Operation Blue Star had reverberations far beyond the Punjab and India. It awoke the Sikh diaspora spread across the world, which in turn served as a crucial source of funding and support for the militants. The events also angered large parts of the previously secular Sikh youth living in the west. Many soon grew their beards for the first time and became baptised Sikhs. Subsequently they began to support the Khalistan cause through organisations such as the International Sikh Youth Federation<sup>129</sup> (C10<sup>130</sup>; C11<sup>131</sup>). The ISYF was at the forefront of the campaign to mobilise the Sikh diaspora. In reaction to Operation Blue Star, the North American Akali Dal within days issued a ten-point 'appeal to the Sikhs', which among other things called for a boycott of Air India, the State Bank of India and the India Olympic team, as well as a plea for funds to campaign for an Independent Sovereign Sikh State – Khalistan (D21<sup>132</sup>).

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128 Document 19: *Freedom Post*, mouthpiece of Dal Khalsa, vol. 3, 26 November 2004.

129 The ISYF has in recent years been banned as a terrorist organisation in the UK (2001), India (2002), USA (2002) and Canada (2003).

130 C10: Sikh activist, interviewed in London on 27 July 2009.

131 C11: Sikh activist, interviewed in Leicester on 24 August 2009.

132 Document 21: press release, North American Akali Dal, 12 June 1984.

## OPERATION WOODROSE

The assault on the Golden Temple was followed by Operation Woodrose, the Army's 'mopping up' exercise. It was intended to clear out the remaining Bhindranwale followers from the villages and Gurdwaras<sup>133</sup> across the state. The operation was led by the Army with troops drawn from largely outside the state who were suspicious of the local police. Consequently, they starved themselves of vital local intelligence. As a result the operation deteriorated towards sweeping and indiscriminate arrests; after three months the Army had arrested 5,000 people, 3,000 of whom were released again (Tully and Jacob 2009, 205). Such operations led to large-scale intimidation and harassments in the Sikh villages, causing lasting resentment. As a result, large numbers of Sikh youths, who were the predominant target of the operation, crossed into a welcoming Pakistan (D19; M2<sup>134</sup>). Initially this was only to escape the harassment, but later these youths became a pool for militant recruitment. In addition, for the first time, many Sikhs started seeking asylum in western countries (Dhillon 1990, 209; Sahni 2006, 36; Pettigrew 1995, 36; Tully and Jacob 2009, 200-5).

Retired General Narinder Singh, vice-president of the Punjab Human Rights Organisation, described the situation:

The real scar was Operation Woodrose. It was operation pacification. The men were taken out of the houses by a predominantly non-Sikh Army. They then searched and removed many precious things from homes. Systematically, everyone wearing the saffron patka or having a flowing beard<sup>135</sup> was branded a terrorist and eliminated. (quoted in Pettigrew 1995, 36)

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133 Gurdwaras are Sikh places of worship.

134 M2: former Dam Dami Taksal and associate of Sant Bhindranwale, interviewed in Amritsar on 16 November 2009.

135 Saffron *patka* and flowing beards were signs of Sikh religious devotion.

## FURTHER DOWN THE SPIRAL: ASSASSINATION AND RIOTS

As Operation Woodrose was coming to an end, two events would further escalate the situation. First, India was rocked by the assassination of Prime Minister Gandhi on 31 October 1984, killed by her own Sikh bodyguards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. She was the first Indian leader to be murdered while in power (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 143; Sahni 2006, 36). A fringe element within the Sikh community responded to the news by celebrating and ‘dancing in the streets and distributing sweets’, which only served to infuriate a fringe element within the Hindu community (Nandi 1996, 1986).

This led quickly to ignite the second event – brutal communal rioting across India directed at the greatly outnumbered Sikh population living outside of the Punjab. According to government figures, 2,717 Sikhs were massacred in the rioting. By far the worst riots were in Delhi, where 2,150 were murdered. A further 50,000 fled to the Punjab to save their lives and another 45,000 took shelter in relief camps. The nature of the killing was particularly gruesome, since most of the victims were burned to death. More shocking were the allegations that the riots were instigated and often led by local Congress politicians, and accusations against the police ranged from failing to protect the Sikh communities to being actively involved in directing the violence (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 143; Dhillon 1990, 210; Tully and Jacob 2009, 7).

The effects of the riots were to further compound the sense of alienation within the Sikh community, already at new heights after Operation Blue Star. The facts that the violence was perpetrated by those with whom they had lived side by side, and that ‘their’ government had done little to protect them, drove even the more moderate into the hands of the extremists. The militant point of view gained further respectability (Dhillon 1990, 210). Harcharanjit Singh Dhami, current president of Dal Khalsa, summed up the sentiment of the period: ‘In the wake of both these episodes the sense of alienation that India is not ours and we don’t belong to India has always remained high on the minds of Sikhs’ (D20<sup>136</sup>).

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<sup>136</sup> Document 20: *Dal Khalsa – 30 Years of Struggle*.

## PHASE 2: CHASING THE POLITICAL SOLUTION (1985-1987)

In the wake of the events of 1984, the new Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi, seeks a political settlement to the Punjab Crisis with the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. In the subsequent state elections, the moderate Akali Dal triumphs and leads a new state government, but their position is undermined by the difficulties of implementing the Accord. Meanwhile the militants begin to reorganise and form the Panthic Committee to coordinate their activity. As the violence begins to increase, Rajiv Gandhi acts by dismissing the Akali government and returning the state to direct rule from the Centre.

### RAJIV-LONGOWAL ACCORD

The following year, 1985, the government pursued a conciliatory approach under the new Prime Minister and son of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi. The leaders of the Akali Dal and about 1,500 persons who had been imprisoned since Operation Blue Star were released (Dhillon 1990, 2009). However, the continued factionalism of the Akali Dal played into the hands of the extremists as '[e]ach faction tried to upstage the other by vociferously propagating the demands of the extremists' (Marwah 2009, 269). Sant Harchand Singh Longowal, the moderate leader of the Akali Dal, made considerable efforts on release from prison to achieve a peaceful reconciliation between Sikh and Hindu communities and with the central government. Tensions in the Punjab began to ease, culminating with the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, a memorandum of understanding to resolve a host of the long-held Sikh grievances, including the fate of the capital Chandigarh and the division of the river water (Dhillon 1990, 209; Sahota and Sahota 1993, 152). However, Longowal was attacked by the other three factions of the Akali Dal, accused of 'sacrificing the Sikh cause for selfish ends' (Marwah 2009, 270).

In the eyes of the separatists, the Accord, stopping short of calling for Khalistan, was a betrayal, and Longowal was assassinated whilst addressing a religious congregation on 20 August 1985 (Sahota 1993, 152;

Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 112). In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, in the elections that followed on 25 September 1985 the Akali Dal (Longowal) won a large majority in the state parliament, largely on the basis of implementing the Accord, while the militants boycotted the elections. The Akali Dal now returned to power under Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 152; Marwah 2009, 270). At the time there was much hope that peace might now be on the horizon. Harish Puri, in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, described the Accord and the elections as two steps towards 'normalisation and the beginning of hope' (D35<sup>137</sup>). However, the Accord proved hard to implement. It was not acceptable to the neighbouring states in terms of resolving the territory and water disputes. The subsequent collapse of the Accord only served to weaken the position of the moderates (Marwah 2009, 271-72).

The Congress government's thinking, according to Gill, was based on the situation in West Bengal, where it was a Marxist state government which brought an end to the Naxalite movement. Transposing this to the Punjab, they believed that an Akali government could achieve the same against the Khalistan militants. However, he argues that this analysis was flawed. For while there were fundamental differences between the Marxists and Naxalites, the Akalis and the militants were of the same 'ideological continuum' (Gill 2009, 21).

## AIR INDIA FLIGHT 182

Virtually unmentioned in the literature on the Punjab Crisis is the bombing of Air India Flight 182 on 23 June 1985. The flight was blown up over the Irish Sea en route to India from Canada via London, killing all 329 passengers and crew on board. It was the single deadliest terrorist attack involving an aircraft until the events of 9/11. It could have been worse, as an hour earlier a bomb which was intended for an Air India plane heading to Bangkok exploded

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<sup>137</sup> Document 35: 'Elections and After', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Puri, Hari, 5 October 1985.

at Tokyo Airport, killing two baggage handlers.<sup>138</sup> Prior to this there had been a series of plane hijackings, but all had been peaceful and aimed only at raising the profile of the Sikh cause (D20; M1<sup>139</sup>). The attack was a setback for the militant movement, as it eroded the foreign support that they had been steadily building for their cause (M1; C10).

## THE START OF THE POLICE RESPONSE

In March 1986 ‘supercop’ Julio Ribeiro, who had previously crushed the Naxalite uprising in Bengal, was appointed Director General of the police (Joshi 1993, 3). He is credited with introducing the counterterrorism rhetoric of a ‘bullet for a bullet’; however, the situation was confused, as the dominant police thinking at the time was that of ‘minimum force’. While AK-47s were beginning to be introduced to the militant arsenal (by Pakistan), there was strong resistance to upgrading the police’s arsenal to meet this threat. There was further confusing rhetoric from Ribeiro when he claimed the police could not wipe out terrorism, but only control it, undermining the police’s response before it had started (Sahni 2006, 37). As the situation failed to improve, central government eventually acted and the Barnala government was dismissed in 1987 (Marwah 2009, 273). Prior to this, the Punjab Governor claimed in a report to the Centre that ‘[n]either the [Punjab] Government nor the party that runs it are fighting fundamentalism, terrorism or extremism’ (D31<sup>140</sup>). As the state returned to direct presidential rule, the situation continued to worsen, with a dramatic increase in the death toll. The situation would not improve until the 1990s (Sahni 2006, 38).

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138 <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/airindia/bombing.html> (last accessed 2 December 2012).

139 M1: former militant from BKI, interviewed in Amritsar on 16 November 2009.

140 Document 31: Asian Recorder , Vol. XXXIII, No. 24, June 11-17, 1987.

## THE INADEQUACY OF THE PUNJAB POLICE

The Punjab police were woefully underprepared to confront the menace of the militants. Prior to the 1980s, terrorism in India was largely exiled to the more peripheral regions, such as the Northeast. The Punjab police were simply not experienced in how to deal with terrorism (PO6). Indeed, in areas such as the Northeast, the military, not the police, largely orchestrated the state's response. The shock of a sudden onslaught of extremely violent militant attacks, entirely unfamiliar to the region, lead to a comprehensive paralysis of the police (Butani 1986, 107; Gill 1999a). It is hard to imagine the level of paralysis achieved by the militants:

On February 14, 1984, a group of militants attacked a police post at some distance from the entrance to the [Golden] Temple. Six policemen, fully armed, were 'captured' and dragged inside. The 'police response' came twenty-four hours later in the form of a senior officer who went to Bhindranwale in the Akal Takht and begged him to release his men and return their weapons. Bhindranwale agreed only to hand over the corpse of one policeman who had been killed. He later relented and released the remaining five men who were still alive. Their weapons, including three sten guns, and a wireless set, were not returned. No one asked for them. No action was ever taken in the case of the murdered policeman. (Gill 2009, 95)

The police apparatus was simply not up to tackling this new and unfamiliar threat (PO6). It had been further undermined by a ban on recruitment imposed by the centre due to fears that the force was 'pro-Sikh'. By June 1984 'the force was carrying a huge number of vacancies in its ranks, almost one-fifth of the total' (Dhillon 2006, 110). The police were further hamstrung by the intrinsic link between the militants and mainstream politicians in the Punjab. The situation was that many mainstream Sikh politicians were directly connected to the militants, and used this for their own political ends. As K. P. S. Gill<sup>141</sup> sums up,

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141 K. P. S. Gill later became Director General of the Punjab police.

[t]o expect a sagacious, balanced and adequate response from district police officials against extremists that is clearly, directly, sometimes openly, encouraged by leaders at the highest levels of governance, is to ask the impossible. In any event, in the absence of a clear mandate and a firm leadership, the police, directionless and demoralised, quite simply, refused to engage. (Gill 1999a)

Before 1984 the police failed to even complete the most basic of police work against the militants. No records were kept of militant crimes and no investigations were pursued. There was a general unwillingness on the part of the police to carry out counterterrorism work, partly for fear of being identified by the militants as a target (*ibid.*; Mahadevan 2007). It was only after the arrival of Gill as the Inspector General of the Punjab Armed Police (PAP) that the painstaking process of record keeping and analysis was established (Gill 1999a). It was this meticulous approach that would go on to form the back bone of the police's intelligence work, identifying individual militants and trends in activity, allowing the police to effectively target their resources at the militant groups (Mahadevan 2008).

## THE EMERGENCE OF 'CAT' OPERATIONS

It was during this period that the Punjab police began their first counterterrorist intelligence operations, which were to become known as the 'cat' operations – a reference to being like a game of cat and mouse (Mahadevan 2007). The first of these were simple spotter operations to identify militants, attacking a militant's key strength, namely his anonymity (PO6). The police's intelligence-gathering began to deliver names of suspected militants; but as one police officer pointed out, with Sikhs there are too few names, so even when they learned the name of a wanted militant, there would be many who shared that name, even in the same village (PO7<sup>142</sup>).

The militants relied heavily on the Punjabi criminal underworld

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142 Punjab Police Officer 7: interviewed in New Delhi on 20 November 2009.

for its logistics and also for recruitment. The police sought to exploit this link to gain intelligence and information on the groups, and in the process to 'challenge the terrorists' monopoly over the underworld as an operational logistics and recruitment arm' (Mahadevan 2007). Next, in 1986, the police moved to infiltrate the groups. One former police officer described how they did this from the bottom up, selecting suitable boys from the villages and directing them to get involved with the militant gangs. In return for weekly updates, the boys were put on the police payroll 'unofficially' and paid the salary of a police constable. Some of those who excelled at this work were later given jobs as police officers. This tactic was to develop to deliver significant results, but it was a slow process, with the police experimenting and improving throughout 1987 before honing their skills in 1988 (PO6).

### THE MILITANT MOVEMENT – REGROUPING AFTER BHINDRANWALE

Operation Blue Star was in some ways a partial success, as it succeeded in decapitating and dispersing the militant movement. However, following the death of Bhindranwale in the operation, the movement became leaderless. The Sikh militancy had been unified under Bhindranwale, but it lacked an institutionalised political apparatus. Instead, grassroots support was provided by the AISSF, led by the Sant's 'blood brother' Bhai Amrik Singh. Following both their deaths in the assault on the Golden Temple complex, the 'AISSF's centralised command and organisational structure were crushed' (Chima 1997, 18). The problem was further compounded by the scattering of the remaining followers across the Punjab, with many crossing over to Pakistan to avoid the post-Blue Star security clampdown. Over the next two years the militants gradually began to regroup and re-emerged with the formation of the Panthic Committee and the declaration for Khalistan (M1; M2).

As Bhindranwale's followers at Damdami Taksal<sup>143</sup> and beyond began to regroup, they developed three objectives to further their

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<sup>143</sup> Damdami Taksal is a Sikh religious seminary, of which Sant Bhindranwale became leader.

cause. The first was to infiltrate and take control of the AISSF,<sup>144</sup> to use it to reach out to the Sikh youth in their universities and colleges and to mobilise them into action<sup>145</sup>. The second was to control the Damdami Taksal. Finally, the third was to rebuild the Akal Takht building in the Golden Temple compound. It was being rebuilt by the central government, but according to Sikh tradition it should only be done by voluntary labour (M2). In January 1986, a Sarbat Khalsa<sup>146</sup> was called to decide on the rebuilding of the Akal Takht, during which the need was expressed for some form of leadership for the movement in the absence of Bhindranwale. The result was the creation of the five-member Panthic Committee to provide overarching political and religious leadership to the movement (M2, M3<sup>147</sup>; Dhillon 2006, 289-90). The five members were more or less chosen at random (M2), and as such were unprepared for the position of leadership that they found themselves thrust into.

Initially, the Panthic Committee was envisioned as an above-ground body that would campaign and compete in elections, essentially pursuing a democratic strategy. However, this was to change with the open declaration of the demand for Khalistan on 29 April 1986. According to militant sources, the ensuing state crackdown forced the committee to go underground, and to take up arms for their struggle (M3). Within the movement there had been a division between those who wanted to openly declare their demand for Khalistan and those who thought it was best not to and to continue campaigning above ground. The latter argued that the Panthic Committee could have developed into a political force equal to or greater than the Akali Dhal (M2).

144 All India Sikh Student Federation.

145 The AISSF was to play a crucial part in the militant movement in the coming years. To a certain degree it was involved in terrorist violence, but its key role was its over-ground operations which raised funds for the terrorist groups and proved the ideal recruitment ground.

146 A Sarbat Khalsa is a large gathering of the Sikh community in order to agree on important matters.

147 M3: former senior KCF leader (part of the interview also contains a discussion with two members of the Indian Security Forces), interviewed in Amritsar on 17 November 2009.

The declaration was a ‘bolt from the blue’ for the Akali Dal government of Barnala, which could not be ignored. In what became known as Black Thunder I, units of the elite National Security Guard (NSG) were flown in to clear the complex of militants again, and to arrest the Panthic Committee. Due to political collusion, the operation was leaked and no one of importance was caught (Sahni 2006, 37). It was also a serious political miscalculation, as the Sikh masses were shocked to see that a Sikh-dominated Punjab government of the Akali Dal could send troops into the Golden Temple complex (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 158).

## MILITANT GROUPS

In this post-Blue Star period, the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) emerged as the main militant group fighting for the creation of Khalistan. Until 1988 the militant movement remained united under the banner of the KCF. Initially from 1984-86 the KCF was a loose grouping of small bands committing uncoordinated attacks in isolation against the police and paramilitary forces. In this period the groups were largely confined to the districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur (Pettigrew 1995, 82).

The position of the KCF within the Khalistan movement became more formalised with the creation of the Panthic Committee and the adoption of the KCF as its official military wing. At this stage the KCF consisted of only 400 young fighters, led by the former general Labh Singh (Pettigrew 1995, 82; Dhillon 2006, 290-92; D30<sup>148</sup>). Under his leadership they began to coordinate the groups under a centralised structure that was cohesive and hierarchical. In 1987 the first splinter group emerged with the split of Gurbachan Singh Manochahal to form his Bhindranwale Tiger Force (BTF), though the group remained loosely aligned to the KCF (Pettigrew 1995, 82; Dhillon 2006, 290-92).

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<sup>148</sup> Document 30: *Patriot*, 13 July 1988.

## PHASE 3: TACKLING THE MILITANTS FOR THE FIRST TIME (1987-1989)

In this stage the wholly inadequate Punjab police undergo a process of radical reform, emerging a stronger institution that starts to take the fight to the militants. The militants themselves go through a period of change, splitting into two competing factions. This is coupled with the increasing criminalisation of the movement, and Pakistan's emergence as a major backer of the militancy. Towards the end of the phase the conflict experiences a steep de-escalation under a sustained assault led by the Punjab police. However, this is interrupted by national elections and a new government.

### POLICE REORGANISATION

Although the Punjab police had started to actively take on the militants from about May 1987, it was not until the promotion of K. P. S. Gill to Director of Police in the Punjab in April 1988 that for the first time a comprehensive counterterrorist campaign was pursued and the tide began to turn. Gill brought with him a 'sea change' in police organisation and strategy, which for the first time started to take the fight to the militants.

When Gill took over as Director of Police he inherited a force that was divided, demoralised, badly organised and ill-equipped for the job of fighting the well-armed militants. Gill 'hit the ground running', initiating a massive reorganisation of the police force into an effective counterterrorism force. The reforms were based around 6 key areas (Gill 1999a).

The first focused on the complete inadequacy of the local *thana* (police station) to react to militant violence independently, due to insufficient manpower, training, weapons, transport and communications (*ibid.*; Sahni 2006, 38). In most situations the local police would delay taking any direct action until backup had arrived from police headquarters or from paramilitary forces. Reforms were put in place to improve the operational capacity of each *thana*, making each *thana*

the centre of the response to terrorism (PO7). As it was financially unviable to upgrade all *thanas*, the process started with an operation to identify those most affected by militant activity and their individual weaknesses (Sahni 2006, 38). In the most sensitive areas, the seniority of the officer in charge was increased from a Deputy Superintendent to a Sub-Inspector (Gill 1999a). There was a phased increase in recruitment of 25,000 additional policemen, to bring the total strength of the force to 60,000 (*ibid.*).

The second reform was the reversal of the unfavourable ratio of police officers on static operations. Initially 40-50% of the entire police force of 35,000 was tied down with entirely unproductive static duties such as protecting buildings and manning checkpoints. These operations rarely apprehended any militants, simply providing them with many soft targets. The police were reorganised to reduce static operations to only 15% of manpower, thus producing an operational force comprising 85% of the total personnel available (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 38). Important innovations included mobile contingents and 'focal point patrolling', where all available vehicles in a district were brought to a single point to create the illusion of massive force and a level of saturation that did not exist (Gill 1999a).

The third key reform was tackling the infiltration of police by militant sympathisers and the communal divisions between the police and paramilitary forces. The paramilitary forces were largely recruited from outside the state, and since they contained few Sikhs, tended to show a strong anti-Sikh bias. Those who were suspected of being compromised were quietly moved to non-sensitive areas. Steps were then taken to end the deep mutual suspicion held by both the police and paramilitaries, largely due to them operating in isolation from each other. Operational practice was changed to ensure the two worked closely together, including the introduction of joint interrogation teams and a system to share all intelligence (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 39).

The fourth problem to tackle was the near-absence of systematic intelligence-gathering and analysis. Gradually a pattern of militant activity at the sub-state level was drawn up. All police stations were categorised as either A, B or C depending on militant activity; this was

then extended to a village-wide analysis. Soon gangs and their members were identified alongside their strengths and areas of operation. Detailed information was procured on the supply of weapons, networks and safe houses, and relationships between gangs. Piece by piece, a detailed picture of the militants and their operations was built up, allowing the police to more effectively target the groups (*ibid.*).

The fifth key area was the absence of a coherent counterterrorism strategy. For the first time the police worked according to a systematic strategy; previous successes were down to individual efforts or ad hoc operations. Starting with the enormous amount of intelligence gained from Black Thunder II, the police started to instigate operations that were gang or militant-specific. After every major militant strike they responded with major counterterrorist operations targeting the group responsible and its support network. The initiative passed to the police as the impact of sustained operations began to paralyse the militants' capabilities (*ibid.*).

## POLICE LEADERSHIP

The final component of the reforms addressed was the failure of police leadership. The police had previously been 'led from behind', with senior officers attempting to run operations by remote control to reduce their own exposure to risk. The low level of casualties in both security personnel and militants pre-1988 was largely due to a tacit agreement between them not to cross paths. In order to change the status quo, Gill set about creating a leadership culture that led from the front. Those who were unwilling to fight were allowed to apply for transfers out of the state or move to non-frontline departments such as administration (PO3<sup>149</sup>; PO5<sup>150</sup>; C9<sup>151</sup>). This was followed by a radical policy of promotions and postings, through which sensitive areas and critical counterterrorism operations were headed by officers

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<sup>149</sup> Punjab Police Officer 3, interviewed in Chandigarh on 19 November 2009.

<sup>150</sup> Punjab Police Officer 5, interviewed in New Delhi on 21 and 24 November 2009.

<sup>151</sup> C9: academic interviewed in New Delhi on 3, 21 and 24 November 2009.

who were willing to confront danger, most of whom had volunteered for the positions (PO5).

An innovative promotion policy was introduced that saw young officers fresh out of cadet school put straight into active duty in the most affected areas, with those who were willing to take on the militants enjoying rapid promotion. Within a few months, capable young officers would be promoted to the level of SP<sup>152</sup> in disturbed areas, a promotion that would normally take three to three-and-a-half years. As the conflict progressed it was not uncommon for young recruits to have been promoted to the level of SSP<sup>153</sup>, with 6-8,000 troops under their command, after just three to four years (PO5). What was practically innovative was that these promotions were only promotion in rank, and not accompanied by the usual salary increase and perks. This allowed Gill to award them the rank necessary to implement operations, without having to gain the necessary financial approval that he was not able to control (C9).

## TECHNOLOGY – PUNJAB POLICE RESEARCH CELL

As the Punjab police continued to face a militant movement that was exploiting increasingly sophisticated weapons, this phase of the conflict also saw the emergence of the crucial role of research and development within the police in order to help level the playing field with the militants. The success of this work led to the formation of the ‘Punjab Police Research Cell’ in February 1990, which pioneered work in providing technological innovations to counterterrorism problems (PO4<sup>154</sup>; Gill 1999b, 17-26). The cell had three main functions: first, to evaluate the militants’ capabilities, i.e. to determine the weaponry they had at their disposal; second, to develop cost-effective scientific gadgets to counter the militants’ capabilities; and third, to train the police in how to protect themselves from the militants’ threats and how to use the gadgets developed (PO4; Gill 1999b, 17-26).

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<sup>152</sup> Superintendent of Police.

<sup>153</sup> Senior Superintendent of Police.

<sup>154</sup> Punjab Police Officer 4, interviewed in Chandigarh on 19 November 2009.

Developments ranged from cheap bulletproof vests and bulletproofing of VIPs' cars to bomb-resistant floors in cars to protect from IEDs<sup>155</sup> and the 'Punjab Robo' for remote-control bomb disposal. Central to the cell's effectiveness was the short turnaround time between identifying a problem and getting a solution in place on the front line. Unlike the usual long R & D processes, prototypes were essentially tested on the job and then adapted and improved as they went along (PO4; Gill 1999b, 17-26.) In this way the cell was a learning institution, constantly analysing and perceiving threats as they evolved and then developing solutions that were quickly deployed. This gave them the ability to quickly adapt and counter changes in the militants' weaponry and tactics. The better technology and weaponry available to the police allowed them to take the fight to the militants (PO1<sup>156</sup>).

## IMPROVISATION

The same 'have-a-go' improvisation ethos that was at the centre of the research cell was nurtured by Gill across the police force. He encouraged his young officers to think outside the box and to develop their own solutions, backed up with the operational freedom to experiment. This resulted in a culture in which many officers piloted and developed projects in their districts. Those that were successful were then rolled out across the Punjab. Examples included the use of spotter operations (PO6) and development of computer software to analyse militant groups' operations (PO5). Gill created the necessary space for innovation and importantly provided the framework for the police to learn from their successes and failures, and for best practice to be adopted.

This situation in many ways reflected the failures of the Indian police service. There was much 'reinventing of the wheel', as there was no training or institutional knowledge of counterterrorism which the officers could draw upon (PO5). Furthermore, they were operating in a knowledge vacuum – these were the days before Google – and the only way to gain access to the necessary knowledge was to buy books

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<sup>155</sup> Improvised Explosive Device.

<sup>156</sup> Punjab Police Officer 1, interviewed in Jalandhar on 13 November 2009.

from abroad, which they did not have the funds to do. Therefore the police had to work from the ground up, learning the basics of successful counterterrorism themselves (C9)<sup>157</sup>. What made the situation unique was that they were in a structure that allowed them to do this. An important factor in this was that, unlike most police chiefs, Gill had had twenty-five years of prior counter-insurgency experience in India's Northeast. However, in a bad reflection upon India's counter-insurgency practice, he came to the Punjab not with the experience of how to fight an insurgency, but with the experience of what not to do based on what he had seen in the Northeast (PO7).

## THE GILL FACTOR

The reorganisation of the Punjab police and the introduction of a new coherent counterterrorism strategy would not have been enough without the unique leadership of Gill. As Anant Mathur expounds, 'Gill's charismatic leadership was singularly responsible for transforming the Punjab Police from an unmotivated and deeply divided force to a task oriented, disciplined and united force' (Mathur 2011). As one officer explained, beforehand there was no leader who could lead. Prior to Gill all police chiefs were seen as political appointees. Gill, though, was seen to have his own mind and not to serve political masters (PO3). He would always back his officers even if a decision was taken without consulting him. This had a huge impact on police morale and gave the officers the confidence to make the combat decisions necessary to take the fight to the militants (PO2<sup>158</sup>). Gill's style was not to micromanage but to promote the most capable and to allow them to get on with the job in the knowledge that he would back their decisions. At the same time, if they had a problem, officers knew that they could go to him for help, and 'invariably he would come up with a solution' (PO5).

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<sup>157</sup> A point worth reflecting on is what impact it would have had on the emergence and progression of the conflict if the Punjab police had already been trained in counter-insurgency, rather than having to learn as they went along.

<sup>158</sup> Punjab Police Officer 2, interviewed in Chandigarh on 18 November 2009.

## COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

An interesting point about the Punjab conflict is that despite the widespread communal violence across India against the Sikhs in the wake of the death of Indira Gandhi, there was no such violence in the Punjab (Tully and Jacob 2009, 5). Despite concerted efforts by the militant groups to ignite communal violence, it failed to take hold. This was, as widely noted in the literature, partly down to the close interconnection between Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab – for many Hindu families it was the tradition that the firstborn son converted to Sikhism (C9; Mathur 2011). What is absent from the literature is the police's policy to protect Hindus in their homes. Gill believed that it was essential to not only protect the Punjab's large Hindu community but also to protect them where they lived. He wanted to prevent a permanent sectarian division that would have resulted if the Hindus had been driven from their homes, dividing the state into Sikh and Hindu only areas (C9). Instead, Gill decreed that in any village where there were four or more Hindu families, they were to be protected in their homes. The job of protecting these families was assigned to Special Police Officers, who were recruited from the local area but had no links to the militants (PO7).

## VILLAGE DEFENCE SCHEMES AND SPECIAL POLICE OFFICERS

Around the middle of 1989, with the public's perception turning towards disillusionment with the militants, a Village Defence Scheme (VDS) was started, along with a system for appointing Special Police Officers (SPOs). They were armed with the police's old .303 rifles as they upgraded their armoury. Initially the response of villagers was outright refusal, for fear of militant retaliation against the entire village. Gradually, with persistent police encouragement, the scheme took off. The nuclei of these forces were Army or police veterans who took charge of the scheme and were willing to mobilise their neighbours against the militants. Volunteers were trained in defence of the villages, detailed tactical plans were drawn up and fortifications

such as bunkers were built (Mahadevan 2008; Gill 1999a; Chima 2007, 630). Gill's slogan was that 'the best villages were those that neither the police nor the terrorists go' (PO7).

Chima argues that these schemes had the knock-on effect of helping to redefine the context of the conflict, stemming the flow of recruitment and reframing it as a Sikh vs. Sikh conflict.

These SPOs were provided with a daily stipend, a gun, and a license to kill militants within their own villages and nearby locals by acting as 'unconventional' counter-insurgents. This was an ingenious strategy of combating insurgency because it prevented economically and socially disadvantaged Sikh youth [sic] from joining militancy as a means of empowerment. More importantly, this strategy 'drew the battle-lines within the villages, with Sikh fighting Sikh, and the police backing their 'good guys'. (Chima 2007, 630)

Over time this would help to reframe the conflict not as a Sikh vs. Hindu or Sikh vs. central government; instead the Punjab crisis became localised as a Sikh vs. Sikh conflict (*ibid.*).

## 'CAT' OPERATIONS

This period also saw the continued use and expansion by the police of 'cat' operations. Two key changes propelled their expansion: increases in reward money and the growing criminalisation of the militant gangs. Initially the police were only allocated a maximum of INR<sup>159</sup> 150 for intelligence collection. After 1988 this went up to hundreds of thousands of INR, depending on the particular militants involved. Nearly all the senior militants killed in 1988-89 had large cash rewards on their heads (Mahadevan 2007).

After 1987 the militant gangs became increasingly criminalised and less ideological. The criminalisation of gangs led to a dramatic increase in the recruitment of young men, with the lure of money and power;

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<sup>159</sup> Indian rupee.

in rural areas youths allegedly even queued up to join gangs (*ibid.*). In this situation, infiltration of the gangs became increasingly easy under the cover of mass recruitment. Captured militants, being often more criminal than ideological, were now easier to ‘turn’; many senior militants, once captured, were then convinced to work for the police (*ibid.*).

In this phase, the police increasingly combined ‘turned’ militants and plain-clothes policemen to make pseudo-militant gangs. These gangs would roam across the rural countryside dressed as militants, complete with Kalashnikovs and motifs of a prominent gang. Subsequently, as the movement descended into criminality the police allegedly set up their own pseudo gangs recruited from criminals. They were armed and allowed to engage in non-lethal criminal activity including extortion and intimidation in order to make contact with real militant gangs and help the police to identify and arrest a number of killer militants (*ibid.*) The role of ‘under-cover’ tactics in general was controversial, with Ribeiro<sup>160</sup> commenting in 1989 ‘I found that the drawbacks outweighed the benefits since members of these underground squads indulged in looting and extortion of money’ (D34<sup>161</sup>).

## BLACK THUNDER II

The militants gradually regained control of the Golden Temple complex. Throughout 1987 there was a rising toll of violence and atrocities committed within the complex (Sahni 2006, 38). Even as late as March 1988, the central government was still seeking a political solution, making the concession of releasing forty high-profile prisoners from jail, including Bhai Jasbir Singh Rode (nephew of Sant Bhindranwale), who was installed as Head Priest of the Akal Takht. As soon as those released arrived in the complex, they began building up its fortifications again. The militants responded to this ‘goodwill gesture’ by killing an unprecedented 288 people in March and 259 people in April, including 25 policemen in each month (Gill 1999a).

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<sup>160</sup> Former Director General of Punjab Police, and by now Advisor to the Punjab Governor.

<sup>161</sup> Document 34: *National Herald*, 31 July 1989.

In May 1988, with the situation in the complex deteriorating day by day, the government decided to rid the complex of militants once and for all. On 9 May Operation Black Thunder II began and lasted until 18 May. The operation was undertaken by NSG commandos, a composite force of army, paramilitary and police headed by a police officer (Marwah<sup>162</sup> 2009, 274). This time the authorities took care to learn from the mistakes of Operation Blue Star. The operation followed a phased strategy, starting with the evacuation of devotees and employees of the SGPC<sup>163</sup>, after which the complex was then surrounded and completely sealed. Next, the power and water supplies were cut. On 15 May, with no water and dwindling food supplies, 168 militants surrendered. In the end, 46 people died in clearing the complex, but not one of the 5,000 security personnel was even injured (Sahota and Sahota 1993, 162; Marwah 2009, 274-78).

The operation was a resounding success. It broke the will of the militants working out of the Golden Temple, which was never again reclaimed by the militants. Importantly, it denied the militants their safe haven and main operational base (Sahni 2006, 38). This proved to be an important juncture, as it removed forever the façade of religiosity from the Khalistan movement that it had enjoyed in the early years and showed how the movement was becoming increasingly criminal. In addition, the operation produced a huge amount of intelligence for the newly reinvigorated police force to act upon (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 39).

### TIME OF CHANGE: MILITANT GROUPS

In this same period the militant movement entered a period of profound change which saw the fragmentation and criminalisation of the movement, along with its increasing reliance on Pakistani support.

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<sup>162</sup> Ved Marwah was at the time the Director General of the NSG.

<sup>163</sup> Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), de facto parliament of the Sikhs set up by the Akali Dal.

## THE MILITANT GROUPS SPLIT

In April 1988, a month before Black Thunder II, a serious rift emerged amongst the leadership of the militant movement. The movement was to shortly split in half, with the creation of a second Panthic Committee. On the one side there remained the KCF – which became known as the KCF (Zaffarwal) – and the splinter group BTFK, which remained loyal to the first Panthic Committee,<sup>164</sup> PC (Zaffarwal). On the other side, following the breakaway second Panthic Committee PC (SS) led by Dr Sohan Singh was the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and a collection of splinter groups, who were collectively known as the *car jhujharu jathebande*<sup>165</sup> (CJJ) (Pettigrew 1995, 70). Importantly this signalled the emergence of the BKI at centre stage of the conflict. Under the first Panthic Committee, which was formed by followers of Bhindranwale, the BKI had been sidelined as former adversaries of Bhindranwale (M1; Tully and Jacob 2009, 110). The decapitating effect of Black Thunder on the first Panthic Committee allowed the second Panthic Committee and the BKI to rise to dominance, a position they would retain for the rest of the conflict.

It is around this time that the militants introduced an agenda of social reforms alongside their political demands, such as banning alcohol and tobacco and in general enforcing their conservative religious social values. Marwah describes the focus on banning tobacco as clever, ‘with the obvious aim to further polarise society on communal lines’ (Marwah 2009, 273). The social reform agenda is attributed by Pettigrew<sup>166</sup> to the rise of the Babbar Khalsa, on whom she comments, ‘[t]he Babbars did not identify with Sikhism as a vehicle of liberation. They identified with it as a vehicle of repression and domination, threatening and killing those who did not obey their guidelines’ (Pettigrew 1995, 174). According to Gill, on the other hand, both Panthic Committees introduced such social reforms in January 1989, but PC (Z) soon dropped this agenda for fear of alienating the public, whilst the PC (SS), dominated by the puritanical

<sup>164</sup> The Panthic Committee was set up to coordinate the efforts of the different militant groups.

<sup>165</sup> ‘The four groups of freedom fighters’ (Pettigrew 1995, 70)

<sup>166</sup> It should perhaps be noted that Pettigrew’s research was based largely on interviews with the Khalistan Commando Force.

Babbars, continued to emphasise the reforms (Gill 2009, 100). The militants did not succeed in stopping Punjabis from smoking and drinking, but they 'succeeded in achieving their more sinister aim of creating a fear psychosis among Hindus and giving the impression that the militants, and not the government were in command' (Marwah 2009, 273).

The groups under the PC (Z) drew their cadres largely from the illiterate and semi-literate of the rural Punjab. Gill describes their 'strategy' as 'to create as much chaos as was possible through completely indiscriminate killings. With their emphasis on "soft targets"' (Gill 1999a). Pettigrew has a slightly different take, arguing that they saw their struggle as against the Indian state, so attacked the police and paramilitary groups in the Punjab alongside economic targets such as electricity generation, transportation, wheat depots and fuel stores (Pettigrew 1995, 93). The groups under the PC (SS) on the other hand largely drew their recruits from the educated urban and semi-urban classes (Gill 1999a). Both Gill and Pettigrew agree that the PC (SS) groups, in particular the BKI, attacked marked individuals who were against their campaign for Khalistan (*ibid.*; Pettigrew 1995, 93; PO3). Targets included Hindus, newspaper editors, radio station directors, landowners and industrialists (Pettigrew 1995, 93).

## SCHEMATIC OF THE MAIN MILITANT GROUPS

### PANTHIC COMMITTEE (1986-88)

Armed wing: KCF

Split (1988)



#### Panthic Committee (Zaffarwal)

Armed Wing:  
KCF (Zaffarwal)      CJJ  
BTFK

#### Panthic Committee (Dr. Sohan Singh)

Armed Wing:  
CJJ  
Including:  
The Babbar Khalsa  
KLF (Budhsinghwala)  
KCF (Panjwar)  
All India Sikh Students Federation (Bittoo)

From 1988 onwards the factionalism within the movement became increasingly complex, with groups changing allegiance between Panthic Committees and Panthic Committees further splitting. In the end there were five separate Panthic Committees (Mahadevan 2007; Gill 2009, 99).

### THE DECLINE AND REORGANISATION OF THE KCF (ZAFFARWAL)

Under the leadership of Labh Singh the KCF had become a centralised organisation, with a limited number of supply lines, but after his death in fractured into numerous smaller groups. In the wake of the intelligence gathered in Black Thunder II, supply lines were targeted and cut. The effect was to reduce the KCF to its pre-1986 position of a few isolated bands; it was only the isolated bands with their own independent supply lines that survived (Pettigrew 1995, 83-84; D28<sup>167</sup>). As Zaffarwal explains,

[a]fter Operation Black Thunder we lost contact with our groups, but after a time started reorganising. What saved us were the individual groups loosely affiliated to us. They would carry out operations as they were the only ones with the supply lines intact. (Pettigrew 1995, 84 and 155-56)

As the KCF (Zaffarwal) began to regroup in 1989, it took care not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Instead of having a centralised supply line, each group was now required to have its own independent supply line. An attack on its supply lines could no longer decapitate the whole organisation. However, though designed to increase the efficiency of the KCF, the new structure had the knock-on effect of increasing the independence of each group and the power of their leaders. This reduced the control the KCF's leadership had over its organisation, its choice of targets and tactics. It also encouraged the leaders of the groups to turn them into their own power bases (Pettigrew 1995, 98).

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167 Document 28: *Hindu Times*, 14 September 1988.

## THE PAKISTANI CONNECTION

At the start of the conflict Pakistani involvement was marginal, and not a significant factor in the escalation of violence. Throughout 1986 it became clear that, at the very least, the Pakistani authorities were prepared to ignore the militants' use of border territory as a sanctuary from Indian security forces (Mahadevan 2007). However, after 1987 Pakistan started to actively train and arm the Sikh militants (Pettigrew 1995, 105). The militants were in effect being remotely controlled by leaders based safely across the border, supported by an elaborate supply chain that provided arms and instructions to the militants (Mahadevan 2007; Joshi 1993, 3).

Pakistan's objective was not the establishment of Khalistan but to weaken India, especially in relation to her objectives in Kashmir. In the process it is alleged by some that that Pakistan was able to control the militants' strategy for its own ends and affect the nature of the violence:

Three top terrorists who were based for a number of years in Pakistan, later bitterly criticized Pakistani intelligence officials for having usurped the Khalistan movement as a means to embarrass India. They admitted afterwards that the illogical and random violence, which came to characterize the terrorist movement after 1989, was primarily a Pakistani stratagem to create an impression of chaos prevailing within India. (Mahadevan 2007)

The Pakistani involvement had two major effects on the escalation of the conflict. Firstly, it dramatically increased the military capability of the militants or, put simply, their ability to kill. After 1987 Pakistan gave weapons 'freely and indiscriminately' (Pettigrew 1995, 105). Secondly, Pakistan encouraged the fragmentation of the militant movement, and supported the proliferation of groups as a way of ensuring maximum chaos and destruction (M3).

## THE DECLINE INTO CRIMINALITY

From 1987 onwards the militant movement became increasingly criminalised. Since the very beginning the militants and the criminal underworld had had a close relationship. Pre-1987, the militants relied on the underworld, especially smuggling operations, for logistical support and arms supplies. Whereas before they used the criminal gangs, the militants now became increasingly criminal in their own activities. In many cases 'militancy' was little more than a cover for criminal operations. Similarly, many petty criminals began exploiting the situation by extorting money under the guise of being militants (D26<sup>168</sup>, D27<sup>169</sup>).

The militants had long been involved in extortion and bank robberies to raise finances, but in some cases this now became the main objective of the groups. Many criminals moved 'sideways' into the militant movement, seeing it as an opportunity to get rich. In addition, large sectors of the Sikh youth, especially those languishing in unemployment, were attracted to join the militant gangs by the prospect of money and the power and respect attained by carrying an AK-47 (Mahadevan 2008). As militants they would be addressed with the respectful title 'Baba' and even the local landlord would bow before them (PO3). The motivation for joining the militant groups is laid bare in the book *Terrorism in the Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality*, which was based on extensive field research<sup>170</sup>. According to the research, the most common reason for joining, given by 38% of recruits, was 'shaukia', a Punjabi word that roughly translates as 'for adventure, thrill or fun of it'. The next most prominent reason, given by 21%, was influence or persuasion of other militants, followed by 11% who gave 'smuggling,

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168 Document 26: *Times of India*, 5 June 1988.

169 Document 27: *Times of India*, 19 September 1989.

170 One caveat to note about this research is that fieldwork took place after the peak of the conflict in 1994-95. The field interviews were conducted in selected villages, and as they describe: '[t]he source of our data and other information about the terrorists from the selected villages as well as the activities of the terrorists and of the police would be the people of those particular villages who had witnessed the history in its making' (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 23) As such the interviews were not with the militants themselves, but with the villagers that lived through the conflict.

looting, making money' as their primary motivation. In contrast to many perceived wisdoms about the militants, only 4% joined out of anger at Operation Blue Star or the anti-Sikh riots, and only 2.5% due to police harassment (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 68-70). Similarly, a survey of arrested Sikh youths in 1987 concluded that only 10% of militants were committed Khalistanis, while 50% joined for 'adventure' and 40% out of poverty (D32<sup>171</sup>).

An economic dynamic increasingly developed to drive the movement forward, in which the educated and business portion of society exploited the lawless situation to further their vested interests, such as businessmen who used the groups to force out rivals (PO3). The flip side was that landowners and traders increasingly 'regarded the emergent local armed groups as a source of security by payment of protection money in a situation of breakdown of order' (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 98).

## TWO-LEVEL CONFLICT

The fragmentation of the movement became one of the major drivers of the escalation of violence. Gradually

[the] top militant leaders also lost control over their expanding network of area commanders, and grassroots cadres. As a result, levels of 'social,' as opposed to 'political,' violence committed by the insurgents steadily increased. This included looting, extortion, rape, and acting as enforcers in personal and family disputes. (Chima 2007, 620)

What started as ideological and personal differences were accelerated by Pakistani support to splinter groups and by the criminalisation of the movement. The net result was that the movement was transformed from one operating under a centralised command and control to a proliferation of armed groups operating under the umbrella of two opposing Panthic Committees. Furthermore, the Panthic Committees had little control over the armed groups (PO1), who had their own supplies of

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<sup>171</sup> Document 32: *Tribune*, 12 March 1987.

arms and funds from criminal activities. The influx of unscrupulous Pakistani support ensured that anyone could form their own group, facilitating the rise of 'bad elements' within the movement's ranks (M3).

As the conflict progressed the macro- and micro-levels of the conflict became increasingly separated. According to one senior militant, '[i]n 1988 the movement got out of hand from the leadership...So at that time there was anarchy' (M1). The violence committed in the villages often had very little to do with the campaign for Khalistan. 'In sum, the village level reality was qualitatively distinct from that of the macro-level discourse' (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 110). The militants, for example, were increasingly drawn into and used in feuds and rivalries. If a local farmer had provided a group of militants with sanctuary, he might ask them to return the favour by helping him in a family feud (Pettigrew 1995, 78). This created a distinct village-level context for the violence, where 'inter-family rivalry and dispute over land were two major non-ideological factors which led to various murders' (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 110). The militant gangs were largely concerned with the village and not the macro level of the conflict (PO1).

#### POPULATION BECOMES THE VICTIM: LOSS OF POPULAR SUPPORT.

This period also saw the start of the erosion of the mass popular support that the militancy had enjoyed. On the one hand, time had started to heal the wounds inflicted on the Sikh psyche by the events of 1984. On the other hand, and more importantly, the Sikh community increasingly became the victims of the militants' violence (PO2; PO1; Joshi 1993, 19; Puri, Judge, Sekhon 1999, 186). The increased criminal activities of the groups, the enforcement of terror edicts and the gradual slide into senseless violence separated the militants from the people (M1).

#### SIX MONTHS TO GO: THE IMPACT OF COUNTERTERRORIST OPERATIONS

The impact of the reinvigorated police force was massive and immediate, and within the first six months the civilian death toll was virtually

halved. Sustained operations in the aftermath of Black Thunder II successfully removed a number of the most active militant leaders. As the impact of the police operations continued to bite, there was a gradual change in the perception of the public and the media that the militants could actually be defeated. One by one the leaders of all the major militant groups began to approach the police to discuss surrendering (Gill 1999a; PO7; D29<sup>172</sup>). Towards the end of 1989, just 13 police stations out of 217 in the state accounted for 65% of all militant crimes and 64% of civilian casualties. At this point Gill was convinced 'that terrorism, at this juncture, could have been wiped out in the state of Punjab within another six months of sustained campaigning' (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 41).

At this crucial juncture, politics once more intervened to undermine the counterterrorism efforts. A national general election was now approaching rapidly, and the decision was taken to include the Punjab constituencies in the election. The Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi, wallowing in a mire of scandals over corruption and nepotism, sought to campaign on security, exploiting national fears about the terrorism in the Punjab and presenting themselves as the only party capable of tackling it. At this point it appeared that 'the party leadership believed it could profit by allowing the sore to fester a little longer. Once it returned to power, of course, the Punjab problem would be sorted out soon enough' (Gill 1999a). As it became clear that the Congress government was not to be returned, the militants withdrew their offers of conciliation as they bided their time waiting to see what the new administration would bring (Gill 1999a; PO7).

## PHASE 4: TAKING THE 'FOOT OFF THE GAS' – POLITICAL INSTABILITY (1989-1991)

Congress loses the election, and the new government at the centre changes direction and seeks a political solution to the militancy. This new direction leads to the biggest escalation of the conflict as the

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<sup>172</sup> Document 29: *Hindu Times*, 23 May 1989.

Punjab collapses into violence and chaos. The government's position is undermined by its inherent instability, as its own survival is in question. Meanwhile the militants continue to fracture and become increasingly criminalised. The police on the other hand feel unable able to act against the backdrop of negotiations with the militants. Eventually, the inevitable happens: the government falls, and new national elections are called.

## POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Simply calling elections in the Punjab served to destabilise the state at this important juncture. The militant All Indian Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) combined with Simranjit Singh Mann's<sup>173</sup> pro-militant United Akali Dal (UAD) to fight the elections. Candidates backed by the militant front organisations won 10 of the 13 seats in the Punjab (Gill 1999a; Joshi 1993, 3). Before leaving office, Rajiv Gandhi released from jail Simranjit Singh Mann and Harminder Singh Sandhu, and Antindar Pal Singh of the AISSF<sup>174</sup>. The election of militants provided them with a public voice for the first time since the death of Bhindranwale (Gill 1999a; Joshi 1993, 4). It also provided the militancy with a sense of momentum and inevitability. Puri, Judge and Sekhon note in their research that many of the villagers they interviewed at this point 'came to believe that the future was with the "boys" and that following a settlement with the Government of India the militants might well become the rulers in Punjab' (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 83-84).

The resulting new government at the centre under V.P. Singh<sup>175</sup> came to power with 'preconceptions, attitudes and a pervasive confusion that surrendered the initiative to the terrorist' (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 42). The government mistakenly thought that the previous administration

<sup>173</sup> Simranjit Singh Mann was a former police officer (Chima 1997, 19).

<sup>174</sup> A peculiarity of Indian law where if a man is elected to parliament he may not be tried for any crime he may have committed (Gill 1999, 13).

<sup>175</sup> Congress had been unable to secure a majority in the 1989 elections, so instead V.P. Singh's National Front, which consisted of at least four national parties and three regional parties, came to power (Chima 2002, 30).

of Rajiv Gandhi had deliberately kept Sikh terrorism alive in the Punjab, which led them to believe that providing a façade of conciliation would be enough for the issue to simply melt away (Gill 1999a). The government had no coherent policy on how to achieve this, aside from making a symbolic visit to the Golden Temple the day after being sworn in. However, within days of taking office, the prime minister showed his weakness in tackling the militants. On 11 December 1989 the daughter of the newly appointed Home Minister was kidnapped in Kashmir, but the government's response was absolute capitulation (*ibid.*; Sahni 2006, 42). The prime minister's position was backed up by the appointment of a new Governor, N. K. Mukharji, who advocated a 'soft line'. He only lasted six months before being replaced by Virendra Verma, who advocated an even softer line. In the meantime, the situation in the Punjab deteriorated and militant activity increased (Sahni 2006, 43; Joshi 1993, 7).

The situation worsened further after the Singh government collapsed and was replaced by the new Prime Minister, Chandrasekhar, on 10 November 1990. The new prime minister started his brief tenure by broadcasting his willingness to 'talk to anyone'. The militants responded that any talks would only be about the formation of Khalistan and to negotiate the boundaries between it and India. With the government on its knees, its survival in question, it was unable to negotiate from a position of strength and the militants knew it (Gill 1999a). The first demand of the militants was the removal of K. P. S. Gill as Director of the Punjab Police. Gill was duly transferred out of the Punjab in December 1990 (Joshi 1993, 4).

## IMPACT OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY ON THE PUNJAB POLICE

The nature of Gill's departure, at the behest of the militants, sent the worst of signals to the police on the front line, significantly adding to their demotivation (PO5; C9). The increasing political uncertainty only further undermined their confidence: 'They could not be sure given the various moves that were being made, as to whether or not they would have to deal with some of the militants/terrorists as ministers

in the near future' (Joshi 1993, 5). As one police officer put it, in these circumstances 'you have to have backing from the top and if that's not available you step out' (PO5).

The process of negotiations, far from helping to diffuse the conflict, instead created the conditions for it to spiral out of control. Between 1989 and 1991, the Centre engaged in talks with a number of the groups, but this was undermined by the weakness of the government, which saw it capitulating to a number of militant demands. Interestingly, the government's weakness was also seen as a negative by the militants, as they had no faith that the government could actually deliver on what was negotiated (M2). Furthermore, by this stage there was no one dominant group to negotiate with, creating a situation with the Centre talking to some groups and not others. Meanwhile the police were asked to continue their counterterrorism campaign, but were hamstrung by being asked to lay off certain groups that were engaged in talks. These protected groups were then able to operate with impunity: 'a very perverse and confusing time' (C9).

## EXPLOSION IN MILITANT RECRUITMENT

The high profile of the militant movement in the wake of the 1989 elections, especially in the face of weak government action, saw a steep rise in recruitment. Perversely, militant casualties also saw a dramatic rise to their peak as recruitment was at its highest point (Gill 1999a). Recruitment, though, continued to outstrip militant deaths. The reasons for this are complex.

Recruitment was driven partly by the perception that there were lots of 'winners' coming out of the movement. The top leadership was seen to have gained considerable power and wealth, while at the same time they were seen to be operating with the impunity of political protection. The message was that 'terrorism pays'. To the poor rural Sikh youth, the allure of power and wealth were appealing attractions for joining the militants (Mahadevan 2008).

At the same time lots of militants were being killed, but the extent of the power and wealth of those at the top made it seem a risk worth

taking. This spirit of adventurism, where putting your life at risk for a big gamble was not alien to Punjabi culture – with an attitude of ‘I’ll either get killed or I’m going to come back rich’ (C9). This was a driving force of terrorism.

An important factor in this dynamic is that despite the high level of militant casualties, it was only foot soldiers that were being killed; the leadership enjoyed political protection. This was significant: it meant that the high casualties had little impact, since it was largely the foot soldiers and not leaders that were casualties. Further, the ‘untouchability’ of the leaders reinforced and drove the circle of recruitment. In the next stage, when the leaders started to be killed, the dynamic worked in reverse. Essentially the boys wanted to be like the top men, but when the top men started being killed they no longer wanted to be like them. Instead, they wanted to go home. It had cease to be a winning proposition (C9). It was only when, Gill argues, that the ‘active life’ of the average militant was reduced below six months, the appeal of wealth and power began to fail (Gill 2009, 16).

## THE MILITANT ESCALATION

Along with recruitment, militant violence also exploded during this phase. The change in militant violence is highlighted by the Hind Samachar Group of newspapers, which was a vigorous opponent to the forces for Khalistan throughout the conflict. In the years 1981-1987, almost every year a member of staff was killed by militants. In 1988 this number rose to three, but then in 1989 this jumped to 24 killed or injured and 22 killed or injured the following year (D36<sup>176</sup>). Perhaps what is more interesting is the change in targeting. Prior to 1989, all those killed were editors or reporters, including 2 chief editors. In 1989 all those killed were lower-level workers on the distribution side: hawkers and agents (D36).

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<sup>176</sup> Document 36: Hind Samachar Group of Newspapers’ documents, listing militant attacks against staff.

## THE TERROR OF EDICTS

The breakaway Panthic Committee (SS), led by Dr Sohan Singh, had emerged by now as the strongest force in the militant movement. They adopted a strategy of issuing diktats that demanded conformity to a new set of social codes based on their own extreme fundamentalist religious views<sup>177</sup> (Joshi 1993, 5; Pettigrew 1995, 73-74). Edicts issued included: promoting the use of the Punjabi language in government jobs and media; demanding that school uniforms be in certain colours of religious significance; against doctors giving advice on family planning; banning the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and meat. These edicts were backed up by acts of violence targeting those who failed to adhere to them (Joshi 1993, 5; Pettigrew 1995, 73-74; Bhatnager 1998, 30). By the end of 1991, the militants had paralysed the Punjab, with the collapse of the Indian bureaucracy in the state. They had coerced the media and their social reform campaign held sway over the state's institutions (Joshi 1993, 6; Mathur 2011). Mathur sums up the situation: 'The terrorists ensured censorship of information by killing non-compliant press editors and journalists. Overall, the intensity of the movement grew rapidly and paralyzed the entire State machinery' (Mathur 2011).

## PUBLIC MOBILISATION AND MILITANT FRONT ORGANISATIONS

In addition to the direct attacks of violence, the militants launched a closely coordinated strategy of public campaigning backed with coercive mobilisation. A thirteen-point directive from Wassan Singh Zaffarwal in Pakistan to Simranjit Singh Mann was intercepted by the BSF. This outlined that Khalistan was the ultimate goal, but the militants' new 'legitimate' public voice could be used to instigate public campaigns and civil agitation for other limited objectives that could help them to their target. This included goals such as getting Sikhs registered as a separate *quam* (nation) under the Indian constitution, or the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (Gill 1999a).

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<sup>177</sup> Some have suggested that the edicts were the result of decisions taken at the local level, and not part of the leadership strategy. (M1)

To support this strategy, the UAD-AISSF alliance organised an enormous public campaign backed up with high levels of coercive mobilisation. A plethora of campaigning events created opportunities for public agitation:

bhog (commemorative prayer) ceremonies for every terrorist killed by the police; numberless anniversaries, shaheedi samagams, of ‘martyrs’; foundation-laying and inaugural rites for commemorative gates, nishan sahibs and gurudwaras constructed or to be constructed in honour of felled extremists – memorials that had, in the past, never been erected except in the names of the greatest saints of Sikhsim. (*ibid.*)

Bhog ceremonies, in particular, were a very successful strategy. Not only did they tie up large amounts of police manpower, but they had a huge public relations impact (*ibid.*; PO3). The creation of such martyrs only inspired more to join. Families – especially among the landless – would encourage sons to join for money and status. If the son died, they still achieved a certain status as the father of a martyr (PO3).

According to Gill, this quasi-political mobilisation was backed by a second well-coordinated campaign by militant front organisations masquerading as human rights groups<sup>178</sup>. These organisations created ‘fact-finding committees’ to investigate the death of every militant at the hands of the police, with the objective of portraying each one as a police murder in a ‘false encounter’. By portraying every death in this way and spreading stories of atrocities, they sought to undermine the public’s support of the police and portray the militants as the public’s defenders. This was a huge propaganda operation, which helped to provoke public ‘outrage’ further and in turn to increase mobilisation for the campaign of public agitation (Gill 1999a).

The combined effect of these tactics was the massive absorption of police time and manpower, reducing their capability to actually do ‘police work’. Furthermore, the activities of the pro-militant groups created space for the militants to operate in across the state, not just

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<sup>178</sup> The obvious point to note here is this is exactly what you would expect Gill to claim if his forces were responsible for extensive human rights abuses.

in the border area where they had previously been hemmed in. The campaigns of mass mobilisation provided ideal cover for the movement of militants and supplies across the state. This in turn put more strain on the security forces, as they were forced to spread out more thinly across the state (*ibid.*).

## TARGETING THE POLICE AND THEIR FAMILIES

Next, the militants stepped up their campaign of targeting security personnel and their families with threats and violence. Their strategy was to provoke mass desertions from the Punjab police force. The campaign was backed by a highly organised intelligence-gathering operation on police personnel and their families. Threats were issued to police personnel that, if they did not resign, they and their families would be killed (Gill 1999a; Joshi 1993, 5). These were not empty threats. In 1990 the number of police killed rocketed to 506, the majority of whom were at home on leave at the time. Nineteen members of policemen's families were also killed, increasing to 134 in 1991 (Gill 1999a). Despite the militants' best efforts, only 600 men left their posts by the end of 1990 from within the combined forces of 60,000 state police, 15,000 PHG volunteers and 10,000 men mobilised under the VDS and SPO schemes. Of these, only a handful were from the police (*ibid.*).

Attacking police families was a tactical mistake. Previously not all police were against the militants or willing to engage with them. The attacks united the police against the militants and compelled them to fight (PO1). Similarly, many in the militancy saw it as a mistake (M1; M3). During the conflict, the police captured a document from KCF-Panjwar analysing the group's mistakes, highlighting the murder of police families as a tactical error (PO5). Marwah sums up the effect: 'If the terrorists had hoped that these tactics would demoralise the police and they would stop taking action against them, they were to be disappointed. The police was so enraged that it retaliated against the militants with full vigour' (Marwah 2009, 293).

## KILLING AND CONFUSION

The conflict in the Punjab had always had a high level of confusion and opaqueness about who was responsible for what and why. In this phase, the level of confusion reached new heights. On the one side, the militant movement had fragmented into two halves, but within each half there were several groups. The militants no longer operated under the unified control that they had had pre-1988 (Pettigrew 1995, 70-78). In addition there was increasing violence between the groups (M3; Chima 2007; 620). There were also those who took advantage of this lawless period to settle old feuds and disputes with the gun under the cover of the militancy (Mathur 2011).

Adding extra confusion to the mix was the police's use of pseudo-militant gangs. The line between the police and the militants was thus becoming increasingly blurred (Pettigrew 1995, 103). Stories were common of farmers being awoken in the middle of the night by armed militants demanding, at gunpoint, food and lodging for the night. Then the next day the same men would return, this time in police uniforms, to arrest the farmer for aiding militants (Pettigrew 1995, 114). The police also gave a certain degree of protection to some militant or criminal gangs that provided them with intelligence (Mahadevan 2007).

It is easy to imagine that in these circumstances it became increasingly hard to ascertain who was responsible for each act of violence. When the police blamed an attack on a certain militant group, the militants would, at the same time, blame the attack on a police-led pseudo-militant group, claiming the attack was a police attempt to discredit them. The militants' alleged use of human rights groups as front organisations, with influence over the media, only added to the confusion. The militants interviewed tended to blame the increasingly indiscriminate violence and criminal activity on the work of the security forces (M1; M3).

The situation was fertile ground for the numerous conspiracy theories that emerged. The confusion is, though, more likely to be explained by the fragmentation on both sides. The militants were made up of dozens of groups and subgroups, loosely operating under two (and in the last stages five) Panthic Committees. The security forces were

similarly fragmented, since there were forces drawn from within the state – the Punjab police, Special Police Officers and Punjab Home Guard as well as Central paramilitary forces such as the CRPF<sup>179</sup> and NSG<sup>180</sup>, the Army and the centre's intelligence service (IB) – all operating at the same time. On top of this, the Punjab police were devolved operationally down to district level, with each district running its own 'cat' operations.

## THE PROBLEM WITH DEMOCRACY

The Chandrasekhar government made a last-ditch attempt to resolve the conflict by calling for nationwide elections. The elections were to be staggered so that they took place in the Punjab well after the elections had taken place in the rest of the country, and the parliamentary elections were to be followed shortly afterwards by elections to the state assemblies. This move split the militants down the middle, with one half, who owed their allegiance to the Damdami Taksal and the first Panthic Committee (Z), deciding to contest the elections, while those aligned to the second Panthic Committee (SS) decided to enforce an election boycott (Gill 1999a).

The result was a plethora of militant-backed candidates, so that by the close of nominations 211 of the candidates had clear militant links (*ibid.*). Even those groups who were officially boycotting the elections were 'hedging their bets' by surreptitiously backing candidates. Many of the candidates refused police protection, preferring to make their own security arrangements. The result was large numbers of militants openly moving round the state, protected by large bands of illegally armed militants, creating an intimidating situation in which democracy was unlikely to flourish. Meanwhile, the militants of the Panthic Committee (SS) embarked on a ruthless campaign of liquidation of candidates in a bid to derail the electoral process. Before the elections were called off, 27 candidates had met their death at the hands of the Panthic Committee (SS) (*ibid.*; Joshi 1993, 6).

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179 Central Reserve Police Force.

180 National Security Guard.

## OPERATION RAKSHAK I

One piece of decisive action taken by the Chandrasekhar government was Operation Rakshak I. It aimed to clear the militants out of the border region and seal the border to infiltration. In this it was successful; it restricted the flow of arms, and the free movement across the border that the militants had enjoyed. Pakistan had been a sanctuary, and now that sanctuary vanished (M3). The success of Rakshak I was also its failure; as there was no strategy of containment, it merely dispersed the militants across the state (C9).

The operation was implemented by the Army, but without learning from the mistakes of their earlier operations in the Punjab: it failed to institute the necessary inter-forces command and coordination. In that way it followed the conventional pattern of Army interventions in internal conflict (Gill 1999a). Though it put pressure on the militants in the border region, the net result was that it simply dispersed the militants who had been concentrated in the border areas across the state (Sahni 2006, 43). What the Punjab needed was a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy and not bit-part policies.

## THE BODY COUNT OF THE 'SOFT' APPROACH

The soft approaches of the Singh and Chandrasekhar governments saw a dramatic spike in casualties in the conflict. In the two years that their regimes were in control, the civilian death toll was almost as much as the combined death toll for the previous 12 years.<sup>181</sup> Despite both regimes being committed to 'hearts and minds' approaches, the militant death toll also almost doubled. In 1989, 703 militants were killed; in 1990, 1,320 were killed, rising to 2,177 in 1991. Also, in 1989 the majority of militant activity was concentrated in just 13 of the 217 police station jurisdictions. After Operation Rakshak, it had spread to the whole state (Sahni 2006, 44).

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<sup>181</sup> 5,070 casualties from 1978-1989 and 5,058 from 1990-1991.

## PHASE 5: THE RETURN OF GILL – THE ENDGAME (1991-1994)

The new elections see the return of strong government at the Centre under the Congress Party. Prime Minister Rao changes direction, and gives the Punjab Police, backed up by the paramilitaries and the Army, a clear mandate to bring security to the Punjab in preparation for new state elections. This time the security forces have the political backing and material support to take on the militancy and win. The new state elections pass successfully and see the return of normal political processes in the state under a new Congress Chief Minister, Beant Singh.

### NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW DIRECTION

It was during the general election campaign that tragedy again struck the Gandhi family: Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated.<sup>182</sup> Subsequently, Congress rode back to power at the Centre on a wave of sympathy (Gill 1999a). The installation on 21 June 1991 of the new Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, signalled a transformation in counterterrorism strategy and the beginning of the endgame. In November 1991 K. P. S. Gill was brought back as Director of the Punjab police and the Army was sent back into the Punjab (Joshi 1993, 16). Together they were charged with the task of restoring order and creating the conditions for a free and orderly election for the Legislative Assembly to be held in February 1992. Elections this time were not an exercise in political opportunism, but a central part of a coherent counterterrorism strategy.

There were four key differences this time in the government's counterterrorism response. Firstly, there was an overarching coherent strategy. Secondly, the strategy set out that peace would not come from elections, but the other way round; peace must be restored in order to hold elections and to resurrect the Punjab's paralysed democratic institutions (Gill 1999a). Thirdly, there was a policy of non-interference from the government; the operation was left in the hands of the professionals

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<sup>182</sup> He was, though, assassinated by the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and not by a Sikh militant group: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/21/newsid\\_2504000/2504739.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/21/newsid_2504000/2504739.stm) (last accessed 16 June 2013).

on the ground: 'There was no back-seat driving from Delhi, no dubious political moves and manoeuvres, no deals with militants and their over-ground agencies, undermining strategic and security initiatives' (*ibid.*). And finally, adequate resources were provided in manpower and equipment (Mahadevan 2008). Also by this stage the state had been successful in changing the perception of the conflict: it had managed to localise it as a Sikh vs. Sikh conflict, rather than a battle along Sikh vs. Hindus or Sikhs vs. central government lines (Chima 2007, 632).

The extent of the use of force applied by the security forces under the direction of Gill in destroying the militant movement is a point of contention. Gill himself maintains it was justified and proportionate given the situation and nature of the militant groups (Gill 1999a). Others describe Gill's campaign as 'brutally crushing the movement' (Chima 2002, 31), or argue that Gill's measuring of success by the number of militants eliminated led his police to use excessive violence. Joshi describes the campaign as being carried out 'with scant respect for the niceties of the law of the land or consideration for human rights' (Joshi 1993, 20).

## OPERATION RAKSHAK II

### Manpower and coordination

Contrary to previous campaigns in the Punjab, this time the manpower was provided to blanket the state in security personnel. Central to this was the return of the Army to the Punjab for the first time in any large capacity since Operation Blue Star. In Operation Rakshak I, the Army was utilised only to seal the border; this time they sent 120,000 troops for operations across the Punjab. In addition there were 53,000 Punjab police, 28,000 Home Guard, 10,000 Special Police Officers and 70,000 paramilitary personnel at the time of peak deployment in February 1992 (Joshi 1993, 12).

Also in contrast to previous campaigns, the Army and police (state and paramilitary) worked together hand in glove. A system of 'cooperative command' was established in which 'the Army formed the anvil

of the counterterrorist effort while the police acted as the hammer' (Mahadevan 2008). A police officer at the level of Inspector General (IG) was attached to each Army corps in the Punjab, a Superintendent of Police (SP) was attached to each brigade and a police contingent was attached to each battalion. The 'flip side' saw army representatives in police control rooms. The result was proper sharing of relevant intelligence and an integrated structure that allowed each unit to take comprehensive and coordinated actions independently in all emerging circumstances (Sahni 2006, 45).

In effect, the Army and paramilitary forces were acting in support of the Punjab police, providing the necessary support and manpower, but the police were the frontline against the militants (Mahadevan 2008). This helped with the framing of the conflict, as it was a largely local Sikh police force taking the lead in fighting the Sikh militancy, rather than the security forces, which had been seen as the Centre against the Sikhs.

### The role of the Army

The Army had four main tasks in Operation Rakshak II. The first was to seal the border to prevent the trans-border movement of militants and arms. The second was to aid the civil authorities in their counterterrorism operations, providing the necessary personnel to back up the police and to increase the overall sense of security in the local population. A key part of the task was psychological; to make the local population 'feel safe'. Traditionally, Army commanders had chosen tactically to deploy with massive concentrations at strategic locations. However, and importantly, this time the Army was broken down to section level in order to saturate the whole state (Gill 1999a). It was largely deployed in rural areas, where they gained dominance over the area through aggressive patrolling at day and night. It provided additional manpower for police cordon and search operations, where it provided the outer cordon, as well as being on hand to provide specialist tactical advice, although the police conducted the searches (Mahadevan 2008). Perhaps most importantly, they established a system of Quick Reaction

Teams (QRTs), which were connected to the police by radio and could be in position to help in a firefight anywhere in the Punjab in fifteen minutes (Joshi 1993, 13).

The third was the undertaking of civil actions, essentially the ‘hearts and minds’ component of the operation. This was key, since to operate effectively the Army needed to restore their image within the state that had been damaged by Operation Blue Star. Furthermore, the state’s institutions had in effect been paralysed by the militants for the last few years (Joshi 1993, 6). The Army played a much-needed role in kick-starting public services. Across the Punjab, army teachers restarted schools, army doctors provided surgeries in the villages, soldiers helped to clear canals and ditches, etc (Joshi 1993, 13; Chima 2007, 626). Chima also cites the importance that the army troops ‘tended to be much more disciplined and even-handed than the comparatively unruly, corrupt paramilitary and local police forces’ (Chima 2007, 626).

The final task was to create the conditions necessary for free and fair elections. Through a combination of preventative measures and extraordinary<sup>183</sup> security arrangements for all the candidates, the elections passed off relatively peacefully. Turnout was low and all the main militant groups boycotted the elections, but the Army and police had managed to prevent a repeat of the earlier election debacle and not one candidate was assassinated during the campaign (Joshi 1993, 13; Sahni 2006, 45).

### The impact

The impact on the ground of this massive and coordinated counterterrorist response was immediate. The civilian and security forces death toll fell dramatically. Under sustained pressure, many of the groups sought to protect their upper echelons by moving them across the border to the safety of Pakistan. More importantly, the policy of restoring order

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<sup>183</sup> A total of 220 paramilitary companies were involved in protecting the candidates, with an entire platoon assigned to each candidate. A section was deployed at the candidate’s residence, another as their personnel escort and another as an advance party to scheduled meetings (Gill 1999a).

and holding elections forced the militants into making what would turn out to be a decisive strategic mistake (Gill 1999a; M1; M2; M3).

By calling elections, the militants were forced into making a decision on whether to contest them or to try and force a boycott. Encouraged by both their Pakistani mentors and supporters in the worldwide Sikh diaspora, the militants decided to opt for the latter. Their strategy was to enforce the postponement of the elections or to keep the turnout below the necessary 10% (Gill 1999a). In the run-up to the election the militants set about implementing a massive campaign of intimidation, including direct threats against candidates, election officials and voters. On the two days of voting, 18 and 19 February, the militants declared a total curfew, on pain of death, to prevent voting (*ibid.*).

Despite the militants' best efforts, the elections were not postponed and they went ahead as planned. Turnout was low at 23%, and a Congress government was returned with a majority secured on only 9% of the vote, but the paralysis inflicted on the state by the militants for the last decade was broken (*ibid.*; Marwah 2009, 279). The upshot of the elections was that the militant organisations were once again banished 'into the netherworld of an unambiguously criminal identity as the mask of politics was ripped away' (Gill 1999a). Through boycotting the elections they had not only eliminated themselves from the political process, but they had also lost the substantial immunities that come with involvement in legitimate politics. Without electoral support, the militants and their front organisations had denied themselves the credibility they needed. The situation returned to that of pre-1989 (*ibid.*). In effect, 'the elections completely transformed the environment in the state. Handing over power to the elected representatives of the people turned out to be the most important step in ending insurgency in Punjab' (Marwah 2009, 281).

Those in the militant movement conceded that the boycott was unsuccessful for the movement. The problem was not the boycott; they argue that it was that the boycott was not properly thought through and that there was no strategy for what to do next (M1; M2). One former militant half-jokingly argues that if they had contested the elections he would be where Badel, the current chief minister, is now<sup>184</sup> (M3).

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<sup>184</sup> This does raise an interesting question of counter-factual reflection: what if the militants had not boycotted the election? Would they have been defeated,

## THE MILITANT RESPONSE

In the days following the election, the militants' response came with the reprisal killings of 24 voters in separate incidents. Soon afterwards, their strategy changed to focus on 'massive strikes in urban complexes', commencing with the slaughter of 15 executives at a private company in Sangrur on 10 March. This was followed in quick succession with similar attacks across the state on 14, 18 and 21 March (Gill 1999a).

In April, the militants next shifted the focus of their efforts back to a policy of targeting police officers and their families in the most intensive campaign of this kind yet (Joshi 1993, 16). In the first three months of the year, 54 security men were killed; in April alone 51 were murdered and 73 injured. In response to the death of Sukhdev Singh Babbar, leader of the most powerful militant grouping at the time, the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) killed 63 members of policemen's families in retaliation. But by October the militants were only capable of attacking 'soft' targets, such as farm labourers at isolated farmhouses (*ibid.* 17).

## THE POLICE RESPONSE

In the aftermath of the successful elections, the Army remained in the Punjab, but was returned to barracks, supporting the police largely through the assistance of quick response teams and extra manpower for cordons and searches. The job of tackling the militants' new strategies rested firmly with the police.

The first challenge was to confront and contain the militant attacks in urban areas. Police attention was focussed on the 140-150 urban centres within the Punjab, and senior officers were put in charge of four to five of these urban areas. Each area was then subdivided into sections along a grid, with manpower and vehicles dispensed for patrolling along strategic points (Gill 1999a).

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or would they have been successful again (whether or not due to coercive force)? And how would this have impacted on the subsequent state response?

Further to this, the police adopted three distinct strategies to take the fight to the militants. The first was to identify the perpetrators of the latest attack as quickly as possible and then to direct police resources to ensure their arrest or elimination (Gill 1999a). When the militant leaders, who had previously enjoyed political protection, started to be killed in police encounters, it had a huge knock-on effect on recruitment (C9). The second, based on careful intelligence-gathering and analysis, was to focus attention on the most important militants, ‘instead of wasting resources on every petty criminal and opportunist who had joined the terrorist ranks. The available manpower and infrastructure was focused disproportionately on the leaders, the planners and the ideologues of the movement’ (Gill 1999a). The third strategy came in the form of Operation Night Dominance in the wake of the August murders of police families. Analysis of militant operations showed that they overwhelmingly operated in the hours of darkness. To counter this, senior officers were put in charge of a campaign of night operations designed to break the militants’ control of the night (*ibid.*).

#### THE FOURTH OPTION: SURRENDER POLICY

By January 1992, fresh recruitment to the militant ranks had all but ended. The question was now how best to end the activity of those who remained. Here the police strategy changed to ‘offer’ the militants a fourth option, on top of the three conventional responses of arrest, flight or death in armed engagements. This was the offer of surrender (Gill 1999a). With the end in sight for the Khalistan movement, many militants were simply looking for a way out and willing to jump at any exit offered to them. Speaking at a surrender ceremony in March 1993, Gill claimed it was ‘neither a defeat of the militants nor a win for the police. It was a win for all Punjabis who had cooperated with the security forces in restoring normalcy’ (D25<sup>185</sup>). By the end of 1992, 537 militants surrendered, including 6 ‘hardcore’<sup>186</sup> militants. The following

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<sup>185</sup> Document 25: *Hindustan Times*, 3 March 1993.

<sup>186</sup> The Punjab police categorised all known terrorists on the basis of their commitment as either A, B or C, where A were ‘hardcore’ terrorists who

year another 379 surrendered, including 11 ‘hardcore’ militants. The surrendered militants in turn provided a rich flow of fresh intelligence that allowed the security forces to further target their operations, thus increasing the momentum of these operations (*ibid.*).

### ‘CAT’ OPERATIONS

Post-1991, Mahadevan argues that money became the police’s asymmetric advantage (Mahadevan 2007). The final offensive, commencing in the autumn of 1991, brought with it liberal funding for the police’s intelligence-gathering operations. The funding allowed the expansion of the number of ‘cats’ in service and also of the focus: from the most-wanted militants to lower-ranking ones as well. Rewards ranging from INR 40,000 to INR 500,000 were dispensed for each militant neutralised. The rewards were split between both the ‘cats’ and their handlers. The increased rewards proved a suitable motivation for turned militants: those who proved naturals at the job were able to become relatively rich. In addition, turned militants were awarded with the prospect of eventually being absorbed into the police force once they had proven their loyalty (*ibid.*; PO6).

After the success of the elections, ‘cat’ operations became an integral part of the police strategy of targeting the militant leadership: ‘Decapitation of terrorist gangs through neutralising the last of the ideologically motivated “hardcore”, who had so far managed to evade arrest, became the purpose of the “cat” system’ (Mahadevan 2007). In this way the ‘cat’ operations returned to having the strategic purpose they had had at the start between 1986 and 1987. Before the end of the year, 139 ‘hardcore terrorists’ had been arrested or killed by the police in armed engagements (*ibid.*). A further impact of the ‘cat system’ was that it ‘caused a spiral of distrust between and within armed insurgent groups thus leading to increased fratricidal blood-letting. This fratricidal warfare was often strategically manipulated by the police to their advantage’ (Chima 2007, 628).

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were the most committed and usually extremely violent (Mahadevan 2008).

In the last years of the conflict, the annual outlay on rewards for killed or captured listed militants was R100 million, averaging R50-60,000 a time. On top of this there were unannounced awards of R4-5,000 for killing unlisted militants, described by some as a ‘cash for corpses’ scheme (Dhillon 2006, 334). Mahadevan describes the reward system as follows:

What was unique about the reward system was the vague and apparently mercenary nature of its operation. While officially, an INR 100,000 reward was placed on category ‘A’ terrorists, the actual bounty could go up to twenty times as much, depending on the particular terrorist to be nabbed. The shadowy nature of the payment, allegedly made in cash-filled suitcases, contributed to the impression of underhandedness in the whole process. (Mahadevan 2007)

There were rumours of abuse of these rewards, often involving the discovery alive of a supposedly ‘killed’ militant for whom the reward has been collected. On top of the rewards, there are many allegations of the police charging bribes for the release of persons arrested during the conflict.<sup>187</sup> The extent of the wealth achieved by some officers was highlighted when the British government in 1997 informed the Indian government that many Punjab police officers had property in the UK, largely purchased in the years during the conflict (Dhillon 2006, 335).

## WINNING THE SUPPORT OF THE PUBLIC: THE PRESSURE COOKER EFFECT

A crucial game changer in the course of the conflict was the shift in public opinion away from the militancy to supporting the police. The root of the public’s change of allegiance was the dramatic increase in the criminality of the movement after 1987. Once the public had lost faith in the movement it was still a big step for them to start actively aiding the police in the climate of fear enforced by the militants. A situation described as the ‘pressure cooker effect’; once the lid was

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<sup>187</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/08/01/punjab-crisis> (last accessed 27 September 2013).

lifted, the information began to flow (PO7). In order to ‘lift the lid’, the police pursued a strategy of psy-ops to encourage the public to come forward with information. A favoured tactic was for the police to falsely announce in the aftermath of a successful operation which had been based on police intelligence that the operation was the result of information given by local people, therefore encouraging the population to give future information, believing that other people were doing so and that the police would act on it (PO7).

Importantly, the Punjab police did not win the public’s support through a policy of winning hearts and minds. Instead, while the militants lost support due to their crimes, the police gained the public’s support by showing that they could take on the militants and that they were more powerful (PO7). The key to this was perception management. The people were with those whom they perceived to be strongest, and the police used careful perception management to get to that key tipping point of winning public support (PO5). Interestingly, when asked why there had not been a strategy to win hearts and minds, a senior police officer pointed out that in India the police are unpopular at the best of times. As a result such a policy was doomed to failure; their only option was to win support by proving that they were stronger than the militants (PO7).

## POLITICAL SOLUTIONS

Security operations were a central part of ending the Punjab Crisis, but they do not tell the whole story. There was also an important political dimension to ending the crisis. The two dimensions were intimately connected, and the former allowed the latter. The return to security allowed the return to democracy in the state. Similarly, John Paul Vann wrote on counter-insurgency in Vietnam, ‘you can argue about whether security is 10 per cent of the problem or 90 per cent of the problem, but it’s the first 10 per cent or the first 90 per cent’ (quoted in Mahadevan 2008).

The formation of the Congress state government under Chief Minister Beant Singh was what Chima describes as an “appropriate”

non-sectarian government to tackle ethnic insurgency' (Chima 2007, 622), whereas previously '[d]irect rule largely legitimatized the Sikh insurgents' claim that the Sikh *quam* [italics in original] (community) and Punjab were being unfairly dominated by a Hindu-majority central government' (*ibid.*). The new state administration, being formed by the secular Congress Party, importantly had support from within both the local Sikh and Hindu communities, and as such 'its internal composition was conducive to waging war effectively against Sikh insurgents' (*ibid.*). In essence the political control of the fight against the Sikh militants had now returned to a locally and popularly elected government that represented the two communities, and in the process it successfully undermined the militants' strategic narrative. They could no longer frame the violence as the religious struggle of a repressed Sikh *quam* fighting a distant Hindu-dominated government. There was now a locally elected secular Congress state government, with a Sikh Chief Minister, backing a largely Sikh police force lead by a Sikh police officer to take on the Sikh militancy. As Chima concludes, 'the central Indian state was successful in crushing the Sikh separatist insurgency by, in part, localizing its violence and turning it into a "Sikh vs. Sikh" battle instead of a "Sikh vs. Hindu" or "Sikh vs. government" one' (*ibid.* 632).

Other commentators have noted, rather suspiciously, the combination of the return of Congress to power in the Punjab and the subsequent rapid collapse in militancy:

One school of thought would have us believe that Sikh militancy in its later phases, the product chiefly of manipulations by certain powerful interest groups in Delhi and Chandigarh through 'plants', contact men and agents provocateurs, operated by Punjab police and central intelligence agencies, ceased to be of any use to the Congress Party, once back in power in the crucial border state. (Dhillon 2006, 346)

The so-called 'managed disorder' thesis saw the Congress Party as manipulating the conflict for its own political expediency: once the militants were no longer of any use, they simply pulled the plug (Dhillon 2006, 246; Chima 2002, 22).

Due to the very low turnout in the elections, the ‘popular support’ of the new government was initially questionable. However, within a few months in office, as the tide began to turn against the militants, the support for Beant Singh’s government increased progressively (Chima 2007, 622). Beant Singh provided the necessary state level political support, without political inference, for the Punjab police to end militancy (Gill 1999a). Marwah highlights the important role of the security forces and the close cooperation between the different forces and agencies, but concludes that ‘the most decisive role was played by Beant Singh, the newly elected chief minister, in 1992. His determination to take on the terrorists and unstinted support to the state police turned out to be the key factors’ (Marwah 2009, 283).

As the Beant Singh administration gradually gained the upper hand over the militants, it provided the political space for the non-violent elements of the Akali leadership to return to the political mainstream. Previously, the moderates had remained on the sidelines for fear that they would have been killed by the militants if they returned to the political process. Through fear, the militants had successfully dictated that the only Akali leadership available was one that supported its position. As their power declined, the moderates returned (Chima 2007, 624; Marwah 2009, 280). Similarly, they realised that if they chose to boycott, they risked political marginalisation as the state returned to the normal political process (Chima 2007, 624). As a consequence, the militants’ stranglehold on the political process was broken, and political power gradually returned to the moderates. The militants never had the support of the whole Sikh community, and now ‘[t]he liberal elements silent for long and pushed to [sic] background became vocal and important once again in Punjab politics after state assembly elections’ (Marwah 2009, 280). At the heart of the Punjab Crisis, in both its cause and endurance, was the collapse of normal political processes in the state under the coercive power of the militants. Through fear and intimidation, the militants had hijacked the political process, silencing the moderate majority. The security operation, in the last phase, created the environment in which the political process could be resurrected from the control of the militants.

## THE END...

Perhaps what was most remarkable about the final phase was just how quickly the conflict ended. Having peaked in 1991, by the end of 1993 the militant violence had all but evaporated (Gill 2009, 12). The assassination of the Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh in 1995 was an exception, though this was to be the last major act of terrorism (*ibid.*). In the fifteen years since, the militant groups have failed to re-emerge in any significant manner and this seems unlikely in the near future considering the lack of public support for the movement. However, beneath the surface there are rumblings and the occasional arrest: in 2006 Jalandhar police arrested a foreign-backed three-man cell of the ISYF with significant quantities of explosives (D22<sup>188</sup>). The remnants of the militant groups are largely based abroad, and are capable of little more than issuing threats. Within the Punjab, the militancy is over.

## ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY: THE GILL DOCTRINE

The key to K. P. S. Gill's success in ending the conflict in the Punjab was how he conceptualised it and the subsequent doctrine he developed to fight the militants. The Gill Doctrine is founded on three points. The first is that coercive force cannot provide the solution to a conflict, but that unless the government actually controls the ground, the administrative wing of the government will be unable to function. As Mathur noted when writing on the lessons of the Punjab campaign, security forces should be used 'to create the environment for a political solution' (Mathur 2011). In short, Gill reversed the traditional approach that rallying the population against terrorism should happen before seeking to achieve operational dominance.

The basis of this view was the concept developed by Gill of a 'societal Stockholm syndrome'. The idea is that even when there appears to be strong popular support for militancy, this may not in fact be the case. It may simply just be a survival tactic developed by a population living in

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<sup>188</sup> Document 22: Punjab Police (Jalandhar) press release, 24 December 2006.

constant fear of the gun. In order to break this ‘mass mental paralysis’ it is necessary for the police to act against the militants operationally and to separate them from those they terrorise (Mahadevan 2008).

The second point is that there needs to be a distinction drawn between the root causes of a conflict and the dynamics that sustain it once the violence has already commenced. A counterterrorism strategy should then be directed towards neutralising the sustaining dynamic, and not at the root causes of the conflict. It is possible that the root causes and the sustaining dynamics are the same, but not necessarily so. In the case of the Punjab, Gill argued that the sustaining dynamics were formed by the power of the militant groups, not the original grievances (*ibid.*).

The third point was the importance of assessing the militants’ ‘group motivation’. Gill argued that the Khalistan movement was less an ideological movement and more an identity-based separatists’ movement. As such it differed from other experiences of terrorism that were largely based on left-wing or communist ideologies. In ideologically-based conflicts, Gill maintains that political views can be moderated through dialogue and discussion. With identity-based conflicts, in contrast, this is virtually impossible to achieve. The way forward, Gill believed, was not to engage in pointless theological debates, but to appeal to the militants’ instinct for survival. Gill offered the militants a straight choice: to either ‘die for their idea of God or to live for themselves. There was no third option’ (*ibid.*).

## THE OPERATIONAL DOCTRINE

The basis of the Gill Doctrine is that counterterrorism should be seen as a war of attrition that seeks to exploit the one common weakness of all militant movements: the need to constantly recruit to replace those lost to the security forces, either through arrest or death in action. Unless the militant group manages to keep recruitment higher than its operational losses, it will simply wither and die. The objective of the security forces was then to engage the militants to neutralise as many as possible and to frustrate recruitment. To achieve this, the Gill doctrine gives three directives:

- 1) Surgically neutralize as many terrorists as possible
- 2) As quickly as possible
- 3) For as long as possible

(Mahadevan 2008)

To achieve this, police needed to target the militants and their active support base. But this needed to be achieved without targeting the population as a whole. The militants needed to be isolated and neutralised. Essential to achieving this was good local intelligence, allowing the police to operate without affecting the non-combatant population. The necessity of good local intelligence is why Gill argues that the job of counterterrorism should rest with the police, who come from the population that the militants claim to represent. The Army, not coming from the region and without a local intelligence network, is unsuited to this part of the job. What is crucial, though, is that the police, Army, paramilitaries and intelligence agencies all work together in a coordinated and integrated manner. The key variables for implementing the Gill Doctrine are:

- 1) The quality of Local Intelligence
- 2) The capacity for Synchronised Operations
- 3) The Degree of Political Resolve.

(Mahadevan 2008)

## SO WHY DID THE CONFLICT END?

In the final phase, a complex web of background factors came together to end the violence. On the one hand there were the contextual factors: the militant groups had weakened themselves through their fragmentation and infighting, and their senseless violence had lost them the support of the people: fundamentally, they had failed to create a united front with the people united behind them. The sealing of the border restricted their flow of arms and supplies, and denied them their usual sanctuary from the onslaught of the police campaign. The Punjab police had been rejuvenated into a force capable of taking on

the militants, and motivated under the returning leadership of K. P. S. Gill. The conflict had become internalised within the Sikh community, removing the disadvantage of being the ‘outsider’ from the government forces, as the action was led by the Sikh-dominated state police.

On the other hand there was the coordinated government response, culminating in the kinetic counterterrorism campaign implemented on the ground by the Punjab police. Firstly, the government made the correct analysis of the situation and chose an appropriate strategic response, deciding that security needed to be restored first to the Punjab, in order to create the conditions for the return to normal political process in the state. Analysing that the groups themselves had become the sustaining dynamics of the conflict, these needed to be taken on first rather than addressing the groups’ ‘grievances’. Secondly, the state now had the capacity to run a sustained counterterrorism campaign to take on the militants. At the operational level the security forces executed a well-thought-through plan, with integrated command and control mechanisms ensuring the coordination of the police, Army and central paramilitary forces. In addition, the security forces were given the necessary and sustained political backing to complete their mission. In other words, the state not only chose the right course of action, it implemented it well. Finally, the success of the security forces created the conditions necessary for the return to normal political process under the new Chief Minister, Beant Singh. This was a crucial part of the equation; the collapse of normal politics in Punjab had been at the heart of the conditions that led to the militancy. Whilst it may have been the security forces that ended the militancy, it was the resurrection of the political process that ensured it did not rise again.

### PART 3: ANALYSIS OF THE PUNJAB CRISIS

This section will analyse the most important factors present in the conflict that have influenced the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation over the lifespan of the conflict. The analytical framework that was outlined in Chapter One will be applied to the Punjab Crisis for this analysis. The framework was constructed through a process of comparative

research on the three conflicts in this project, and is now being applied retrospectively onto each of the three conflicts.

The analytical framework is divided into a trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors, with each containing a series of key factors:

**CONTEXT:** Social cleavages; popular support; grievances; local politics; national politics; international politics/foreign support

**STATE ACTORS:** State action – coercive force; state action – policy solution; state capacity; strong government/weak government

**NON-STATE ACTORS:** Strategy of armed groups; capacity of armed groups; factionalisation; criminalisation

## CONTEXT

### Social cleavages

The Punjab presents a very complicated social context, with many overlapping and intercutting social cleavages. Religious cleavages, along Sikh vs. Hindu lines, presented the most important social division at the heart of the conflict, followed by a strong Centre-periphery division between the Punjab and central control from Delhi. The two cleavages were coupled in the rhetoric of the Sikh militancy to produce the mutually reinforcing narrative of the Hindu-dominated centre exploiting the Sikh community. As such it combined both religious and political divisions.

The Sikh community itself was heavily divided, with numerous fissures. There were religious divisions between orthodox and secular, which in turn had political manifestations in support of the Akali Dal or the Congress parties. There were also divisions within Sikhism, most notably between orthodox Khalsa Sikhs and sects such as the Nirankaris. Bhindranwale's campaigns started along these cleavages of orthodox Sikh revivalism against encroaching secularism, and the Nirankaris, who he saw as heretical (Chima 1997, 7 and 11). In time this grew to

include the wider cleavages of Sikh vs. Hindu and Centre vs periphery. The Punjabi Sikh community was also divided horizontally along caste divisions, with the Sikh militancy finding its roots and resonance within the Jat Sikh caste of peasant farmers (Tully and Jacob 2009, 27, 37 and 47). To understand the conflict, it has to be viewed as a largely Jat Sikh-led movement which was heavily influenced by the politics of small farmers. This in turn is interconnected with the Centre-periphery divisions, as the peasant farmers blamed their economic woes on the policies of central government (Pettigrew 1995, 4).

These social cleavages played a crucial role in the dynamics of the conflict. On the one hand they played an escalatory role, providing the fissures in society that Bhindranwale was able to exploit in forming the Sikh militancy. On the other hand the cleavages had a de-escalatory effect on the conflict. This worked in three ways. Firstly, the complexity and fractious nature of Punjab society made it almost impossible for the militancy to create a united front (Chima 2002, 22; Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 113). It largely only took root within the Jat Sikh community<sup>189</sup>, and even within this community, the high degree of competition and factualism served to undermine the movement rather than to unite it (Pettigrew 1995, 190-91). Similarly, not all Sikhs were Jats, and many non-Jat Sikhs did not support a Jat-dominated movement. As Pettigrew remarks, '[u]rbanites in Delhi and in the Punjab frequently told me that they did not want to live in a Jatistan' (*ibid.* 190).

Secondly, the Sikh and Hindu communities were intricately and deeply interconnected; the communal hatred preached by Bhindranwale never took hold. As mentioned earlier, it was common culture for many in the Punjabi Hindu community for the eldest son to convert to Sikhism (C9; Mathur 2011). The two communities were much more interconnected than in other ethnic-religious conflicts, such that it placed too high a barrier for communalism to properly take hold (Chima 2002, 22). As Chima sums up, '[a] common "Punjabi" identity and culture often transcends local caste, class and communal identities to bind Punjab's Hindus and Sikhs' (Chima 1997, 11). These 'cross-cutting and overarching

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<sup>189</sup> In Puri, Judge and Sekhon's field work, in the sample of villages they researched 264 out of 323, i.e. nearly 82% of the militants, were Jat Sikhs by caste (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 59).

identities' had the impact of moderating the Sikh-Hindu communal divide, which in practice helped to prevent the institutionalisation of the political front of the Khalistan movement (*ibid.* 21-22). Without the institutionalised political support, Chima argues, its militant groups were easily marginalised and eliminated (*ibid.* 22).

Finally, the removal of the multitude of social cleavages from the equation would greatly assist the state's efforts to end the militancy. By the end of the conflict the state had managed to internalise the conflict as Jat Sikh vs. Jat Sikh, with a largely Sikh police force, led by a Sikh, backed by a Sikh Chief Minister, taking on a largely Sikh militancy. This changed the framing of the conflict, and denied the militants the ability to exploit the tensions along social cleavages, or to paint the conflict as that of 'us against them' (Chima 2007, 630-37). Instead it became a fight for the soul of the Sikh community.

### Popular support

It took a while for Bhindranwale and the militancy he led to gain popular support, but once it began to gain traction, it was quick to rise. The perceived weakness of both the Akalis and Congress, and their failure to act, only buoyed his popularity. As he became a centre of power in his own right, his support continued to grow. However, it is important to remember that the militancy was not at its peak in terms of popular support under Bhindranwale, and talk of Khalistan was still seen as an extremist position.

It would be the events of 1984 that would truly ignite the popular support behind the Sikh militancy. The combined effect of Operations Blue Star and Woodrose, followed by the anti-Sikh riots, served to alienate the Sikh population and drive them straight into the hands of the extremists (Dhillon 1990, 208; Gill 2009, 95). The botched actions of the Indian state, far from de-escalating the violence, only poured fuel on the fire. Ironically, the state actions of 1984 became the basis of the popular support for the militancy. In practice it served to radicalise a large number of the Sikh worldwide diaspora, providing a vital early line of funding and support. Between 1984 and 1987 the movement

received widespread popular backing within the Punjabi Sikh community. On the back of such strong and widespread support the militant movement was able to flourish. The population provided not just emotional support but funding and places of sanctuary.

However, from around 1987 the militant movement began to lose genuine popular support (PO2; PO1; Puri, Judge, Sekhon 1999, 165; Joshi 1993, 19). By this stage the anger and outrage of the events of 1984 had begun to subside, but more importantly as the movement became increasingly criminalised, the ordinary Sikh population increasingly became the victims of the militants' violence. Similarly, the Sikh population had had time to reflect on the militants' aim of Khalistan, and consider if that was what they really wanted considering how interconnected their identity and community was with both India and the Hindu population.

On the surface, it would continue to appear that the militants had maintained massive popular support, and were able to mobilise large parts of the population. However, the population were supporting the militants out of fear; they had achieved complete paralysis of the state and appeared poised to achieve Khalistan. Gill describes that popular support as more of a survival instinct, in a phenomenon he describes as a 'societal Stockholm syndrome' (Mahadevan 2008). He points to the thousands of ordinary Punjabis who joined the fight against the militants through the village defence committees and special police officers as evidence of the population turning against the militancy (Gill 1999a).

The success of the police operation in the final stage coincided with the police managing to win the support of the people. The population was trapped by fear; the police had to gradually convince the people that they were stronger than the militants, and they would stay the course in fighting the militancy. It was a case of reaching that all-important tipping point where the population could be convinced to bring their support behind the police. As this happened, the public supplied the police with a rush of information that provided the necessary intelligence to successfully target the groups (PO1), a situation described as the 'pressure cooker effect': 'when the people's minds were turned around, terrorism was defeated' (PO7).

## Grievances

In the initial phase, Bhindranwale tapped into the Sikh identity crisis and the very real sense of grievance on a number of issues. The Sant combined a selection of present and historical grievances to justify his preaching of the exploitation of and discrimination against Sikhs. These ranged from the economic woes of peasant farmers to the control of Chandigarh; from division of river waters to demands of recognition of the Sikhs as a separate nation. All of the grievances were used to confirm Bhindranwale's preachings of persecution. The manipulation of these grievances found fertile ground in the growing number of (and often well-educated) unemployed Sikh youth (Tully and Jacob 2009, 49). Despite some very real grievances, the Sikhs were far from persecuted: '[h]ow a proud and martial people such as the Sikhs came to voluntarily cast themselves in the role of habitual victims and complainers is incomprehensible' (Gill 2009, 69). They were (and remain) one of the most prosperous communities in India (Tully and Jacob 2009, 36).

The real grievances that were to drive the conflict were the wounds inflicted on the Sikh population by the disastrous actions of the state. The combined impact of Operations Blue Star and Woodrose and the anti-Sikh riots provided the real grievance that would escalate the conflict (Dhillon 1990, 208; Gill 2009, 95). It would be these actions which would drive the moderate Sikhs into the hands of the extremists, both in the Punjab and across the Sikh diaspora. The brutal and corrupt practices of some of the police and paramilitary forces only added to this grievance (Marwah, 261-63; Tully and Jacob 2009, 105-9; Dhillon 2006, 139).

However, even the events of 1984 would not provide a sense of grievance that would drive and sustain the conflict. As the militancy progressed, it created its own dynamic, driven by foreign support and criminalisation. As the movement became increasingly criminalised, the lure of power and wealth became the driving force of the conflict rather than any sense of grievance (Mahadevan 2008), a situation that was worsened by Pakistan's funding and support of the movement that helped to sustain the violence. As research has since shown, a sense of adventure and the lure of money proved to be far greater motives of

recruitment to the militants' ranks than any grievance (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 68; D32). It is worth remembering that the conflict was ended without any political compromises or any 'root causes' being addressed (Mahadevan 2008; Sahni 2006, 33).

### Local politics

The tumultuous nature of Punjabi state politics would both play a role in the emergence of the conflict and in driving the escalation and de-escalation in violence as the conflict progressed. In the initial stage, the power struggles, infighting and instability of the state's politics would provide the backdrop for the rise of Bhindranwale. The Sant himself was initially patronised by the Congress Party as a means to undermine the Akali Dal, and hence divide the Sikh vote to allow Congress to return to power in the state. Before this, like Frankenstein's monster, he turned on his former masters (Marwah 2009, 257). The Akalis themselves were stuck in a dynamic of agitational politics and campaigning on Sikh grievances in order to gain power – although they failed to address these issues once in power (Tully and Jacob 2009, 43 and 51). As Gill notes, '[n]one of the grievances they persistently harp on [sic] are really anything more than a ploy to harness the energies, occupy the minds and secure the volatile loyalties of their "turbulent followers"' (Gill 2009, 68). Their response to Bhindranwale's extremism was to embrace him for political expediency rather than to have the conviction to stand against his extremism. This created a 'race to the bottom', with the Akalis being dragged to the extreme for fear that Bhindranwale would undercut their support. This was further aggravated by the internal factionalism and competition between the leaders, with some seeking to use Bhindranwale in their own struggles for power within the Akali Dal (Chima 2002, 26; Tully and Jacob, 73 and 99). In the end, both Congress and the Akali Dal, through seeking to exploit Bhindranwale for their own power games, would ultimately weaken themselves and contribute to the Sant's rise to power and the emergence of militancy.

In the aftermath of the events of 1984, the new government under

Rajiv Gandhi set about reaching a political solution, culminating in the Rajiv-Longowal Accord. In the subsequent state elections, despite Longowal's assassination, the moderate faction of the Akali Dal came back to power in Punjab. However, the failure to implement the Accord only served to undermine the moderate government and to strengthen the extremists' factions, who argued that this only showed the futility of the political process in addressing Sikh grievances (Marwah 2009, 270-71). An armed struggle would be the only hope, they claimed. As the violence escalated, and the Centre again dismissed the elected state government, this fed into their narrative of the Hindu-dominated central government discriminating and exploiting the Sikhs.

The 1989 national elections would, just by being called, destabilise the state, and the subsequent election of a number of militant-backed candidates would have a number of consequences (Gill 1999a; Joshi 1993, 3). It provided the militants with a voice that had been lacking since Bhindranwale's death, but also it provided the groups with a certain amount of political protection and legitimacy. The police were unwilling to crack down on groups connected with prominent politicians, especially against a backdrop of secret talks and negotiations that might have seen the very militant leaders they were pursuing emerge as ministers in a new state government (Joshi 1993, 5).

When K. P. S. Gill returned in late 1991 and launched his counter-terrorism campaign, it provided the secure environment necessary for the state elections to take place in 1992. However, the return of an elected state government and the emergence of Beant Singh as the new Chief Minister would also prove crucial in the continued success of the campaign against the militants (Marwah 2009, 283). This denied the militants the ability to frame the conflict as a Sikh vs. Hindu or central government conflict. He also provided the police with the necessary political support to take on the militants and win. Ultimately, the Sikh militancy emerged from and was sustained by a broken political process in the Punjab. Thus the restoration to normal political process in the state was central to ending the militancy (Chima 2007, 624-25; Marwah 2009, 280). As noted above, the failure of the militant groups to institutionalise their political support made the movement's marginalisation easier (Chima 1997, 22).

## National politics

Similarly, events and currents at the national political level would play their role in the emergence and development of the conflict. The profound changes that would evolve in Indian politics following Indira Gandhi's ascension to power would help create the context in which the militancy would emerge. In the change from relying on Congress's usual support base of Muslims and untouchables to trying to form a Hindu majority bloc vote, Congress moved from secular to Hindu politics. In this move it is alleged that Mrs Gandhi sought to exploit the rising Sikh militancy to attract Hindu voters across the northern states (Tully and Jacob 2009, 11-12; Chima 2002, 20-21; Dhillon 1990, 205; Chima 2002, 28; Major 1987, 52). Further, Mrs Gandhi's policy of not allowing any politician to maintain an independent power base saw her appoint home minister Zail Singh's arch rival, Darbara Singh, as Punjab Chief Minister. The subsequent power struggles between the two, and Zail Singh's attempts to use Bhindranwale to destroy his rival, would exacerbate the situation and contribute to the Sant's rise (Tully and Jacob 2009, 63; Chima 2002, 26; Dhillon 2006, 67-68; Marwah 2009, 258).

National politics would again intervene with the 1989 elections. Mired in corruption scandals, Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party sought to fight the election on security grounds: that only Congress could resolve the Punjab Crisis. In order to help their election chances, it has been alleged that Congress decided to 'let the sore fester a little longer', instead of seizing the moment to negotiate an end to the militancy. As the groups floundered in the face of the Punjab police's onslaught, the government chose to wait until after the election (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 42; PO7). As it soon became clear that Congress was going to lose the election, the militants withdrew their offers to negotiate, preferring to wait and see what the next government would bring.

What the next government brought was instability and weakness. Failing to understand the conflict, they called off the police's campaign against the militants just as it was biting (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 42). The government's 'soft touch' allowed the militants to rise again, and their attempts at negotiating were undermined by the fact that the

militants knew they were negotiating from a position of weakness. The period was characterised by secret talks and negotiations with the different militant factions, but to no avail. It only succeeded in having the perverse effect of undermining the police, who were no longer confident in taking on militants when in talks with the Centre.

The eventual collapse of the government and the subsequent 1991 elections were to bring about a sea change in the national political context. Congress returned to power at the Centre on a tide of sympathy following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. A new strong government under Prime Minister Rao would provide the necessary political will to take on the militants. This time the government entrusted the security forces to complete their campaign against the militants, providing them with the political backing and material support to see the job through (Gill 1999a; Mahadevan 2008).

### International politics

Although essentially an internal conflict, the wider international political landscape would play a significant role in the dynamics of the conflict, in particular in the roles of Pakistan and the Sikh worldwide diaspora. In the initial stages, and throughout the conflict, the diaspora that would play the key role, providing both ideological and monetary support to the emerging militant movement (M1; Joshi 1993, 25). Operation Blue Star would have an equally dramatic effect on radicalising Sikhs around the world, and many diaspora organisations rallied to collect funds for the militancy – according to one newspaper report £8 million a year was flowing to the Punjab from Sikh supporters in the UK alone (D23<sup>190</sup>). However, the bombing of Air India 182 by Sikh militants would do much to undermine the foreign support for their cause (M1; C10).

The real escalating factor came in 1987 when Pakistan decided to come off the fence and start direct support for the militants (Pettigrew 1995, 105). To understand Pakistan's involvement it needs to be viewed

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<sup>190</sup> Document 23: *National Herald*, 10 December 1988.

as part of the ongoing geopolitical struggle between the two arch-rivals, who had already been to war three times since Independence, most recently in the 1971 Bangladeshi War of Independence, which had seen East Pakistan cede to become Bangladesh. Pakistan sought to exploit the Punjab Crisis for its own ends, using its support for the Khalistani groups as a political tool in its struggle with India. An independent Khalistan was never Pakistan's objective; it sought to exploit it to weaken India as part of its strategy to focus on its real objective – Kashmir (Mahadevan 2007).

The introduction of Pakistani support would have a dramatic escalatory effect on the conflict. The supply of sophisticated weapons and training transformed the groups into a much more lethal operation, and by allowing the groups to operate out of camps across the Pakistani border it provided them with the necessary sanctuaries from which to wage their campaign. However, Pakistani support would not just escalate the conflict; it would also change the nature of the conflict. Through their support of the groups, Pakistan was able to influence the strategy of the militants, twisting it to suit their geopolitical objectives of creating as much chaos and violence as possible in the Punjab to weaken India, rather than creating a coherent strategy to win independence. Some commentators blame the change to random and senseless killings on Pakistan's influence (*ibid.*). Crucially, Pakistani support also played a key role in the factionalisation and criminalisation of the militancy, there was a free flow of arms and ammunition from Pakistan such that anyone could get arms, form a group and start looting (M3). The logic behind Pakistan's policy of arming as many splinter groups as possible, driving the factionalisation of the movement, was to maximise the chaotic violence (M3). This only undermined the coherence of the movement and the discipline of the groups: if one group expelled some members, they could simply form another splinter group with Pakistani support. The failure of the movement to present a unified front, a clear strategy and the infliction of violence on its own people, can all trace their roots back to the hand of Pakistan.

## STATE ACTORS

### State action – coercive force

Throughout the conflict the Indian state sought to use its coercive ability to resolve the conflict, but with very different results at different stages. In the first phase the state made the key mistake of not acting soon enough, for fear of provoking a Sikh backlash. However, in doing so they allowed the situation to get out of control and the militants to grow in strength. When the state did act, it was forced to bring in the Army, which was a blunt instrument. The ‘hard’ militarily-led approach blew open the situation, turning what was at this stage (relative to later) a small militant threat with limited public support into a full-blown insurgency. The repressive state actions of operations Blue Star and Woodrose only served to help the militants by alienating and angering the Sikh population and driving them into the hands of the militants (Dhillon 1990, 208; Sahota and Sahota 1993, 147; Sahni 2006, 36). Although Operation Blue Star succeeded in clearing the militants from the Golden Temple complex, this came at a heavy cost. In the end it was a complete public relations disaster that would serve as one of the main drivers of the conflict. Operation Woodrose compounded the situation: starved of intelligence and in unfamiliar territory, the Army made sweeping and indiscriminate arrests. The state also failed to foresee the action-reaction effect of their actions. The assassination of Indira Gandhi and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots did more to instigate a Hindu-Sikh divide than the militants could ever have dreamed. The state actions in the first phase were the greatest victory the militants achieved over the course of the conflict (Gill 1999a). As Gill sums up, ‘the two most significant victories for the cause of ‘Khalistan’ were not won by the militants, but inflicted... upon the nation by its own Government. The first of these was Operation Blue Star; the second, the anti-Sikh riots of 1984’ (Gill 2009, 95). In this phase the state violence would only serve to escalate the conflict.

The third and fifth phases also saw major operations by the security forces, but unlike the other phases saw the only de-escalations in the conflict. Key to both these phases was firstly that the security forces,

in particular the Punjab police, were left without political interference to get on with the job. There were no secret negotiations or backroom deals to undermine the security forces. Secondly, under the leadership of K. P. S. Gill, the Punjab police instigated a coherent and coordinated counterterrorism strategy. Through solid intelligence and analysis work the police were able to lead targeted operations. The reorganisation of the police, combined with an intelligence-led approach, led to the most efficient use of police resources. Most importantly, the police force was reinvigorated by the leadership of Gill, and for the first time the police were led from the front (PO3; PO5).

The failure to end the conflict during the third phase was ultimately the result of the return of partisan politics interfering to keep the conflict alive (Gill 1999a). Crucially, in the final phase Gill did not suffer from political interference, and was able to sustain the campaign until the militants had been comprehensively defeated. In addition, in this phase Gill had at his disposal the necessary manpower to saturate the state with the Army's return to the conflict. As Mahadevan sums up, '[i]n 1992, three distinct and separate factors converged to defeat the terrorist movement. These were: an intelligence-led Police offensive, a massive influx of supplementary manpower to assist the Police, and the acquisition of a political mandate to eradicate terrorism' (Mahadevan 2008).

A part of the success of the state action in the final phase was Gill's analysis of the situation, in which he viewed the groups themselves as the sustaining dynamic of the conflict, rather than the alleged grievances of the militancy. Thus the security forces were used to eliminate the militants who were sustaining the conflict, which then provided space for the political process to be restarted. Security and political solutions were combined, in which the former allowed the latter. Gill was given a clear objective: to enforce peace in order to create the conditions for elections that would be the basis for a longer-lasting peace (*ibid.*). Gill began negotiations with the militants for their surrender only after the initiative had returned to the police (Gill 1999a). Elections and negotiations worked in the final phase because the necessary conditions for them to work were achieved first.

In phases one, three and five the state sought to use its coercive ability to de-escalate the conflict. However, as discussed, the results

were not uniform. The point to take from this analysis is that it is not as simple as understanding whether coercive force does or does not work in resolving such conflicts. In reality the effectiveness of such coercive state action depends on how well it is executed, i.e. sweeping repression vs. targeted intelligence-led campaigns. It also depends on the coercive force being used to achieve the right ends. Coercive force worked in phases three and five because the groups had become the sustaining dynamic of the conflict, and eliminating them would de-escalate the conflict. Coercive force would not necessarily have been as successful in a different context, even if it had been well executed. With this in mind, the conflict must be analysed correctly and force applied to achieve the correct strategic goals.

### Coercive force and human rights?

One of the most divisive issues in the conflict was the question of the extent of the use of violence by the security forces. Pettigrew is fairly emphatic in her description of police brutality, especially in the rural villages of the Punjab. She cites the violence of the security forces as one of the main contributory factors to the conflict (Pettigrew 1995, 4). Her book *Sikhs of the Punjab* is filled with 'first-hand' accounts of excessive violence and torture at the hands of the security forces (Pettigrew 1995). Similarly, Dhillon highlights the allegations of human rights abuses, pointing to research carried out by the international human rights organisation Asia Watch (Dhillon 2006, 251-59). The report alleges that

the security forces have adopted increasingly brutal methods to stem the militant movement, resulting in widespread human rights violations. Countless civilians and suspected militants have been summarily executed in staged 'encounter' killings or have 'disappeared' while in police custody; thousands have been detained without trial and subjected to torture.<sup>191</sup> (Asia Watch 1991)

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<sup>191</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1991/08/01/punjab-crisis> (last accessed 27 September 2013).

This needs to be juxtaposed against other works such as the data collected by Puri, Judge and Sekhon, which shows that less than 2.5% of militants gave police harassment as their motivation for joining groups (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 68).

In contrast, K. P. S. Gill is equally emphatic in his denial of accusations of state terrorism. He argues that the stories are largely fabrications created by militant front organisations for the purposes of propaganda:

The countryside was rife with stories of these alleged ‘police atrocities’; but in every case, they were ‘known’ to have happened in ‘a village nearby’, to have been witnessed by a person invariably other than the narrator; they transpired in an indeterminate area of the mind that could not be identified on any map of Punjab, but existed, at once everywhere and nowhere. (Gill 1999a)

Similarly, Mahadevan denies the allegations of police brutality as ‘demonstrably false’ (Mahadevan 2008). Gill, however, does defend the use of coercive force: ‘the use of this coercive force was (and is) not just a necessary expedient, but a fundamental obligation and duty of constitutional government, and its neglect inflicts great and avoidable suffering on the innocent and law abiding’ (Gill 1999a).

Without wishing to diminish the seriousness of the allegations of violence placed against the Punjab police, excessive violence by Indian police is the norm and not the exception. Supporters of the Punjab police are keen, though, to make a distinction between the police violence in the Punjab and in other Indian insurgencies such as Kashmir and the Northeast. In the Punjab they argue that the police’s use of violence was targeted at those suspected of terrorism, whereas in Kashmir and the Northeast the security forces did not discriminate with their use of violence, subjecting whole populations to violent repression (C9). Joshi describes the work of Gill in leading the Punjab police as being

able to take a united force into battle and carry out a brutal campaign in such a way that very few of the practical implications of the ‘shoot-to-kill’ policy became publicly known... while they did kill innocent people, by and large their targets were the guilty. (Joshi 1993, 20)

Another important part of the Punjab context was the collapse of the judicial system during the militancy (C9). Due to intimidation of judges and witnesses, the legal system ground to a halt, making it virtually impossible to prosecute militants under existing laws and procedures, creating a situation where ‘the laws were more or less irrelevant’ (C9; Dhillon 2006, 358). ‘Finding them powerless to meet the challenge, the state allowed the civil and judicial processes to be rendered impotent and gave the police a virtual carte blanche to deal with the situation in any way they thought fit’ (Dhillon 2006, 358). There is an unanswered question as to whether reforms or strengthening of the judicial system might have contained state violence, or indeed if a smaller sacrifice of human rights, such as the introduction of internship, could have curtailed the greater violations of human rights by the state.

#### State action – policy solution

In the initial phase of the conflict, there were many apparent attempts at trying to negotiate a compromise, none of which in the end amounted to anything. The reasons for this failure are probably best explained both by the difficulties in reaching an agreement acceptable to all sides and also to party politics and internal power struggles that provided all sides with reasons not to reach a deal. Congress was allegedly more concerned with exploiting the situation in to seek both a return to power in the Punjab by dividing the Akalis and to help win the Hindu vote in the northern states (Tully and Jacob 2009, 57; Dhillon 1990, 205; Chima 2002, 28; Major 1987, 52). While Zail Singh sought to use the situation to undermine his rival Darbara Singh (Marwah 2009, 258), the Akalis themselves feared agreeing on anything that might look like a compromise for fear of shedding power to Bhindranwale. In the end the situation slipped beyond a point where a political solution was possible, and Mrs Gandhi was forced to dismiss the state government and prepare for military action.

After the events of 1984, Rajiv Gandhi’s attempts at finally reaching a political solution and restoring democracy to the state were short-lived. The signing of the accord, followed by the victory of the

moderate Akali faction in the state election, all appeared to point in the right direction. However, the failure of the government to implement the accord would only undermined the position of the moderates (*ibid.* 271-72). As the moderates failed to stem the rising militancy, the Centre again dismissed the state government, bringing it back under presidential rule. This again only played into the extremists' hands, portraying the Punjab as being run by the Hindu-dominated Centre that sought to exploit them.

The situation in the state was further destabilised by the national elections of 1989. The militant groups aimed to control the election result through coercion and intimidation. Against the backdrop of lawlessness and insecurity, it is hardly surprising that the majority of elected candidates were militant-backed. Free and fair elections they were not; in practice the militants had hijacked the election. The result was to provide them with both a public voice and the legitimacy and protection that come with public office (Gill 1999a; Joshi 1993, 4-5). The next elections in 1991, before they were eventually called off in the Punjab, were again to serve as a destabilising influence, plunging the state into violence as the groups fought to control the result again (Gill 1999a).

After the 1989 elections, the new government at the Centre made the mistake of dropping the police counterterrorism campaign and changing tack to pursue a political solution. At the time, the groups had been contemplating surrender and Gill believed that he could have eradicated the militancy with another six months of campaigning (*ibid.*; Sahni 2006, 41). The change in strategy provided the militants with the respite they needed to regroup. The new government was riven with internal weaknesses, and the militants knew it. Negotiating from a position of weakness, each concession the government made only strengthened the militants, who were already emboldened by their electoral victories. In addition, the web of secret negotiations and background manoeuvres between the Centre and the militants undercut the security forces (Chima 2002, 31). Until the final phase, the militants had been viewed as potential future political allies and so: '[c] onsequently, each major terrorist had a political patron to shield him from Police action' (Mahadevan 2008). It was only when the politicians

began to see their militant protégés as liabilities that they abandoned them to the police (*ibid.*). In a newspaper interview in 1993, Gill commented that ‘previously the police were unable to launch an all-out offensive against militants because of the possibility that some might eventually become their political bosses’ (D24<sup>192</sup>).

In the final phase, the Indian state made the key decision to use the security forces to create the conditions to allow the return to normal democratic political process in the state. The security forces were not used to resolve the conflict, but to create the context for the political process to restart. Creating an environment of security prevented the militants from hijacking the elections, and allowed them to be as free and fair as possible. The resulting Sikh-led secular government provided the ‘appropriate’ type of political leadership to support the police in defeating the militants, denying the militants the opportunity to frame it as a struggle against a Hindu-dominated government at the Centre intent on exploiting the Sikhs (Chima 2007, 622). As security returned, the moderate Sikh political leaders returned to the political process from which they had previously withdrawn due to fear of the militants. In short, the rise of the militants had led to the collapse of the political process. By ensuring security first, the state was able to resurrect the political process.

### State capacity

As the Sikh militancy unfolded, what was notable (but often lacking from commentary) was that the security apparatus in the state, the Punjab police, completely lacked the capacity to contain the militancy. It is true that the police were hamstrung by political manoeuvrings, but once the militancy had grown beyond the embryonic stage they lacked the capacity to take it on. This was not just in terms of men and equipment, but also in training and leadership. The Centre’s response was to send in the Army and paramilitaries. Although these had the manpower and firepower, they did not have the training or

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<sup>192</sup> Document 24: *Tribune*, 24 January 1993.

local knowledge to successfully defeat the militants. The events of 1984 made that painfully clear.

The story of the state's capacity to take on the militants is one of a learning curve. From 1984 onwards the Punjab police went through a period of rejuvenation and learning. One of the key but undermentioned factors in the ultimate defeat of the militancy was that by the end of the conflict the police had developed the capacity to take on the militants. This was not the only reason for their defeat, but a crucial one. To understand the success of the Punjab police force in defeating the militants, it is necessary to appreciate more than just their weapons and tactics; an understanding of the management and culture of the force is required. A major driver of the police's increasing success during the course of the conflict is down to nothing more spectacular than good management (PO7). The organisational changes initially instigated by Rabiro and Gill were not earth-shatteringly radical, but were basic best practices such as motivation, promotion of those willing to fight and targeted application of resources. Most importantly was the joined-up thinking that presented a coherent counterterrorism strategy.

This was coupled with the strong leadership of Gill, who was able to implement the organisational changes and strategy. The leadership qualities of Gill certainly cannot be underestimated. It was poignant that every police officer interviewed, without hesitation, cited Gill's leadership as the most important factor. His unflagging support of his men gave the force confidence to make those difficult combat decisions that proved so crucial (PO3; PO2; PO5). As one officer described, Gill would meet one-to-one with officers. He gave absolute support and never questioned their decisions (PO3). By leading from the front, he managed to motivate a force which had previously been thoroughly demoralised (PO2).

Of significant importance was the culture of innovation and sharing of best practice that he fostered in the force. By devolving significant operational freedom down to district level, the local officers experimented and developed strategies and tactics in their districts (PO5). Gill saw insurgency as a small commander's war. He delegated power down to officers on the ground (C9). Best practice was then rolled out across the state. In this way the Punjab police became a learning

institution that was flexible enough to evolve to face the ever-changing militant threat.

They were also joined by tens of thousands of military and para-military forces to provide the additional manpower and firepower needed to defeat the militancy. Importantly, this time the forces worked ‘hand in glove’ with the police, with the police leading the fight – they had learnt from past mistakes (Mahadevan 2008). As such, in the final stage, the state’s complete security apparatus – police, paramilitary and military – learnt how to work together to use the best of their abilities to take on the militancy. By the final stage of the conflict, the Punjab police had developed into a force capable of taking on the militants. The state had finally developed the capacity to take on the militancy and win.

#### Weak vs. strong government

Political dynamics swayed the Punjab Crisis in many different directions, and affected the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. At the heart of these dynamics were the strengths and weaknesses of the government.

In the first stage, part of the reason for not containing Bhindranwale’s rise was the weakness of the state government (partly due to being undermined by the Centre). Similarly, if Mrs Gandhi had been in a strong position she would have been able to take the necessary action to curb the militancy when it was needed. Instead, her handling of the conflict was contained by the electoral considerations of how this would play out in other states. The major impact of weak government came in the fourth stage, when the election of a weak and unstable coalition to the Centre saw the Punjab Crisis enter its most violent and volatile phase. In this phase the Singh government signalled its weakness in its first weeks by capitulating to the Kashmiri militants. This was compounded by the inherent instability of the two administrations in this phase, with their day-to-day survival in question (Gill 1999a; Sahni 2006, 42). As the militants sensed their weakness, it only emboldened them further.

The eventual collapse of the government in the fourth phase was followed by the return of strong government at the Centre under Prime Minister Rao. Under Rao the government had the political capital and the political will to take on the militants. He was able to give the Punjab police and other security forces both the political backing and the resources they needed to tackle the militants (Gill 1999a). The subsequent election of Chief Minister Beant Singh in the Punjab saw strong government return to the state and a Chief Minister prepared to back the police (*ibid.*; Marwah 2009, 286). The potent combination of a security apparatus that now had the capacity to take on the militants, backed by strong political leadership both in the state and at the Centre, would defeat the militancy.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

### Strategy of armed groups

In the early days of the militancy, Bhindranwale seemed to follow a two-pronged strategy, firstly eliminating or intimidating anyone who opposed his views, and secondly inducing communal violence between the Sikh and Hindu communities. This was an attempt to drive Hindus out of Punjab and also to provoke a Hindu backlash against Sikhs across India, driving them back to the Punjab (Tully and Jacob 2009, 80). However, it was never entirely clear what his true objectives were, as he never came out and categorically backed Khalistan.

After the events of 1984 and the death of Bhindranwale, it was not until 1986 that the movement began to reform with the creation of the Panthic Committee. However, by the following year the Panthic Committee had already split into two competing committees, and the armed wing had fractured into numerous splinter groups. As a result, for most of the conflict the strategy of the armed groups can be best described as inconsistent and contradictory. The failure to achieve a united front to propagate the armed struggle resulted in the lack of any cohesive overarching strategy. For a movement as divided and fractured as the militancy, it would be impossible for all parties to agree

on a coherent strategy. It wasn't even clear if the groups had the same objectives, with some aiming for independence and others focusing on social control. For others, criminal and other selfish motives appear to have driven their activities. The impact of Pakistan, which sought to control the strategies of the groups for their own ends, was added to the mix. This is held by some to explain the collapse into random violence after 1989 that did little to help the cause of Khalistan, but helped further Pakistan's objectives.

The militants did show the ability to adapt their strategy at a number of junctures. After the decapitation of central command and control in Operation Black Thunder II, the structure of militancy changed to a more dislocated form with each group developing its own supply lines, where only groups with independent supply lines could survive. Similarly, in phase four the groups adopted a strategy of combining armed struggle with above-ground politics, especially through the use of public mobilisation and use of front organisations to further their struggle, but also in an attempt to gain a legitimate voice and to frustrate police efforts (Gill 1999a). The phase also saw the expansion of the terror of edicts, which helped to paralyse the state (Mathur 2011).

What stands out from the militants' strategy is two key strategic mistakes that they made. The first was the targeting of police officers and the targeting of their families (M1; PO5). The objective was to break the morale of the police force and to provoke mass desertions. However, this backfired spectacularly and drove the police instead to crush the militancy (Marwah 2009, 293). For the police it now became a situation of either defeating the militants, or risking themselves and their families becoming victims. The second key mistake was the decision to boycott the 1992 state elections (Gill 1999a; M1; M2; M3). The militants gambled that they had enough power to completely derail the elections and prevent them from taking place (Gill 1999a). The successful election not only showed that the state now had the strength to take on the militants, but it also – due to the militants' boycott – resulted in the election of a state government unconnected to the militancy. This proved crucial in returning the state to a situation of normal political processes. This in turn led to the re-emergence of the moderate Sikh political leaders and the political marginalisation of the militants.

For almost a decade the militancy had survived in part because it had derailed the ‘normal’ political process by coercive force. That now was over. Imagine what would have happened if the militants had not boycotted the election. Would they have won?

Although these two mistakes would prove crucial in ending the militancy, the truly fatal blow was the failure to create a united front with clear objectives, and a coherent strategy to achieve them. The groups managed to paralyse the Punjab and instigate a reign of chaos and violence, but without a united front and a clear strategy the militancy’s days were always numbered. Once the state could deliver a clear strategy to end the conflict, the groups did not last long.

### Capacity of armed groups

Throughout the conflict, the militants’ capabilities varied along with their weaponry. As the conflict progressed, the militant gangs acquired increasingly more sophisticated and lethal weaponry. Below is an overview<sup>193</sup> of the changes in arsenal available to the militants (PO4).

1981-83	Pistols/handguns, low-explosive and country-made bombs
1983-84	SMGs (WWII vintage) – guns came via Mujahedeen and Pakistan.
1984-87	AR 15 / AR 16, sniper rifles
1985-87	Middle-power explosives
1986-88	AK 47, AK 74, Uzi SMGs, folding SMGs, PPH 41
1988 / 89	Factory-made grenades/rockets/mines
1991	LMG-GPMG and better ammunition

The reasons behind the escalations in violence are manifold, of which one is the militants’ weaponry capabilities. Some of the escalations can simply be explained by the militants’ increased ability to kill more

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<sup>193</sup> This should only be taken as a rough overview of the changes in weaponry and not as a definitive guide.

people, more quickly. The introduction of AK-47s into the conflict had a particularly dramatic impact. Where previously it would take two militants up to thirty minutes to kill eight to nine people, with an AK-47 one man could kill ten to fifteen people with one burst (PO7). This in turn had a huge psychological impact, increasing the fear of the militants, especially in the face of a police force that (at the time) was so comparatively ill-equipped.

As the conflict progressed, the quality and sophistication of the weapons and training of the militants increased; over time they developed into a more capable and potent adversary. However, this increase in 'capacity' was undermined by degeneration in the structure and organisation of the militancy. From 1987 onwards, as noted, the movement began to fracture into multiple splinter groups under two and then eventually five different Panthic Committees (Mahadevan 2007; Gill 2009, 99). Similarly, following Operation Black Thunder II the central command and control structure of the leading faction, the KCF, was eliminated. The movement then dissolved into a dislocated collection of factions and splinter groups. Although their military capacity increased, the prospect of being able to form a united front receded. The movement, beset by division and inter-factional fighting, lacked the internal cohesion to propagate an armed struggle. The situation involved into one in which the individual groups had increased capacity to carry out violent attacks, but the movement as a whole lacked the capacity in strategy, leadership and coordination to successfully pursue an armed struggle.

### Factionalisation

The internal dynamics of the militant movement also strongly influenced the escalation and de-escalation of the conflict (M3). From 1987 onwards, the militants changed from one main armed group, operating with a centralised command and control system, to a plethora of splinter groups operating loosely under one of two opposing Panthic Committees. What ensued was a period of chaos and anarchy as the leadership lost control over the armed groups on the ground (M1;

Chima 2007, 620). Pakistani support for splinter groups further drove this process (M3). The breakdown of the central command structure of the movement's armed wing (KCF) and the proliferation of groups led to an escalation in violence (Pettigrew 1995, 98).

The factionalisation of the movement had three major implications for the movement. Firstly, it made it virtually impossible to create a united front that could lead a coherent campaign for independence. As the movement continued to split into ever more factions, this became ever less likely. By the end of the conflict there were five Panthic Committees claiming to lead the militancy, three different sets of Singh Sahibs (religious appointees of the Golden Temple and Akal Takht), and 'over 160 more or less autonomously operating and competing outfits' (Mahadevan 2007; Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 116; Gill 2009, 99). Secondly, the violence rose partly due to rivalries and inter-factional killings but largely because the movement had simply got out of control (M3). Groups had to waste their energies fighting each other, not just the state. This internal violence played straight into the hands of the security forces, weakening the militancy. As a consequence, many have suggested that the security forces deliberately tried to exploit this situation and increase the infighting. Thirdly, as the movement continued to fracture, the leadership lost control over the movement. In this context it became increasingly criminalised, with many criminals moving sideways into the militancy and exploiting it for their own aims. It seems no coincidence that the slide into criminality and senseless violence was preceded by the factionalisation of the movement.

### Criminalisation

The biggest dynamic of change within the Khalistan movement was the slide into criminalisation that began in 1987, which within the following years had totally transformed the militancy. This process had numerous effects. Firstly, it signalled the beginning of the end of popular Sikh support. As the community increasingly became the victims of the movement's violence, extortion, looting and rape, the militancy began to lose popular support (PO2; PO1; Joshi 1993, 19;

Puri, Judge, Sekhon 1999, 165, 186; Chima 2007,619). The behaviour of the militants against their own people was a decisive factor in their downfall, aiding the process of internalisation of the conflict within the Sikh community. As control of the human terrain passed from the militants to the police, the ‘water in which the fish survive’ began to be drained.

Secondly, criminalisation changed the nature of the armed groups. The huge profits being made attracted many ‘bad elements’ to move sideways into the movement as a career move (M3). The motivation for the militancy was to change. While the first wave of militants from 1984 to 1987 were largely motivated by the preaching of Sant Bhindranwale or the impact of Operation Blue Star, the later waves of recruits were drawn in for adventure or profit (Mahadevan 2008). The movement became increasingly criminalised as it moved further away from its objectives of Khalistan. As the groups became self-sufficient through their criminal activities, the control over them by the Panthic Committees disintegrated, in turn fuelling the fragmentation of the movement.

Thirdly, the new criminal orientation of the movement led to an escalation in violence, both by the growth of practice of ‘profit from terror’, and through the rise in recruitment in young Sikhs drawn to terrorism by dreams of money and power (Mahadevan 2008). Furthermore the groups became ‘guns for hire’ in family feuds, business rivalries and disputes over land (Pettigrew 1995, 78; PO3). In this context of lawlessness, the militancy became the perfect cover for many to engage in criminal activities or resolve feuds by resort to the gun. This in turn created a vicious circle in which others then sought the protection of militants.

Militancy became a convenient cover for all kinds of violent activity. Increasingly, the conflict began to operate at two levels (Puri, Judge and Sekhon 1999, 110). The first was the macro-level of the Panthic Committees and their overarching strategies for Khalistan. The second was the village level, where the groups began to act much more like warlords controlling their area, such that violence in the name of the militancy revolved more around criminal activity, feuds and village land disputes.

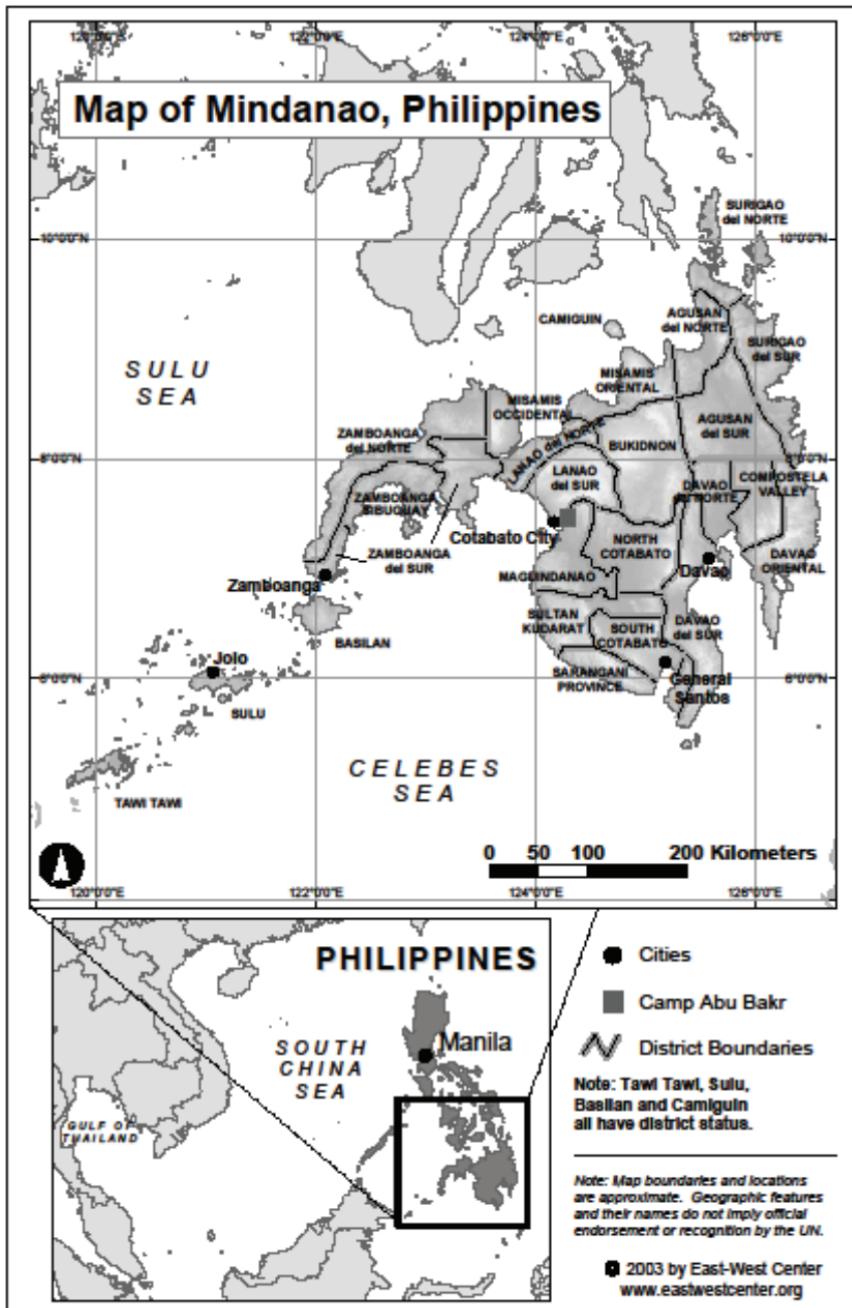


FIG. 5 Map of Mindanao

# 4

## THE MORO REBELLION IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES

Mindanao is the second-largest and most southerly of the collection of islands that make up the Republic of the Philippines. It is 94,630 square kilometres in area and has a population of nearly 22 million. The term Mindanao is generally taken to include Mindanao Island itself as well as the Sulu Archipelago to the southwest.

### PART 1: MINDANAO – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

In order to fully understand the complexities of the Mindanao conflict, it is first important to reflect on the distinct history of the region. Below is an outline of the main historical events that have shaped modern-day Mindanao.

### SOURCES

This chapter is based on a review of secondary literature and interviews carried out by the author during 2011 with former and current insurgent leaders and cadets, retired and current Army officers, politicians, peace negotiators, human rights activists, journalists and academic experts. As in every conflict, there are many different narratives on the the

Moro Rebellion, and everyone sees events from their own perspective. However, through combining and weighing the different sources it has been possible to construct a detailed history of the conflict.

## ARRIVAL OF ISLAM

The roots of the conflict can be traced back as far as the expansion of Islam. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D., Islam expanded out across the Middle East, North Africa, Spain, Central Asia and Eastern Europe, through military conquest. In time, Islam continued its expansion into south-east Asia along the trade routes, leading to the spread of Islam in the Malayo-Indonesian region, and ultimately Sulu and Mindanao.

The arrival of Islam to the southern Philippines was to have a significant effect on the political and economic development of the region. From these Muslim communities emerged the first centralised political powers, with the Sulu sultanate in the middle of the fourteenth century followed by the Maguindanao and Buayan sultanates (and succeeding sultanates) on mainland Mindanao. As Rudy Rodil argues, '[t]he combination of trade and Islamization created the necessary conditions that enabled the Sulus, and later, the Maguindanao, to advance way ahead of the other indigenous inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago' (Rodil 2003, 7). The sultanates developed into significant regional powers, with thriving economies based on maritime trade and with extensive diplomatic relations (Abreu 2008a, 10; Ahmad 2000a, 8; Jubair 1999, 14). Jolo, capital of the Sulu sultanate, became the 'foremost and richest settlement in the Philippine islands' (Najeeb Saleeby, quoted in George 1980, 20).

From the southern Muslim sultanates, Islam spread northwards across the archipelago in advance of European colonisation (George 1980, 20). Historians have speculated that if the Spanish had not arrived for a few more years, the Philippines would not be the 'only Christian country' in Asia, but rather a Muslim nation like her close neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia (George 1980, 20; Jubair 1999, 9).

## SPANISH COLONISATION

Colonisation began in earnest with the arrival of Miguel López de Legazpi<sup>194</sup> on behalf of Spain via Mexico in 1565 and the founding of the first European settlements in Cebu. It was the Spanish that would introduce the term ‘Moro<sup>195</sup>’ for the Muslim population of the Islands (Rodil 2003, 3). At the time of the Spanish conquest there was no unifying political state across the Philippines, but rather it was subdivided into numerous smaller political units ruled over by datus<sup>196</sup>, rajahs and sultans. Within this context, according to Rodil, ‘the Moro people in their respective sultanates were the most dominant groupings in the entire archipelago’ (Rodil 2003, 22). The Spanish quickly subdued and colonised the less politically and economically developed northern islands of Luzon and Cebu, but ran into ferocious resistance from the Moro sultanates. This resistance was to last for 333 years in the Moro-Spanish War from 1565 to 1898.

The Spanish attitude towards the Moros was shaped strongly by their own experience of being colonised by the Muslim Moors over the course of four centuries. For George, this led the Spanish to view Islam ‘as the embodiment of everything hateful. When they reached the eastern seas as conquerors themselves, they had obviously carried their psychological hang-up with them’ (George 1980, 37).

The conflict had many ebbs and flows across its long duration, but essentially the Moro people remained unconquered. At their most successful, the Spanish never managed more ‘than the collection of tribute and the creation of some garrison towns’ (Ahmad 2000a, 4). Technological advances, notably the steamboat and modern artillery, allowed for more successful Spanish military campaigns in the late nineteenth century, but they failed to gain full control of the Moro territory. Despite establishing fortified military garrisons deep within

<sup>194</sup> Ferdinand Magellan had earlier arrived in the Philippines in 1521, and claimed the islands for Spain.

<sup>195</sup> As Rodil explains ‘they called them Moros, in the same manner that they called those Muslims from North Africa who had conquered and occupied Spain’ (Rodil 2003, 3).

<sup>196</sup> A term for the native aristocracy.

Moroland, their ‘authority was never accepted outside of the camp walls’ (Rodil 2003, 21).

While the Moro people emerged from the 333-year conflict unconquered, they were ‘almost hopelessly divided among themselves and severely impoverished’ (*ibid.* 22). The Spanish had managed to isolate Mindanao and in the process destroy the long-distance trade that had been the foundation of its wealth and civilisation (Ahmad 2000a, 6). Similarly, the depopulation of Muslim settlements and accompanying destruction of farms and plantations arrested the development of the more agriculturally based communities (George 1980, 43). A perpetual state of war sucked up and squandered its ‘social capital and human resources’ (Ahmad 2000a, 6). Furthermore, the Spanish exploited Moro infighting over the succession of the Moro sultanates (Jubair 1999, 51). As Ahmad points out, this led to a historical paradox: while the south’s wealth and development prevented its conquest, the instability and cost of a three-century-long war meant that the north was relatively more developed by the time the Spanish left (Ahmad 2000a, 7).

Perhaps the most devastating and long-lasting impact of war was the wedge it created between Christian and Muslim Filipinos, as the conflict was largely fought by conscripted Christianised Filipino armies with Spanish officers against the Moros. Furthermore, the Spanish were instrumental in this, because ‘[a]s part of the intensive religious instruction imparted to the people the converted masses were told that the Muslims were the natural enemies of the faith and values of Christians’ (George 1980, 44). These divisions were re-enforced in the popular ‘Moro-Moro’ folk theatre based on ‘Christian heroes tangling with Muslim villains in garish black and white. Nothing was too mean for the villains to try; there was no limit to the nobility of the heroes’ (*ibid.*). The result was to ‘nurture deep-seated mutual animosity which to this day continues to color Moro-Christian relations’ (Rodil 2003, 28).

## THE AMERICAN ARRIVAL

The end of the nineteenth century was to see profound change in the destiny of the Philippines, but perhaps not in the direction expected.

In 1896 the Philippine Revolution broke out, pitting the Philippine people against their colonial masters. The revolution proved largely unsuccessful until it became embroiled in a much wider conflict – the Spanish-American War. War broke out between the two powers in 1898 as a result of the US's interference in the ongoing Cuban War of Independence. The war soon spread out of the Caribbean to the Pacific, with the US backing the Philippine Revolution and wresting control of the Philippines from Spain.

The war ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1898, in which the USA bought the Philippines for 20 million dollars (Rodil 2003, 56). The treaty was controversial for two particular reasons. Firstly, it effectively ended the Philippine revolution by simply changing one colonial ruler for another, and in the process sparked the Philippine-American War. The US forces easily overpowered the ill-equipped Filipinos, who George describes as 'pathetically armed: most had settled for bolo knives in the absence of rifles' (George 1980, 55).

The second reason was that the Treaty of Paris saw Spain ceding the entire archipelago, including Mindanao and Sulu, to the USA. As Rodil puts it, '[b]y the stroke of the pen, the independent sultanates of Moroland found themselves claimed as the legitimate property by Spain and ceded to the United States' (Rodil 2003, 56). America seemed to gain overnight what the Spanish had been fighting to establish for over 300 years. It is arguable, according to Jubair, that the territory of the Moros should have been excluded because 'Spain had never really acquired these islands either by conquest, purchase or any other means' (Jubair 1999, 59). According to George, 'even the Americans were unsure about the legality of the deal' (George 1980, 56).

## AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT

Shortly after the Treaty of Paris the Americans signed the Bates Agreement with the Sultan of Sulu in 1899. The treaty ensured American sovereignty over Sulu, whilst protecting the rights of the Sultan and his datus (Rodil 2003, 57). The American motives were twofold: first to plug any loophole in the law as far as Mindanao was concerned by

concluding a separate treaty with the leading Muslim power (George 1980, 56). The second ‘was to neutralise the Sulus while the American Army fought with the Filipino liberation forces in Luzon and the Visayas’ (Rodil 2003, 57). Two versions of the treaty were signed, one in English and one in Moro (*Tausūg*). Many Moro nationalists have argued that the two versions differed significantly, in particular regarding the question of American sovereignty over Sulu (Jubair 1999, 61).

The agreement did not last long. Before the year was out, sporadic clashes had broken out and by the following year it ‘was all but dead’. In 1904, America officially abrogated, which signalled ‘all-out effort by the United States to establish absolute authority over Mindanao’ (George 1980, 57). The period between 1899 and 1913 saw extensive military campaigns in what became known as the Moro Rebellion. The American offensive was bloody and brutal: ‘it was a sledgehammer approach that took no chances, offered no quarter’ (*ibid.* 62). Where the Spanish had previously failed, the Americans’ military might, alongside technological advances, ensured their victory. Technology was not the only key to the Americans’ success; they proved more successful than the Spanish in the implementation of divide and rule tactics. The Muslim aristocracy, deeply divided, metamorphosed from anti-colonial fighters against the Spanish into willing collaborators with the Americans (Ahmad 2000a, 6).

The Americans introduced a system of government that devolved considerable administrative powers to municipal and district levels. However, much more crucially for the future conflict, they set about changing the demographic make-up of Mindanao. Christian enclaves were created amidst Muslim populations by the transfer of populations from Visayas and Luzon. ‘Entire populations, for the most part landless and ambitious, were transferred from the Visayas and Luzon to create Christian enclaves amidst Muslim populations, on lands the Muslims claimed as their own’ (*ibid.*). A knock-on effect of this was that the American-Moro colonial conflict was obscured by the more immediate Muslim-Christian conflict over land (*ibid.*).

Throughout the remainder of American rule in Mindanao there were periodic uprisings and revolts. However, it was the first time the Moro people found their internal affairs and system of local government

interfered with (George 1980, 62). A series of reforms, in the tradition of the American enlightenment, were introduced which ‘recognised the personal and private rights of individuals and encouraged them to break free from traditional chiefs’ (*ibid.* 64). The American governance of Mindanao was to have long-term implications, especially in two key areas: education and land reform.

The introduction of an American-style education system to the Philippines has often been viewed as one of the great gifts of the colonisers to the Filipino people. Despite its modern-day benefits, the roots of the education were in the colonial powers’ military strategy<sup>197</sup> (Rodil 2003, 73). However, in Mindanao the Moros ‘shunned the American education as they had shunned Spanish Christian education’ (George 1980, 65), whilst the Christian population took to it enthusiastically, widening the gulf between Muslims and Christians.

The impact of land reform was even more significant and was to signal the emergence of one of the key drivers of the conflict in later years. American reforms introduced an alien system of land ownership. The Public Land Act #718 of 1903 made void land grants from Moro sultans, datus or chiefs of non-Christian tribes when made without governmental authority or consent, rendering traditional systems of land ownership illegal overnight (Rodil 2003, 105; Abreu 2008a, 14; Jubair 1999, 95). On top of this, the previous Land Registration Act No. 496 institutionalised the Torrens system requiring the registering and titling of private lands, which left no room for the indigenous concept of private communal property<sup>198</sup> (Rodil 2003, 105). George summarises this:

Land had a very special connotation in the minds of the Philippine Muslims. To them it was not alienable property. All land in a given area belonged to the community inhabiting that area. Individuals

<sup>197</sup> General Arthur McArthur commented: ‘I know nothing in the department of administration that can contribute more in [sic] behalf of pacification than the immediate institution of a comprehensive system of education’ (quoted in Rodil 2003, 73).

<sup>198</sup> As Rodil points out, even if they had had the desire to register land, the majority would not have been able to as they were illiterate (Rodil 2003, 106).

only received the right to use a portion of the land, not to own it... the datu was trustee of the community and had sole authority to decide who would use which parcel of the community's land' (George 1980, 109).

However, some datus did understand these new changes, 'and obtained titles to their lands and to those of their clansmen' (Ahmad 2000a, 13).<sup>199</sup>

Later, in 1903, the Public Land Act 926 stipulated that all lands unregistered under Act 496 were deemed public lands, and therefore available for homesteading, sale or lease (Abreu 2008a, 14; Jubair 1999, 95). Additional land laws that came later further institutionalised the discrimination in the land reform against the Moros by setting a different lower level on the amount of land that a non-Christian could homestead compared to a Christian (Rodil 2003, 106; Abreu 2008a, 14). To compound matters, the Philippine government would later embark on a policy of resettlement from the overcrowded northern islands to Mindanao. The combined result was to turn some indigenous communities into squatters on what they considered to be their own land and to see those lands 'occupied by streams of settlers from other parts of the country' (Rodil 2003, 107).

## THE COMMONWEALTH

By the 1930s the Americans were beginning to deliver on their pledge made at the onset of their colonisation of the Philippines: to return her to self-rule at the 'earliest feasible time'. The first step was the creation of the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1936. For the first time in history this saw a Filipino government governing across the whole archipelago. During the first ten years, until 1946, the USA was to play a supervisory role, taking care of foreign and military affairs, and certain legislation still required approval by the American president. Despite being interrupted by WWII and the ensuing Japanese occupation, ten years later and on schedule on 4 July 1946, the Philippines

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<sup>199</sup> This is what provides the legal basis for today's large-scale Muslim landlordism (Ahmad 1981, 13).

became independent. The USA still held considerable influence over the Philippines, however, with the maintenance of military bases and the Philippine Trade Act in return for the US offering post-WWII rebuilding grants. This committed the Philippine economy to free trade, and gave parity in property rights to both Philippine and American citizens (Nadeau 2008, 67-69; Jubair 1999, 117).

## THE NEW COLONIALISTS

A positive view of independence in 1946 was not shared by all Filipinos. To many in Moroland they were just witnessing a change in colonial master from the Americans to the Filipinos from the northern end of the Philippine archipelago, as they had seen earlier from the Spanish to the Americans. As Julkipli Wadi succinctly describes, '[t]he main difference is that while Filipinos were recipients of independence in 1946 as they relished their "freedom" thereafter, the Moros remained perpetual victims of colonialism without closure' (Wadi 2008, 21). Jubair describes independence as the annexation of Mindanao and Sulu, as the 'Moros were never given the right to free choice and to national self-determination' (Jubair 1999, 115).

At the root of these widely different perspectives was the reality that Filipino nationalism over the last few decades had united the rest of the population as one body of people – Filipinos – in the quest for self-determination. The Moros on the other hand had remained outside of the nationalist awakening. The Muslims took no part in the 1896 nationalist revolution which, George argues, was a 'major historical error'. The result was a legacy in which '[w]hen the Tagalogs and Ilocanos and Visayans were becoming Filipinos, Muslims withdrew into a self-woven web of isolation' (George 1980, 73).

The sentiment only deepened with the arrival of the Americans. The Americans saw the Christian north as natural partners, but remained suspicious of the Muslim southerners. As America began to prepare the Philippines for self-government, she opened the doors of the institutions of administration to the Filipinos. Whilst the Christians

responded positively, the Muslims remained suspicious. This was compounded by the fact that, as many Muslims had already shunned the American-style education system, they would not have been able to take advantage of these opportunities even if they had wanted to. The result was a largely Christian civil service, creating a situation in the south where a mainly Christian civil service was administrating the mainly Muslim Moro areas. In the end, '[t]wo decades of collaboration between Americans and Filipinos in the field of administration did as much to divide the people of the Philippines as three centuries of Spanish evangelism' (*ibid.* 79).

### ARISTOCRACY, CLASS AND DEMOCRACY

The arrival of the new republic saw the collision of democracy with the traditional form of government still in control in the Muslim areas, the institution of Datuism. Muslim Mindanao was and essentially still is a feudal society. In pre-colonial times sultans and their 'datus' ruled over the population in a way that was not dissimilar to the earlier feudal system in Europe. Society consisted of landed datu aristocracy, freemen and a subaltern/slave class<sup>200</sup>. A corresponding religious hierarchy provided a judicial authority that 'reinforced the powers of the political rulers' (Ahmad 2000a, 10). The institution had been strengthened with the arrival of Islam, as many of those who brought Islam to the Southern Philippines and founded the original sultanates claimed to be direct descendants from the Prophet Mohammed, bestowing an inviolable spiritual authority (George 1980, 102-3). However, as George argues, the datus were by and large men

who did not hesitate to contravene even Quranic dicta if they stood to profit from doing so. The institution of the datus as it developed in Mindanao was a major obstacle to national integration as well as to Muslim progress. (*ibid.* 98)

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<sup>200</sup> Over the centuries the majority of the population had become freemen (Ahmad 2000a, 10).

The combination of the datu system and the new national government created a new power game. Some datus cooperated with the government, for favours such as grants of land. This set in motion a power game where wealth and power often came from cooperation with the government. Others allied themselves with the official opposition, but for those that did not benefit from the situation, many became sour. In theory the position of the datus should have been undermined by ‘such novel and evidently alien concepts as adult franchise and elective posts’ (*ibid.* 99). However, many datus combined the new and traditional power structures by moving sideways into politics, with the more enterprising gaining election as mayors, governors and congressmen. The two systems which at heart had inherent contradictions, seemingly making them incompatible, would, ironically, make them attractively compatible. The non-democratic nature of the feudal system would serve as ideal for perverting the democratic system in the datus’ favour.

This move into politics further divided the communities, for the political datus found it expedient to organise the Muslims into an exclusive voting bloc, and exploited the emotive call of religion for their own ends. The datus’ emergence into the political arena was largely a power game played for their own good and not for that of the people. As George argues, ‘the primary interest of the datus was to make sure that the inherent contradiction between their hereditary privileges and the people’s democratic rights would not be exposed’ (*ibid.* 100). He also argues that it was as though the datus had a ‘personal stake in keeping Muslim masses backward’ and deliberately shunned the spread of education to Muslim areas (*ibid.*).

## THE LAND OF PROMISE

The promotion of internal immigration from the northern islands to Mindanao began to take off in the 1930s under the Commonwealth government’s promotion of Mindanao as the ‘land of promise’. The 1936 Commonwealth Act 141 declared all ancestral domain public land. ‘By a simple piece of legislation, the Moros became landless and were

deprived of their ancestral holdings' (Jubair 1999, 103). This opened up vast swathes of land for an ever-growing flow of homesteaders from the north, encouraged by the government, who could now legally claim and title what might previously had been ancestral lands. Immigration moved a population surplus in the north to the sparsely populated but resource-rich south. Some argue the motivation for this was that moving some of the poor and landless south helped to diffuse the peasant militancy in the north, whilst in the south the political purpose was to solve the 'Mindanao problem' through land settlement (Ahmad 2000a, 13). Whatever the real reason – and there were probably many – the process of mass immigration of Christian settlers and the economic exploitation of Mindanao had begun. However:

Economic exploitation of Mindanao was a good idea gone bad. Instead of raising the standards in the south and generally helping integration, it developed into a greedy exercise, brought the government into the picture as an apparent collaborator with Christian private enterprise, dispossessed numerous Muslims, and gave the community as a whole a pervading persecution complex. It was the single most important factor behind the Muslim unrest which was to spawn an insurgency movement in the Marcos era. (George 1980, 107)

It was not long before the lure of the 'Land of Promise' took on its own momentum; those who migrated south through official government programmes constituted only the tip of the iceberg. An untold amount also made their way south at their own expense in search of land (Ahmad 2000a, 13). The mass influx of outsiders was bound to cause friction, but this was an inevitable situation that was only compounded by the confusion over land titling and ancestral domain. Sometimes settlers would legally buy unclaimed and uncleared land, only to be approached on arrival by nearby Muslims who claimed traditional rights to the land. The concept of land titles was an alien concept to most Muslims, and they failed to grasp their importance. But the support of the law followed those that had the legal titles to the land. As George commented, 'with the necessary papers a migrant could legally evict a Mindanao family from land

it might have been occupying for generations' (George 1980, 115). Similarly, when local datus tried to demand that settlers pay 'Kawali', a traditional levy on the produce of all farms in a community, settlers saw this as extortion (*ibid.*). Many datus also used the situation to enrich themselves, through obtaining 'community land titled in their names, then sold portions of it for un-Islamic profit' (*ibid.* 116). It was not just individuals who could claim land; the territory was also available to corporations, and this saw the start of the arrival of largely American corporations acquiring thousands of hectares for plantations, logging and other operations – thanks to the clause in the constitution that gave Americans and Filipinos parity in property rights (Ahmad 2000a, 16).

The majority of Christian settlers were just as exploited and impoverished as their Muslim counterparts; it was only the small elite at the top, whether Muslim or Christian, that was able to enrich itself. The small title deeds that the homesteaders claimed did little to change their position of poverty, forcing many to sell their land to big landowners or agro-businesses and then to rent themselves out as wage slaves (*ibid.* 14). Ahmad argues that it was only through framing the later conflict in religious terms could the 'north Filipino elite obtain the ideological allegiance of the equally exploited and pauperized Christian Masses' (*ibid.* 19).

Christian politicians took advantage of the migration policy to create Christian-majority constituencies in Mindanao. Muslim politicians reacted either by collaborating with Christian leaders or fighting them (George 1980, 120). Mindanao soon became a land full of conflicts, controlled by political kingpins, both Christian and Muslim, and their private armies. In a frontier state, political power lay with the guns.

The mass immigration of northerners changed the facts on the ground in Mindanao. From a population of 2.5 million in 1948, this had more than tripled to 8.7 million in 1976, fundamentally changing the demography forever (Ahmad 2000a, 13). The Moro population went from being the majority, in control of most of the territory, to the minority, with much of their land gobbled up by settlers. The exact figures are debated. Ahmad maintains that Muslims made up 98 per cent of the region's population in 1913 but only 40 per cent by 1976,

according to government estimates, and owned less than 17 per cent of the land (*ibid.*). Miriam Coronel Ferrer notes that in 1903 Muslims made up 76 per cent of the Mindanao population, but only 23 per cent by 1960 (Ferrer 2006, 463). Either way, the trend is clearly from Muslim majority to minority.

## PART 2: THE PHASES OF THE CONFLICT

This chapter examines the Moro Rebellion in the Southern Philippines from the mid-1960s until the late 1990s. In order to gain a deeper insight into the conflict it will be analysed across five distinct phases. Phase 1 explores the descent into violence between the mid-1960s until 1972. Phase 2, 1972 to 1976, covers the declaration of martial law and the outbreak of insurgency. Phase 3, 1976 to 1986, examines the first attempts at peace and the last ten years of the conflict under the Marcos regime. Phase 4, 1986 to 1992, considers the period under President Corazon Aquino and Phase 5, 1992 to 1998 the events leading up to the implementation of the final peace agreement under President Fidel V. Ramos.

### PHASE 1: MID-1960S TO 1972 – THE CONFLICT BREWS

In the late 1960s Mindanao begins to slide into communal violence, largely driven by local political clans jostling for power. In the meantime a new Muslim counter-elite is being formed which will challenge the Muslim traditional leaders for leadership of the Muslim community. Following the massacre of a group of young Muslim army recruits and the subsequent formation of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM), secessionist views begin to grow. In 1971 Mindanao is thrown into chaos as the political violence reaches a peak during the local elections. News coverage of the violence reaches the wider Islamic world, leading to support from Muslim nations, most notably Libya.

## UNDERSTANDING POLITICS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines in the 1960s were in theory a democracy, but the real power lay with a small elite. Since independence the country had seen the rise of the 'Robber Barons', powerful oligarchs who cemented economic and political control with the power of the gun, turning the Philippines into 'a cluster of private fiefdoms, each under a political dynasty' (George 1980, 138). Within their domain, these oligarchs controlled everything. Their strength was backed by private armies consisting of

paid men recruited and trained by an inner core of thugs faithful to the boss. Their numbers and equipment would only be restricted by the resources the boss wished to expend. 'Standing armies' of 1,000 well-armed fighters were not uncommon. (*ibid.* 139)

Philippine politics had a distinctly 'wild west' flavour.

It is against this backdrop of armed political dynasties that the context in Mindanao must be viewed. There, as in the north, ambitious political operators manipulated the system and employed the power of armed gangs to amass wealth and control. But there were two important differences that made the south more explosive. Firstly, like the Wild West, the south really was a frontier being opened up for the first time. The opening up of huge areas of land for economic exploitation and the land-grabbing that came with it provided the opportunity for wealth to be amassed and new dynasties to be forged. Secondly, unlike in the rest of the country, the population was made up from two religious groups. Politics and religion mixed together in an explosive manner, as naturally the gangs of Muslim politicians tended to be Muslim, and those behind Christian politicians Christian. The struggle for power between local strongmen, soon became polarised, and only helped to further divide the communities. Interwoven into this were the Muslim tribe and clan structures (*ibid.* 140).

On top of these local divisions came national political cleavages. Most local politicians were at least nominally connected to one of the two national parties, the Liberalistas and the Nacionalistas. As national

politics became even more divisive in the 1960s, the ramifications were felt locally as the two parties vied for power. Tensions escalated in the 1969 presidential elections. Marcos's Nacionalistas, campaigning for his re-election, made a push into Mindanao in order to help win power nationally. National and local politics collided and 'saw gang warfare gripping every politically sensitive town in the south' (*ibid.* 142).

In the south it was the land-hungry Christian settlers who set the pace. As the settler population grew and they acquired more and more land, disputes over property rights proliferated. They soon began to organise their own security and 'breathed new life into the concept of private armies' (*ibid.* 140). The Muslim leaders quickly followed the lead set by the Christian settlers. Soon the situation took on its own dynamic, creating an escalating cauldron of land-grabbing, power politics, religious divides and private armies.

### THE FORMATION OF A NEW MUSLIM COUNTER-ELITE: THE CAIRO BOYS AND THE MANILA BOYS

An unintended side-effect of two rather dissimilar education projects starting in the 1950s was the formation of a new young educated Muslim counter-elite (McKenna 1998, 138). The first of these sent young Muslims for a university education in Manila and the second in Cairo. The graduates of these two scholarship programmes would form the foundation of a new Muslim elite, which would pose a challenge not only to the traditional ruling Muslim elite, but also go on to form the nucleus of the Muslim separatist movement.

The first of these programmes was the result of a Commission on National Integration (CNI), which served to address ways in which the government could help improve the 'social, moral and political advancement of Non-Christian Filipinos' (*ibid.* 139; C12<sup>201</sup>; M6<sup>202</sup>). One of the outcomes of this was a programme to provide a significant number of Muslim students with the opportunity to study at universities in Manila. This represented the first opportunity for a large number of non-elite

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<sup>201</sup> C12: academic, interviewed in Manila on 31 March 2011.

<sup>202</sup> M6: Moro rebel civilian adviser, interviewed in Manila on 23 March 2011.

Muslims to go to university. Between 1958 and 1967 over 8,000 Muslim CNI scholars had studied in Manila, and their shared experiences would have a profound effect on Muslim politics after 1968 (McKenna 1998, 140). They gained much of their political experience outside of the classroom as they became caught up in the student activism of the 1960s. It was here in Manila that Nur Misuari, a Tausūg<sup>203</sup> from a very poor family in Sulu and the future leader of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), cut his political teeth. It was here where he joined the Kabataan Makabayan (Patriotic Youth)<sup>204</sup>, ‘a radical student group in Manila which applied a Marxist analysis to the Philippine situation and advocated a revolutionary struggle against feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism’ (Che Man 1990, 77). It was, though, the fallout from the Jabidah Massacre (see below) that would galvanise the Muslim student community in Manila, who demonstrated throughout the year against the killings. It was also these protests that transformed Misuari from a campus activist into a Muslim separatist. Significantly, Misuari ‘redirected the revolutionary rhetoric of the Manila student movement (and of student movements elsewhere in that period) towards the goal of Muslim nationalism rather than adopting a specifically Islamic discourse’ (McKenna 1998, 141).

The second scholarship programme came from outside of the Philippines. As part of promoting his pan-Islamic ideology, Gamal Abdel Nassar and the government of Egypt granted more than two hundred scholarships to young Philippine Muslims, the majority of whom studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo<sup>205</sup> (McKenna 1998, 143; C12; M6). Similar to the CNI scholarships, although some were connected to datus, this became another way for ordinary Muslims to go to university. Both sets of students would play a central role in activism for social and political change in the Muslim Philippines. However, in contrast to the student activism in Manila, the Cairo group was ‘explicitly and exclusively Islamic in character’ (McKenna 1998, 144). Although much smaller in number than those that studied in Manila, ‘the influence of the Islamic graduates was out of proportion to their

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<sup>203</sup> A Muslim tribe from Sulu.

<sup>204</sup> Led by the future CPP-NPA leader Jose Maria Sison.

<sup>205</sup> Although some went for military training (M4).

number' (*ibid.*). Prominent amongst this group was Hashim Salamat, a Maguindanaon from Cotabato, who would play a founding role in the MNLF and later leave to found the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). In contrast to Misuari, Salamat was, according to Che Man, a religious-educated aristocrat, while McKenna maintains his family was 'neither wealthy nor prominent', although he was related to Congressman Pendatun (Che Man 1990, 84; McKenna 1998, 144). It was within these two similar but fundamentally different groups that the future Muslim separatist movement and insurgency groups would find their leaders.

Two important points should be noted here. First, the education and student activism of the Cairo and Manila Boys is not just the story of how the Moro community became politicised; it is also the story of the formation of a new elite, an educated counter-elite to the vested interests of the traditional Muslim elite had emerged for the first time. The conflict was not just against the Christian majority government but also against the established datus, who were essentially aligned to 'the national state that had underwritten their local rule for more than seven decades' (McKenna 1998, 138). Secondly, although this new elite was united in its struggle for separatism, this hid the fundamentally different roots of their ideological motivations. At the time these differences were not delineated, but in time they would emerge to fracture the unity of the movement (C12; M6).

## REGIONAL TENSIONS: SABAH – MALAYSIA VS. THE PHILIPPINES

It is sometimes easy to overlook just how different the context was, even in times as recent as the 1960s. In this period the world was still going through a tumultuous tide of de-colonisation, and south-East Asia was no different. At the time, the large island of Borneo, located just off the end of the Sulu Archipelago, was enduring a period of change. The southern section of the island was a part of Indonesia, whilst on the northern side there were the two British protectorates, the states of Sarawak and Sabah. In 1963 these two states gained independence from the British and formed part of the new independent Malaysia.

This proved controversial; the State of Sabah had formerly been part of the sultanate of Sulu, and since Sulu was now part of the republic of the Philippines, Sabah became a disputed territory. Following the integration of Sabah into the Federation of Malaysia, the Philippines broke off relations with Malaysia (Samad and Bakar 1992, 554-58).

## THE SPARK – THE JABIDAH MASSACRE

The international tug-of-war over Sabah was to set in motion a chain of events that would culminate in a key event, the Jabidah Massacre, which would provide the spark to ignite the conflict. The events of the Jabidah Massacre have been shrouded in mystery, and it is hard to separate fact from fiction. What is clear, though, is that in 1967, as part of a plan to gain control of Sabah, President Marcos planned an operation to form a special military unit with the objective of infiltrating and destabilising Sabah, with the eventual aim of Philippine annexation of the territory. Members of this special unit were recruited from Moros in Sulu and Tawi-tawi, as these communities had strong tribal links to the population in Sabah. Towards the end of their training in 1968, the Moro recruits were moved for specialist training to the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay. Exactly what happened afterwards will probably never be completely known, but for some reason there was a mutiny amongst the recruits and their military handlers responded by summarily executing up to twenty-eight<sup>206</sup> of them. One recruit, Jibin Arula, escaped to tell the tale. The reason for the ‘mutiny’ is not clear, some authors tell how the men had not been paid their salary; others argue they were massacred when they found out the true nature of their mission and refused to fight fellow Muslims<sup>207</sup> (McKenna 1998, 140-41; Rodil 2003, 133-34).

What was clear was the impact that the news of the massacre had on the Muslim population. As Rodil describes, ‘[i]t created waves of righteous indignation among progressive Moros and their sympathizers. It was a most potent fuel in creating a revolutionary situation in

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206 McKenna says at least 14, but up to 28. Rodil states 26.

207 Although there are suggestions this is just a propaganda spin put on it by the Muslim separatists (Rodil 2003, 133-34).

Moroland and quickly reverberated at the community level' (Rodil 2003, 135). For McKenna, '[t]he Jabidah Massacre provided both provocation and metaphor. The Philippine Muslims who had volunteered to serve the republic had been deceived, exploited, and treacherously murdered by Christian agents of the state' (McKenna 1998, 143). Young Muslim student activists were galvanised from peaceful protest to preparing for an armed conflict. The immediate cause of the foreign military training of young Moros that would follow was the Jabidah Massacre (M4<sup>208</sup>).

### THE MUSLIM AWAKENING: DATU UDTOG MATALAM AND THE MIM

The first post-war articulation of secession on record is that of Congressman Ombra Amilbangsa from Sulu, who filed a bill in 1961 in the House of Representatives seeking independence for the province of Sulu (now Sulu and Tawi-Tawi). The bill progressed nowhere, and it was not even clear what factors lead him to file the bill. The first seed of independence had been sown; but it would not be until 1968 that the concept of independence began to gain traction (Majul 1985, 39; Rodil 2003, 132).

In the wake of the Jabidah Massacre, the first separatist movement emerged: the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM)<sup>209</sup>, formed in Cotabato province by Datu Udtog Matalam. He was a powerful regional political strongman who had 'ruled the roost in Cotabato during the 1950s and most of the 1960s. He was something of a patriarch, unchallengeable in his stature' (George 1980, 130). However, his conversion to the secessionist cause was something of an about-face. Cotabato was a rich province and had attracted many Christian settlers, so much so that by the 1960s Christians had begun to outnumber the Muslim Maguindanaos. However, the province remained the political preserve of two powerful Muslim clans. As governor, Datu Matalam had been a prominent advocate of Muslim-Christian political harmony in the region, and had kept the lid on any trouble during his five terms in office (McKenna 1998, 145; George 1980, 130).

<sup>208</sup> M4: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 21 January 2011

<sup>209</sup> The name was later changed to the Mindanao Independence Movement (George 1980, 133).

However, in 1967 two events were to rock the patriarch's world. The first was the death of one of his sons in a shootout with an officer from the National Bureau of Investigation in a Cotabato nightclub. The patriarch was devastated by the loss of his son, but his deep pain soon turned to anger as he watched his son's killer seemingly walk away free. His sense of injustice was compounded as 'during his long years of power he had gone out of his way to be good to Christian settlers in his province. Now he thought bitterly that the Christian government in Manila was turning its back on him' (George 1980, 131).

Secondly, in a political deal that went wrong, Matalam agreed to step down and not run again for Governor in 1967. This was provoked by the incursion of the furious competition of the national two-party political system into the local politics of Cotabato. Both Matalam and his political partner Pendatun – congressman of Cotabato – belonged to the Liberalista Party. The bitter presidential election campaign of 1965, which saw the victory of Nacionalista Party challenger Ferdinand Marcos, was followed up by a push by the Nacionalista party in 1967 against Liberalista office holders in the local elections. Cotabato, which had previously been seen as the unassailable territory of Pendatun and Matalam, now became a target. Marcus personally selected a Muslim Nacionalista candidate, Datu Abdulla Sangki. Sangki was, however, part of the Ampatuan clan and closely aligned to the 'Sinuats, the persistent political rivals of Pendatun and Matalam' (McKenna 1998, 145). Matalam, who normally relied on his prestige to win rather than campaigning, was not impressed by this new threat. Pendatun, however, a modern campaigner, took the threat much more seriously<sup>210</sup>. In the end a deal was done in which Matalam agreed not to stand again in order to allow Pendatun to run for governor. Pendatun chose as his running-mate Simeon Datumanong for vice-governor; as a member of the Ampatuan clan he was in part a counterweight against the Nacionalista candidate. Pendatun won the governorship, but decided to

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210 Partly because tradition dictated that the positions of Governor and Congressman were always held by members of the same political clan. If Matalam failed to get re-elected, his own position would have been untenable (McKenna 1998, 144; George 1980, 132).

stay as congressman, resulting in Datumanong automatically becoming governor! As McKenna sums up,

Datu Udtug thus found himself in 1968 involuntarily retired from public office and far from the reins of provincial power, which were now held by a youngster closely related to his political foes. He reportedly felt abused by his old comrade Pendatun and more disgusted than ever with national party politics. (*ibid.*)

In May 1968, just six weeks after the Jabidah Massacre, Matalam announced the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement. As George argues, '[i]n all probability Datu Matalam, the veteran politician, was simply using genuine Muslim outrage over Jabidah for personal ends'<sup>211</sup> (George 1980, 134). The MIM itself was never a popular secessionist movement, with its public actions amounting to little more than issuing a manifesto and press releases. However, the MIM's statements were taken more seriously by Cotabato's Christians, and a month after the MIM published its manifesto there were news reports of Christians fleeing from several towns for fear of a Muslim uprising. The government even airlifted combat-ready troops (*ibid.* 134-35). It wasn't long before political and communal violence had become intertwined, with politicians exploiting communal divisions for political gain. As George comments, 'The polarization of religion in Mindanao now became systemic, MIM had given political legitimacy to what was till then a cult of lawlessness' (*ibid.* 136).

## THE NEXT STEP: THE TOP 90

Although the MIM itself did not become a broad-based movement it was a catalyst, helping to inspire a wider Muslim awakening across the south. Other Muslim organisations emerged, including Ansar El Islam, a religious-cultural organisation, and the Green Guards, a civic association of Muslim students in Zamboanga (George 1980, 153).

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<sup>211</sup> Since it would make more sense for a Muslim backlash against Jabidah to have its epicentre in Sulu, from where the men originated (George 1980, 134).

Importantly, the MIM also ‘became a vehicle for the convergence of old and new, established and antiestablishment, Muslim interests’ (McKenna 1998, 147). Many from the new emerging counter-elite of student activists, including Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat, were drawn to align themselves with the organisation. Misuari also made contact with two prominent Muslim politicians of the day, Salipada Pendatun of Cotabato and Rashid Lucman of Lanao. Lucman was closely acquainted with Tun Mustapha, the Chief Minister of Sabah. These relationships and connections were to play a crucial role as the Muslim awakening moved to the next stage.

Against this backdrop the members of the new young counter-elite of Muslim activists decided to go beyond simply demonstrating and began to prepare for a possible armed conflict. The resources and contacts for this transition, though, came from their acquaintance with the traditional Muslim elite. Through Lucman’s relationship with Mustapha, it was arranged for 90 young Muslim activists – including Nur Misuari and Hashim Salamat – to travel to Malaysia for military training. The so-called ‘Top 90’ left in late 1969, returning in early 1971. The training was allegedly ‘financed as well as sanctioned by the government of Malaysia through the intercession of Tun Mustapha’<sup>212</sup> (McKenna 1998, 148). McKenna argues that the tie-up between Misuari and the other student activists with the established Muslim elite was an entirely pragmatic relationship: ‘With no resources of his own, and having disengaged himself from the campus-based Marxist nationalist opposition, he turned to those apparently sympathetic Muslims who had their own resources and, more important, access to potentially significant quantities of external resources’ (*ibid.*). Further, McKenna argues, the motivation of Pendatun and Lucman may not have been the ideology of independence, but rather

it was more likely conceived as a new tactic in the evolving national party politics of the period. Both men found themselves in 1969 aligned as bitter foes of an increasingly aggressive national president who

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<sup>212</sup> However, it was interesting that forty years later none of the Top 90 that I interviewed would name the country that they went to. As one replied to my enquiry: ‘never mind the country, as I have to respect the country’ (M5).

was actively strengthening (with money and arms) their Nacionalista Muslim rivals in their home provinces... Pendatun and Lucman most probably saw the creation of a well-trained armed force, whose instruction and supplies they did not have to finance and whose existence they could deny, as a useful new resource in a mixed political strategy. (*ibid.* 148-49)

After organising the foreign training, Lucman set up the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO) to act as an umbrella organisation for all liberation forces (Che Man 1990, 78). However, the Top 90 soon took on a life of its own. It was whilst abroad that the members of the Top 90 formed themselves into the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) with Nur Misuari as their leader, without the knowledge of Lucman: "This was because the younger generation of Moro leaders... wanted to dissociate the MNLF from the traditional aristocratic elite whose leadership was viewed as feudal and as "a party to the oppression being waged against the Bangsa Moro people" (George 1980, 201-2)' (Che Man 1990, 78). It was in many ways a coup by the younger generation against the established politicians; although numerous members of the Top 90 were sons of elite families, Misuari himself came from a very modest background. Lucman even went as far as to describe the formation as counter-revolutionary (Che Man 1990, 79).

Now the young leaders of the MNLF had direct contact themselves with foreign backers, they no longer needed the old politicians. From now on the MNLF and Nur Misuari would become the 'centre of gravity' for the Muslim rebellion, around which people with different motivations converged (C14<sup>213</sup>). On returning from training the MNLF made their way to Datu Matalam, as they thought he could give the fledgling group the protection they needed, where it set up its first guerrilla camp in North Cotabato (M4). The MNLF soon set about preparing for what they hoped would be the forthcoming fight for independence. Soon a Top 300 was dispatched for foreign training, to be followed by other groups. The Top 90 itself acted as a catalyst, training groups of Moro fighters for the conflict to come (M4; M5<sup>214</sup>).

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213 C14: former negotiator, interviewed in Davao City on 4 March 2011.

214 M5: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 24 March 2011.

## THE CONFLICT ESCALATES: THE MINDANAO CRISIS

When the violence began to escalate, it is interesting to note that it started in the Cotabato and Lanao regions of western Mindanao (home to the Maguindanao and Maranao tribes respectively) and that corresponding violence did not initially take place in the Sulu Archipelago, home to the fearsome warrior tribe of the Tausūgs. Sulu would perhaps have been the logical starting point for the nationalist separatist struggle; it had a long and proud independent history, whilst as a part of the Philippines it had fared badly and was a very impoverished region. Furthermore, the recruits from the Jabidah Massacre, the initial spark to the Muslim separatist cause, originated from Sulu. The answer perhaps lies in that the escalating violence had more to do with local politics and communal tensions than an independence struggle. Unlike the rest of Mindanao, Sulu had not experienced an influx of settlers, and was by a large majority Muslim (Majul 1985, 40). But it was more than just the dynamic of conflict between Muslims and Christian settlers over land. The epicentres of the emerging violence were the Cotabato and Lanao del Norte provinces. Both these provinces were mixed Muslim and Christian areas where Muslims had historically dominated politically but where Christian politicians were now making a push for power. Add to the mix the intense two-way national political situation which was being fought out locally and it was a powder keg waiting to explode.

From the outside the violence appeared to be communal in nature, with the Muslim and Christian settler communities fighting it out for control. However, upon deeper analysis, the underlying antagonisms were not solely ethno-religious in nature. McKenna asserts that the divisions were principally class-based rather than ethnically motivated. There were three main axes of division: 1) between ordinary Christian settlers and Muslim elites; 2) between ordinary Muslims and Christian elites, often representatives of the state; and 3) between competing Muslim and Christian elites (McKenna 1998, 150). The crescendo of violence that came to be known as the ‘Mindanao Crisis’, in the run-up to the 1971 elections, was largely Christian and Muslim elites fighting for power.

After its formation in 1968, the ‘immediate, and predictable, result of MIM was that every instance of violence in Cotabato now appeared to be related to it’ (George 1980, 134). Following the MIM manifesto launch in 1969, there were press reports of Christians starting to flee from several towns for fear of a Muslim uprising. Those that stayed were prepared to fight to protect their livelihoods. Further worsening the situation was that this happened in the run-up to the particularly bitter 1969 presidential elections, during which ‘[p]arty activists, driven by the relentless logic of elective politics, took full advantage of popular emotions without a second thought’ (George 1980, 136). However, this was nothing compared to the coming 1971 local elections. A victorious Marcos won the 1969 presidential elections, becoming the first president to ever be re-elected; he soon began to prepare for the crucial local elections. Political and religious cleavages soon converged, as both Lanao del Norte and Cotabato saw Christian vs. Muslim competition for the governorships. However, the cleavages were not clear-cut, as the two national parties both backed a Christian candidate in one and a Muslim candidate in another (George 1980, 174). The violence across Mindanao reached its peak in 1971, the so-called Mindanao Crisis, as local politicians, whether Muslim or Christian, sought to consolidate their positions in the local elections of that year. The violence was savage but also highly selective, being confined to ‘those places with a significant proportion of Muslim and Christian populations, and those towns where rivalry between Muslim and Christian politicians were most intense’ (Rodil 2003, 136).

## THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN AND THE ILAGA TERROR

The violence reached a new level of organised ferocity in 1971. In March 1971 a Visayan settler, Feliciano Luces, known as ‘Kumander Toothpick’, led a gang of Tiruray tribesmen<sup>215</sup> in an assault on the town of Upi, kill-

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<sup>215</sup> It should be noted that in Mindanao there is a third much smaller ethnic group, after the Muslim and Christian populations, the highland tribes or the Lumad of the mountainous regions of central Mindanao, of which the Tiruray are one. For the sake of simplicity, the Lumad tribes and their role in the Mindanao conflict are not addressed.

ing six Muslims and wounding many more (Majul 1985, 48). The attack is relevant because it set the pattern of violence to come, marking the start of the Ilaga Terror. The motivations behind the attack are disputed. Early newspaper accounts portrayed Toothpick as a Robin Hood figure, defending poor Tirurays, Christians and Muslims (McKenna 1998, 151). Behind this were allegedly two factors: land-grabbing by influential Christians and Muslims, who were using Muslim outlaws to scare off the inhabitants, and attempts by Muslim datus to coerce tribute from Christian and Tiruray villagers. McKenna essentially argues that this was not so much sectarian violence as class-based conflict (McKenna 1998, 150). However, Majul argues that the

true significance of this incident, however, appeared later when it was revealed that Manuel Tronco, a former constabulary officer with aspirations of becoming Mayor of Upi, was a close friend of Lucas [Toothpick]; possibly he had persuaded Lucas to launch the attack that was meant to drive the Muslims out of Upi. (Majul 1985, 48)

Perhaps what the attack on Upi shows best is the multiple motivations and cleavages at work. But its importance in the conflict is that it set a pattern for a wave of violence known as the Ilaga Terror, which would engulf Cotabato and Lanao and in which uniformed, well-armed and well-trained gangs struck terror into the heart of Muslim communities, driving them from their homes (*ibid.*). The 'Ilaga became a terror weapon such as even the Philippines had not known before. Toothpick was so powerful, his methods, so merciless, that whole towns fled at the mere rumour that he was headed their way' (George 1980, 149). The reason for this wave of terror? Majul argues that 'these terrorist activities were meant to ensure victory for Christian mayors in the upcoming November elections' (Majul 1985, 48).

There is no doubting the campaign of terror against Muslim communities, but exactly who or what the Ilaga was is not clear. There is much speculation that the Ilaga were centrally organised by Christian politicians, in particular by seven local politicians – nicknamed the 'Magnificent Seven' by the press (Majul 1985, 48; Rodil 2003, 135; George

1980, 145). The motivations behind the Ilaga are disputed; some argue their primary motivation was as self-defence in the wake of increasing sectarian violence and fears of a possible Muslim uprising (Rodil 2003, 135). Others argue their motivation was purely political, with George citing a study<sup>216</sup> that claimed, '[t]he overall plan is to ensure that political power is kept by Christians where they have it already, or is wrested from other groups where they still don't have it' (quoted in George 1980, 148).<sup>217</sup> He paints a picture of a well-trained private army, working at the behest of Christian politicians that 'appeared to enjoy the backing of government officials and military men in a wide area' (George 1980, 144). The two points of view are not necessarily mutually exclusive; a Christian community fearing a Muslim uprising would naturally want the local political control to be in the hands of members of their own community – a perfect situation to be exploited by ambitious politicians.

McKenna criticises this thesis of political collusion; firstly for the lack of reliable information, considering most material written on the subject as largely speculation, and secondly, as he points out, these politicians 'were, in fact, themselves divided by separate political parties, aspirations and interests' (McKenna 1998, 321). Furthermore, it wasn't clear who the Ilaga were. As Toothpick's gang was called the Ilaga, the name became a blanket term for any well-trained Christian group attacking Muslims (Majul 1985, 48). But not all gangs were centrally organised; many groups 'were isolated, independent, and hastily formed to protect settlers' and should not perhaps be considered Ilaga (*ibid.* 49). Under the fog of violence, all anti-Muslim violence fitted into the Ilaga conspiracy; however, it seems likely that under this blanket term well-organised politically motivated gangs of prominent Christians coexisted with hastily formed Christian settler self-defence groups.

Violence begets violence; organised and uniformed Muslim paramilitary groups, the 'Blackshirts' and the 'Barracudas', arose in response

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<sup>216</sup> Cited from a confidential study by a Muslim activist on behalf of a Government department.

<sup>217</sup> McKenna also points to the lack of evidence and to certain logistical problems such as divisions within the Ilonggo politicians (McKenna 1998, 151).

to the Ilaga. The first operated in Cotabato and is alleged to have been the armed wing of the MIM<sup>218</sup>. The Barracudas operated further north in the Lanao area, allegedly under the leadership of a Maranao Muslim politician (*ibid.*). While aiming to protect Muslims, the two groups also served their political masters in protecting their power bases (*ibid.*). Alongside these were numerous smaller Muslim armed groups connected to neither the ‘Blackshirts’ nor the ‘Barracudas’. This cross-cutting dynamic of sectarian violence – committed by paramilitary groups serving political agendas and mixed in with a plethora of other armed gangs and self-defence groups – saw a downward spiral of violence. In the atmosphere of chaos and disorder that prevailed, ‘personal scores were settled. Military officers and men took their sides. Politicians secured themselves. The general masses, both Muslim and Christian, were caught in the crossfire and fought their own little battles’ (Rodil 2003, 136). It became an imbroglio of violence, consisting of a myriad of conflicts and motivations, all played out under the umbrella of communal violence.

The brutality of the conflict seemed to know no end, reaching a terrifying crescendo of violence with a series of massacres. The most infamous of these took place in a small town in Cotabato called Manili, where sixty-five Muslim, men, women and children were massacred in a mosque after being lulled there under the false pretences of a peace conference (McKenna 1998, 151; Rodil 2003, 137; Majul 1985, 50). This systemic pattern of violence was repeated time and again, terrorising Muslims in certain towns and forcing them to flee (Majul 1985, 51). These shocking attacks caught the attention of the foreign media and started to internationalise the conflict, especially across the Muslim world. It was a BBC report on the Manili massacre that reached Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi. He would go on to charge the Philippine government with genocide in the UN and become, along with other Muslim nations, a supporter of the MNLF (Rodil 2003, 167; McKenna 1998, 155).

One of the major implications that the violence had on the future of the conflict was the perceived bias of the state against the Muslim

<sup>218</sup> Although Datu Matalam insisted ‘with apparent sincerity’ they were nothing to do with him (Majul 1985, 49).

population (McKenna 1998, 154). Majul sums up the Muslim sentiment at the time:

Manili had been under constabulary control and therefore under its protection. So why would the constabulary wait until the Ilagas had withdrawn before coming to squelch the attack? Yet, strangely enough, when Muslim armed groups took the offensive, they often found armed troops of the Republic facing them. (Majul 1985, 51-52)

In all they were left with the lasting impression that the state had little interest in protecting them; if not aiding the Christians, it was at least biased towards Muslims. Alongside this came the realisation that their traditional leaders were ‘unable or unwilling to protect them against the hostile forces of the state’ (McKenna 1998, 155). This made the Muslim population open to new leaders and protectors.

## THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

The 1960s were a period of change in the Muslim world, in particular the Arab word, as it saw the rise of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism ideologies, promoted by the popular Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser. These ideologies and growing sense of confidence in the Muslim world were transmitted directly back to Mindanao through the many young Moros who had benefited from scholarships in Cairo. Following the defeat of Egypt in the Arab-Israeli Six-day War, though, Nasser’s power began to wane. The Islamist ideologies of the Muslim brotherhood then began to ascend, and were once again to influence the Moro students. This is where Hashim Salamat, key player in the MNLF and later founder of the MILF, was to be introduced to such thinking (McKenna 1998, 144).

The 1969 revolution in Libya brought to power Colonel Gaddafi, who as leader of the revolution ‘took it as his mission to uplift Muslims in many parts of the world from oppression into self-government. The Philippines became one of his chosen spots’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000,

60). In the same year, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference<sup>219</sup> (OIC) was also formed as the Islamic states' response to the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem while under Israeli military occupation (Rodil 2003, 139). For the first time, a permanent international organisation representing the Islamic world was created. Through the OIC the Islamic world would provide support to the Moro cause.

Closer to home, the relationship between Malaysia and the Philippines had been frayed over the tussle for Sabah, only to be further inflamed by the revelations of the Jabidah plot in 1968. By coincidence, the first secretary general of the OIC was Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, and through his new office 'he is said to have played an active role in asking King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and Mummar Kaddafi [sic] of Libya to support MNLF' (*ibid.*). The Malaysian government never gave official support to the MNLF, but it is alleged that they provided training and arms to them (*ibid.*). The nature of Malaysian support was also at two levels, both federal and state. At the state level, Datu Tun Mustapha, Sabah's Chief Minister from 1968-76, was

[a] Tausūg whose family came from Sulu. He had spent the war years as a guerrilla fighter in Mindanao. His clan was extensive in the Sulu Islands and scores of his relatives were engaged in the insurgency in one way or another. It would have been impossible for him to keep out of the conflict even if he had wanted. (George 1980, 234)

As a result he was personally supportive of the Moro struggle and 'openly allowed Sabah's territory as a training ground for MNLF mujahideen as well as [sic] conduit for transport of guns and ammunitions, [sic] communication center, supply and sanctuary for Moro refugees' (Rodil 2003, 139). To understand this dynamic properly, it is important to comprehend the somewhat unique situation that Sabah was in within the Malaysian Federation. When Sabah and Sarawak<sup>220</sup> joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 they were allowed to keep

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<sup>219</sup> It has since been re-named the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC): [http://www.oic-oci.org/page\\_detail.asp?p\\_id=52](http://www.oic-oci.org/page_detail.asp?p_id=52) (last accessed 20 June 2013).

<sup>220</sup> The two Malaysian states that are part of the island of Borneo.

'such critical powers as internal security, immigration and deportation' (George 1980, 234). West Malaysians needed passports to enter the state, and Mustapha even once refused entry to two Malaysian MPs (*ibid.*). Such autonomy led him to support the Moro cause in his own way. It is also alleged that he had political aspirations behind his support for the Moros. He hoped that an independent Muslim Mindanao would join with Sabah, as in the old days of the Sulu sultanate, to form a new state with him as its leader (*ibid.* 237).

## PHASE 2: 1972 TO 1976 – FROM MARTIAL LAW TO WAR

In September 1972 President Marcos declares martial law across the Philippines. However, far from quelling the situation in the south, it sets in motion a chain of events that ignite a full-blown insurgency. The MNLF emerges from the underground to become the leader of the Muslim rebellion, launching an offensive that catches the Philippine Army by surprise, forcing them into a massive airlift of forces to Mindanao. The military recovers and launches a counteroffensive, but fails to deliver a knockout blow. The conflict reaches a stalemate. Meanwhile, Marcos engages in a diplomatic offensive to charm the OIC nations backing the MNLF. In 1976 the MNLF and GRP sit down for OIC-sponsored talks in Tripoli.

### THE SITUATION IN MINDANAO

After the orgy of violence in 1971 that peaked with the local elections in November that year, 1972 started off as quieter. The first half of the year saw no more of the massacres or large-scale skirmishes that had plagued the previous year. Ilaga activity across Lanao and Cotabato was diminishing, perhaps because, as Majul argues, '[p]ossibly they had already performed their function there, since almost all the Christian candidates had won in the November elections' (Majul 1985, 59). However, the genie was out of the bottle; it proved harder to disband armed groups once they were formed (George 1980, 155). Many gangs

simply moved sideways, finding a new sponsor or turning to crime and extortion (*ibid.*; Majul 1985, 59).

The communal violence began to move out of Cotabato and Lanao towards Zamboanga, targeting the Tausūg Muslim minority. Who was behind the violence was unclear, for the Ilaga of Cotabato denied that the Ilaga attacks in Zamboanga were committed by true Ilaga. This was to be a turning point in the conflict, not just because it was ‘no small matter to provoke the Tausūgs of Sulu, the fabled warriors of the south’, who soon threatened to sail from Sulu to defend their brothers in the Zamboanga, but because ‘they were considered the core ethnic group in the south without whose active participation nothing important could develop in [sic] Muslim Philippines’ (George 1980, 181). The three main Muslim ethnic groups<sup>221</sup> were now embroiled in communal violence and there emerged rumours of new Muslim training camps across Mindanao and of Muslim groups with new, sophisticated weapons and showing apparent signs of better training (Majul 1985, 59; M4; M5).

## MARTIAL LAW

Suddenly in September, events unfolded at the national political level which were to ‘impinge on the Muslim question in a cataclysmic way. Neither the Muslims nor the political leadership of Manila saw the essential link between the southern crisis and the national emergency developing along parallel but separate lines’ (George 1980, 189). On 21 September 1972 President Marcos declared martial law across the whole of the Philippines. This had less to do with the situation in Mindanao (although it was cited as a reason) than with the national situation in Manila. As the country prepared for the scheduled presidential elections that November, the Nacionalistas and Liberalistas fought it out, and Manila descended into a state of virtual war. ‘Both sides brought in students and labour, Communists and Catholics, Maoists, anarchists,

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221 The Moro community is made up of a number of tribes and sub-tribes. The three dominant communities are the Tausūg, Maguindanao and Maranao (Ahmad 2000a, 9).

criminal and plain anti-Marcosists for good measure' (*ibid.*). Panic was further spread by a series of bomb attacks across urban areas. As the country was apparently sliding towards anarchy, with the complete breakdown of law and order, Marcos struck before his enemies and declared martial law (*ibid.* 189-90).

On the surface, martial law perhaps should have quelled the situation in the south. According to George, Marcos in effect put on ice the whole political structure of the Philippines. There were no longer any political parties and elections to compete in. As such '[t]he all-pervasive motivation behind the violence in the south vanished. No longer was there need for an individual or group to inflame religious emotions' (*ibid.* 190). The reaction of Filipinos varied, with those who believed the country was falling into chaos or communism supporting martial law (Noble 1986, 86). However, it was to have a profound effect on the nature and direction of the conflict. As McKenna describes,

[t]he imposition of martial law was, in fact, the proximate cause, not the consequence, of an armed Muslim insurgency against the Philippine State, and it led to an unprecedented level of violence and disruption in Cotabato and all of Muslim Mindanao. (McKenna 1998, 156)

There were three direct implications of martial law (Noble 1976, 411-12, cited in Che Man 1990, 76). The first was the centralisation of political control, which left power exclusively in Christian hands under Marcos, his associates in Manila and the military. This was, after all, coming not long after the '71 elections which had already seen a shift of political power from Muslims to Christians. The Muslims were specifically suspicious of Marcos, as it was under him that both the Jabidah Massacre and the alleged collusion between the Ilaga and the security forces took place, and they believed it could be traced all the way up to the commander-in-chief. Secondly, with the restriction of legitimate political activities, the only options left were either acceptance of the regime or anti-regime revolutionary activity. Thirdly, one of the actions under martial law was the collection of guns from the civilian population, '[b]ut most of the Muslim private armed groups

refused to surrender their arms because of their history of continual wars, their fear of army retaliation and their unarmed exposure to Christian terrorist attacks' (Majul 1985, 60). This also had a particular effect on the Moro communities due to the importance of guns in their culture; there is a well-known saying that 'to a Moro his gun is more important than his wife'. Operations to collect weapons provided the spark needed to ignite the conflict. The immediate removal of arms also removed the option of pursuing an armed struggle at some later date; it was now or never (Noble 1976, 411-12, cited in Che Man 1990, 76; George 1980, 190-91). The net result was to broaden the support base of the secessionist movement, and to force the pace of the revolution. At the time martial law was welcomed by many ordinary people in the Philippines, given the context of the high level of violence and possible imminent communist takeover.<sup>222</sup> As time progressed, the cronyism and military excesses eroded popular support. It is a telling fact that in interviewing former MNLF fighters who had since been integrated<sup>223</sup> into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), when asked their initial reasons for joining the MNLF, many gave the martial law abuses of the military as a reason (I1<sup>224</sup>). Martial law was not a consequence of the Moro conflict, but a clear driver of Moro support against the Marcos regime.

## RISE OF THE MNLF

It was not until after the declaration of martial law that the MNLF began to rise to prominence, and ultimately picked up the mantle of leadership of the Muslim secessionist movement (Majul 1985, 62). The immediate impact of martial law was to force the MNLF leadership to go underground for fear of being arrested in the political clampdown,

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<sup>222</sup> <http://www.philippine-history.org/martial-law-philippines.htm> (last accessed 23 June 2013).

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/456399/Philippines/23721/Martial-law> (last accessed 23 June 2013).

<sup>223</sup> As part of the 1996 peace agreement – see Phase 5.

<sup>224</sup> I1: Focus Group 1, MNLF Integrees, interviewed in Mindanao on 4 March 2011.

in the process galvanising them into action (M4; M7<sup>225</sup>). The events essentially saw a shift in the movement by forcing the dissolution of above-ground organisations such as the MIM and Nur Islam and in the process activating the underground MNLF (McKenna 1998, 156). The group's leaders had been busy laying plans for their future struggle for Muslim independence. What these events did was to bring forward their timetable and force them into action prematurely (George 1980, 207). The MNLF was not the only armed group, but rather one of many in a well-armed Muslim population. However, due to its early successes, the MNLF acquired a nominal leadership role and 'by the end of 1972, the developing Muslim insurgency began to coalesce under its banner' (McKenna 1998, 157).

Despite assuming the leadership of the struggle, the MNLF remained a dislocated organisation which was unable to bring all of the Muslim armed groups that were fighting the Marcos regime under its structure (Che Man 1990, 83). In reality the MNLF represented a coalition of forces, a combination of their own forces and aligned forces of traditional leaders and outlaws who had sided against Marcos. McKenna expounds:

The MNLF never controlled all of the rebels fighting the government and was, in fact, a loosely knit group, with the borders between those fighters who were members of, aligned with or exterior to the MNLF never very clear. Nevertheless, the MNLF was the principal, and by far the most important armed separatist organization, largely because it became the major supplier of arms and ideological support for the insurgency. (McKenna 1998, 157)

The MNLF's ability to gain significant external assistance contributed to its rapid ascendancy (Che Man 1990, 82). This became the foundation of the MNLF's strength, as it 'began to take overall charge of the armed conflict in Moroland by providing weapons and other supplies to the Muslim groups which were already at war with government forces and to those who wanted to join the struggle' (*ibid.* 79). As McKenna

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<sup>225</sup> M7: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 29 March 2011.

notes, '[t]he authority over rebel fighters enjoyed by the MNLF derived at least partly from its access to critical resources from outside the Philippines' (McKenna 1998, 157).

The MNLF was organised along classic revolutionary lines, based on parallel political and military (the Bangsa Moro Army) structures, which were then broken down into regional revolutionary committees. At the top sat the thirteen-member Central Committee, the most prominent of whom were its chairman Nur Misuari, vice-chair and later foreign affairs minister Salamat Hashim and Abdul Khayr Alonto, overall field commander of the Bangsa Moro Army.<sup>226</sup> Alonto was one of the few top leaders to remain in the Philippines, with the central committee in effect operating from abroad (Che Man 1990, 82).

The MNLF was unable to establish a clear chain of command, and remained a dislocated organisation. By early 1973 the BMA, the armed wing of the MNLF, was estimated to consist of a force of 15,000, and more than double if the traditional leaders could be persuaded to join it (Majul 1985, 64). Although, as Che Man points out, 'if one defines a member as one who signs an undertaking to the organization and thereafter pays his subscription... then the MNLF had no members' (Che Man 1990, 83).

## THE OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE

Exactly a month after the declaration of martial law, on 21 October 1972, a force of between 500 and 1,000 Muslim fighters descended on the Muslim majority city of Marawi in Lanao del Sur. The assault followed widening tensions between the Christian and Muslim population,<sup>227</sup>

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226 Importantly, the three leaders represented the three major tribal groups, respectively the Suluano, Maguindanao and Maranao (Che Man 1990, 82), projecting the MNLF as transcending ethnic divides. (Suluano taken here to mean the tribes associated with Sulu, the dominant Tausūg tribe and other smaller tribes).

227 In May the Christian-dominated Iligan City, the capital of Lanao del Norte, started an economic boycott of Muslim-dominated Marawi City, capital of Lanao del Sur. It was portrayed as through the prism of increased Muslim-Christian conflict. However, George argues, '[i]n reality, it was simply a case

which were brought to a head by the deadline for the surrender of private firearms (George 1980, 204). At first appearances, it seemed the start of a religious uprising, but by digging a bit further it became clear that '[t]he principal organizer turned out to be a man with a personal grudge – the police chief of Marawi City. He had a long history of complaints against his superiors over promotions and privileges' (George 1980, 205). The uprising collapsed after two days of fighting, when reinforcements arrived from Iligan City. Although the attack had not been organised by the MNLF, it had the knock-on effect of upsetting their planned timetable, forcing them into action (*ibid.* 207).

The MNLF sprang into action in early 1973; violence started in the south from the Misuari stronghold of Sulu. Well-armed MNLF groups took on the government forces in Sulu and in the Zamboanga peninsula. Then, in early March, the MNLF made a well-coordinated push into Cotabato province, occupying and controlling 12 municipalities, surrounding and threatening Cotabato City itself. 'the MNLF overran in blitz-like manner the government's military detachments in the central plains of Cotabato' (Abat 1999, xxiii). The assault was a game changer in the nature of the conflict, as Majul describes:

This large-scale attack, which revealed the MNLF's ability to co-ordinate with precision and expand its operations, caused deep concern in army quarters because it was not at all like the attacks by private armies of the traditional Muslim warlords, by bandits, or by isolated disgruntled groups. (Majul 1985, 64)

The attack nearly proved decisive, and forced Marcos to airlift troops from outside Mindanao to relieve the beleaguered Cotabato forces. The memoirs of the General in charge of that operation, Gen. Abat, are indicatively entitled *The day we nearly lost Mindanao* (Abat

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of vested interests disrupting life in order to gain objectives that had nothing to do with religion. Marawi's Mayor was frank enough to admit, after several days of boycott, that the price of salt in his city had jumped from 20 to 40 pesos per sack, flour from 6.5 to 9 pesos. Soft-drinks had doubled' (George 1980, 180).

1999). As one senior officer – who was amongst the vanguard that was airlifted to Mindanao – described, his first assessment on arrival and hearing a briefing from the local forces was ‘we have lost the war’ (A4<sup>228</sup>).

### THREE AMIGOS TO THE RESCUE: AIRLIFTING THE ARMY TO MINDANAO

The government position in Cotabato was dire: the MNLF had succeeded in taking them by surprise with their blitz-like assault, and nearly three-quarters of the vast province was under their control. In a desperate attempt to regain control, Marcos was forced to scramble his forces in Cebu under Gen. Abat (Gen. Abat and his two deputies were nicknamed the Three Amigos by the press!) and airlift them to Cotabato. Abat’s forces arrived just in time. As one former army officer explained, the MNLF could easily have overrun Cotabato and its strategically important airport. In fact, it was a major tactical mistake; if the airport had fallen it would have proved impossible to get troops into Cotabato – there was no other airport or port available. Furthermore, if they weren’t stopped at Cotabato, they planned to sweep south through General Santos and then Davao City (A4).

These dramatic events highlighted the weaknesses and failures of the Philippine military. The armed forces in Cotabato were aware of the MNLF forces in the area in training camps, but had chosen not to take any action, to avoid provoking them. They ‘lacked the capability in manpower and resources’ to take on the MNLF forces, who were ‘then superior in arms and number’, and feared that in a confrontation they would be overwhelmed (Abat 1999, 20-21). If action had been taken earlier then perhaps the situation could have been avoided (A4). As another officer based in Mindanao in the late 1960s recounted, ‘the army could have prevented it, but preparation is largely a political matter’ (A3<sup>229</sup>).

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228 A4: retired Army officer who served in Mindanao, interviewed in Cebu on 14 March 2011.

229 A3: retired Army officer who served in Mindanao, interviewed in Manila on 25 March 2011.

After arriving and surveying the situation, Abat and his team set about formulating their five-phase campaign. This consisted of:

- 1) Consolidation and build-up
- 2) Offensive
- 3) Re-establishment of civil authority
- 4) Reconstruction and rehabilitation
- 5) Reconciliation.

After consolidating their forces, which saw a massive deployment of soldiers from elsewhere in the Philippines to Cotabato, the Army began to switch to the offensive. The principal plan was to engage the MNLF's forces and clear them from the areas they held, preceded by massive psychological operations, including leaflet drops. Commenting on the importance of such operations, one officer said, '[i]t is the civilians that are affected. The moment that you have the civilians with you, they'll help you' (A4). The strategy was to re-establish civil authority in these areas and secure them with Civil Home Defence Forces – locally raised paramilitary units – before moving on to the next target area. The concept was to push, push and push to not allow the MNLF to establish control in an area and gain the sympathy of the people (*ibid.*).

The fighting was exceptionally bloody and heavy, but as the year went on, the initiative moved to the military. The MNLF made the mistake of confronting the Army conventionally and engaging in positional warfare, choosing to stand and hold the areas they had taken against the Army's counteroffensive. This was perhaps a reflection of the MNLF's training: they were well trained and well-armed, but trained in conventional warfare (Ahmad 2000b, 31). The military's siege operations simply outmanoeuvred and outgunned them. The MNLF had proved fatal to the pre-existing forces based in Mindanao, but could not compete in conventional warfare against an army that was able to mobilise and bring to Mindanao its full resources from across the Philippines. Apparently the MNLF had thought that 'the troops stationed in Mindanao (at that time) were all that the government could afford to send. So we went to war' (Manuel Cayons, quoted in Abat 1999, xxiii).

By early the following year the rebels had moved away from conventional tactics, because, as Gen. Abat describes,

it became evidently clear to them the futility of confronting the government forces head-on. They therefore shifted to guerrilla tactics of hit-and-run, harassment and terrorism, and occasional attacks if only to remind their patrons of their significant presence in some areas. (*ibid.* 123)

Their change in tactics exploited their natural advantage of familiarity with the local terrain (McKenna 1998, 158). At this stage the military shifted into the second phase, going on the offensive, which focused on destroying the rebel groups, aided by population and resource control measures and massive psychological operations (Abat 1999, 39).

However, that year was to see the largest battle of the war, when in April 1974 the MNLF launched a deadly and well-coordinated attack on Jolo, the capital of Sulu, which resulted in the almost complete destruction of the town. The destruction was not caused directly by the MNLF, but mostly by the Navy's shelling of Jolo in its attempt to retake it.

All sides generally agreed that the MNLF attack on Jolo had been disciplined and well organized and that its subsequent retreat had been orderly. Witnesses testified that army soldiers, on the other hand, had looted many jewellery shops in the town. (Majul 1985, 66)

The military dynamic of the situation was going in one direction – towards a stalemate in which neither side was able to produce the knockout blow needed to decisively resolve the conflict. The human cost of the war was also immense: by 1976 over 120,000 people had lost their lives in the fighting and another 300,000 had been displaced (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 27). Financially, the cost of the war was also crippling: the annual budget of the armed forces had increased fivefold since martial law. By 1975 three-quarters of the Philippine Army was deployed in the south. Meanwhile, as a result, the Army had already grown fourfold to 250,000 (Ferrer 2006, 467; McKenna 1998, 165). As McKenna surmises, 'President Marcos realized fairly early on that an

exclusively repressive response to the rebellion in the South was far too costly financially and politically' (McKenna 1998, 165). Furthermore, the stability of the north was now under pressure, facing opposition on many fronts including the CPP-NPA and the 'church radicals' (Ahmad 2000b, 31).

In the days before the declaration of martial law, the leaders of the CPP-NPA and MNLF had held a secret meeting in Manila, in which they came to an informal tactical alliance. However, this would never develop into a more significant strategic partnership, and did not go much further than mutual recognition, with the CPP-NPA recognising the Moros' right to self-determination and some local mutual assistance (Santos and Santos 2010, 337; Abreu 2008b, 134-35). It remains an open question what the outcome would have been if the MNLF and CPP-NPA had waged a joint war on two fronts against the Marcos regime.

## MARCOS'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL POLICIES

It was soon clear to Marcos that 'such a threat could not be permanently quelled without addressing successfully some of the socio-economic and political dimensions from which it sprang' (Che Man 1990, 148). And it was not long until the 'mailed fist' was joined by the 'outreached hand of friendship to right-minded Muslims' (McKenna 1998, 166). A wave of initiatives was introduced:

Some early decrees were intended to remove restrictions on the traditional barter trade<sup>230</sup> (Presidential Decree [PD] 93, 1973); to grant amnesty to persons who had committed any act penalized by existing laws in Muslim areas (PD 95, 1973); to authorize the use of Arabic language as a medium of instruction in madaris (Letter of Instruction [LOI] 71A, 1973); to declare Muslim holidays as legal Philippine holidays (Proclamation 1198, 1973); to direct the University of the Philippines Board of Regents to establish an Institute of Islamic

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<sup>230</sup> The barter trade between the Southern Philippines and Borneo and Sabah had been an important means of employment. Previous clampdowns on this trade had caused much resentment and unemployment.

Studies (LOI 82, 1973); and to declare ancestral lands occupied and cultivated by national minorities as alienable and disposable in the 26 provinces across the country (PD 410, 1974). (Che Man 1990, 151)

For economic development, the Rehabilitation and Development (RAD) for Mindanao was formed, later to become part of the Southern Philippines Development Administration. This was followed by the ‘creation of the Philippine Amanah Bank (PAB), the codification of Muslim laws, and the establishment of the Ministry of Muslim Affairs’ (Che Man 1990, 155).

As well as trying to solve some of the root causes, Marcos used this as an opportunity for divide and rule through the implementation of a policy of attraction, where ‘[k]ey rebel leaders are offered amnesty, livelihood projects and business opportunities, as well as political positions that allowed them to surrender with “dignity”’ (Gutierrez 2000a, xvi). Marcos further exploited these returnees by using them as ‘legitimate’ spokespersons for Muslims in the Philippines, even though, as McKenna points out, they ‘had surrendered to the government in exchange for incentives that included large cash payments, timber concessions or other special export licenses, and government positions’ (McKenna 1998, 167). Shrewdly, Marcos also targeted the traditional Muslim elite, co-opting them into his regime, easily exploiting the division between them and the revolutionary ideals of Nur Misuari. The traditional elite’s primary objective was the protection of their privileged position of power, rather than the ideology of nationalism: ‘Datu commanders surrendered earlier and in greater numbers than any other rebel leaders’ (*ibid.* 162-63).

## FOREIGN SUPPORT

The Moro uprising may have been an entirely home-grown rebellion, but from the very onset it was dependent on foreign support. The international front of the conflict was fought out in tandem with the domestic front; the importance of the international dimension was highlighted by the majority of the MNLF leadership being based outside of Mindanao.

Principal support for the Moros came through the Libya/Malaysia/Sabah nexus. Malaysia had been the first country to support the MNLF, but it was Libya that was to provide the subsequent major support. Libya is alleged to have provided \$1 million to fund the training of 300 Moro recruits in Malaysia in 1971 to 1972; in total, from 1972 to 1975, about \$35 million was contributed to the MNLF by Libya and the OIC (Che Man 1990, 140). The majority of this support was channelled to the MNLF via Sabah between 1972 and 1976. Chief Minister 'Tun Datu Mustapha allegedly allowed Sabah to be used as a training camp, supply depot, communications centre, and sanctuary' (*ibid.* 139). In reality Sabah acted as a safe haven for the MNLF and a 'jump board' for their campaign in Mindanao, which was only four hours by boat from the first islands of the Sulu Archipelago. The military advantage of having the Sabah safe haven was vital for the MNLF; so much so that a former Sulu Army commander recounted that if it had been possible he would have wanted to attack the MNLF bases there (A4). Under Mustapha, Sabah also offered sanctuary to tens of thousands of displaced Moros.<sup>231</sup>

Misuari proved to be an adept diplomat and quickly and successfully ensured that the MNLF's cause became internationalised, in particular in the assurgent Islamic world. Marcos soon realised that the conflict was not just fought in Mindanao, but could be won or lost in the diplomatic front:

In confidential exchanges between Marcos and his senior advisers, the government acknowledged that it could not deal with the MNLF without considering its rich and powerful supporters in the Middle East. Oil politics seemed like an umbilical cord tied up with the MNLF problem. (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 31)

Marcos responded by 'realigning his foreign policy and organizing diplomatic initiatives to win over the Muslim world' (Gutierrez 2000a, xv). Previously, the Philippines were allied to the USA in foreign policy.

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<sup>231</sup> By 1983 there were estimated to be 160-200,000 evacuees living in Sabah. Part of the motivation for allowing so many refugees may have been economic, as Sabah faced a manpower and labour shortage (Che Man 1990, 139).

Marcos now adjusted foreign policy for domestic political expediency. The Philippines' relationship with Muslim nations in general came into sharp focus following the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the subsequent oil crisis, in which the Philippines' realignment of foreign policy was expressed in condemnation of Israel's occupation of Arab territories as an act of aggression (Che Man 1990, 145). This was followed by a flurry of activity in which Marcos sought to set up diplomatic ties with many Muslim nations and strengthen existing ones (*ibid.* 146).

The centrepiece in the MNLF's international effort was the OIC, and it was through this organisation it was able to muster the combined strength of the Islamic world behind it. As Samuel Tan asserts,

[w]ithout the OIC's consistent support for the MNLF, the Moro struggle would have gone the way of all its frustrated struggles in the past. The position and status of the MNLF in the OIC has remained the most important leverage of the Moro struggle. (Tan, quoted in Vitug and Gloria 2000, 61)

In the fourth annual Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM), held in Benghazi, Libya in March 1973, the ICFM expressed deep concern in Resolution No. 4 over the 'reported repression and mass extermination of Muslims in the South Philippines', calling on the Philippine government to protect the Muslim population (Majul 1985, 64). The resolution also suggested that a delegation of four foreign ministers be sent to the Philippines to discuss these issues with the government (*ibid.*). Marcos embraced the delegation and gave them free access to the troubled area, and they subsequently reported that there was no genocide in Mindanao and called for a peaceful solution (Che Man 1990, 143).

The strength and importance of the OIC was also a double-edged sword for the MNLF. Reliant on the OIC's support, they were also bound to acquiesce to their advice (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 63). The fifth ICFM in 1974 kept up the pressure on the Philippines, calling on the government in Resolution No. 18 'to find a political and peaceful solution through negotiation and particularly with the representatives of the Moro Liberation Front in order to arrive at a just solution to the plight

of Filipino Muslims' but it continued to say 'within the framework of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Philippines' (Majul 1985, 67; Gutierrez 2000a, xvi). The OIC essentially forced the MNLF to abandon their goal of total independence and move to a resolution of the conflict along the lines of autonomy. Misuari is later quoted as claiming 'the primary reason why we had to accept that resolution was because we were terrified at the prospect of being isolated from our brothers in the world' (quoted in Vitug and Gloria 2000, 31).

As a result of the resolution, the first formal talks between the Philippine government and the MNLF took place in January 1975 in Jeddah (Majul 1985, 68), unfortunately failing to produce an outcome. Marcos did, though, intensify his diplomatic charm offensive, unleashing his 'secret weapon': the Philippines' first lady Imelda Marcos, who would play an 'important role in strengthening the Philippine relations with the Arab world. Acting as special representative of President Marcos' (Che Man 1990, 146). Imelda Marcos was to play a key role when she made a trip to Libya the following year in a diplomatic effort to re-establish the peace process. Imelda's charms worked, and 'Colonel Qaddafi [sic] personally offered to help solve the problem and suggested that his country host the resumed negotiation between the Philippine government and the MNLF' (Majul 1985, 73). The result was the Tripoli peace talks.

### PHASE 3: 1976 TO 1986 – A FAILED PEACE

The third phase starts hopefully, as the MNLF and GRP sign the Tripoli Peace agreement with the aim of delivering autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. However, the agreement falls apart as Marcos begins to undermine it, and the MNLF return to armed struggle. In the wake of the failure of the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF goes through a period of internal dissent and splits. Meanwhile the MNLF enters into an alliance with the anti-Marcos democratic alliance. As Marcos is forced out of power in the EDSA revolution, there is a hope that peace will be achieved under the new president, Aquino.

## THE TRIPOLI AGREEMENT

The talks, unlike the previous year's Jeddah talks, were successful in leading to the signing of the Tripoli Agreement on 23 December 1976, which 'provided the general principles for Muslim autonomy in the Philippine South' (Majul 1985, 73). The agreement paved the way for a ceasefire, and a commitment for the introduction of autonomy in 13 provinces. However, as ever, the devil was in the detail. A last-minute inclusion by Marcos that the agreement must fit within the constitution of the Philippines would have important ramifications. The detent soon broke down into acrimony, as the MNLF insisted that the 13 provinces be immediately declared a single administrative unit (*ibid.*). Marcos, countering that the agreement was subject to constitutional process, insisted that a plebiscite must be held first in each province. As Gutierrez remarks, '[t]his was Marcos's ace in his gamble during negotiation. He knew that with his control of state machinery, including his near perfection of electoral manipulation, all commitments and promises to the MNLF could be reversed with ample justification' (Gutierrez 2000a, xvii).

A plebiscite-referendum was put in motion to ask each province whether it wanted autonomy and also on other issues including MNLF demands. In part Marcos had a point, as that Muslim community only constituted a minority in Mindanao. Among the 13 provinces included for autonomy, only a few were actually almost entirely Muslim.<sup>232</sup> As the majority of voters were Christian, it was expected that the MNLF's demands would be rejected. On the flipside, Marcos had made no mention of the necessity of a plebiscite in the agreement. In the end the MNLF rejected the results of the plebiscite-referendum and negotiations with the government were discontinued (Majul 1985, 75). Marcos then proceeded to introduce his version of autonomy into the 10 out of the

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<sup>232</sup> 'The population of only a few of these provinces – Lanao del Sur, Sulu and Tawi Tawi, was almost wholly Muslim, that is over 90 percent. The population of Basilan and North Cotabato was about 70 percent Muslim. That of Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat, however was less than 50 percent Muslim, and that of Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur and Palawan less than 20 percent' (McKenna 1998, 74).

13 provinces that voted for it. By creating two separate autonomous regions (Regions 9 and 12) out of the ten provinces, this was a far cry from the MNLF's hope for a single autonomous unit consisting of the 13 provinces. As one interviewee dryly commented, 'Marcos was so generous he gave us two autonomous regions' (C13<sup>233</sup>). Further the autonomy in these regions was not substantive, as McKenna elaborates that '[t]he governing bodies of the nominally autonomous regions were cosmetic creations with no real legislative authority and no independent operating budget. They were headed by martial law collaborators and rebel defectors' (McKenna 1998, 168). Some have suggested that Marcos exploited the autonomous regions as a divide and rule tactic, first by dividing the region in two along tribal lines,<sup>234</sup> and second by using the government offices of the autonomous regions as part of his policy to co-opt members of the MNLF (C13).

## MILITARY FRONT: CONTINUING VIOLENCE

When the ceasefire between the two sides broke down, however, the MNLF was unable 'to match its field performance of 1973 and 1974' (Majul 1985, 84). What followed was years of pocket wars and skirmishes, which would escalate at times but never again return to the heights of the earlier war. However, as Ahmad notes, 'From the military point of view, a situation of strategic stalemate has prevailed ever since, from which neither side could emerge victorious' (Ahmad 2000b, 37). In practice, MNLF forces remained armed and in their areas, and the army kept to their areas, except for low-level tit-for-tat violence. There were a number of prominent, high-profile attacks such

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<sup>233</sup> C13: NGO worker, interviewed in Manila on 15 February 2011.

<sup>234</sup> Region 9 contained the Sulu Archipelago and Zamboanga peninsula, while Region 12 contained central Mindanao; as such the former was dominated by the Tausūg tribe and the latter the Maguindanao and Marranao tribes. [full details: Region 9 – Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-tawi plus the cities of Dipolog, Dapitan, Pagadian and Zamboanga. Region 12 - Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, and Lanao del Sur plus the cities of Iligan, Marawi, and Cotabato (Ferrer 2006, 470).]

as the infamous 1978 massacre in Sulu of General Teodulo Bautista and 33 soldiers, who had believed they were meeting the MNLF for peace talks (Gutierrez 2000, xix).

## THE SPLITS

The breakdown of the Tripoli Agreement was to have important implications for the leadership of the MNLF, bringing into the open for the first time a cleavage that had always existed (Che Man 1990, 84). In late December 1976 Hashim Salamat, then a member of the central committee and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee, announced an ‘Instrument of Takeover’ in an attempt to remove Misuari as leader. The move was backed by the re-emerging traditional Muslim politicians, the now Sultan<sup>235</sup> Rashid Lucman of the BMLO, Salipada Pendatun of the Muslim Association of the Philippines (MAP) and Domocao Alonto of Ansar El-Islam (Gutierrez 2000a, xviii; Che Man 1990, 84). Misuari counter-attacked by expelling Salamat from the central committee, and reinforced his power base by appointing more committee members from his own Tausūg ethnic group (Majul 1985, 86). There were now two MNLF factions. Pendatun was at this stage based in Jeddah, and the traditional leaders tried to persuade Salamat to stay in Jeddah with them, and base his faction of the MNLF from there. However, Salamat chose to return to his base in Cairo instead, for, as Majul argues ‘[i]t can be surmised that Salamat had strong reservations about some traditional leaders’ commitment to Islam: he knew their main purpose was to control the MNLF through him’ (*ibid.* 87). Lucman and Pendatun stayed in Jeddah and set up the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organisation (BMLO).

A further blow came later that year when in December Abdul Khair Alonto, member of the central committee, one of the original founding

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<sup>235</sup> Lucman had been acknowledged as the ‘Paramount Sultan of Mindanao and Sulu’ in May 1974 by Marcos as part of his policy of attraction and strategy to promote divisions within the Moro leadership (Che Man 1990, 79). However, after demanding autonomy, Lucman, Pendatun and some other traditional leaders left for Saudi Arabia in the hope of uniting with the MNLF (*ibid.* 80). Despite backing Salamat, the traditional leaders never managed to return to the leadership of the movement.

members and also significantly head of the BMA forces in Mindanao, along with his supporters surrendered to the Philippine Government. Alonto was replaced by Dimas Pundato. However, Pundato would in 1982 find himself the leader of another breakaway faction, the MNLF-reformists. The reformists' group was perhaps an accidental faction; Pundato had hoped to reform the MNLF from within, and after consulting with local commanders he submitted a 9-point reform proposal to Misuari, along with forty-four others (Che Man 1990, 85; M5). Misuari's response was to expel Pundato and his supporters from the MNLF (*ibid.*).

The splits served to highlight existing cleavages within the MNLF, which had been papered over in the rush to form a united front in the face of the escalating Mindanao violence, but can be traced all the way back to groups origins in the student activism of the Manila Boys and Cairo Boys: specifically, the left-wing revolutionary ideologies of the Manila Boys vs. the Islamic ideologies of the Cairo Boys. At the heart of the splits was the accusation that Misuari was a communist, with his membership in his Manila days of Marxist revolutionary groups cited as evidence. This accusation brought into the open two connected cleavages. The first was a revolutionary vs. conservative cleavage. Misuari was not just driven by Muslim independence, but also had the 'aim of transformation of Moro society as an ultimate objective beyond winning independence' (Che Man 1990, 86). As a revolutionary movement the MNLF was against the concept of royalty and the datu system (M7). In short, he had a parallel revolutionary agenda and sought to reform what he saw as the 'feudal' datu system that empowered the traditional Muslim elites and impoverished the masses. George quotes an MNLF field commander who sums up this viewpoint of the traditional elite: 'Although these people call themselves Muslims, they are a party to the oppression being waged against the Bangsa Moro people. They are our enemies' (George 1980, 202).

However, this revolutionary zeal was not shared by everyone.<sup>236</sup> For many, their aim was for secession but not for a revolution in Muslim

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<sup>236</sup> It is most likely that the revolutionary vs. Islamic tensions are what prevented Misuari entering into a strategic alliance with the CPP-NPA, fearing the divisions this would inflame within the MNLF.

Mindanao's social structure. The Cairo Boys, from whom Salamat stemmed, were of a conservative social perspective. Furthermore, many of the young leaders of the MNLF, including Salamat, were scions of the Muslim traditional leaders. Misuari, in contrast, was from an extremely impoverished background. This conservative social outlook however does not mean that this wing of the movement necessarily supported the existing traditional ruling elite, of the older generation. They were often seen as corrupt and in collusion with the Manila government. It was more that they did not share the Misuari revolutionary view of society.

The second cleavage was a secular vs. religious division. It was alleged that Misuari was a communist, and as such was against religion and hence against Islam; an accusation that Misuari strongly denied. To Misuari the MNLF was a nationalist<sup>237</sup> organisation first of all, fighting for secession. Despite being a devout Muslim, the organisation was secular in nature, in that it aimed for an independent Mindanao, not for the creation of an Islamic society. In contrast, many of the Cairo Boys, Salamat included, were Islamic scholars. As such they were also concerned with the establishment of an Islamic society. As Salamat would later explain when he officially formed his own group, the Muslim Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the ideology of his movement was Islam and not nationalism (Hashim 2001, 66).

These two cleavages manifested themselves along the lines of divisions. Misuari's MNLF was revolutionary and secular. Salamat's MNLF-faction was socially conservative and Islamic in nature, drawing most of its leaders from the religiously educated traditional elite. At the same time, Pundato's MNLF-reformists were similarly conservative in nature, but drew most of their leaders from the secularly educated traditional elite (Che Man 1990, 88).

A third cleavage was the age-old divisions of the main Muslim groupings of Mindanao; the Maguindanaos, the Maranos and the Suluanos.<sup>238</sup> This three-way division is also represented in the division of the three groupings' leaders: Salamat, Pundato and Misuari

<sup>237</sup> The MNLF even contained some Christian and Lumad members.

<sup>238</sup> Taken here to mean the tribes associated with Sulu, the dominant Tausūg tribe and other smaller tribes.

respectively. There were also cultural differences between the tribes that were reflected in their preferences of the groupings. As Che Man argues, '[t]he Maguindanaos and the Maranos, who incline towards the preservation of the traditional Moro system, are supporters of Salamat Hashim and Dimus [sic] Pundatao [sic] respectively. The Suluanos, many of whom advocate egalitarianism, are behind Nur Misuari' (*ibid.* 89).

Despite the splinters and the emergence of the cleavages, the MNLF still remained by far the most significant grouping. The factionalism though did weaken it, and bring out dividing lines that would only grow with time. These divisions were far from clear-cut and many cross-cutting tribal and ideological boundaries existed. Personal loyalties also played a part, for as Che Man argues, 'Only the leaders are really conscious of adhering to an ideology; the followers are conscious only of being Muslim and feeling discriminated against' (*ibid.*).

## THE LOW POINT

The years following the Tripoli Agreement were difficult years for the MNLF. On the one side their strength was weakened by defections as Marcos's policy of attraction continued to find suitors from within the MNLF ranks. On the other side the factionalism and splits further weakened the MNLF as well as opening up cleavages of division. Alongside this the organisation was allegedly experiencing financial difficulties, funding (although substantial) was irregular which made it hard to budget (C17<sup>239</sup>). One visitor to the MNLF's camp in Sabah described the situation as 'our experience in Sabah was terrible.... The MNLF are on their own... you could see MNLF commanders spending their days catching fish' (C16<sup>240</sup>).<sup>241</sup>

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239 C17: political activist, interviewed in Manila on 28 March 2011.

240 C16: political activist, interviewed in Manila on 28 March 2011.

241 It should be noted that I put this account to a number of MNLF sources from this period, and none of them would confirm this picture. C16 also mentioned 'starvation', but that this was not corroborated by other sources.

## BACK FROM AUTONOMY TO SECESSION

Misuari had been a reluctant signatory to the Tripoli Agreement; it was only under OIC pressure that the MNLF had downgraded its demands from secession to autonomy. In his own words 'I was the one who earlier defined the objective of independence. But due to the pressure of the OIC, I was persuaded to put this aside' (quoted in Bauzon 2008, 113). Following the effective collapse of the Tripoli Agreement, Misuari reverted to his original position of secession and independence. Next Misuari set about trying to convince his OIC patrons to back his renew position. However, such support was not forthcoming; the OIC maintained its position of calling for a peaceful solution on the basis of Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity (Majul 1985, 90).

## THE DOMESTIC SITUATION

Martial law still remained in place across the country, and Marcos retained the significant powers that this gave him to rule by decree. Elections for the national assembly which took place on 7 April 1978 saw overt election-rigging by the Marcos regime and this caused a dramatic change in the strategy of the anti-Marcos democratic opposition. 'When the opposition to Marcos lost to massive cheating in the 1978 Batasang Pambansa elections, the moderate forces identified with the late Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr. flirted with the thought of arming themselves' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 35). In pursuit of this, the opposition sought to make contact with the MNLF – as opposed to the CPP-NPA – as much of the democratic opposition was strongly anti-communist. Bert Gonzales<sup>242</sup> was dispatched to make contact with the MNLF on a 'my enemy is your enemy basis' (*ibid.* 35-36; NG 1).

Gonzales finally made contact with Misuari in Jeddah in 1979. Apparently, 'Misuari was also fascinated with the idea about an opposition to Marcos on two fronts: the traditional opposition base in Luzon, and the MNLF in Mindanao' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 35). What followed

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<sup>242</sup> Bert Gonzales was Chair of the PDSP, which was part of the broader anti-Marcos alliance.

was a loose alliance between the democratic opposition and the MNLF against the Marcos regime. Considering the recent splits and defections from the MNLF, it seems likely that Misuari would have been open to new alliances. This also produced a possible new strategy, for if Marcos was replaced by a new government it was likely that there might be a better chance of implementing the Tripoli Agreement. The two sides began helping each other, with the MNLF providing sanctuary to some members of the democratic opposition, offering them protection in their base in Sabah (C16; C17). While Sen. Aquino was in exile he met with Misuari, ‘Aquino was sympathetic to the Moro cause and was considered an ally by the rebel organization’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 36).

### THE ASSASSINATION OF BENIGNO AQUINO

In 1983, due to the worsening political situation and rumours over the declining health of Marcos, Aquino chose to come home. However, he was assassinated as soon as he arrived back in the Philippines; shot in the head as he stepped off the plane while escorted by the guards who had arrested him (Nadeau 2008, 89). Who exactly killed Aquino, and why, are still widely debated topics in the Philippines and the root of a thousand conspiracy stories. But one thing that was crystal clear was that the assassination, and the perceived involvement of the Marcos regime, marked a turning point in popular opposition against Marcos. The event acted as a catalyst against the Marcos regime, and political unrest only deepened as the economy began to falter as foreign investment took fright at the political situation (Lande 1986, 114).

Following the assassination, foreign support seeped away from Marcos, as world opinion began to change, and increasingly fell behind the democratic opposition. This situation also benefited the MNLF, as they were now allied with Aquino and the wider democratic opposition. It was a time of rejuvenation for the MNLF as Misuari toured the Middle East gaining support, and donor funds once again flowed in (C16). Meanwhile back in the Philippines the tide was surely turning against Marcos.

## SALAMAT'S RETURN: THE BIRTH OF THE MILF

In March 1984 Hashim Salamat's faction formally became a separate organisation, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), apparently seeing no hope for gaining control of the MNLF or reconciliation with Nur Misuari's faction. Further, Salamat wished to emphasise the Islamic orientation of his group by detaching it from what he saw as the left-leaning MNLF (Che Man 1990, 85).

Salamat had spent the last few years in Lahore, where he had been planning his new organisation and conceptualising its plan of action (M6). The formation of the MILF was not just the crystallisation of a new Moro group, but the arrival of a group that was different to the MNLF in two crucial aspects. First, it was not a secular organisation, but rather put Islam and the formation of an Islamic society in Mindanao at the heart of its *raison d'être* – 'Islam, not nationalism is the ideology of the organisation' (Hashim 66, 2001). Secondly, Salamat had learnt from the mistakes of the MNLF, noting the failures of the 1970s when conventional warfare strategy had been adopted, in its initial stage the MILF 'concentrated on accumulating strength by organizing mass bases in Mindanao' (Abreu 2008b, 128). Conceiving of the conflict as a long-term struggle, the MILF instigated a 20-year four-point strategy to further the Moro cause:

- 1) Islamisation
- 2) Strengthening of the organisation
- 3) Military build-up
- 4) Self-reliance

(Hashim 66, 2001; Abreu 2008b, 128).

In essence, what the MILF did was to set up camps (or in reality Islamic communities) which acted almost as embryonic Islamic states, and use these as a basis from which to grow. In these communities the MILF ran a virtual shadow government with executive, legislative and judicial structures in place, and Camp Abubakar as its central base (Abreu 2008b, 128-29). Whilst the MNLF was a much more top-down organisation reliant on foreign backing, the MILF was to be a self-reliant grass roots organisation.

## INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

Back in 1973 Marcos faced a serious international crisis, with increasing sympathy across the Muslim world threatening to tip the balance in the conflict, not least through the oil embargo. However, by the late 1970s Marco's (and Imelda's) charm offensive throughout the Muslim world had paid off in good diplomatic relations, even with the MNLF's main backer Libya. As a result of this improved image, Marcos felt less pressure to adhere to the wishes of the OIC and implement the Tripoli Agreement as envisioned. Instead he enacted it as he saw fit for his purposes, knowing that a token effort and an avoidance of the return to violence would be sufficient not to draw a strong reaction from the Muslim world (Che Man 1990, 148; Majul 1985, 84).

Earlier in 1976 Tun Datu Mustapha, the long-running Sabah Chief Minister and prominent Moro supporter, was defeated in the April elections. His successor Tun Muhammad Fuad 'indicated that he would not follow his predecessor's policy with respect to the Moros' (Che Man 1990, 140). Mustapha's fall from power was allegedly engineered from Kuala Lumpur, as the federal government became more alarmed at Mustapha's personal ambitions of creating a new state of Sabah and Sulu combined (George 1980, 326). Nevertheless, the MNLF continued to use Sabah as a base, which would imply a certain amount of continued support or tolerance of the MNLF.<sup>243</sup> Over this period Malaysian-Philippine relations continued to thaw as the two nations began working closer together through ASEAN, and in 1976 Marcos made a dramatic step towards normalising relations, stating 'that the Philippines no longer intended to press its claim to sovereignty over Sabah'<sup>244</sup> (Marcos, quoted in Samad and Bakar 1992, 558).

The revolutionary vs. conservative cleavage that came into the open after the Tripoli Agreement, with the emergence of factions within the

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<sup>243</sup> It could be speculated that the MNLF would prove useful to Malaysian in the ongoing tensions with the Philippines over Sabah, but it was not in their interests to see a separate state Moro state emerge.

<sup>244</sup> Although he did not officially drop it.

Moro separatist movement, was also replicated at the international level. The MNLF under Misuari maintained closer ties with other Muslim revolutionary countries such as Libya, Syria, Iran and Algeria (Che Man 1990, 87), whilst Salamat's MILF had the support of conservative Muslim nations such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia and Kuwait (*ibid.* 88). The MNLF also became embroiled in the wider power struggle between revolutionary and conservative Muslim countries, with Libya accusing Salamat of being an agent of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat (*ibid.* 85). In 1978 Salamat was unable to attend the ninth ICFM in Dakar, Senegal, allegedly because the Egyptian authorities had made sure he could not leave Cairo for fear of further increasing their friction with Libya (Majul 1985, 88).

Two other international events in the Muslim world would take place in this period and would change the context within which Muslim armed groups in Mindanao were operating. The first was the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This did not have a direct effect on the Muslim conflict in the sense that Iran did not become a major backer of any of the Moro groups (although they did temporally suspend Iranian oil exports to the Philippines in 1979) (*ibid.* 89); its impact was much more prosaic. It was an Islamic revolution, and the new nation was an Islamic theocratic state. One expert commented that what was important is that it showed there was 'an alternative' (C12). It gave a sense of hope that an Islamic revolution was possible. It also saw a shift in power from the Arab revolutionary to the conservative Muslim nations, a division in ideologies that was being played out in Mindanao between the MNLF and the MILF.

The second event was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent mujahideen struggle. Many young Moro Muslims were recruited and allegedly trained by the CIA for the Afghan war. The impact was not apparent at the time; it would be years later that the famous blowback would happen, with the return of former mujahideen fighters (C12). Together the two events would help drive the growth of Islamic revivalism. As Santos and Dinampo explain,

[t]he renewed impetus to bring this revival into the realm of politics and governance was provided by Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution and

reinforced by the jihad against the soviet occupation of the 1980s, which also served as a venue for practical exposure for many young Moro rebels. (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 119)

## THE NEW DAWN

In the Philippines the situation continued to disintegrate. As public discontent and foreign pressure mounted, Marcos was forced into calling snap elections. The democratic opposition rallied around Cory Aquino, Benigno's widow, as their official candidate. The MNLF also joined in, throwing its support behind Aquino in the presidential elections (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 36). Marcos unsurprisingly won the election due to massive vote-rigging, but the victory was short-lived, as the EDSA's People Power Revolution<sup>245</sup> soon swept Marcos from power. The Philippines now faced a new dawn, with Cory Aquino as president.

## PHASE 4: 1986 TO 1992 – A NEW PRESIDENT, A NEW HOPE

President Aquino makes a strong start to the peace process by agreeing to meet with MNLF leader Misuari in his home territory of Sulu. However, the hope is short-lived, as the peace process fails to gain traction. Meanwhile, the president is preoccupied with rebuilding the nation, countering a series of military coups and launching an offensive against the CPP-NPA. The ceasefire agreed with the MNLF, though, continues to stay in place.

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<sup>245</sup> After the elections there was a defection within the military, with the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) planning a coup against Marcos. As Marcos made a pre-emptive strike against the leaders - General Enrile and General Ramos, secured within Camp Crame and Camp Aquinaldo in Manila - Cardinal Sin, leader of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, called out hundreds of thousands of people to surround and protect the soldiers. Within a matter of days the Marcos regime had crumbled and Marcos was airlifted away by the US (Nadeau 2008, 94-95; Lande 1986, 143).

## THE NEW DAWN: CORAZON AQUINO COMES TO POWER

Following the EDSA People Power Revolution, Marcos was finally forced from office after 21 years in power. It was an undignified exit for the strongman of Philippine politics, as he and his family were airlifted by American forces into exile in Hawaii. Meanwhile Corazon Aquino was sworn in as president, forming a ‘revolutionary government’.

### WHY RESURRECT A DYING MOVEMENT?

Once Aquino was in power, Bert Gonzales wasted no time in lobbying the government to open talks with the MNLF. However, he immediately ran into resistance from within the administration, as the current military intelligence painted a belittling picture of the group. The military’s view was that entering into talks with the MNLF would simply resurrect a dying movement (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 37). In an attempt to dispel this belief, Misuari organised for Gonzales to travel to MNLF camps in Sulu, Baziland, Zamboanga and Lanao to witness for himself their capabilities. Gonzales videotaped his trip, and when he showed it to military and government officials on his return, including the head of the armed forces Fidel Ramos, they were taken aback by the MNLF’s firepower. Allegedly what really impressed them was the film from Sulu. Gonzales had filmed his journey along the 7 km road from the capital city Jolo to the meeting point. For the entire journey, both sides of the road were lined one abreast with armed men. Estimates put the figure at 7,000-10,000 armed fighters. (C16; C17). The next day they went to see the president.

The president and the administration were now in agreement that negotiation would be the best course of action. Aquino was keen to meet with Misuari directly, but this was problematic as Misuari would obviously not come to Manila and Aquino could not leave the country as it was so soon after the revolution and her rule was not yet assured.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> There was always a chance while she was out of the country that elements would use the opportunity to stage a coup. Aquino’s rule was to be plagued by instability and coups.

However, she told her advisors point-blank that she would be happy to meet Misuari in Mindanao (C16; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 37). Gonzales phoned Misuari to inform him of Aquino's offer to meet with him in Sulu. Initially Misuari was taken aback and rejected the suggestion as 'tantamount to surrender'. Gonzales replied, '[b]ut Sulu is your homeland, it is not Malacanang'<sup>247</sup> (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 37). Misuari acquiesced, and plans for the historic meeting were set in motion<sup>248</sup> (C16; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 37).

## THE SULU MEETING

The Aquino and Misuari meeting was a success, and set in motion a process of peace talks. Upon meeting Misuari, Aquino told him 'I am not your enemy' (Rodil 2000, 76). There were three very important outcomes of the meeting. First, both sides agreed to uphold the 'cessation of hostilities'; second, Misuari would conduct a 'process of consultations with leaders in the other provinces'; and third, the MNLF and the government would hold negotiations under the auspices of the OIC (*ibid.* 77). It also allowed Misuari to regain the initiative and to establish himself and the MNLF as the government's negotiating partner. In August, after mediation by the OIC and Muslim World League, the MNLF agreed to form a joint negotiating panel with the MILF. However, the momentum was now with Misuari, and the MNLF pushed ahead alone (Gutierrez 2000a, xxii). For the next three months Misuari toured Mindanao in a 'consultation caravan' made up of twenty big buses,<sup>249</sup> receiving overwhelming popular support in the Muslim-dominated areas. The response, though, from Christian-dominated areas such as Illigan City, was equally strong: 'they did not wish to be governed by the MNLF' (Rodil 2000, 78).

<sup>247</sup> Malacanang Palace is the official residence and workplace of Philippine presidents.

<sup>248</sup> Organising the meeting deep in Nur Misuari's MNLF heartland was a security nightmare for the Army, who were concerned over Aquino's safety. It was a very brave gesture by her (C16).

<sup>249</sup> Rodil estimates the caravan contained 1,200 people, mostly 'heavily armed Mujahideen' (Rodil 2000, 77).

## THE MNLF: WAR OR PEACE?

The situation was nearly very different. In the years immediately preceding the EDSA revolution, the MNLF was regaining its strength. When Marcos was toppled, there was a discussion within the MNLF about the best course of action. Many pressed for the MNLF to seize the opportunity and exploit the weakness in the national situation by going on the offensive to occupy territory, so it could then negotiate with the new government from a position of strength (C16; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). Strategically, this made sense: the national government was weak and the Army divided after the fall of Marcos. Furthermore, a resurgent CPP-NPA at its peak strength was posing a serious threat (Santos 2010a, 21). It appeared to be an opportune moment to strike. However, Misuari chose to give peace a chance. The MNLF, sensing a ‘friendly government’, felt that there was now a realistic chance of having the Tripoli Agreement finally implemented (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 37). This belief was strengthened by the friendships that had been established between certain members of the anti-Marcos movement and the MNLF in the preceding years.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT

The EDSA revolution and Aquino’s subsequent installation as the new president presented a unique opportunity to resolve the conflict. The sticking point of the Tripoli Agreement and of subsequent peace processes was the provision that it had to fall within the constitution of the Philippines. As such, any agreements on autonomy were subject to political approval and plebiscites to determine the areas for inclusion. However, immediately after assuming office, President Aquino established a revolutionary government under the Freedom Constitution. She abolished the previous 1973 constitution that had been in place during martial law, before setting up a constitutional commission to form a new constitution, which was ratified on 7 February 1987. In the meantime, Aquino ruled on a freedom constitution, which allowed her to exercise both executive and legislative powers until the new constitution was

ratified (Nadeau 2008, 95-96; Jubair 1999, 184; Gutierrez 2000a, xxi). This therefore presented a window of opportunity in which a peace process could be implemented outside the constitutional framework.

## THE JEDDAH ACCORD

Following the Sulu meeting, peace talks took place first in Spain later that year and then in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in January 1987 (Rodil 2000, 78; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). The talks led to the issuance of the Jeddah Accord, which highlighted the need for continued talks on the ‘proposal for the grant of full autonomy to Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Palawan subject to democratic processes’ (Rodil 2000, 79; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). However, cracks had begun to appear. By the time of the talks, the constitutional commission had completed its work and presented a draft constitution, which ‘contained extensive sections on the establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras’<sup>250</sup> (Rodil 2000, 78). This created an impasse where the government insisted on working within the framework of this new constitution. The MNLF asked the president to suspend the provisions on autonomy contained within the draft constitution, in order to remove the conditions of a plebiscite. The president declined the MNLF’s request (Rodil 2000, 78; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). The continuing talks agreed in Jeddah took place as planned, in Manila and Zamboanga, but eventually fell apart along this issue, with the MNLF insisting on full autonomy without a plebiscite. The window of opportunity closed.

## THE INSTABILITY OF THE AQUINO GOVERNMENT

There is little doubt that Aquino had the will to forge a new peace in Mindanao, but the practicalities and context of the period made delivering peace unachievable (C16).

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<sup>250</sup> The Cordilleras are a mountainous area in Northern Luzon, home to many indigenous tribes.

[W]hile Mrs. Aquino had the will to pursue peace with the secessionist rebels, she simply had no time to focus on such a tedious process. After all she was busy rebuilding the nation and warding off what would be six attempts by military rebels to overthrow her. (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38)

On the one hand, Aquino simply did not have the time necessary to devote to the peace process, given everything else she had to deal with in the aftermath of the revolution, while on the other hand, the number of the attempted coups underlines the instability and vulnerability of the administration. Many in the military were vehemently against concessions to the MNLF, and now was not a time to further anger them. In short, Aquino had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to impose a peace process outside of the constitutional process, but lacked the stability and political capital to deliver it. Although she had the opportunity and legal authority to implement an agreement, she was vulnerable to political pressure to adhere to the coming constitution (C16).

## FORMATION OF THE ARMM

As the talks failed, Aquino went ahead with implementing the process for autonomy as outlined in the new constitution. This started with the formation of the Regional Consultative Commission to assist with drafting an organic act on autonomy for Muslim Mindanao. (Rodil 2000, 80; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 40). Both the MNLF and the MILF denounced the government's moves (Gutierrez 2000a, xxii). This led to a plebiscite on 19 November 1989 to determine which areas were to be included in the autonomous region. Both the MNLF and MILF boycotted the elections (*ibid.* xxiii). The end result was the formation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), consisting of only the four Muslim-dominated provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The eight predominant Christian provinces voted overwhelmingly to be excluded from the ARMM's formation. These consisted of Davao del Sur, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Cotabato, Lanao del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga

del Norte, Basilan and Palawan (Rodil 2000, 89). It is perhaps not surprising the MNLF wanted a process without the inclusion of a plebiscite.

## RETURN OF THE POLITICAL CLANS

Prior to Marcos's declaration of martial law, the Philippines' politics had been dominated by a few oligarch families. It is often said that less than 100 families controlled the Philippines. Under martial law, the dynamic of political clan-led violence had been diminished, as Marcos had simply eliminated the political structure within which they were competing for power. However, the exit of Marcos from power also saw the return of the traditional political elites. The opposition against Marcos was actually a combination of progressive elements and traditional political elites. The new 'revolutionary' President Aquino herself came from the traditional elites (Nadeau 2008, 97). There was no leadership among the progressive forces in 1986, for Marcus obliterated a whole generation of future politicians; when political democracy returned, it was returned to the traditional elites. As a result Mindanao saw a return of the 'political kingpin'. This, coupled with the formation of the ARMM and the competition for power this created, led to the re-emergence of the old dynamic of political violence (C16; C17; A3).

## MNLF BACK TO WAR...?

The MNLF naturally rejected the formation of the ARMM. Despite this, Misuari resolved to keep an indefinite ceasefire in place. This move was to cause some division within the MNLF, with the chief of staff Melham Alam opposed to it. However, the MNLF Central Committee had ceased to exist at this stage and Misuari alone was making decisions. The last Central Committee meeting had been in 1982 (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 41). This decision to maintain an indefinite ceasefire without an ongoing peace process put the MNLF in a strange no-man's-land. As

such it began to have a debilitating effect on its troops: ‘revolutionaries don’t get tired of war,’ says Alam. ‘It is when you stop fighting that you get tired’ (quoted in *ibid.*).

## THE MILF

Whilst the MNLF remained the predominant group of the Muslim rebellion, Hashim Salamat’s MILF had continued to quietly develop and grow its military capability in accordance with Salamat’s four-point strategy, and ‘[b]y the mid-1980s, it had a firm network of at least seven major training camps, which served as bases for training and operations’ (Santos and Santos 2010, 352). The MILF was not yet in any position to challenge the supremacy of the MNLF, but it was laying secure foundations on which it would continue to develop. It also offered an alternative for MNLF commanders who had become increasingly disillusioned with Misuari’s leadership and the failure to achieve a successful peace process. The MILF maintained a more hardline position than the MNLF, remaining committed to achieving independence and rejecting the notion of autonomy.

In protest against the Jeddah Accord, which it described as a ‘cheap drama’, the MILF launched a full-scale five-day tactical offensive in Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte between 13 and 17 January. The so-called ‘five-day war’ was the MILF flexing its muscles so that it would not be ignored (Jubair 1999, 186; Santos and Rodriguez 2010, 435; Gutierrez 2000a, xxii). As Jubair explains, ‘[t]he MILF also wanted to convey the message that it was not a pushover organization, but a power to reckon with. It would always rise to the occasion in full force, if the situation warrants’ (Jubair 1999, 186).

## THE BLOWBACK: ASG

The roots of al-Qaeda have by many authors been traced to the end of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and the return of the

well-trained and radicalised mujahideen to their home regions. This process was also experienced in Mindanao as Moro former mujahideen fighters returned home. One of these was former MNLF member Janjalani, who came back to the Philippines in mid-1989 and formed the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), with the ultimate goal of ‘establishing a pure Islamic government through a necessary war to seek *kaadilan* (justice) for the Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu’ (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117). Some authors maintain that the formation of the ASG was sponsored by al-Qaeda as its contact and support group in the Philippines (*ibid.*; Santos and Santos 2010, 367; ICG 2008, 7). And it appears that it was during Janjalani’s time in Afghanistan<sup>251</sup> that he ‘made personal contacts with key al-Qaeda personalities who would later bring the ASG into the international terrorist loop’ (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117).

The importance of the Afghan connection should not be overstated; at its core, the ASG was ‘essentially a home-grown organisation’ (*ibid.*). Janjalani himself was formerly a member of the MNLF, and his new organisation was joined by many leading MNLF officials. The roots of the organisation, some argue, can be traced back to the, disenchantment within the MNLF, in particular by the younger MNLF cadres and their Moro youth base, who questioned Misuari’s unproductive 1986 peace negotiation efforts with the Philippine government. As well as questioning Misuari’s leadership, Janjalani, also believed that the MNLF had failed to appropriate Islamic concepts of jihad into the Moro struggle (C12; Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117; Santos and Santos 2010, 365). He would take a much more extreme view to the MNLF and the MILF, rejecting negotiations and declaring jihad against the Philippine government. In short, the ASG was an extremist organisation that would engage in a campaign of terrorism to achieve its ends. It was not until later that it would rise to prominence, but its foundations were being laid now.

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<sup>251</sup> One prominent expert on Janjalani, Professor Julkipli M. Wadi, rejects the idea that Janjalani ever went to Afghanistan, arguing that it was fabricated ‘to make the man appear what he is not’ (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117).

## PHASE 5: 1992 TO 1998 – PEACE AT LAST

Former head of the armed forces Fidel Ramos is elected as president in 1992, and immediately embarks on a sustained peace effort. In 1996 the GRP and MNLF sign the final implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. As part of the deal, Misuari runs for and wins the election for Governor of ARMM, backed by Ramos's political party. However, the MILF rejects the agreement and many hardliners in the MNLF move over to the MILF.

### THE WORLD HAD CHANGED

The world was a very different place in 1992 than the one the MNLF had emerged into in the early 1970s. The Cold War had ended; the 'new world order' under one superpower was emerging. The Islamic world was going through upheavals following the end of the first Gulf War. All around the world countries were making peace with old foes; there was a new sense of hope. Closer to home, the ASEAN countries were about to go through a dramatic economic surge as the 'Asian economic miracle' began to take hold (Ramos 1996, 1).

The Islamic resurgence that had been developing over the last two decades would now come to prominence. This was, as Ramos describes, a double-edged sword: 'The worldwide Islamic resurgence itself renewed a sweeping sentiment for universal harmony and solidarity, even as it also bore the incipient seeds of terrorism' (*ibid.*). It was in this period that the world saw the emergence of Islamist terrorist groups spouting a pan-Islamist ideology. This manifested itself in the Philippines with the activation of the ASG and other extremist groups, allegedly supported by a network of other Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117; Santos and Santos 2010, 367; ICG 2008, 7).

Change was on the cards too for the MNLF's most important and ardent supporter Libya, which was starting to 'feel wary and hurt by its isolation from the West' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 68). As a result of its role as a state sponsor of terrorism around the world, Libya had become an international pariah. In 1992 the UN Security Council imposed

sanctions following the involvement of Libyans in the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie in Scotland. This included a 'flight ban' that, in effect, emptied Libya's airports and cut it off from the rest of the world' (*ibid.*). Although it would be many years later that Libya would begin to return to the international community, it perhaps begins to explain the change from armourer and financier to 'doggedly determined peace maker' (*ibid.*). Crucially, Libya still retained its power of persuasion over the MNLF. As Ramos summed up,

[i]n line with its role as a peacemaker, Libya wished to participate actively in packaging a solution to the conflict. At the same time, the MNLF continued to somehow be beholden to Colonel Khaddafi [sic] and was evidently prepared to accept reasonable suasion to temper its stand in future negotiations. (Ramos 1996, 11)

Similarly, the position of the OIC had been transformed: 'After keeping the flames burning for the MNLF for more than 20 years, the OIC also finally became weary of this never-ending conflict' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 67). It adopted a posture that was less militant, but more reasonable and realistic in the eyes of the Philippines (Ramos 1996, 21). Ramos suggests that there are perhaps two reasons behind this. The first was that the OIC members had not believed for a while that there was any 'widespread or systematic oppression of Muslims in the Philippines.' The second was that at the time the OIC was busy dealing with so many other serious conflicts that the events in Mindanao looked like a relatively minor problem in comparison. At this time the OIC was tackling situations in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Bosnia, Somalia, Sudan and, since the fall of the USSR, the new Central Asian republics. As a result the OIC choose to regionalise the Mindanao Conflict under the Committee of Six chaired by Indonesia (*ibid.*; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 67).

Previously, the Mindanao question had been the responsibility of a Quadripartite Committee set up in 1973 (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 62). Strikingly, this committee did not contain a single Asian nation. At the Dakar summit in 1991, the Muslim ASEAN nations pushed for this to change with the inclusion of Bangladesh and Indonesia, creating the

OIC Ministerial Committee of Six (Ramos 1996, 3; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 68). Indonesia would play its role as an honest broker with distinction, and prove crucial in delivering the peace process. Indonesia was a perfect choice. It had never been involved in the conflict and had not backed any of the groups like many Muslim nations had. Furthermore, it had had plenty of experience in separatist insurgencies within its own territory, and as a close neighbour it had a personal stake in delivering regional security.

## THE RAMOS VISION

The election of Fidel Ramos as president in 1992 brought a new opportunity for peace. Importantly, Ramos would have the necessary understanding, determination and political capital to deliver the process. He had a clear vision of the peace he wanted to create across the Philippines, including Mindanao. Most importantly, he was determined to sign a peace deal, and this determination drove the process (C14). He once said that, given the choice, he wanted to be remembered as a peacemaker when he stepped down (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 43). To Ramos, ‘peace was priceless’. He was thoroughly engaged throughout the peace process and always available to those involved (C15<sup>252</sup>).

Early on he established the National Unification Commission (NUC) to formulate a process that would lead to a lasting peace (Rodil 2000, 100). But even before he became president, Ramos was making the first tentative steps. During his election campaign he made a secret trip to Libya to discuss peace in Mindanao with the MNLF’s main supporter (Ramos 1996, 4). He understood how important it was to hit the ground running; that for the process to have a chance to work it needed to be started at the beginning of his term in office. As one of the peace negotiators recalled, ‘we were really lucky that the President … was really on the ball’ (C15).

Alongside his determination, President Ramos had a deep understanding of both Mindanao and the MNLF. As a career soldier he knew

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252 C15: former negotiator, interviewed in Manila on 23 March 2011.

the Muslim rebellion well. Importantly, he understood the dynamics of the MNLF and the predicament of Nur Misuari, who was ‘trying very hard to perform a balancing act in front of three audiences: his internal constituency within the MNLF, the whole Mindanao community and Member-states of the OIC’ (Ramos 1996, 65). Ramos also had the political capital to make the deal work. When he was elected he was hugely popular. On the one hand he was a military man, which perhaps gave him greater latitude in pursuing peace, and on the other hand he was the hero of the EDSA revolution, which had brought down Marcos. Early on he was also able to resolve the issues that had led to six coup attempts under Aquino, creating the stability necessary to pursue peace (*ibid.* 70).

### THE MNLF – WHY NEGOTIATE?

The MNLF-GRP ceasefire had more or less held since it was instigated between Misuari and President Aquino in 1986. Neither the MNLF nor the government had given the order to launch an offensive since then (Ramos 1996, 9). When President Ramos came to office there were those who were critical of his policy of engaging with the MNLF. They claimed that ‘the Government had unnecessarily given status or prominence to an organization that had already lost steam politically and militarily’ and that ‘if the problem were simply ignored, the MNLF would die a natural death’ (*ibid.* 22). However, as Ramos points out, despite being relatively inactive since the meeting of Misuari and Aquino in Sulu in 1986, the MNLF’s armed strength had not diminished. In 1990, they were down to a strength of 13,000 fighters and 8,000 firearms, still a somewhat formidable force (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 41). Similarly, the MNLF had kept up the pressure on the diplomatic front by waging a propaganda battle against the Philippine government. This had succeeded in marginally affecting the Philippines relations with Islamic nations. He also notes that ‘[t]he Exploratory Talks had revived the MNLF in a positive way, because now they had begun to side with the Government against terrorists, as a demonstration of their sincerity in the peace process’ (Ramos 1996, 22).

As the MNLF responded positively to Ramos's overture of peace, the question has to be asked: why did they want to negotiate? There are numerous possible reasons; in reality it was probably a combination of many, if not all of, the following reasons. Firstly, some argue that Misuari was simply tired; the struggle had been going for more than twenty years by now, and 'he saw the peace process as the only way to retire gracefully from the battlefield' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 44). It was not just Misuari who was tired after twenty years; many of his troops were perhaps just as tired of fighting. Secondly, Misuari had no option but to grasp the chance of peace with both hands for his own political survival. Within the MNLF's ranks some senior commanders were agitating for him to be ousted after the failure of the Aquino peace process (*ibid.*). Thirdly, there was continued pressure from the OIC, and other Islamic countries such as Libya. The MNLF had always been overly dependent on outside supporters for help. As the OIC embraced Ramos's peace initiative, the MNLF had no option but to follow (Ramos 1996, 26). Fourthly, the MNLF was in a race against time to deliver peace, as more militant armed groups such as the MILF and ASG were gaining popularity and could potentially at some point threaten the MNLF's leadership. Finally, perhaps the MNLF felt it needed to 'establish a legitimate transitional structure that would institutionalize its ascendancy and power versus traditional leadership groups' (*ibid.*).

## THE PROCESS AND THE DEAL

The core of Ramos's strategy was to bring the MNLF back into the political mainstream through a combination of concessions and accommodations, creating the space within which a lasting peace could be forged, what Vitug and Gloria describe as 'co-option with grace' (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 43). He was prepared to accommodate the MNLF in many forms as long as it was within the constitution, including creating government offices for it or appointing MNLF leaders to various positions. However, he was also prepared to go further and operate outside of the bounds of government, offering the MNLF's commanders

the backing of his political party, Lakas-NUCD, and bankrolling their campaigns for the next ARMM elections.

The quest for peace started even before Ramos had won the election. By 1993 the formal talks had begun under the supervision of the OIC Committee of Six chaired by Indonesia. The starting point for the talks was the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement. One innovative change in the negotiations this time was that the government allowed the MNLF to 'tap Muslims in government service to join as member of various MNLF committees' (Rodil 2000, 111). This was described as 'an intelligent move of the President', for these Muslim professionals were able to work with the MNLF to temper their demands to fit within the laws of the land (C15).

The stumbling blocks again came in the familiar area of the constitution. Unlike Aquino, who ruled initially as a revolutionary president, Ramos was firmly bound by the constitution. The crucial issue was the formation of a provisional government as described by the Tripoli Agreement. The MNLF wanted the creation of a provisional government which they would head, and which would implement the autonomous region. However, for the government this posed two problems. Firstly, the ARMM was already in place and could not just be dismantled to make way for a provisional government. Secondly, under the current constitution the president did not have the powers to appoint a provisional government, unlike Marcos when he signed the Tripoli Agreement during martial law. In the eyes of the government, in order to keep within the constitution, the creation of any provisional government would automatically trigger elections (Ramos 1996, 34; Rodil 2000, 103, 119). The resolution to this issue was the formation of a 'transitional implementing structure and mechanism' (Rodil 2000, 103). This was manifested in the formation of the Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). This was to be chaired by Misuari, and would lay the groundwork for the new autonomous region which was to be created in 1999. In addition the MNLF conceded to a plebiscite to determine the areas to be included in the new autonomous region (*ibid.* 121).

The formation of the SPCPD was only one side of the deal. Although not technically part of the negotiations, but in parallel with

the negotiations,<sup>253</sup> the government made an irresistible offer: for Misuari to be their candidate for in the forthcoming elections for the Governor of ARMM. ‘Misuari would run unopposed: all his elections expenses would be shouldered by the ruling party at that time, Lukas-NUCD; and seats for the ARMM council would be shared equally by the MNLF and Lukas’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 47). As a result Misuari would be both governor of the ARMM and Chair of the SPCPD at the same time. As Rodil concludes,

ARMM would provide the MNLF with the ‘Provisional Government’ that they wanted so much, and the SPCPD would be the mechanism to enable them to make their presence felt in the rest of the 14 provinces and nine cities outside of the ARMM. (Rodil 2000, 121)

Misuari duly ran for and won the ARMM elections. Part of the thinking was that as chairman of the SPCPD he would not be wielding real power, and that his relationship when working with elected leaders such as mayors and governors would be enhanced if he was also an elected leader (C15). The decision remained a contentious one; there were those from within the MNLF who saw this as co-option gone too far, and those that felt it better for another MNLF commander to run as Governor. They feared that Misuari would get bogged down in the day-to-day running of the ARMM and not be able to focus on the SPCPD (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 49; C15; M7).

## WHAT TO DO WITH THE MNLF FIGHTERS?

Perhaps the most contentious issue – what to do with the MNLF’s significant armed fighters – was left towards the end of the negotiations.

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253 The Lukas-NUCD party provided an almost parallel structure for what was not possible through official channels. During the peace process, Ramos’ Executive Secretary Ruben Torres drew P3.5 million from the Lukas-NUCD party funds to help finance Misuari and his men during the negotiations in Mindanao. ‘[T]he money came in the form of cold cash Torres handed out to Misuari’s men’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 52). Asked ‘why get funds from the party?’ Torres answered, ‘[b]ecause party funds are not subject to audit’ (*ibid.*).

There were those, especially in the AFP, who argued that the agreement meant the MNLF should now surrender their weapons. The MNLF, for their part, ruled out the idea of laying down their weapons. They ‘would not countenance the very thought of it because, if they surrendered their firearms, there was no way they could still face their people afterwards. That would have been the ultimate humiliation’ (Rodil 2000, 121). The resolution came with the agreement to integrate MNLF fighters into the AFP and PNP. The last-minute agreement was that 7,500 MNLF members would be integrated; 5,750 into the AFP and 1,750 into the PNP. Misuari had pushed for double that number of his troops to be integrated, but the reality was that it was simply a means of employing his former fighters in the new time of peace, as one of Misuari’s advisers expounded: ‘These men never knew anything outside handling guns all their lives. Where will we put them?’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 57). The question of ‘demobilisation’ of the MNLF fighters that were not integrated was never properly resolved, in that there was no demobilisation; there was no surrender of arms. In fact, the MNLF kept its structure, and used it to deliver the development work that would come after the peace agreement (C14).

The question over the numbers to be integrated highlighted one of the more practical issues of making peace. What to do with the former combatants? As Vitug and Gloria comment,

[w]hat was apparent to Misuari – when he agreed to the SPCPD concept and to the integration of his troops into the police and the military – was employment. He was more interested in how many posts the MNLF would occupy in these twin processes rather than the power that they could exercise to push for their own programs’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 56).

While the Accord provided for the integration of MNLF fighters, it did not provide for disarmament. Those being integrated were invited to hand in weapons under the ‘Bring a Rifle and Improve Your Livelihood’ programme, but this hardly made a dent in the number of weapons held by the MNLF (Santos 2010c, 175; Santos and Santos 2010, 337-8).

## THE OTHER SIDE: THE NON-MUSLIMS OBJECT

Any peace agreement was going to have an impact not just on the Muslim population but on the whole Mindanao population. In 1970, the Muslims had only accounted for 30.44% of the total population of Mindanao; by 1990 this was down to 26.89% (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 55). Few areas were almost exclusively Muslim, with the vast majority mixed. Many in the non-Muslim communities could not identify with or felt violated by the proposed plans. As Rodil commented,

[i]t can be said that the population was obviously divided: the Muslims overwhelmingly for it and the Christians against. Even the bishops and other church dignitaries who earlier approved of it [SPCPD] had to change their tone for fear of being alienated from their own flock. (Rodil 2000, 118)

As the peace plans came out into the open, there was a ferocious reaction from the Christian community. ‘Christian politicians raised hell over the SPCPD, staged protest rallies, and warned of dire consequences. It’s the typical siege mentality’ (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 56). There was a feeling in the Christian communities, especially in the border towns, that the government had bent over backwards to give concessions to a group that had committed atrocities against their communities (C14). Ramos succinctly described the situation:

Just as the negotiations had a centripetal effect in pulling social and political forces together, there were also centrifugal forces working in the opposite direction. The political opposition seemed to be constantly placing roadblocks to the successful settlement of the problem, as it urged caution on the part of government, and catered to the line of disgruntled Mindanao leaders that the negotiations were a sell-out. Some Mindanao politicians for fear of prejudicing their vested interests, also vehemently fought a negotiated settlement, advocating the medieval military solution to resolve matters. Others, in ignorance of the attendant complexities and exploited by irresponsible leaders, started to garrison themselves in enclaves. (Ramos 1996, 76)

It is a tribute to Ramos's determination that he did not allow this predictable reaction to derail the peace process.

### MEANWHILE, THE MILF

Throughout this period a subtle rebalancing of power was taking place within the Moro Rebellion; the MNLF was in decline while the MILF was in ascension. The MILF had remained outside the peace process, watching from a cautious distance to see what the outcome would be. It continued to attract disaffected MNLF hardliners opposed to the peace process, a movement that accelerated once the peace deal was signed, and continued to do so afterwards as many became disappointed at what peace had brought: 'With the unravelling of Misuari's leadership, the MNLF, the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, and the ARMM, the MILF took over as the main standard bearer of Moro aspirations' (Santos 2010b, 76). This shift in power from the MNLF to the MILF also represented a shift along all three of the cleavages that had divided the MNLF in the past. A shift from secular to Islamic, from revolutionary to conservative, and from the Tausūg tribe to the Maguindanao and Maranao tribes; and geographically from the Sulu Archipelago to central Mindanao.

In the meantime the MILF continued with their four-point, twenty-year programme for building up their strength. At the heart of their strategy was the development of their camps as Islamic communities, or even embryonic Islamic states. The centre of this was their main base, Camp Abubakar. Later the MILF would open the camp to visitors to see the 'MILF program of a micro-Islamic state'. It was essentially building a parallel state within its own areas. This included 'establishing committees from barangay<sup>254</sup> to district levels for political matters and corresponding structures in judicial matters. Barangay Reconciliation Committees to District Shariāh Courts made up the MILF structures' (Abreu 2008b, 128). The MILF summarises in its own words: 'after more than two decades of hard struggle, it [MILF] managed to organize the

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<sup>254</sup> A Barangay is the equivalent of a village. It is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines.

people into committees that functioned as parallel governments in several provinces, towns and villages in Mindanao' (Hashim 2001, 65).

The protracted nature of the MILF's struggle was highlighted by the addition in 1997 of a 50-year programme, to run from 2001-2050. This programme built on the four previous points, but also added:

- 1) To establish justice for all
- 2) To establish full freedom and respect of human rights
- 3) To overcome criminality, poverty and ignorance
- 4) To ensure equality for all
- 5) To promote health and sanitation
- 6) To overcome graft and corruption
- 7) To preserve the patrimony and to protect the environment

(Abdulhaqq 2001, ix; Hashim 2001, 66).

In 1999 the MILF would also enter into a tactical alliance with the NDFP, the political umbrella of the leftist revolutionary movement, including the CPP-NPA. Due to the ideological differences of the two sides it had taken some time for them to enter a formal relationship. However, this relationship has yet to develop beyond mutual recognition and local tactical assistance to a more strategic alliance (Abreu 2008b, 135; Santos and Santos 2010, 353).

#### AN ENIGMA WRAPPED UP IN A RIDDLE: THE ROLE OF THE ASG

The ASG remained the smallest of the main Moro separatist organisations, rising in strength from 650 fighters in the early 1990s to almost 3,000 following the Sipadan hostage crisis in 2000<sup>255</sup> (Santos and Santos 2010, 368). The group began to make headlines with a series of bombings and kidnappings in 1993. In an infamous attack in 1995 the ASG ransacked the town of Ipil on the Zamboanga peninsula, killing many civilians. This was a major blow to peace (Santos and Santos 2010, 374; Ramos 1996, 61-62).

<sup>255</sup> In April 2000 the ASG kidnapped 21 people from a remote island resort in eastern Malaysia, including 10 foreign tourists (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 126). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/apr/24/malaysia>.

As the ASG evolved and grew in strength, exactly what the group was and how it should be defined became increasingly hard:

Aside from being labelled ‘international terrorists’, they have also been described as ‘Muslim bandits’, social bandits, ‘outlaws with an agenda’... ‘new entrepreneurs in violence... neither rebel nor revolutionary’... a ‘revolutionary group’ fighting for an Islamic state... a ‘splinter group’ or ‘dirty tricks’ division of the MNLF or MILF, or even the AFP, and a ‘CIA creation’. (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 115)

In reality the ASG has become an enigma, with both sides projecting a view of the organisation which serves their purpose best. On the one side both the MNLF and MILF claim that the group is infiltrated by the military, and is exploited for ulterior motives such as to discredit and to give a bad name to the Muslim separatists, giving justification for a military solution or to derail peace negotiations. On the other side, the military accuses the MNLF and MILF of using the group for fundraising and as an unofficial “dirty-tricks department” of Moro separatism’ (Gutierrez 2000c, 354).

What exactly the ASG was is not the point; what is more important is how its image was used by others to further their own agendas, and in particular the indirect role that the ASG would have on the MNLF-GRP peace process. ‘Intentionally or not, the ASG threat pressured both President Fidel V. Ramos and MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari to accelerate their peace negotiations’ (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 122). Some authors argue that Misuari was pressured into seizing the opportunity for peace to fend off the potential pull that the ASG might have on the MNLF’s rank and file. Others argue that the ASG served the MNLF’s interests by adding confusion to the situation and forcing Ramos to speed up negotiations. The MNLF was able to use the ASG to highlight the problem, and Misuari could present himself as the only person capable of solving that problem; hence the government should negotiate with him. In reality the ASG was exploited by both sides, with the MNLF and the government using the ASG card against each other (C12; Santos and Dinampo 2010, 122). This was the ASG’s most important role in the conflict.

## ENACTING PEACE

On 2 September 1996, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed the historic peace agreement with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) (Gutierrez 2000b, 225). Peace was to be implemented in a two-phase process. In phase one, the SPCPD was formed, chaired by Misuari, which would supervise the Southern Philippines Zone for Peace and Development (SZOPAD). In this period, autonomy was meant to be increased and plebiscites held to decide the areas for inclusion. In parallel, Misuari was elected Governor of the ARMM, which covered only a part of SZOPAD. Phase two would follow implementation of Republic Act 9054, with the formation of a more permanent autonomous arrangement (Ferrer 2006, 474). If all went to plan, a new, more powerful and enlarged autonomous region would be in place by 1999.

However, it was not long before the process ran into difficulties. The transitional structures were described as 'essentially powerless and unable to make any noticeable impact' (Gutierrez 2000b, 226). Furthermore, MNLF secretary-general Muslimin Sema, who was appointed director of the SPCPD Secretariat, describes it as 'a practically useless body' (*ibid.*). In general the structures were not well set up, and their position in relation to other regional political structures remained unclear. Meanwhile Congress voted to deny them funding, making them entirely reliant on the president, who had to scrounge for money from discretionary items from within his budget (*ibid.*).

## EPILOGUE

### DIFFERENT GROUP, SAME CONFLICT: THE MILF CONTINUES

When the 1996 peace agreement was announced, the MILF distanced itself from it, but said it would not stand in the way of peace. Ramos formed a new negotiating panel to start talks with the MILF. Meanwhile the group held a huge 'Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly' as a show of strength in December near Cotabato, where

it reaffirmed its commitment to independence (Gutierrez 2000a, xxvi; Santos and Santos 2010, 347). This was 'organized to feel the pulse of the Bangsamoro people vis-à-vis the resolution of the problem in Mindanao and Sulu' (Jubair 1999, 261). Over a million people are reported to have attended, pointing to the significant support the group was fostering. Future assemblies in 2001 and 2005 were, according to the MILF, attended by 2.6 and nearly 3 million people respectively (Santos and Santos 2010, 347).

However, in early 1997 violence broke out between the MILF and the AFP in the Buldun area, and the talks were suspended. In June the AFP launched a major offensive against the MILF; but the following month a cessation of hostilities was agreed between the two sides (Gutierrez 2000a, xxvi). This was the first major offensive since Marcos.

The International Crisis Group, in a report at the time, provided a very succinct analysis of the MILF's overall strategic thinking:

Throughout 1997-1999, ceasefire monitoring mechanisms were gradually strengthened, while the MILF pushed for recognition of its camps. In the absence of international mediation, the rebel panel saw this as a form of embryonic Bangsamoro sovereignty, providing symbolic equality with the government prior to discussion of a comprehensive settlement. The camps were also at the centre of the MILF's very real political, religious and military power, and the ceasefire machinery provided them with an additional line of defence [...] For the government, the purpose was to define the boundaries of MILF influence so as to hold the group accountable should lawlessness or clashes occur. For the MILF, however, each acknowledgement was another step towards de facto belligerency, and its panel insisted on completion of the process as a precondition for formal talks. (ICG 2004, 6)

## GOODBYE RAMOS, HELLO ESTRADA AND BACK TO WAR

After all the success of reaching a peace agreement with the MNLF, it seems sad that the last year of Ramos's presidency was marred by

the first major offensives against a Moro group since Marcos. Ramos's successor to the presidency, Joseph E. Estrada, was somewhat of a hawk to Ramos's dove. He had been elected in an 'electoral alliance with politicians who opposed the peace agreement' (Gutierrez 2000a, xxvi). In the cessation of hostilities agreement reached under Ramos, a number of the MILF's major camps had been 'recognised'. However, as Abreu describes, 'the hawkish clique within the Philippine military was naturally wary of this development, equating such recognition with the virtual granting of status of belligerency to the Islamist forces' (Abreu 2008b, 129).

As the Estrada administration became alarmed that the MILF camps covered significant areas of municipalities, it 'decided not only to reverse on the ground the two joint acknowledgements of the seven MILF major camps already made in 1999, but also to change the reality of all 46 identified MILF fixed camps on the ground' (Santos 2005, 13). To achieve this, President Estrada launched an 'all-out-war' against the MILF. Mindanao had not seen violence like this since the early 1970s; 738,000 people were displaced due to the conflict in the heartland of Maguindanao, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte (Santos and Santos 2010, 359). Despite the widespread destruction, the 'all-out-war' changed little; after putting up stiff resistance, the MILF fighters simply melted away with their weapons. The camps were soon back in their hands after the war had ended. The MILF strength of around 12,000 fighters was little affected (Santos 2010b, 77).

## ONE LAST REBELLION

Due to the various crises that had been faced by the Philippines, including the impeachment of President Estrada for corruption, the implementation of Republic Act 9054 became delayed and did not come into law until 2001. As a result, the length of the SPCPD and Misuari's term as Governor of the ARMM had to be extended by legislation. Following the Act, a plebiscite was held in August 2001 to decide on the areas to be included in the autonomous region. This resulted in

expanded coverage, with the original four provinces of ARMM – Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur – being joined by Basilan Province (excluding its capital city Isabela) and Marawi City (Ferrer 2006, 475). On 24 November 2001, the elections for a new set of officials for the autonomous region were set to take place, excluding the post of Governor, with Misuari seeing his term extended until September 2002 (*ibid.*).

There were also problems stirring within the MNLF's ranks. As the peace deal failed to deliver, many MNLF members continued to move sideways into the MILF. Misuari's leadership also came in for criticism as the ARMM continued to be corrupt and inefficiently run. As a result of tensions that had been brewing for a while, the MNLF split. The so-called MNLF Council of 15, constituting 15 senior leaders, had broken away earlier in 2001 from the Misuari-led MNLF. Misuari's frustration at what he saw as the failure to implement the agreement, along with the feeling that he was being 'eased out' of his positions of authority in the ARMM and the MNLF, led him to rally the troops and lead his men on one last rebellion (Santos 2010b, 75). On 19 November 2001, Misuari and his men launched simultaneous assaults in Jolo and Zamboanga. The rebellion was short-lived and Misuari fled to Malaysia, where he was arrested and extradited back to the Philippines – quite a change in attitude for the nation that had first backed Misuari and his men way back in 1969.

## STILL THE LAWLESS SOUTH: THE NEW ENTREPRENEURS OF VIOLENCE

Eric Gutierrez has described five types of violence in Muslim Mindanao. The first is what appeared 'random, spontaneous violence' that accompanied native-settler conflicts in this frontier region. The second is 'more organised and syndicated violence' led by a warlord or strongman. The third is 'revolutionary and political violence' by groups fighting for a political purpose. The fourth is state violence. In addition to this he identifies a fifth kind, a new trend in violence, which appears ironically to have gelled in the wake of the 1996 MNLF-GRP peace accord:

[It] initially appears to be a form of local political competition in a region where state control and authority are weakest and where the revolutionary movement has failed to develop a symbol under which armed men of different persuasions outside the state will rally under. As such, it begins to manifest itself as Moro-against-Moro violence. (Gutierrez 2000c, 357)

Early examples of this were the bloody rivalries for elected office; however, this competition has mutated into turf wars to control lucrative illegal enterprises such as money laundering, extortion, smuggling, illegal logging and kidnapping, creating an environment where such criminal gangs were given the space to operate by revolutionary organisations, warlords or military, as long as they ultimately ‘exercise control of such violence’ (*ibid.*).

Those that are successful in the five types of violence Gutierrez describes as ‘entrepreneurs of violence’. In the context of Moro areas, a reputation and capacity for violence becomes a powerful form of social capital, which when ‘used wisely, can provide such an entrepreneur the security and power that engenders a sense of control in a highly unstable and volatile situation’ (*ibid.* 358). As such, an individual’s reputation for violence becomes a resource which they can exploit themselves or put at the disposal of others (*ibid.* 359).

## THE FUTURE OF THE ARMM

In the elections for the ARMM that followed Misuari’s rebellion, Parouk Hussein, former MNLF Foreign Minister and now Chairman of the MNLF Council of 15, was elected Governor. However, in the subsequent elections in 2005, those associated with the MNLF lost the race for governorship and most of their seats in the legislative assembly. The governorship was instead won by ‘Datu Zaldy Ampatuan, scion of a powerful Muslim political clan’ (Ferrer 2006, 475). The situation had gone full circle; power was now back in the hands of the political clans.

The Ampatuans were one of the most powerful political clans in Mindanao, enjoying patronage from Manila, and a heavily armed private

army of more than 2,000 men.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, '[t]he family also took advantage of the conflict between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to position itself as a loyal counterinsurgency force' (ICG 2009, 1). In 2009 the family gained notoriety for their alleged involvement in the massacre of 57 civilians, including many members of a rival political family and thirty journalists.<sup>257</sup>

Mindanao has again become increasingly marred by violence between competing political clans. Two quotes taken from interviews with two long-term senior MNLF officials on the current state of affairs in Mindanao are insightful:

'In the ARMM, sad to say, there are elements at the top of the hierarchy who are against stability, who are against peace, for their own selfish agenda.' (M7)

'Some people are contented with the lack of rule of law, because with that they can break the law, make their own rule, the rule of guns and goons, and get away with it... Instability is a heaven for corruption... some people want war to continue, so they can make business' (M8<sup>258</sup>).

### PART 3: ANALYSIS OF THE MORO REBELLION

This section will analyse the most important factors present in the conflict that have influenced the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation over the lifespan of the conflict. The analytical framework that was outlined in Chapter One will be applied to the Moro Rebellion for this analysis. The framework was constructed through

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<sup>256</sup> In 2006, Mrs Arroyo issued an executive order legalising the informal private "armies" being kept by families like the Ampatuans, enabling them to work alongside the regular army - but by extension legitimising their use as a means of local control'. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11139653> (last accessed 21 June 2013).

<sup>257</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11225151> (last accessed 21 June 2013).

<sup>258</sup> M8: Moro rebel civilian adviser, interviewed in Davao City on 11 March 2011.

a process of comparative research on the three conflicts in this project, and is now being applied retrospectively onto each of the three conflicts.

The analytical framework is divided into a trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors, with each containing a series of key factors:

**CONTEXT:** Social cleavages; popular support; grievances; local politics; national politics; international politics

**STATE ACTORS:** State action – coercive force; state action – policy solution; state capacity; strong/weak government

**NON-STATE ACTORS:** Strategy of armed groups; capacity of armed groups; factionalisation; criminalisation

## CONTEXT

### Social cleavages

At the heart of the conflict was the cleavage between the Muslim and Christian communities. However, even this was not straightforward. There was a difference between the massive influx of Christian settlers that had arrived in the years before the conflict ignited and those Christian communities that had been there for generations. The Lanao and Cotabato regions had endured a recent massive influx of Christian settlers, and subsequently experienced dramatic sectarian violence.

The other major social cleavage, across the whole community, is that of class, essentially between rich and poor. This transcends religious social cleavages. As McKenna argues, there were class divisions to the violence along three lines: between Muslim and Christian elites, ordinary Christians and Muslim elites, and ordinary Muslims and Christian elites (McKenna 1998, 150). The interplay between class and religious cleavages is complex, and the direction of causality is not always clear. Some authors argue that the foundations of the conflict are essentially

class-based, but that this has been misdirected into a sectarian conflict (Ahmad 2000a, 18).

The Muslim community was equally as divided by cleavages. Probably the most important one for the emergence of the conflict was the formation of a Muslim counter-elite to challenge the monopoly of power enjoyed by the traditional Muslim elites. The roots of the counter-elite are found in two separate education programmes that provided scholarships for young Moros to attend university in Cairo and Manila, giving the first opportunity for those from non-elite backgrounds to attend university. In the process this created a new educated elite that was also exposed to the political activism of their universities (McKenna 1998, 138-44; C12; M6). Previously Moro society had been essentially a feudal society ruled over by the aristocratic class of datus and sultans (Ahmad 2000a, 10; George 1980, 98-100). This aristocracy class had, in practice, colluded with the national powers in Manila in order to maintain their privileged position. Manila ruled Muslim Mindanao through a patronage system that co-opted the aristocracy (McKenna 1998, 138). The vested interests of the datu class, which maintained the monopoly of leadership over the Muslim masses, meant that they would never lead a rebellion that would challenge too vigorously the status quo. It was only with the emergence of the counter-elite that this became a possibility.

Within this new counter-elite that went on to form the MNLF and lead the rebellion there were three main cleavages that drove the internal dynamics and led to the fracture of the movement. The first was the revolutionary versus conservative. The former saw the rebellion as not just about fighting for independence but also consisting of a social revolutionary agenda. They were against the feudal set-up of Moro society, and saw the traditional leaders as collaborators with Manila in oppressing the Muslim masses (Che Man 1990, 86; George 1980, 202). The conservative wing, by contrast, which contained many scions of the traditional leaders, was against the corrupt vested interests of the traditional leaders that had kept the Muslims under Manila's control. However, they did not want a social revolution: they wanted an independent Muslim Mindanao, but one that maintained its traditional social construction.

The second and related cleavage is that of secular versus Islamic. The MNLF under Misuari was a secular organisation; for him, the ideology of the groups was nationalism. Contrary to his critics' beliefs, Misuari was not a communist and hence against religion, including Islam; he was a devout Muslim, as were most of the MNLF, but the driving force of the organisation was nationalism. The MILF under Hashim Salamat in contrast saw Islam as their ideology and not nationalism (Hashim 2001, 66). The formation of an Islamic society was their leading objective. And later the ASG would be motivated to create a pure Islamic government, although with a much more extremist interpretation.

The third cleavage was that of tribe. The Muslims of Mindanao have never been a heterogeneous community, but rather one formed by a number of different tribes, which in the past had often been at war with each other. There are a number of Muslim tribes, but the three major tribes are the Tausūg, Maguindanao and the Maranao (Ahmad 2000a, 9). It was a significant achievement of the original MNLF to form an alliance across all the major tribes to fight for independence. However, later, the splits along tribal lines began to show. Misuari was a Tausūg from Sulu, and after the post-Tripoli Agreement splits, the MNLF became increasingly dominated by Tausūgs. Even before the splits, there had been friction caused by accusations of favouritism to the Tausūgs within the MNLF regarding distribution of supplies (Che Man 1990, 83). It also hampered the MNLF's strategic operability, for it was hard for it to send reinforcement troops from Sulu to mainland Mindanao because of the historic friction between the tribes (Ahmad 2000a, 9). Hashim Salamat was a Maguindanao and Dimas Pundato was a Maranao, and their factions, the MILF and Reformists respectively, were similarly dominated by their respective tribes. The first two cleavages also had some tribal foundations. Both the mainlanders were seen as having a stronger traditional leadership structure and being more religious. Some argued that unlike those in Sulu, these communities had felt threatened by the influx of settlers and clung more strongly to their traditional identities (C12). The population in Sulu was also much more impoverished and unequal in comparison to the mainland; hence the revolutionary ideology was more likely to be appealing.

## Popular support

There is little doubt that the Moro Rebellion has enjoyed significant popular support from within the Moro community over the duration of the conflict. However, quantifying that support is much more complicated, as there are many overlapping and competing loyalties that bind society together and drive participation, such as tribe, clan, village, kin or political loyalties. It is hard to decipher what is popular support for the Moro rebels and what appears support but is driven by other loyalties. Furthermore, there is a difference between support for independence or autonomy for Moro regions, and support for an armed struggle to achieve it. An indication of the level of sustained support can be gained from the level of attendance in the MILF's Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly mobilisations in 1996, 2001 and 2005, which attracted respectively over 1 million, 2.6 million and nearly 3 million people (Santos and Santos 2010, 347).

Popular support, though, has had a number of direct impacts on the dynamics of the conflicts. First of all, the rapid escalation of the conflict during the second phase would not have been possible without the widespread support of the Moro communities. The MNLF went, within a few years, from a few hundred cadets to being able to launch a full-blown uprising against the Philippine government. Such a large-scale uprising would not have been possible without widespread support.

Secondly, although both received significant foreign support, both the MNLF and MILF in the end relied on the support of the local populations to survive (Santos and Rodriguez 2010, 428). As such the continued support of the Moro communities has allowed the Moro rebel groups to sustain the conflict over time. If the MNLF had not enjoyed significant support, it is doubtful that it could have maintained its strength for such a long time. It was ultimately the military strength and popular support the MNLF maintained that ensured that the Philippine government would return to the negotiating table in the mid-1980s and again in the 1990s. The popular support enjoyed by the group has ensured that they can sustain the conflict, and will not simply wither and die.

Thirdly, the widespread support for Moro separatism, whether

independence or autonomy, transcends any of the militant groups. Following the 1996 MNLF-GRP peace accord, significant support passed on to the MILF as it rose to prominence as the standard-bearer of Moro separatism (Santos 2010b, 76). The crucial aspect of this is that groups are not the sustaining dynamic of the conflict; there is instead a groundswell of grievance and popular support for Muslim separatism that sustains the groups. As such a Punjab-style solution that eliminated the militant groups would not work here. Ultimately only a political solution will work.

Finally, the competition between the different Moro rebel groups played a role in the dynamics of the conflict. One of the factors driving the MNLF to make the 1996 peace accord work was the fear that if they failed again to deliver a peace agreement, they would bleed support to the more radical positions of the MILF and to a certain degree the ASG (Ramos 1996, 26). The MNLF had chosen to maintain its 1986 ceasefire despite the failure of the peace talks; if it did not deliver peace soon, there was the very real possibility of losing support to the other groups that argued for the continuation of the armed struggle.

### Grievances

At the heart of the Moro conflict is a question of identity. Many (if not the majority) of the Moro community do not identify with the Philippine national identity, but rather see themselves as a distinct Moro nation. As such the central grievance is political: the denial of the right to self-determination. However, this is not the only grievance; there are a number of other grievances that have driven the conflict and, in the process, reinforced the desire for self-determination. These fall into four broad categories.

The first is the question of violation of human rights: essentially that the human rights of the Moros are less respected by the state than those of other Philippine citizens. This was brought into close relief with the Jabidah Massacre and also the biased behaviour of the security forces in favour of the Christian communities during the sectarian/political violence of the first phase. To many this seemed to confirm

that the Moros were second-class citizens in their own country. The ignition of the conflict would only worsen this dimension. Following the implementation of martial law, the human rights violations committed by an ill-disciplined army on the Moro population only increased this grievance. It is notable that in interviews with former MNLF fighters a majority of them highlighted Army abuses as their reason for joining the insurgency.

The second is the question of land. The reforms introduced by the American colonisers required titling of land as proof of ownership, and hence prior occupancy was no longer sufficient basis to claim ownership. This was an alien concept to the majority of the indigenous population, who largely failed to acquire titles to their own lands (Ferrer 2006, 464). In addition, there was no provision for the titling of communal land that was a foundation of the traditional systems. In this process many found themselves becoming squatters on their own land as it was legally acquired by incoming Christian settlers (Rodil 2003, 107). The situation was further inflamed by the exploitation of the situation by the powerful and well connected, with many allegations of blatant land-grabbing. The net result was the alienation of the Moro communities from their ancestral lands.

The third is the demographic change that followed the American land reforms as Christian settlers were brought in from the north to form agricultural colonies. The process was continued under the Philippine Republic as agencies were created to pursue the task of resettlement. As Ferrer points out,

[s]pontaneous and organized migration were encouraged as part of state policy to increase food production, develop uncultivated areas, balance population distribution, and subsequently, diffuse land tensions in other parts of the country, notably Central Luzon where peasant discontent was being transformed into a radical social movement. (Ferrer 2006, 463)

Others argue that there was an additional political imperative to resolve the Mindanao question once and for all through land settlement (Ahmad 2000a, 13). The net result was that within a space of a few decades the

Muslim population had gone from being a large majority to a small minority in the land they called their own (*ibid.*; Ferrer 2006, 463).

The fourth is economic exploitation and marginalisation. The American land reforms paved the way for the commercial exploitation of Mindanao, which was at the time essentially an underpopulated frontier region with huge potential. This underpinned the mass migration from north to south as Mindanao was opened up. As Ahmad contends, ‘the opportunities for profit were and remain endless. No surprise the population has quadrupled in less than three decades’ (Ahmad 2000a, 16). The commercial exploitation of Mindanao further alienated the indigenous people from their land as agro-businesses opened huge plantations and ranches, logging companies cleared forests, minerals were mined, and valleys were dammed to provide hydroelectric power for these new industries. As a result, according to Bobby Tuazon, ‘Moro communities lost their traditional livelihoods with no adequate compensation or alternative sources of income within the new exploitative structures’ (Tuazon 2008, 79).

The commencement of the protracted conflict coincided with Marcos’s aggressive policies of the commercial development of the south. On one side, it can be argued that Marcos aimed to address some of the root causes of the conflict through economic development. However, it was foreign companies or elite-controlled enterprises that led the government-backed development projects, who have greatly enriched themselves while leaving the majority of the population impoverished (Ahmad 2000a; Tuazon 2008). As President Ramos describes the situation in the mid-1990s,

[w]ealth was unevenly distributed – more than in any other region in the country. The top three-tenths of income groups was composed of a mere ten per cent of all families; while 60 per cent of the population crowded into the lowest three-tenths of income groups... While we had a 50 per cent poverty incidence rate for Mindanao, the rate for the ARMM was 66 per cent. (Ramos 1996, 54-55)

Some academics have argued that the real drivers of the conflict are economic. On the one hand economic exploitation has spurred on the

processes that have seen the indigenous population driven off their land and the massive influx of settlers that have made them a minority in their own land. On the other hand the economic exploitation has impoverished the majority of the population and created huge wealth inequalities that continue to drive the conflict, not just for the Muslim community but also for the Christian community (it should be noted that the CPP-NPA is also very active in the Christian areas of Mindanao). Furthermore, these dynamics, essentially the foundations of a class-based conflict, are misdirected into a sectarian conflict. As Ahmad expounds,

Like all wars, the one now raging in Mindanao is being fought in pursuit of all types of power, principally economic power. But there has been an astonishing displacement: economic and political conflicts are experienced and interpreted as religious conflicts because religious identity is the most obvious social identity. (Ahmad 2000a, 18)

Addressing the grievances of the Moro community is central to the resolution of the conflict. However, there is a question of what came first. Is the quest for self-determination a result of the other grievances; did the quest for self-determination emerge as a proposed solution to the other grievances? Or is the fundamental grievance the root of the conflict? If the former is correct, then the resolution of the other grievances should dissipate the quest for self-determination. However, if the latter is correct, there is no hope for a resolution of the conflict without addressing the question of self-determination, whether through autonomy or independence.

### Local politics

The intrigues of politics have, in many different ways, driven the dynamics of violence in Mindanao. In the early years of the conflict the violence was instigated by political clans vying for power. Although in principal a democracy, local politics in the Philippines had always been dominated by political kingpins, backed up by their private armies,

who treated the areas they dominated as their own private fiefdoms (George 1980, 138-39). This was even more so in the lawless south. In the first phase, the cycle of violence was clearly driven by the electoral cycle. Violence escalated in the run-up to elections as the political groupings sought to use their armed gangs to secure the elections (*ibid.* 142; Rodil 2003, 136).

The political violence was driven by power struggles at two levels. Firstly, it was driven at the local level between the local political elites. In the Lanao and Cotabato regions, where the violence began, there were mixed populations which saw struggles for control amongst and between the Muslim and Christian elites (George 1980, 171-74). Secondly, the volatile situation was further inflamed by power struggles at the national level: by the bitter political battle between the Nacionalistas and the Liberalistas, moving south to Mindanao after Marcos won the 1965 presidential elections. The subsequent 1969 presidential election and 1971 local elections saw this national battle being fought out in Mindanao through their local proxies. National and local rivalries interacted in an explosive manner (*ibid.* 142).

These cross-cutting political dividing lines collided with the division between Muslim and Christian communities. It served the purpose of unscrupulous politicians to fan the flames of sectarianism for political ends (*ibid.* 136). Political and sectarian lines were not coterminous; both the Liberalistas and the Nacionalistas backed Christian and Muslim candidates for Governor in Lanao and Cotabato. However, the end result was electoral races polarised by sectarian divides, as both provinces had races for the governorship between Muslim and Christian candidates, although backed by different parties in each province (*ibid.* 174).

The sectarian divides had begun to emerge in 1968 with the formation of the MIM by Datu Matalam. His call for an independent Muslim Mindanao created a fear of a Muslim uprising, which, once the seed was sown, started a self-reinforcing cycle of fear and violence. It has been argued by some that Matalam's formation of the MIM had more to do with the loss of personal political power than with Muslim repression (McKenna 1998, 145-46). Even the help given later by Pendatun and Lucman in organising the training for the 'Top 90' was allegedly motivated more by the creation of an armed force to

buttress their political position than by a desire to fight for independence (*ibid.* 148-49).

Gradually the conflict lines settled along sectarian divisions, with the 1971 local elections being fought out between the Christian Ilaga and the Muslim Black Shirts and Barracudas armed groups. However, the driving force behind the violence was still political, using force to ensure victory in the local elections. Under the cloud of sectarian violence, multiple local political battles were fought out. As Rodil notes, the violence was highly selective, confined to those areas where the rivalry between Muslim and Christian politicians was most intense (Rodil 2003, 136).

One of the side effects of the imposition of martial law was that it froze out the entire political structure of the Philippines. The very prize that politician elites had been fighting for – elected political office – was no longer up for grabs (George 1980, 189-90). The end of the Marcos regime brought with it the return to democracy, but it was a return to the pre-Marcos days of elite-based democracies. The political clans which had been subdued during his regime returned. Mindanao saw the re-emergence of political violence as political clans and their private armies vied for power (C16; C17; A3). Violence mutated from political competition to also include turf wars for illegal enterprises (Gutierrez 2000c, 357).

### National politics

The national political situation also affected the dynamics of the conflict in Mindanao. As noted above, the intense national political rivalry between the Nacionalistas and the Liberalistas would spill over into the local political struggles in Mindanao. However, the biggest national political impact would come in 1972, when Marcos declared martial law. This was partially due to the situation in Mindanao, but largely because of the political chaos that was encroaching on Metro-Manila and the incessant rise of the communists (George 1980, 189-90). The declaration of martial law would transform the situation in the south and ignite the separatist insurgency (McKenna 1998, 156). Similarly, in

1976 other internal factors played a part in drawing Marcos to the negotiating table, such as the financial drain of the conflict and the stability of the regime in the north, which was facing opposition ranging from the CPP-NPA to the 'Church radicals' (*ibid.* 165; Ahmad 2000b, 31).

Similarly, the downfall of Marcos following the events of the EDSA People Power Revolution, sweeping President Aquino to power, would have a significant impact on the situation in Mindanao. The change of leadership brought in a new chance to reach a negotiated peace, and Aquino's position as a revolutionary president offered the opportunity of a settlement not constrained by the constitution. This opportunity was in turn undermined by the national political situation. Never entirely secure in her position, she was constrained by the instability of her term in office, marred by six coup attempts, not to mention the need to focus on rebuilding a nation (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). Similarly, she was also preoccupied with dealing with the communist insurgency which was at that time at its peak strength, and against which, following the failure of the government's talks with the CPP-NPA in 1987, her administration launched a 'total war' (Santos 2010a, 21).

As well as the national political events, the characters and nature of the different presidents would impact upon the conflict. Marcos was a wily operator whose motivation was more about staying in power than resolving the conflict. It cannot be doubted that Marcos did implement many reforms in the south that were aimed at helping Muslims, but he was also never sincere in his pursuit of peace. The 1976 Tripoli Agreement presented a real chance for peace, but Marcos sought simply to exploit it as an opportunity to buy him time. His master stroke was making it adhere to the constitution, successfully allowing him to undermine the whole process (Gutierrez 2000a, xvii). Aquino by contrast was committed to making a lasting peace, and demonstrated her sincerity by meeting Misuari in Sulu, an incredibly brave step that rejuvenated the peace process. However, events conspired to prevent her from delivering her goal (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). Ramos similarly was determined to forge peace, and his determination drove the process (*ibid.* 42-43). He was already working on it before he was elected, travelling to Libya to see Colonel Gaddafi and then hit the ground running (Ramos 1996, 4). He also showed a willingness to be

creative in the delivery of a new peace. In the end, he had the political capital, insight and commitment to deliver a peace deal. Estrada would in turn bring a sea change in attitude, as he sought to pursue a military solution towards the MILF (Gutierrez 2000a, xxvii).

## International politics

Foreign support was crucial to the rise of the Muslim rebellion and its maintenance during the course of the conflict. Malaysia provided the training for the original ‘Top 90’ recruits who would go on to form the core of the MNLF, and in the process kick-started the movement. Libya provided the substantial funding that followed, allowing the MNLF to grow in size rapidly enough to be able to fight a conventional war against the AFP (Che Man 1990, 138-40). Crucially Sabah would serve as a safe sanctuary from which to coordinate their campaign in Mindanao. Without this significant level of foreign support, it would have been impossible for the Moro Rebellion to have escalated so quickly to the point where the Philippine government nearly lost control of Mindanao. Furthermore, it was by achieving a monopoly of foreign support that the MNLF was able to establish leadership of the movement (McKenna 1998, 157).

The OIC’s support of the MNLF would play a central role throughout the conflict. Its continued support was the backbone of the MNLF’s strength and represented its most important leverage (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 61). The organisation acted as a force multiplier, coordinating a united front across the Islamic world against the Philippines. In the context of the early 1970s oil crisis, the OIC and its petroleum-rich members carried an increasing amount of power. As a result Marcos realised that the Moro conflict could not be won in Mindanao alone, and forced the Philippines into a diplomatic offensive to win over the OIC countries, in the process realigning its foreign policy agenda (*ibid.* 31; Che Man 1990, 145-46). The local conflict had acquired an important international dimension, and diplomacy became the new front in the conflict.

The other side to this equation was that due to the importance of

the OIC's support to the MNLF, it had significant power it could exert over the group. Importantly, the OIC's influence forced the MNLF to downgrade its demands from independence to autonomy, and to maintain that as the MNLF's position. After the failure of the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF returned to its aims of secession; however, it was OIC pressure that forced its position back to one of autonomy (Majul 1985, 90). Similarly, pressure from the OIC was instrumental in getting the MNLF across numerous hurdles to sign the 1996 final peace agreement (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 67-70). Ultimately, the OIC's support would prove paradoxical, providing the root of the MNLF's strength but never providing the assistance necessary to fight for independence and pressuring it to accept a negotiated peace. This may partly explain why the MILF subsequently pursued a policy of self-reliance. Conversely, the OIC also acted as a moderator on the actions of the Philippine government; they feared that any forceful actions would drive the OIC to wholeheartedly support the MNLF in a campaign for liberation (*ibid.* 31).

The rise of the OIC into such a pivotal position was itself the result of the changing political landscape in the Muslim world. The formation of the organisation was a response to the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem while under Israeli military occupation (Rodil 2003, 139). This was coupled with the emergence of Colonel Gaddafi following the Libyan revolution, who saw it as his mission to uplift Muslims around the world from oppression, which in turn coincided with the emergence of the Moro Rebellion (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 60).

Another important aspect is the impact of changes in the Islamic world in the context of Mindanao. The Arab nationalism of Gen. Nasser would play a key role in forming the new Muslim counter-elite in Mindanao that would go on to lead the Muslim rebellion. It was Nasser's pan-Islamic vision that led to the offering of scholarships to young Moros to study in Cairo. Through these channels, the Islamic ideologies that would play a part in the conflict would reach Mindanao. The differing ideologies of the Cairo and Manila Boys would go on to lay the groundwork for cleavages that would fracture the movement (C12; M6; McKenna 1998, 144). Later, the events of 1979 – both the Iranian Islamic revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – would

have further reverberations. The former would give momentum to the idea of forming an Islamic state, whilst the infamous blowback of the Afghan mujahideen would see the transportation of extremist Islamic ideologies back to the Mindanao conflicts, and contacts made there would lead to the later connections between al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiah (JI), and militants in Mindanao (C12; Santos and Dinampo 2010, 117; Santos and Santos 2010, 367; ICG 2008, 7).

When Ramos arrived as president in 1992, determined to deliver peace in the Philippines, he noted that the environment was more conducive to peace. Across the world countries were resolving old conflicts. The world had changed as it emerged from the spectre of the Cold War into the new world order with only one superpower. The Islamic world was dealing with the events of the recent Gulf War. Closer to home the ASEAN region was going through an economic surge as the Asian economic miracle was taking hold (Ramos 1996, 1). Wider events in the Islamic world caused the OIC to redefine the MNLF and the Mindanao conflict as a regional issue. For the first time, two Asian nations, Bangladesh and Indonesia, were added to the OIC committee on the conflict, with Indonesia as the chair (*ibid.* 3; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 68). Indonesia would prove a good choice as chair; it had not been involved in the conflict, but had a vested interest in ensuring there was peace in its backyard, and had experience of its own separatist conflicts.

## STATE ACTORS

### State action – coercive force

In the early stages of the conflict, the state played a powerful role in turning a period of political violence and lawlessness into a sectarian conflict for the secession of Muslim Mindanao. The perceived collusion of the state security forces with the dreaded Ilaga served to crystallise the Muslim population's alienation from the mainstream (McKenna 1998, 154).

It drove them to feel that they did not have a real place within the Philippine nation if their own government would not protect them.

When the concept of independence was put forward by the MIM, it did not have mass appeal, but its idea would gain currency as the violence against the Muslim communities escalated. In addition, the traditional Muslim leaders, whose ultimate power lay in their co-option, were seen to be impotent to protect the Muslim masses. The time was now ripe for new leadership, which would soon be provided by the MNLF (McKenna 1998, 155-56).

It was the subsequent act of declaring martial law which really drove the conflict to the next level; the Moro insurgency was the consequence of martial law, not the cause (*ibid.* 156). Firstly, martial law centralised power almost exclusively in Christian hands. Secondly, by removing all political options, it presented Moro Muslims with either acceptance of the regime or a revolution to remove the regime. Thirdly, the moves to collect guns from civilians not only greatly upset Moro traditions of gun ownership, but also removed the option of resorting to armed conflict at a later stage after exhausting other avenues. It forced the rebels' hand. Lastly, the atrocities committed by an undisciplined Philippine Army only further drove the population to support the rebels. Initially the troops had been welcomed by some as martial law had restored peace, but this was only a temporary abrogation. The net result was that state action that was designed to quell the situation actually did the opposite (Noble 1976, 411-12, quoted in Che Man 1990, 78; George 1980, 190-91). The declaration of martial law transformed the nature of the conflict overnight. What was previously sectarian violence driven and exploited by political competition was now overtaken by the Muslim separatist insurgency. Martial law had changed the context, creating the conditions for the fledgling MNLF to emerge and lead a struggle for independence. In this ironic turn of events state action became the main driver of escalation in the conflict that it was intended to de-escalate.

The Marcos government's primary response to the emerging Muslim rebellion was military. In the months after martial law, the MNLF would launch its coordinated offensive, which caught the AFP off guard and nearly succeeded in taking Mindanao from the government forces. In response, Marcos scrambled the Army from across Mindanao to confront the MNLF (Abbat 1999).

The military created two integrated commands: CenCom and SouthCom (Gutierrez 2000a, xv). In the fighting that followed, the AFP was able to regain the upper hand. The superior firepower and resources of the AFP proved too much for the MNLF as it sought to engage in conventional positional warfare. The AFP slowly began to regain the territory under the control of the MNLF. The MNLF then began a change to more classical guerrilla tactics and the AFP in turn changed its strategy to counter-insurgency (Abat 1999, 39 and 123; McKenna 1998, 158). The net result was that by 1974 the war had reached a stalemate. Neither side was able to deliver the knockout blow necessary for a military resolution of the situation either way. The cost of the war had also become unsustainable: the military had grown fourfold to 250,000, with 75% of this tied down in Mindanao (Ferrer 2006, 463).

As it became apparent that a military solution was not possible, or even desirable due to the immense damage it would inflict, Marcos began to adopt a new strategy (see below) that was to be fought out both domestically and internationally. From then on, the Philippine government did not pursue a military solution against the MNLF. Military operations were limited in scope and largely law-and-order based. From 1976 to 1978 the two sides were in a ceasefire following the Tripoli Agreement. When the ceasefire broke down in 1978 the violence never regained the level of previous years, but remained as pocket wars and skirmishes. Then from 1986 to 1996 the MNLF and GRP were once again in a ceasefire. It is an interesting point that the Philippine military never launched a sustained counter-insurgency operation against the MNLF in the way that they did, with some success, against the CPP-NPA.<sup>259</sup> One can think of numerous reasons for this: not wanting to escalate the situation, especially given the quasi-ceasefire situation; that the Philippine military simply didn't have the resources to carry out such a long-term counter-insurgency campaign; or that it simply would not have worked. It can be imagined the tactics that worked against the CPP-NPA may not have worked against the MNLF because of the nature of the Muslim community: as soon as the Army

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<sup>259</sup> In the late 1980s the AFP had led a successful counter-insurgency campaign against the CPP-NPA.

would launch operations, the whole community would unite to fight them off. Whatever the reason it remains unclear. It was not until the emergence of the ASG in the early 1990s that the government once again pursued a military option. The ASG was perceived as an extremist terrorist organisation and as such negotiation was not an option, leaving a military solution the only viable option. The election of President Estrada in 1998 saw a change of tactics, with the abandonment of negotiations with the MILF and the launching of a military campaign in 2000, with the aim of providing a military solution through 'all-out war' (Abreu 130b, 2008; Gutierrez 2000a, xxvi).

### State action – policy solutions

The Philippine state's non-coercive strategies for tackling the Moro Rebellion can roughly be divided into three policies. Firstly, the Mindanao conflict has seen extensive negotiations throughout its duration, with each successive government attempting to negotiate a peace. The first peace agreement signed between the MNLF and GRP was the 1976 Tripoli Agreement. It can be questioned whether this was a genuine attempt by Marcos to resolve the conflict or simply a strategy to manage the conflict. By ensuring that the agreement was subject to 'constitutional process', it in practice allowed Marcos to substantially revise the agreement. He knew that his control of the state machinery and mastery of electoral manipulation would allow him to easily reverse promises made to the MNLF (Gutierrez 2000a, xvii). In essence Marcos used negotiations as a ploy to de-escalate the conflict by promising the MNLF what they wanted, whilst knowing he was able to prevent its implementation.

The next two sets of negotiations, under Presidents Aquino and Ramos respectively, were more honest affairs. Aquino had shown that she had the will to resolve the conflict, but the circumstances of her term in office prevented her from being able to deliver peace; although the ceasefire she agreed with the MNLF was to hold (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 41). This was perhaps the best chance there has been to have delivered a lasting peace. As a revolutionary president, Aquino was

able to implement a peace agreement outside of the constitutional process. Ramos did succeed in signing a lasting peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996, but the major obstacle of that peace process was to fit a solution into the confines of the constitution. Although Ramos reached a peace with the MNLF, it was not an end to the conflict. The MILF, who had been watching the talks from the sidelines, chose to reject the agreement. They picked up the torch from the MNLF as the new leaders of the armed struggle for an independent Muslim Mindanao (Santos 2010b, 76).

Secondly, Marcos pursued a policy of attraction towards the rebels and their constituents. He established a two-pronged strategy to convince the wider Muslim community in Mindanao (and the world) that he had their interests at heart. The first was major investment in economic development in the south, including the creation of the Southern Philippines Development Administration and also an Islamic Bank. The second prong, for all intents and purposes, was a PR assault. These included policies such as the codifying of sharia law within Philippine law, liberalising the barter trade and allowing the use of Arabic as the language of instruction in madrasas. Marcos himself regularly recounted the story of how he was saved by a Muslim solider in WWII and also that he had Muslim heritage himself (Majul 1985, 79).

Towards the leaders of the Muslim community Marcos pursued a policy of co-option: '[k]ey rebel leaders are offered amnesty, livelihood projects and business opportunities, as well as political positions that allowed them to surrender with "dignity"' (Gutierrez 2000a, xvi). The co-opted leaders and the Marcos regime cooperated to mutually reinforce each other's legitimacy. He cleverly exploited the natural cleavages between traditional leaders who felt their position of privilege was threatened by the revolutionary ideals of the MNLF. Furthermore, Marcos used the former rebels as 'legitimate' Muslim spokespersons in the PR battle to further propagate the divide and rule effect (McKenna 1998, 167).

The process of concessions and co-option that was laid down so expertly by Marcos was essentially the format used by both Aquino and Ramos. Although the talks under Aquino failed to deliver, the process of co-option continued, with Pundato agreeing to return from

exile to become head of the Office for Muslim Affairs (OMA) (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). Similarly, Ramos's strategy was 'to convince the MNLF to join the political mainstream even before any provisional government was set up in Mindanao – in short, co-option with grace' (*ibid.* 43). The peace agreement was full of concessions, from the formation of the SPCPD as an alternative provisional government to the economic development plans and the integration of MNLF fighters into the AFP and PNP. However, Ramos did show a willingness to be unconventional and to use his political party to facilitate what could not be achieved by the government within the constitution, notably using his Lucas-NUCD party to bankroll Misuari's campaign to be Governor of the ARMM (*ibid.*).

Marcos realised that the Mindanao conflict could not be dealt with in isolation, as it became apparent that the MNLF was receiving considerable support from foreign Islamic nations (*ibid.* 31). Marcos launched a sustained and high-profile diplomatic campaign to win over the Islamic world. He took the situation so seriously that he systematically realigned the Philippines' foreign policy position in order to appease them (Che Man 1990, 145-46). Notably Marcos employed his 'secret weapon', his wife Imelda Marcos, sending her abroad on crucial diplomatic missions. This resulted in the OIC-sponsored Tripoli Agreement in 1976 (Majul 1985, 73).

For the rest of the conflict the diplomatic front remained crucial to the conflict, as successive Philippine governments on the one hand sought to prevent the OIC and the Islamic world from supporting the Moro Muslim secessionist groups and on the other hand used them to apply pressure to the groups to reach a negotiated peace. In both the 1976 and 1996 peace agreements, the OIC is cited as having applied significant pressure on the MNLF to reach an agreement (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 31, 67-69). To show how important the diplomatic front remained, it is worth highlighting that President Ramos made a trip to Libya to gain Colonel Gaddafi's support for a new peace plan, even before Ramos was elected (Ramos 1996, 4). A key strength of the MNLF has been its ability to mobilise international support for its cause, and as such it required the Philippine government to counter these moves.

## State capacity

The story of state capacity in the Mindanao conflict is a complex one. On the surface it appears that the Philippine government lacked the capacity to prevent the Muslim insurgency from arising or from taking the action necessary to ‘nip it in the bud’. However, this doesn’t accurately describe the picture. The reality of the situation is that the root of the conflict and its continuance can be traced back to the Philippine government’s lack of capacity to govern Mindanao.

The Philippines in general has a lawless element; despite being a democracy, the real power lies with competing political dynasties and their private armies (George 1980, 138-39). This is accentuated in Mindanao, which was in the 1960s – and to a certain extent still is today – a frontier province. Over a large part of the territory, especially the Muslim areas, there was barely any state footprint; many areas were even without roads. Where the state was present, the institutions had been captured by corrupt politicians backed by their armed groups. This had two important consequences for the conflict. Firstly, the situation in Mindanao was one of a lawless power vacuum, where the state did not have a monopoly of coercive force. In such a context, it was inevitable that those seeking power would use violence to get it. The violent political power struggle between competing factions that drove the initial conflict was a direct result of the lack of state capacity to govern in the region.

Secondly, the apparent sectarian bias showed by the police and military during the political violence of the first stage demonstrated the weakness of the state institutions. Rather than acting as impartial arbiters in community conflicts, they were seemingly acting in collusion with Christian politicians and settlers. The evidence suggests that this was more the result of local political dynamics than a strategy that emanated from the Centre. The result was to leave the Muslim population with the belief that state power was not on their side, fueling sectarian divisions and separatist views (McKenna 1998, 154-56; Majul 1985, 51-52).

This dynamic would remain an issue throughout the duration of the conflict. Even after the 1996 MNLF-GRP peace accord, the state

institutions remained weak in the south. Violence continued to be driven by competition between political clans, which also mutated into turf wars over control of illegal activities (Gutierrez 2000c, 357). In a power vacuum of weak governance, political power rested in the barrel of a gun.

Regarding the capacity of the state's security apparatus, the rapid emergence of the separatist insurgency in the wake of martial law highlighted its weakness. Although the MNLF camps were known to local security forces, these lacked the manpower and resources to take any action, and feared being overrun by separatist forces superior in arms and numbers (Abat 1999, 20-21). As a result, the military came very close to losing Mindanao to the MNLF, only saved by a massive airlift of troops and some strategic mistakes by the MNLF (Abat 1999; A4).

By 1976, the tide had turned in favour of the AFP, but as it descended into a protracted guerrilla war, the conflict headed towards stalemate (McKenna 1998, 159 and 165). Although the AFP had managed to neuter the threat of the MNLF to achieve an independent Mindanao by force, they were unable to defeat the MNLF. It still remained a potent force with thousands of men under arms. As noted above, there is an open question about why the AFP never again launched an intelligence-led counter-insurgency campaign to destroy the MNLF. Was this a strategic choice or a result of the lack of capacity? My speculation would be that they lacked the capabilities to do this, especially in the light of fighting a communist insurgency in parallel, and opted to contain the conflict instead. This is not to say that this would have been the correct strategic choice, but fundamentally, the option of a military solution was never a viable option for the Philippine government.

### Strong/weak government

Across the duration of the conflict, the dynamics were directly influenced by strong or weak government. There are two periods within the conflict in which strong government was crucial in the role of de-escalating the situation. The first was during martial law under Marcos as the MNLF swept across Mindanao: it was Marcos's strong

leadership that managed to mobilise all the resources of the state to counter the MNLF threat. The second was the 1996 peace accord under President Ramos. It would not have been possible to have delivered that agreement without his strong leadership. He had the vision and determination, as well as the political capital, to deliver an agreement. If Ramos had not been secure in his position, he would not have had the strength to be able to broker an agreement which was unpopular with much of the Christian majority.

The situation was quite different under President Aquino. The post-Marcos period under her presidency was the most promising opportunity to resolve the Mindanao conflict; Aquino, governing under a revolutionary constitution, had the flexibility to be able to deliver a compromise with the MNLF, creating a Muslim Mindanao region with sufficient autonomy and scope to end the insurgency. In this brief period Aquino was not bound by the constitution and could have delivered the necessary compromises. However, Aquino's position was never completely secure; she spent time fighting off military coups and trying to rebuild a nation (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38; Santos 2010a, 21). Ultimately, although her government had the tools and the opportunity to make an agreement, it was too weak to deliver it.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

### Strategy of armed groups

Over the course of the conflict the strategies of the armed groups have changed, and these in turn have had consequences on the dynamics of the conflict. In the initial stage, the MNLF sought to gain independence for Mindanao by force. It focused on building up its military strength, sending recruits for training in Malaysia. After Marcos had declared martial law, it launched a blitzkrieg-like offensive to achieve independence. The military strategy at this stage reflected the MNLF's foreign training, as it sought to fight a conventional war against the AFP. This proved to be a strategic flaw; once the AFP had recovered from the shock attack, the MNLF was unable to defeat a military force that was

able to mobilise and bring its entire resources to bear against the MNLF (Abat 1999, 123). There were also some initial strategic failures, such as not taking Cotabato city, and especially the airport, which allowed the AFP to conduct a massive airlift of men and supplies which saved the day (A4). As the tide turned against the MNLF they successfully changed from a conventional strategy to guerrilla warfare, and by 1976 had forced the AFP into a stalemate.

Alongside the military strategy, the MNLF pursued a successful diplomatic strategy. This on the one hand allowed them to procure the necessary arms, training and funds from foreign backers to enable the MNLF to wage a war against the Philippine government. On the other hand, it successfully opened up a diplomatic front to the conflict in which the MNLF skilfully cultivated an alliance of international support via the OIC. This introduced an international dimension to a local conflict. The OIC was able to put considerable pressure on the Philippine government. However, this strategy came to be a double-edged sword for the MNLF; it had become so dependent on the OIC for both material and diplomatic support that the OIC in turn could bring considerable pressure to bear on the MNLF, forcing it to change its aims from independence to autonomy (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 31).

In the third phase, as negotiations broke down over the implementation of the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF opted to return to the armed struggle for independence. However, weakened by splits and internal strife, it was unable (or unwilling) to escalate the conflict beyond a low-intensity level. Late in the phase it made a key strategic choice to back the democratic alliance against the Marcos regime, figuring that a change of regime would present a better chance of implementing the Tripoli Agreement properly (*ibid.* 35-36; C16). With the subsequent fall of Marcos and the new administration under Aquino, the MNLF found itself faced with a new strategic dilemma: to either exploit the new government's weakness and launch a renewed offensive with the aim of capturing more territory to negotiate from a position of strength, or to enter talks for a peaceful settlement with its former allies now in power (C16; Vitug and Gloria 2000, 38). The MNLF opted for the latter; but crucially, even when the talks collapsed, they chose to maintain their 1986 ceasefire indefinitely and seek a peaceful solution, ensuring

that the conflict did not escalate again before the implementation of the 1996 peace accord.

Meanwhile the MILF adopted a significantly different strategic approach. Whereas the MNLF was essentially top-down, with its strength based in its diplomatic connections and its leadership based abroad, the MILF pursued a bottom-up approach, focusing on building its strength from the grass roots and avoiding reliance on foreign backers. The MILF's strategy was almost Maoist in approach, with its focus on building strength over a long timeframe, and was based on four elements:

- 1) Islamisation
- 2) Strengthening of the organisation
- 3) Military build-up
- 4) Self-reliance.

At the heart of this plan was the creation of Islamic communities that acted as embryonic Islamic states. The MILF was creating 'facts on the ground' which would be hard to change. Whilst the MILF never managed to reach the military heights of the MNLF, it succeeded in institutionalising the political base of the conflict on the ground. This was evident from the large numbers it would attract to its Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly mobilisations in 1996, 2001 and 2005 (Santos and Santos 2010, 347).

Throughout the Mindanao conflict, there remains one major strategic mystery. Why did the MNLF not pursue a strategic military alliance with the CPP-NPA against the Philippine government?<sup>260</sup> The MNLF (and later the MILF) had agreements with the CPP-NPA, but these never went further than mutual recognition and some local tactical assistance (Abreu 2008b, 134-35). In the second phase, Marcos was facing a war on two fronts, but the 1976 ceasefire with the MNLF allowed the AFP to redeploy its forces against the rising CPP-NPA threat. Similarly, in the fourth phase, as the negotiations failed the

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<sup>260</sup> The reason is likely to rest in political considerations. Misuari was already wary of accusations that he was a communist, considering the revolutionary/Islamic ideological split that would lead to the eventual formation of the MILF.

MNLF maintained its ceasefire while the government was fighting an escalating struggle against the CPP-NPA. The question has to be asked: would the Philippine government have managed to fight off a sustained insurgent struggle fought on two fronts?

### Capacity of armed groups

The first phase saw the MNLF develop its capacity, while in the second phase it reached the height of its military and diplomatic capacity, allowing it to launch an all-out assault to gain control of Mindanao. However, by 1976, after two years of heavy fighting the group had been forced into a stalemate, abandoning conventional war for a guerrilla struggle. As it became clear that it did not have the capacity to defeat the AFP and win independence by force of arms (and due to OIC pressure), the MNLF sought to reach a negotiated settlement for regional autonomy with the Philippine government.

Following the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF declined in strength and was never again able to seriously challenge the Philippines' hold over Mindanao. Its strength was further weakened by subsequent splits and a decline in foreign support. However, it still maintained a considerable force of men under arms, significant enough for the AFP to be unable to militarily eliminate the organisation, but lacked the capacity to escalate the conflict beyond limited pocket wars and skirmishes. Essentially the MNLF would never again regain the capacity to seriously threaten the territorial integrity of the Philippines. As world opinion turned against the Marcos regime and the MNLF joined the anti-Marcos alliance, it saw an increase in foreign support and was able to begin to rebuild its strength (C16).

After the fall of Marcos, the military initially advised President Aquino not to engage the MNLF in talks, for they believed the organisation was by now so weak as not pose a threat, and the act of negotiation would merely revive a dying organisation. However, when they realised the extent of the military capability that it retained, the Army's chiefs changed course and advised a negotiated peace. The MNLF maintained enough strength that it could not be ignored, nor easily militarily

defeated; but at the same time it was unable to liberate Mindanao by force of arms. Although the talks fell apart, and the MNLF held to the 1986 ceasefire, by the fifth phase it still had a force of 13,000 fighters (Vitug and Gloria 2000, 41). The maintenance of such latent coercive ability ensured that the conflict was one that would not simply dissipate over time, but required a political solution, leading to the eventual 1996 final peace agreement.

The MILF's capacity, meanwhile, was going in the opposite direction. Throughout the 1980s it remained the far weaker faction. However, over time, following Salamat's four-point strategy, the organisation built up its capacity to present a significant threat. Following the MNLF's signing of the 1996 peace accord, the balance of power began to move to the MILF as many disaffected fighters turned from the former to the latter, swelling its ranks. The MILF now emerged as the leading force in the independence struggle (Santos 2010b, 76). The same conflict now continued under new leadership.

### Factionalisation

The cleavages within the separatist movement already outlined above created a set of dynamics that split the movement apart in a process of factionalisation. However, it should be noted that the MNLF was never a firmly organised group; the line between core MNLF and those Muslim groups which were associated with it was never clearly delineated. To a certain extent, in the early stages, it acted as a banner under which groups coalesced, so an amount of divergence was always inevitable. Following the failure of the implementation of the Tripoli Accord, the movement witnessed the Salamat faction breakaway in 1977 and Pundato's reformists in 1982, as well as a series of co-options by Marcos's government (Che Man 1990, 84-85). Salamat's faction would go on to become the MILF, the major challenger to the MNLF, and later, in the early 1990s, the ASG would emerge as an extremist faction.

The factionalism of the movement weakened it. It was never again able to launch the type of offensive it was able to stage in the early 1970s. However, as Che Man notes, while factionalism is a source of

weakness, it can also be a source of strength. 'While factionalism weakens the struggle in many ways, it also provides a spirit of competition among factions. Each group seems to try hard to strengthen itself by concentrating on building camps and organizing recruits' (*ibid.* 86). The emergence of different factions also allowed alternative strategies to evolve, in particular the MILF's long-term grass roots strategy. One interesting fact about the Mindanao conflict was that the onset of factionalism did not ignite a serious internal conflict for control of the movement; both factions had cordial relations (Santos and Santos 2010, 336 and 352). There was a certain amount of inter-factional violence (often related to other issues), but there was no large-scale conflict for control of the movement as seen in other conflicts.

The emergence of different factions also polarised the movement, and reduced the political space within which the MNLF could operate. On the one hand it could not concede too much ground to the government for fear of bleeding support to the more militant groups of the MILF and ASG (Ramos 1996, 26), while on the other hand the existence of these groups exerted pressure on the MNLF to deliver a peace deal while it was still the dominant player, starting a race against time for Misuari to conclude a deal before the other groups could grow in strength. The MILF had a similar relationship with the ASG, as the extremist ASG allowed the MILF to present itself as the moderate alternative<sup>261</sup> (C12).

Factionalism made it harder to create a peace, as witnessed by the failure of the 1996 agreement to create a lasting peace in Mindanao. While the peace held with the MNLF, the signing of the agreement simply saw the disgruntled hardline of the MNLF move sideways into the ranks of the MILF. The same conflict remained, only the leadership of the struggle had changed. For any peace agreement to hold, it is necessary for all the factions to be a party to it. The division of the movement was also exploited by the Philippines government as a reason not to enter negotiations at different times. It was, however, perhaps a valid point: with no clear leader, who should the government

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261 It has been suggested that it was good for the MILF that the ASG became strongly associated with al-Qaeda, because otherwise if there was no ASG, it would have been associated with the MILF (C12).

negotiate with? Furthermore, without a democratic mandate it can only be speculated as to how much support any of the groups enjoyed from the wider population.

### Criminalisation

In the Moro Rebellion the main issue is not of the armed groups becoming criminalised during the course of the conflict, but rather that the conflict took place in a lawless context with limited state governance and an institutionalised criminality. From the first phase until the present, Mindanao has been a frontier province where the writ of the state only goes so far; in which criminal gangs have been a part of the fabric of society and form a symbiotic relationship with parts of the political elite. The question is more how this context intersects with Moro armed groups fighting for independence.

Neither the MNLF or the MILF has descended into criminality. Santos and Rodriguez, utilising Jeremy Weinstein's typology, describe the two groups as 'activist' rather than 'opportunist', in that their modus operandi were driven by the quest for independence and the promise of a better life that this would bring, as opposed to exploiting the opportunity as a means to enrich themselves and using economic incentives to motivate individuals to join the rebellion (Santos and Rodriguez 2010, 428). In the case of the ASG, the situation was different. Despite its Islamist ideological roots and its emergence as a reaction to a loss of faith in the MNLF following the failure of the 1987 negotiations, over time it metamorphosed into an essentially criminal organisation, which specialised in kidnapping for ransom. By 2001, following the Sipadan and Dos Palmas hostage crises, the group had become what Gutierrez describes as 'entrepreneurs of violence' (Gutierrez 2000c, 351-62), an organisation that exploited its 'reputation and capacity for violence to gain relative security, power, and control in a highly unstable area as well as money, resources, and respect needed for self-perpetuation' (Santos and Dinampo 2010, 125-26).

The MNLF and MILF, although never criminal organisations, were, however, directly or indirectly connected to criminal activity and the

context in which it happened. The exact relationship is a matter of interpretation. Firstly, some of the criminal gangs, such as the notorious Pentagon Gang, contain former members of the organisations (Santos and Santos 2010, 393 and 398). The prolonged armed struggle created a situation in which there were large numbers of armed and well-trained fighters, who knew no other form of livelihood. It was inevitable, given the lawless nature of the region, that some cadres would move sideways into criminal activities. In addition, all the groups had rogue commanders or 'lost commands' who unofficially engaged in criminal activities. Similarly, there have been accusations from some quarters that they have used groups such as the ASG and the Pentagon Gang as unofficial fundraisers (Santos and Santos 2010, 398; Gutierrez 2000c, 354). This is further complicated by the nature of Moro society, in which individual MNLF or MILF members may be connected to members of criminal gangs through tribal or kin networks, and may provide assistance due to such obligations. Secondly, the prolonged armed struggle and situation in which the MNLF or MILF, rather than the state, were in control of certain territory, helped to provide the context in which the criminal gangs could flourish. Such areas were used as safe havens out of the state's reach. It is worth noting that later agreements between the government and MILF included provisions to jointly crack down on criminal gangs (Santos and Santos 2010, 352-53).



# 5

# ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section brings together the three separate case studies in a process of comparative analysis.

In Part 1 each conflict is analysed separately through two different lenses. The first focuses on the progression of the conflict through its distinct stages, and the second from three different perspectives, that of the context in which the conflict took place and of the two actors in the conflict, non-state and state actors. In Part 2 the three case studies are compared on the basis of the analysis in Part 1.

## PART 1: ANALYSIS OF EACH CASE STUDY

Below each case study is analysed in turn. Each conflict is analysed through the trinity of context, non-state actors and state actors; where the context section reflects the factors that affect the dynamics of the conflicts at the local, national and international levels at each stage, and the state and non-state actors sections reflect the thinking and objectives of these actors at each stage. Each part of the trinity is applied to each of the conflicts' stages, so it can be clearly seen how these factors change and affect the conflict throughout its lifespan.

## THE NAGA INSURGENCY

### CONTEXT

Throughout the duration of the Naga Insurgency the dynamics of the conflict were influenced by a series of contextual factors. These factors operated at three different levels – international, national and local – but interacted to affect the course of the conflict. At each of the insurgency's seven stages the factors at these different levels combined to create a unique context for that stage.

#### Stage 1: 1947 to 1957 – independence for India; independence struggle for Nagaland

Indian independence raised deep questions of identity for the Nagas over whether their future lay inside or outside of the new Indian Union. However, nothing short of independence was sufficient for a faction of the NNC led by the charismatic Phizo, who set about preparing for an armed struggle. Sporadic violence began to break out in 1954, and by 1956 the situation had escalated out of control, forcing the Indian government to send in the Army to support the Assam Rifles. The Indian forces carried out a scorched earth campaign against the Nagas in which it was claimed that almost all the Naga villages were burned and up to 100,000 Nagas killed. The Indian atrocities served to unite the Nagas behind the NNC as the conflict escalated to a full-scale war of independence.

#### Stage 2: 1957 to 1964 – the first glimmers of peace; the first glimmers of division

At the height of the violence in 1957 the Naga People's Convention was formed to find a peaceful solution. This successfully led to the creation of the new Indian state of Nagaland. However, the Naga community was now divided between pro-statehood and pro-independence. The

NNC continued with its armed struggle for independence, but this was now conducted against both the Indian state and the ‘traitors’ of the Nagaland government. In 1962, as tensions between India and China boiled over into the Sino-India War, the security of the Northeast now took on a new strategic importance. Similarly, the intractable Indian-Pakistan relations led to Pakistan supporting the NNC, offering it training and sanctuary in camps in East Pakistan from 1962.

#### Stage 3: 1964 to 1968 – the two nations talk peace

Attention moved to the national level, with the start of a peace process brokered by the Baptist Church. However, despite six meetings at the prime ministerial level, the talks collapsed as neither side was prepared to compromise over sovereignty. The Naga community began to become increasingly divided between pro- and anti-statehood, further complicated by the surfacing of long-held tribal divisions within the Naga community. Internationally, the NNC continued to gain Pakistani support and also established links to and support from China. The NNC now had the active support of India’s two regional foes, and with their help built up its military capability.

#### Stage 4: 1968 to 1975 – from political solution to a military solution

As the talks broke down in 1968, a strengthened NNC relaunched its military campaign, although the violence remained at a relatively low level and the Indian forces refrained from launching any major offensives. Following the NNC’s attempted assassination of Nagaland State’s Chief Minister, the Indian government felt compelled to act, launching a sustained counter-insurgency campaign against the NNC. At the same time the NNC’s foreign support was cut off following the Bangladeshi War of Independence. By 1975 the Indian forces had brought it to its knees. As a result the group signed the Shillong Accord, ending its armed struggle and accepting ‘by its own volition’ the Indian constitution without condition.

### Stage 5: 1975 to 1988 – from the ashes of defeat, the rebirth in Burma

The Shillong Accord, however, brought nothing more than a temporary cessation in violence rather than an end to the conflict. The NNC had been forced to sign the accord through military defeat; it was not a political solution to the Naga conflict. What was left of the NNC took up bases across the border in the Naga areas of Burma. Following division over the Accord, the anti-accordists broke away to form the NSCN. The leadership of the nationalist struggle now passed to the NSCN, while the NNC went into terminal decline. The conflict had largely moved over to the Burmese side as the NSCN concentrated on securing its position in the Naga areas there. However, the group would soon split into two factions: the NSCN (K) and the NSCN (IM). The result was to split the NSCN along tribal lines. The much smaller NSCN (IM) was driven out of the Burmese side back into India. The NSCN (K) stayed largely on the Burmese side.

### Stage 6: 1988 to 1997 – back into India, back to war

The NSCN (IM) would rise to be the dominant group, and soon the conflict returned to levels not seen since the 1970s. Nagaland State was no longer the epicentre of the insurgency; instead it was being driven by those Naga tribes left outside of Nagaland State. One of the NSCN (IM)'s key aims became the unification of Nagaland State with the adjoining Naga areas. This in turn ignited ethnic violence in those states which had significant Naga areas, who feared the loss of their territory.

This period also saw the increasing criminalisation of the movement, which provided the groups with the means to sustain the conflict; but the wealth it generated also changed the nature of the conflict, as violence was increasingly linked to fights over criminal rights and smuggling routes. The whole Northeast became increasingly unstable, and across the region a plethora of other insurgencies began to emerge. At the heart of it was the Naga

Insurgency, described as the ‘mother insurgency’. As the conflict began to re-escalate dramatically, the Indian government was again forced to launch a major counter-insurgency offensive against the NSCN (IM).

#### Stage 7: 1997 to 2005 – the ongoing peace process

In 1997 the NSCN (IM) entered a ceasefire agreement with the Indian state. A subsequent ceasefire was reached with the NSCN (K) in 2001. However, the ceasefires have yet to provide a lasting political solution, and the two factions are still in ongoing peace negotiations with the Indian government. Peace with the Indian state had important ramifications, leading to an increase in inter-factional fighting and criminal activities. Furthermore, it increased the anxieties of neighbouring ethnic groups that any eventual peace deal would concede territory to the creation of a ‘Greater Nagaland’, in turn driving violence between the Naga factions and other ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, India began to adopt a ‘Look East’ policy of focussing on the booming economies of the Far East for trade and economic growth. In this new policy agenda, the Northeast now became of strategic importance.

#### STATE ACTORS

As with the context, the strategy, motivation and behaviour of the state actors was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage.

#### Stage 1: 1947 to 1964 – a new nation and a remote tribal insurgency

The Indian position on the Naga question needs to be viewed against the backdrop of the trauma of partition. The new government faced a challenging task to mould a new nation out of the diverse lands that

had made up British India. Its priority was to create a united India; any secession of territory would have gone against this, not to mention being politically impossible.

Under the British, the vast majority of the Naga territories had been unadministered areas. Following partition the new Indian government started to move into these areas for the first time, causing much resentment, which was exploited by Phizo and the NNC. As the Assam Police began to clamp down on the NNC, the subsequent police violence only aggravated the situation, driving a vicious circle of escalation. Eventually the Indian government was forced to send in the Army, whose scorched earth policy decimated the Naga communities and united them behind the NNC.

#### Stage 2: 1957 to 1964 – an undercover strategy for peace

With the situation by now having descended into a full-scale war, the Indian government began to search for a political option. The emergence of the Naga People's Convention was no coincidence; it was allegedly the brainchild of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), designed to give credibility to a political solution. This split the Nagas between those who returned and supported statehood and those who chose to stay in the jungle and fight on.

Meanwhile in 1962 India faced a new regional crisis with the outbreak of the Indo-China War, fought out in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, just north of the Naga territories. The Northeast took on a new level of strategic importance, whereas before it had been a rather distant backwater to mainland India. Resolving the Naga insurgency lay at the heart of securing the Northeast.

#### Stage 3: 1964 to 1968 – we offered peace, they chose war

The third stage started on a positive note, with a ceasefire between the Indian forces and the NNC and the commencement of peace talks. Progress was restricted by India's insistence on a solution within

the Indian constitution and the NNC's unwillingness to concede on independence. India did, however, offer an olive branch, suggesting a solution not within the constitution but within the union, hinting that the constitution could be changed and at the possibility of a Bhutan-style protectorate. As the talks collapsed, the two sides returned to war, although at a lower intensity.

#### Stage 4: 1968 to 1975 – a military defeat and an enforced peace

In 1971, India intervened in the Bangladesh War of Independence, leading to the separation and independence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh. As a result, the new Bangladeshi state initially had warm relations with India, and stopped Pakistani and Chinese support for the Nagas going through their state.

When the Indian state later launched a sustained counter-insurgency campaign, they had learnt from past mistakes, and this time they dominated the territory – even the jungle – leaving the NNC no sanctuary to hide in. Similarly, after twenty years of conflict, the NNC no longer enjoyed the monopoly of knowing the terrain. Alongside the stick, there was a carefully orchestrated carrot of incentives aimed at persuading members of the NNC to surrender. The government followed a tribe-by-tribe, village-by-village approach of offering tailored inducements to break NNC support. As the NNC was brought to its knees, it was forced to sign the Shillong Accord, recognising the Indian constitution. India may have thought that such a devastating military defeat would have enforced a resolution of the Naga problem, but without a proper political solution, it was not the end of the conflict.

#### Stage 5: 1975 to 1988 – out of India, into Burma

During this stage the focus of the conflict moved across the border and out of India.

### Stage 6: 1988 to 1997 – a new group and a new threat

The NSCN (IM)'s return to India reignited the conflict on the Indian side. The NSCN (IM) changed its tactics to bring the fight out of the jungle and into urban centres, increasing the visibility of the conflict so that it could no longer be ignored. By 1995 the Indian forces were once again leading a sustained counter-insurgency campaign against the NSCN (IM), which would bring them to the negotiating table in 1997.

The NSCN (IM)'s focus on a 'Greater Nagalim' created wider problems for the Indian government as it fermented political violence in the adjoining Naga-minority states, particularly in Manipur. This change in focus essentially had the impact of widening the Naga problem into a regional conflict. Any political resolution was now not just between the Nagas and the Indian state, but also with the adjoining states and other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Northeast was now in flames, with dozens of interconnected insurgencies across the seven states. At the centre of this web of insurgencies stood the NSCN (IM). Resolving the Naga conflict now became inseparable from achieving peace across the Northeast.

### Stage 7: 1997 to 2005 – a regional problem

As the counter-insurgency campaign began to bite, the Indian government accepted the NSCN (IM)'s offer of talks, learning the lesson from the past that a military solution would only be temporary, and that a political solution was needed. The political context had also changed. Resolving the Naga insurgency had taken on a special importance due to its role as the 'mother insurgency', stoking the flames of insurgency that were sweeping the Northeast. In addition to this, following the liberalisation of the Indian economy earlier in the 1990s and the recent economic boom in the Far East, India adopted a 'Look East' policy for trade and economic growth. Central to this plan was peace in the Northeast, as this was seen as India's gateway into China and the Far East.

Although reaching a political solution was now paramount, the Indian government faced a paradoxical situation. Any solution that would be

acceptable to the Naga groups would have somehow to include the Naga tribes in territories outside of Nagaland State. But how to achieve this without igniting political violence in the neighbouring states and further destabilising the region? The Indian government was left with the possibility of merely swapping one insurgency for another.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

The strategy, motivation and behaviour of the insurgent groups was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage.

### Stage 1: 1947 to 1964 – a national struggle for independence

The early years saw the rise of Phizo, who soon became President of the NNC, changing it from a moderate middle-class organisation into a militant one set on achieving independence. In 1951 he presided over a referendum which resulted in 99% support for independence. This became the foundation of the legitimacy of the NNC's demands, despite questions over its validity.

Phizo travelled across the Naga territories, uniting the different tribes behind the concept of an independent Naga state and in the process setting up the necessary political and military organisation for an independence struggle. As the situation escalated out of control, the Army was sent in, playing straight into the hands of Phizo and uniting the Nagas behind the cause of independence. In the meantime the NNC set about forming a Naga-run parallel state with the creation of the Federal Government of Nagaland.

### Stage 2: 1957 to 1964 – statehood or independence?

In the first stage, the Naga struggle had been a national struggle with the Nagas united behind the NNC. However, the formation of the

Naga People's Convention (NPC) presented the first alternative political leadership to the NNC and espoused a more moderate view. Its call for the creation of a Nagaland State within the Indian Union significantly undercut the NNC's position. The NNC soon branded the NPC traitors and the subsequent state government as a 'puppet government', representing the first major divisions in the Naga communities. This was further complicated by tribal divisions. The NNC now waged an armed struggle against both the governments of Nagaland State and of India. The advent of Pakistani support helped significantly to professionalise the NNC's fighting capability.

#### Stage 3: 1964 to 1968 – a peace process, and new foreign friends

The talks eventually collapsed due to the NNC's refusal to consider anything that fell short of complete independence. The Indian government showed some flexibility, suggesting the possibility of a 'Bhutan-like protectorate status'. Ultimately the NNC threw away its best chance of a negotiated political solution with the greatest possible autonomy within the Indian Union.

Meanwhile, many within the NNC felt that the talks would inevitably collapse and soon began to prepare for the return to the armed struggle, reaching out to China. The subsequent Chinese support, coupled with the existing Pakistani support, continued to build up the Nagas' fighting capability. The splits within the Naga community were deepening and tribal divisions came into the open, with the Sema tribe breaking away from the NNC and forming the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN). The NNC blamed Indian security forces for this split and labelled the RGN as renegades and traitors.

#### Stage 4: 1968 to 1975 – back to war...

As the NNC renewed armed struggle, the conflict remained at a much lower intensity than previously. Then in 1972 Nagaland's Chief Minister spoke at the UN declaring that the Naga issue had been resolved with

the creation of Nagaland State. On his return the NNC attempted to assassinate him, spurring the Indian government into delivering a comprehensive and sustained counter-insurgency campaign that devastated the NNC and brought it to its knees. The campaign came soon after the Bangladeshi War of Independence, which had seen the NNC cut off from its foreign backers just when it needed them most. As the Indian forces cut their supply lines, they were left literally starving in the jungle, unable to continue fighting. It was a comprehensive defeat for the NNC, which was then forced by India into signing the Shillong Accord.

#### Stage 5: 1975 to 1988 – splits and more splits

The fallout from the Shillong Accord caused great confusion and division amongst the Nagas. What was left of the NNC relocated to the Naga territories on the Burmese side of the border, but was deeply divided between the pro- and anti-accordists. Following a series of coups and counter-coups a new group emerged, the NSCN, emerged, led by Th. Muivah, Isak Swu and S. S. Khaplang. What followed was a period of bitter fighting and fratricidal killing between the NNC and NSCN, which has left some of the deepest scars on the Naga communities. The NSCN ultimately proved successful. However, it would be thrown into turmoil when Khaplang launched a surprise coup against Muivah and Swu. The two survived the attack and escaped to set up a new faction. The NSCN was now divided into the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K), roughly along tribal lines. The much smaller NSCN (IM) fled from Burma back to India, into the Tangkul Naga area in Northern Manipur (Muivah's tribal homeland).

#### Stage 6: 1988 to 1997 – back into India

The small NSCN (IM) faction had to fight for its survival both against the NSCN (K) and the Indian forces. However, the group soon grew to become the dominant insurgent group, significantly escalating

the campaign against the Indian forces. The NSCN (IM) represented a major evolution in strategy, adopting a Maoist protracted war analysis. Notably, it sought to form a united front, developing relationships and alliances with other insurgent groups across the Indian Northeast. It became the ‘mother insurgency’, incubating many groups across the region. Similarly, it sought organic growth based on self-reliance, rather than relying on foreign support. This period also saw an increase in the criminality of the groups, which on the one hand served as a means to finance the struggle but also changed the nature of the conflict as groups began to fight for control of criminal activities.

In a major change since the start of the conflict, both factions drew the majority of their support from Naga tribes outside of Nagaland State. The NSCN (K) was made up largely of the Naga tribes in Burma and the parts of northern Nagaland it controlled, while the NSCN (IM) was dominated by Tangkul Nagas and members from the other Naga tribes in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. One of the key aims of the NSCN (IM) was the creation of a ‘Greater Nagalim’ through unifying Nagaland State with the adjoining Naga areas in neighbouring states and in Burma. This led to the ignition of violence with other ethnic groups. Some commentators accuse the NSCN (IM) of engaging in ethnic violence to gain exclusive control of the disputed areas.

#### Stage 7: 1997 to 2005 – peace with India, war amongst brothers

By 1997, as the campaign was taking its toll, the NSCN (IM) changed direction and sought to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Indian government, based on certain preconditions. A ceasefire with the NSCN (IM) came into effect on 24 July 1997. A second ceasefire followed with the NSCN (K) on 28 April 2001. The peace process set off a wave of inter-factional violence, as the groups freed from fighting the Indian state concentrated on fighting for control of the Naga people. As the Indian forces sat on the sidelines, the criminal activities of the groups grew, allowing them to rebuild their strength and seeing the conflict’s transformation from an insurgency to an industry.

## THE PUNJAB CRISIS

### CONTEXT

Throughout the duration of the Punjab Crisis the dynamics of the conflict were influenced by a series of contextual factors. These factors operated at three different levels: international, national and local, but interacted to affect the course of the conflict. At each of the five stages the factors at these different levels combined to create a unique context for that stage.

#### Stage 1: 1978 to 1984 – from identity crisis to Punjab Crisis

The rise of revivalist Sikh preacher Bhindranwale and his militant campaign for ‘Sikh rights’ would plunge the Punjab into chaos. However, this was precipitated by the existing political turmoil within the state in which the Congress Party clandestinely supported Bhindranwale in order to split the Sikh vote and undermine the Akali Dal. Internal power struggles in both the Akali Dal and the Congress Party also saw factions bolstering Bhindranwale for their own personal advantage.

As Bhindranwale and his supporters took control of the Golden Temple, from which they unleashed an escalating campaign of violence and intimidation, the government was forced to act, dismissing the state administration and sending in the Army. The subsequent Operation Blue Star regained control of the Golden Temple from the militants, but quickly spiralled out of control, with heavy fighting leading to extensive loss of life and virtually destroying parts of the Sikh holiest of holy sites. The Sikh community was outraged, a situation compounded by the nationwide anti-Sikh riots in which thousands were killed (following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard) and the heavy-handed mopping-up exercise Operation Woodrose. The net result was a Sikh population that felt alienated and isolated, pushing the moderate majority straight into the arms of the extremists.

### Stage 2: 1985 to 1987 – the calm before the storm

The next stage started on a conciliatory note, with the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord and the return of the state government. However, the accord proved hard to implement and its subsequent collapse undermined the Akali moderates and strengthened the militants. At the same time militants began to regroup, forming the Panthic Committee (PC) to lead the struggle and adopting the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) as its official armed wing.

Meanwhile, the Punjab police force remained woefully inadequate to tackle the militant threat; embryonic police reforms began, but as the situation failed to improve, central government acted to dismiss the state government and to bring the Punjab back under direct presidential rule. Further afield, the Sikh diaspora, shocked by the events of Operation Blue Star, raised funds to support the emerging militants. However, this was undermined by the subsequent bombing of Air India Flight 182. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to monitor the situation.

### Stage 3: 1987 to 1989 – both sides develop

At the state level the conflict saw two important developments in Stage 3. Firstly, the police reorganisation began to pay dividends. With the promotion of K. P. S. Gill to Director of Police in April 1988 a comprehensive counterterrorism campaign was instigated for the first time, which slowly began to turn the tide. Secondly, the militant movement began to fracture. Initially the movement split in two, with each side led by a separate Panthic Committee, but this signalled the beginning of an enduring process of continuous factionalisation of the movement. Pakistan's decision to support the militants proved a major catalyst for escalation. It also helped spur on the fragmentation of the movement as a means of creating as much chaos and destruction as possible.

The movement also became increasingly criminalised, with many criminals simply moving sideways into freedom fighting. This change

in the nature of the conflict was reflected by the beginning of the erosion of the movement's popular support as the population increasingly became victims of the violence. By the end of 1989, Gill believed that another six months of sustained campaigning would have wiped out the terrorist groups. However, a national election was approaching, and with Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party mired in scandals of corruption and nepotism, it sought to fight the election on a security platform, exploiting national fears over the terrorism in the Punjab. In order to maximise the situation, the government allegedly delayed responding to the militants' offers to negotiate a peace.

#### Stage 4: 1989 to 1991 – the escalation

The elections brought a new administration and ushered in two years of weak and indecisive government. Crucially, the new administration fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the conflict, believing that the Rajiv Gandhi government had artificially kept Sikh terrorism alive. The government followed a soft approach of concessions and compromise. A number of militant-backed candidates were successfully elected, giving the militants a public voice for the first time since Bhindranwale, and also the veneer of political respectability. Without the political support of the Centre, the police felt unable to act against militants openly connected to elected officials.

The militants went through a period of rapid expansion but also increased factionalism and criminalisation, the lure of money and power drawing in many young Sikhs. Pakistani support was at its height during this stage, with many of the groups allegedly being remotely controlled from Pakistan and their actions increasingly directed by Pakistan's strategic objectives, rather than their own. The movement lost its way as the Punjab descended into killing and confusion. The population increasingly suffered at the hands of the movement, although it remained traumatised by the violence into lending it at least passive support.

## Stage 5: 1991 to 1994 – the Endgame

The new elections saw the return of a new strong government at the Centre under Prime Minister Rao, who tackled the militants head-on by providing the security forces with the resources and political support to launch a counterterrorism campaign and sealing the border to curtail Pakistani support.

A crucial shift on the ground was the change in public support away from the militant groups towards helping the police. While popular support for the militants had been declining since 1987 as the population increasingly became victims of the violence, it was not until the final stage that the public ‘came off the fence’ and began to help the police. Previously, they had been terrorised into passively supporting the militants, in what Gill described as a ‘societal Stockholm syndrome’. As the population moved away from the militants, they isolated them and provided the police with a plethora of actionable intelligence.

## STATE ACTORS

Similarly, the strategy, motivation and behaviour of the state actors was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage.

## Stage 1: 1978 to 1984 – out of the frying pan, into the fire

The Congress Party in government at the Centre played a significant role in destabilising the situation in the Punjab through covertly supporting the radical Sikh preacher Sant Bhindranwale with the aim of splitting the Sikh vote, allowing Congress to rule supreme in the state. However, supporting Bhindranwale was like letting the genie out of the bottle, and like Frankenstein’s monster he would turn on his Congress backers.

Nationally, Indira Gandhi sought to attract the Hindu-nationalist bloc vote, and to this end she exploited Sikh-Hindu tensions in the Punjab

to her own electoral advantage. Inside the Punjab, the police force lacked both the capabilities and the will to confront the Sikh militants.

As the violence escalated the Centre felt compelled to act, dismissing the state government and imposing direct presidential rule. Indira Gandhi then set in motion Operation Blue Star to clear the militants from the Golden Temple, and Woodrose as the subsequent ‘mopping up’ operation, the lasting result of which was to alienate the Sikh population and drive them into the hands of the militants. Following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and elsewhere would only further alienate the Sikh population, especially because of the alleged involvement of Congress Party leaders in organising the riots.

#### Stage 2: 1985 to 1987 – giving peace a chance

The new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, reached out to the Sikh community in a gesture of conciliation. This was cemented with the signing of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord between the prime minister and the leader of the Akali Dal, followed by state elections and the return of power from the Centre to the state government towards the end of 1985.

Meanwhile, the government set about addressing the inadequacies of the Punjab police force. ‘Supercop’ Julio Ribera was appointed the new Director General of the Punjab police in March 1986. However, as the Accord collapsed, weakening the moderates, the militants gained strength. As the situation continued to worsen, and the Punjab police were still not in a position to counter the militant threat, the Centre acted again to dismiss the state government and to bring the Punjab back under direct presidential control.

#### Stage 3: 1987 to 1989 – police reform and taking on the militants

The government at the Centre changed tack and threw their weight behind the police, backing a kinetic security solution to the Punjab Crisis. The police fightback began in May 1988, with Operation Black

Thunder II, to re-clear the militants from the Golden Temples. This was a complete success, with the police and paramilitary forces retaking the complex with none of their men sustaining an injury. More importantly, it delivered a crushing blow to the militants, decapitating their leadership and providing useful intelligence.

In this stage, the reorganisation of the Punjab police force really pushed ahead, finally creating a force that was capable of taking on the militants. However, it was not until the promotion of K. P. S. Gill to the position of Director General of the police in April 1998 that the force for the first time executed a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy against the militants. By 1989 Gill believed that they were within six months of eradicating terrorism from the Punjab. One by one the leaders of the major terrorist groups began to approach him to discuss surrendering. However, the political support was to wane at this crucial point. A national election was fast approaching, and the Congress Party, subdued by scandals of corruption and nepotism, decided to fight the election on a security ticket, exploiting nationwide fears over the terrorism in the Punjab. As such the Congress Party is alleged to have decided not to act just yet on these approaches of surrender but to let the 'sore to fester a little longer', so as not to resolve the foundation of the public's fears until after the election.

#### Stage 4: 1989 to 1991 – instability and weakness

The fourth stage saw the end of Congress Party control at the Centre, and ushered in two years of weak government and instability. Fundamentally, the new administration under V. P. Singh misunderstood the nature of the conflict in the Punjab, falsely believing the Congress Party had been artificially keeping the conflict alive, and all that was needed was a conciliatory approach and the conflict would simply melt away, putting on hold the counterterrorism campaign that had been bearing fruit before the election.

In reality the government was weak, and the Singh government collapsed the following year to be replaced by Prime Minister Chandrasekhar, who continued the 'soft' approach of conciliation

and concession. One of the first concessions was to acquiesce to the militants' demands for the removal of Gill as Director General of the Punjab police, a move that only served to demoralise the police. In this period the police felt that they did not have the political backing to go after the militants, so they stepped back. As the government was in continuous negotiations with the militants, there was also a fear that a terrorist whom they were going after one week could become a senior member of the state government the next if a deal was reached. The Chandrasekhar government made a last-ditch attempt to resolve the conflict by calling nationwide elections. The result was to pour petrol on the fire: the state exploded into violence as the militants sought to coerce the election of their candidates. Before the elections in the Punjab had been called off, twenty-seven candidates were assassinated.

#### Stage 5: 1991 to 1994 – the return of Gill

The national elections brought another change of administration and a new government under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. With a strong government at the Centre, there was a shift from a conciliatory approach to the return of a kinetic counterterrorism strategy. Gill was brought back as Director of the Punjab police to run the campaign, and charged with the task of creating the conditions for a free and orderly state election.

Crucially, in this stage Gill was given the political support to see the job through but also the necessary resources to sustain the campaign: 120,000 troops and 70,000 paramilitary personnel were sent to the Punjab. Learning lessons from the past, the police, Army and paramilitary forces were organised into one coordinated command system, in which the police took the lead in the counterterrorism campaign and the Army and paramilitary provided the additional manpower and firepower – the Army was the anvil on which the police's hammer would smash the terrorist groups. At the heart of Gill's strategy was the realisation that the militants themselves presented the sustaining dynamic of the conflict, and conceptualising the campaign as a war of attrition, in which the terrorists should be surgically neutralised as quickly as possible,

for as long as possible. Ultimately, this strategy worked to destroy the groups quicker than they could recruit new fighters.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

The strategy, motivation and behaviour of the militant groups was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage.

**Stage 1: 1978 to 1984 – terror in the Temple**

The nexus of the conflict centred on the rise to prominence of the radical Sikh preacher Sant Bhindranwale, and his campaign for ‘Sikh rights’. The ideology of Khalistan was still a fringe view. From within the safety of the Golden Temple – the Sikh holiest of holy sites – and effectively off-limits to the police, Bhindranwale ran his campaign of intimidation and murder against all those that opposed him, and also increasingly attempted to ignite sectarian violence. As the government prepared to act, the militants fortified the Golden Temple. The resulting attack turned into a bloodbath as the Army was unprepared for such stiff resistance.

**Stage 2: 1985 to 1987 – the militants regroup**

Over the next two years the militants began to regroup, coming together to form the Panthic Committee to provide the overarching political and religious leadership of the movement. Only in this period did the Sikh militants explicitly adopt the ideology of Khalistan, believing that after the events of 1984 only an independent Sikh state could protect the rights of Sikhs.

At first the Panthic Committee was seen as an above-ground organisation which would engage in the democratic process to achieve its ends. However, the ensuing state crackdown forced the PC underground, and it decided to pursue an armed struggle to achieve an independent Khalistan. The Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), initially a loose collection of groups committing uncoordinated attacks, became the official military wing of the movement, transforming into a centrally

organised body with a cohesive and hierarchical structure. The armed groups fighting for Khalistan would remain united under the KCF's leadership until 1988.

#### Stage 3: 1987 to 1989 – the movement starts to change; splits and criminals

In early 1988 the Khalistan movement split in two. While the KCF remained the official military wing of the first Panthic Committee, a second Panthic Committee emerged with the backing of the BKI and a collection of smaller splinter groups. A month later the police launched the successful Black Thunder II operation, which succeeded in decapitating the leadership of the KCF. As a result the second Panthic Committee would rise to dominance. The split would ignite the process of factionalisation and the groups associated with both PCs would continue to splinter, with each associated with a collection of groups.

The other major change was the movement's increasing criminality, which saw many criminals simply move sideways into 'freedom fighting'. It began to lose its way and anarchy soon set in. This resulted in the bifurcation of the conflict: at the top level the PCs leading an ideological struggle for Khalistan, and at the village level the violence more likely connected with criminality, feuds or land disputes, as the gangs increasingly acted as warlords. Towards the end of this stage the Punjab police's operations began to take effect and the groups one by one reached out for a negotiated settlement. However, as the national elections approached, the groups decided to bide their time and see what a new administration would bring.

#### Stage 4: 1989 to 1991 – chaos and violence

The 'soft' policies pursued by the Centre and the government's inherent weakness only encouraged the movement to escalate its campaign. The election of militant-backed candidates provided the movement with a public voice for the first time since Bhindranwale. As well as the veneer of political legitimacy, and with many of the armed groups

close to such elected politicians, it offered them a certain amount of political cover. Meanwhile the movement continued to fracture and became increasingly criminalised. Soon criminal gain and not Khalistan became the dominant motivation. Criminality changed the nature of the groups, and became the major motivation for recruitment through the lure of money and power.

The militants pursued some new tactics in this stage, including public mobilisation – essentially public campaigning backed up by coercive mobilisation. The campaign of social edicts gained momentum, and soon held sway over the state's institutions and media. However, the militants made the crucial strategic mistake of targeting police families. This was a fatal error as the police, who had taken a step back in this phase, were forced to come off the fence and take the fight to the groups.

#### Stage 5: 1991 to 1994 – the defeat

The final stage saw a rapid disintegration of the militant movement. The movement had essentially become a house of cards, built on young recruits recruited in the good times with the lure of power and wealth, rather than ideological zeal. Whereas a year earlier membership of a group had meant respect, power and wealth, now it meant a hard life on the run, with death the likely end result. Soon only the ideological rump was left. The groups also made one final fatal tactical error – to boycott the elections. As a result, when they were unsuccessful in derailing the process and the police managed to ensure that the elections passed off successfully, it denied the groups the public voice and political legitimacy they had enjoyed before.

## THE MORO REBELLION

### CONTEXT

Throughout the duration of the Moro Rebellion its dynamics were influenced by a series of contextual factors. These factors operated at

three different levels – international, national and local – but interacted to affect the course of the conflict. At each of the five stages the factors at these different levels combined to create a unique context for that stage.

#### Stage 1: mid-1960s to 1972 – the conflict brews

Within a generation the Muslim Moro community found themselves transformed from a majority into a minority due to the mass immigration of Christian northerners. As well as inducing fears of marginalisation it set off a complex set of power struggles for control of wealth and resources, which soon took on a sectarian nature. The early violence was driven by the electoral cycle as the competing factions fought to secure elected office, and was compounded by a national power struggle between the Nacionalistas and Liberalistas, fought out through local proxies.

Meanwhile, a Moro counter-elite emerged to pick up the mantle of nationalism and to challenge the national government in a way that the traditional elite, who ultimately relied upon state co-option for their power, would never have done. Revelations of the Jabidah Massacre ignited Moro nationalism and shook Philippine-Malaysian relations over the disputed region of Sabah, with Malaysia soon training and arming the fledgling MNLF.

Elsewhere the Islamic world was going through a period of change with the formation of the OIC, and Colonel Gaddafi came to power in Libya and took it as his mission to uplift Muslim minorities around the world.

#### Stage 2: 1972 to 1976 – from martial law to war

Marcos declared martial law as the political crisis deepened in Manila, forcing the embryonic MNLF to bring forward its plans for an armed struggle. Catching the military off-guard, the MNLF launched an all-out offensive. Only after an emergency mobilisation and airlift of forces was the Army able to roll back the MNLF's advances.

Gradually the conflict transformed into a guerrilla struggle and stalemate. The MNLF's rapid growth and control of the movement depended on its large foreign support, notably Libya, while Sabah provided the perfect safe sanctuary and logistics base. The OIC supplied the MNLF with legitimacy and applied diplomatic pressure on Manila, especially in the wake of the 1974 Oil Crisis. As the conflict continued to stagnate, the OIC managed to bring the two sides to the negotiating table in Tripoli.

#### Stage 3: 1976 to 1986 – a failed peace

OIC pressure led the MNLF to sign the Tripoli Agreement, dropping its demands for independence and settling for regional autonomy. However, it was not long before the agreement broke down, as Marcos sought to undermine it by using the last-minute inclusion that it must fit within the Philippine constitution. The conflict reignited but remained at a low-intensity guerrilla level and never returned to the heights of the early 1970s.

Meanwhile, the MNLF was weakened by splits with the formation of the MILF and MNLF reformists. Furthermore, Marcos's policy of attraction paid dividends as it attracted many from the movement, especially those from the traditional Muslim elite.

Nationally, Marco's popularity and political control began to decline, along with his health. The assassination of returning opposition leader Benigno Aquino marked the beginning of the end of the regime. The popular protest against Marcos's rule ended with the 1986 EDSA Revolution that swept Benigno Aquino's wife, Gloria Aquino, to power. Internationally, the start of the Afghan War and the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 would have important ramifications for later stages.

#### Stage 4: 1986 to 1992 – the EDSA Revolution and the new hope

After the EDSA Revolution, the change of regime brought fresh hope and a renewed peace process. Despite starting well, the talks began to

fail. Ruling as a revolutionary president, Aquino had the legal powers to agree the necessary compromises, but lacked the political strength to deliver. As the talks failed, the Aquino administration set about implementing an autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao without the support of the MNLF or MILF.

Internationally the Islamic resurgence continued, reflected in Mindanao in the growing development of the MILF and its ideology of creating an Islamic state in the southern Philippines. The end of the Afghan-Soviet War saw the exodus of thousands of mujahedeen to their home nations, taking with them the ideology of jihad and leading to the formation of the extremist terrorist group, the ASG, by a returning Afghan veteran.

#### Stage 5: 1992 to 1998 – a president who can deliver

The 1992 national elections brought to power the former head of the armed forces Fidel Ramos as president. From day one Ramos set out to bring the MNLF back to the negotiating table and to deliver a lasting peace. Internationally the world was a very different place and the time was right for it. The Cold War had ended, the ASEAN nations were going through an economic boom, and Libya, still the MNLF's most important backer, had begun to tire of international isolation and responded to Ramos's overtures by agreeing to support a new peace process.

The MNLF welcomed the new peace process, whilst still maintaining a sizable military capability and remaining the dominant Moro group. However, there were internal pressures to reach an agreement after the failure of the last talks. Four years after coming to power Ramos signed a peace agreement, the final implementation of the Tripoli agreement. The deal saw Misuari becoming chair of the SPCPD, set up to oversee the process of forming a new autonomous region, while at the same time entering an electoral pact with Ramos's political party to win the election and to become head of the existing autonomous region. The MILF meanwhile opposed the deal, and with its ranks beginning to swell as disaffected MNLF fighters moved to join the MILF, the

leadership of the Moro struggle now passed from the MNLF to the MILF. The MNLF was now essentially co-opted into the state; however, the conflict still remained.

## STATE ACTORS

The strategy, motivation and behaviour of the state actors was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage. Stage 1: mid-1960s to 1972 – power struggles and sectarian divides

The election of Marcos as president in 1965 ignited a period of intense rivalry between Marcos's party, the Nacionalistas, and the main opposition, the Liberalistas. This would add a new dynamic to the local power struggles of Mindanao, with each side backing different political clans. Locally the political power struggles began to take on a more sectarian divide as politicians on both sides exploited religious divisions for their own political gains. The situation escalated with the emergence of the Ilaga, allegedly backed by prominent Christian politicians and intent on using extreme violence against the Muslim communities in order to win the upcoming local elections in 1971.

Philippine-Malaysian tensions continued to rise over the disputed state of Sabah with the emergence of reports of the Jabidah Massacre – the summary execution of a group of young Moros recruited into the Army as part of a secret plan to invade the state. The revelations shocked the Muslim population, and served as the spark to ignite rising Moro nationalism. Crucially, it further alienated the Muslim population from the national government, and, coupled with the open collusion between the police and Ilaga still to come, it ingrained the sectarian divides and distrust of the Christian-dominated state.

Stage 2: 1972 to 1976 – the day we nearly lost Mindanao

Although the situation in Mindanao was cited as one of the reasons for martial law, the reasons more likely lay with the political chaos in Manila and the CPP-NPA threat. The declaration of martial law was

a major miscalculation that became a significant cause – no other single event did more to escalate the conflict. Once the Army had taken control, human rights abuses by undisciplined soldiers began in themselves to be a major driver of support for the MNLF and the struggle for independence.

The subsequent MNLF offensive caught the military off-guard and the situation was only saved with the massive airlift of forces to Mindanao. As the Philippine Army regained the upper hand the conflict transcended into a protracted guerrilla war, and began to stagnate by 1974. Despite a huge increase in military expenditure and the quadrupling of the Army to 250,000 (three-quarters of which was stationed in Mindanao), it was unable to defeat the MNLF. In addition Marcos instigated socio-economic policies and a policy of attraction to co-opt Muslim leaders. As the huge financial burden of the conflict began to threaten the national finances and the country faced a rising CPP-NPA threat, it became paramount to resolve the Mindanao Conflict. In order to counter the MNLF's foreign support, Marcos launched a sustained diplomatic offensive to charm the Islamic nations. This was successful, leading to OIC-sponsored talks and the 1976 Tripoli Agreement.

### Stage 3: 1976 to 1986 – Marcos undermines the peace deal

It was not long before Marcos started to undermine the application of the Tripoli Agreement. The ace up his sleeve was the last-minute addition that the agreement must fit within the constitution. It meant that, in practice, all promises could be reversed with 'legitimate' justification. Marcos set about implementing the peace agreement as he saw fit. This included creating not one, but two autonomous regions, allegedly in an attempt at divide and rule. This was followed by an extensive campaign of socio-economic policies to address some of the sustained inequalities and under-development perceived to be at the root of the conflict and the continuation of the policy of co-opting Muslim leaders.

As martial law continued, opposition to the regime increased.

Meanwhile, Marcos's health began to deteriorate. The assassination of Benigno Aquino as he stepped off the plane proved to be the catalyst to ignite the popular opposition. In an attempt to regain control of the situation Marcos called for a presidential election, which he subsequently won. However the blatant electoral fraud ignited the People Power Revolution that swept him out of power.

#### Stage 4: 1986 to 1992 – the end of Marcos, and the new dawn of Aquino

The new President Aquino was committed to a negotiated settlement with the MNLF. However, there were many of her advisors who felt that the MNLF was a spent force and engaging with it would simply resurrect a dying movement. She made a determined start by making the hugely symbolic, not to say risky, step of travelling to meet with Misuari on his home turf of Sulu. The meeting went well, and a ceasefire and preliminary talks soon followed.

Despite a lot of goodwill and a promising start, the talks failed to deliver a negotiated settlement. The stumbling block was again delivering an agreement within the constitution. As a revolutionary president, ruling without a constitution, she had the powers to implement any agreement. However, Aquino just did not have the political capital to see it through. Her presidency was always fragile, suffering no less than six attempted coups, and the CPP-NPA represented a more imminent and real threat to the security of the nation.

#### Stage 5: 1992 to 1998 – President Ramos – peace is priceless

The election of President Ramos brought to power for the first time a leader who was committed to delivering a lasting peace and who had the political capital to see it through. As former head of the Armed Forces, Ramos had both the deep understanding of the Moro conflict and the credibility to deliver peace. His solution to the sticking point of the appointment of a provisional government was to come to an electoral agreement with Misuari and the MNLF

outside of the peace process. Lukas-NUCD, the political party of Ramos, would back Misuari in the upcoming elections for ARMM, and shoulder all the election expenses (in the end engineering Misuari to run uncontested). As the deal was announced there was a backlash from the Christian community, inflamed by those Christian politicians who felt the deal might prejudice their vested interests. Despite this, Ramos held his ground and did not allow the situation to derail the peace process.

After the deal was signed, Ramos formed a new panel to begin negotiations with the MILF, who had so far stayed out of the peace process. However, in early 1997 violence broke out between the MILF and the Philippine Army, resulting in the Army launching in June the first major offensive against the MILF since Marcos. A cessation of hostilities was signed between the two sides later that year. The MILF now constituted the major secessionist threat.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

Similarly to the previous section, the strategy, motivation and behaviour of the insurgent groups was not consistent across the duration of the conflict; it varied from stage to stage.

### Stage 1: mid-1960s to 1972 – the emergence of the counter-elite

The social structure of Muslim Mindanao was essentially a feudal society, ruled by a small hereditary traditional elite; it was through their co-option that Manila had traditionally ruled. It was only with the formation of the new counter-elite that the nationalist struggle became possible. The new elite had its foundations in two different university scholarship programs in Manila and Cairo. Although united at the time, the later splits along social revolutionary and Islamic ideology can be traced back to these groups.

In 1968 a powerful Cotabato Muslim politician formed the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM), capitalising on the uproar over the

Jabidah Massacre; however, the real motivation was more likely political expediency than nationalism. The emerging counter-elite, under the leadership of Nur Misuari, began to gravitate towards the MIM. Through their connections it was arranged for 90 young Moros to go to Malaysia for military training in late 1969 – the so-called ‘Top 90’. While on training the young recruits formed the MNLF, in practice a coup by the younger generation, taking control of the nationalist struggle away from the traditional elite. On return they set about preparing the ground for the future armed conflict, including sending more groups for military training.

### Stage 2: 1972 to 1976 – the premature revolution

The declaration of martial law by removing the option of legitimate political activity left armed struggle as the only alternative, and the move to disarm the population meant it was now or never. The MNLF was forced to bring forward its plans for revolution, and soon emerged as the leader of a broad coalition consisting of its own forces and aligned forces of traditional leaders and outlaws who had sided against Marcos. Central to the MNLF’s rise to power were its foreign connections and the external assistance it achieved from these sources in terms of funding, weapons and other supplies.

In March the MNLF launched a blitzkrieg-like offensive across the vast Cotabato province, taking control of 12 municipalities and threatening Cotabato City itself. It very nearly succeeded in taking control of Mindanao, and was only halted by the massive airlift of troops and some tactical mistakes. Initially the MNLF fought the Army conventionally in positional warfare, but as it was pushed back it changed to guerrilla warfare. Soon the conflict reached a stalemate. The OIC had provided significant support to the MNLF, but now this became a double-edged sword as it put pressure on the group to abandon independence and seek a negotiated peace based on autonomy.

### Stage 3: 1976 to 1986 – the illusions of peace

The Tripoli Agreement was soon thrown into disarray due to Marcos's last-minute inclusion that it must fit within the Philippine constitution. While the MNLF insisted that the thirteen provinces be immediately declared a single administrative unit, Marcos countered that since the agreement was subject to the constitutional process, plebiscites must be held first in each province. As the agreement broke down the MNLF returned to war, but was unable to match the peak of its performance in 1973-74. Instead what followed was a series of skirmishes and pocket wars.

In late 1976 Hashim Salamat launched an 'instrument of takeover' in a failed attempt to remove Misuari as leader, following which he broke away to lead his own faction which became the MILF in 1984. Misuari saw the MNLF as a secular nationalist organisation, but also with a social revolution agenda to remove the traditional elite that he saw as repressing the Moro people. Salamat and the MILF, on the other hand, saw Islam and not nationalism as their ideology. Furthermore, the groups were split partly along tribal lines – with Misuari from Sulu and Salamat a Maguindanaon – with each drawing their power base from their constituent tribes. A subsequent division followed with the split of the MNLF-Reformists in 1982 under Dimas Pundato. In the late 1970s the progressive anti-Marcos alliance was forced underground. In due course they developed a mutually supportive coalition with the MNLF against a common enemy.

### Stage 4: 1986 to 1992 – a new president and a new chance at peace

The new administration presented a new hope; but there was indecision within the MNLF, with some arguing that now was the time to launch an offensive, taking advantage of the national turmoil. Misuari was, though, persuaded to give peace a chance with his former allies and entered into negotiation with President Aquino following their historic meeting on Misuari's home turf of Sulu. The talks started well, leading to the signing of the Jeddah Accord in 1987, but soon they began

to fall apart over the familiar issue of creating an autonomous region within the confines of the constitution.

Despite the collapse of the talks, Misuari opted to keep the ceasefire in place. Meanwhile, the Aquino administration set about introducing autonomy without the consultation of the MNLF or the MILF, leading to both groups denouncing the plebiscites in late 1989. The MNLF remained by far the dominant group, but during this period the MILF began to develop as a serious force. From a series of camps that it had established across central Mindanao, it set about building a grass roots organisation based on Salamat's four-point strategy of Islamisation, strengthening the organisation, military build-up and self-reliance. This period also saw the emergence of the extremist terrorist group ASG, led by returning Afghan veteran Janjalani.

#### Stage 5: 1992 to 1998 – one last chance at peace

The MNLF responded favourably to Ramos's overtures for peace. There were many reasons why: firstly, the leadership and many of the fighters were simply tired of fighting. Secondly, Misuari was concerned with political survival, as his leadership had been in question since the collapse of the last talks, and many questioned the logic of maintaining a ceasefire. Thirdly, there was pressure from the OIC nations, on whose support the MNLF still relied, to forge a lasting peace. Fourthly, the MNLF realised that it was in a race against time to deliver peace as it was losing support to the more militant position of the MILF and the extremist ASG. Finally, there was perhaps a desire by the MNLF to establish a political structure that would assure its ascendancy versus the traditional elite in peacetime.

The deal saw Misuari becoming chair of the SPCPD but also, in an intriguing twist, entering into an electoral pact with Ramos's political party for Misuari to lead the existing ARMM. The idea was that controlling ARMM would give the MNLF the 'provisional government' that it was demanding as part of the peace deal. This decision divided opinion within the MNLF: some saw it as necessary to give the MNLF some real political powers and legitimacy, while others saw this as co-option

gone too far. The deal soon ran into problems, as the SPCPD turned out to be a particularly weak institution and Misuari became bogged down in governing the ARMM, becoming tainted with the endemic corruption that existed within the institution. The MILF meanwhile had decided to sit out the peace process. As the implementation of this process failed to deliver, many in the MNLF began to move sideways into the MILF. As such, the MILF soon emerged as the more powerful group, picking up the mantle of leading the secessionist movement.

## PART 2: ANALYSIS – UNDERSTANDING THE PROGRESSION OF THE CONFLICTS

In the previous sections, each conflict has been dissected into discrete stages, in which each stage represents a unique set of factors and conditions which make that stage distinct from the previous and following stages. Furthermore, for each stage the changes in context and the evolution of the strategy/actions of both the state and non-state actors are outlined. The progression of the conflict has been unpacked and light shed on how it transformed across the stages. This process shows how the changes in the trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors defined the stages and the transformation from stage to stage.

This process has illuminated the individual conflicts, illustrating how they are not just homogenous entities but change over time and, importantly, highlighting how the multitude of factors that drive the conflicts also develop over time. As such, a conflict with two different stages across its duration could be driven by entirely different factors in each. The question now is: what can a comparison of this analysis on the three conflicts tell us? If the factor(s) in each of the stages of each of the conflicts are identified, this will allow the examination of two things. Firstly, it will illuminate clearly how the drivers of the conflicts have changed across the stages. Secondly, it will allow a comparison between the conflicts of the factors driving them and whether there are any similarities in these drivers, or whether there are any patterns to their appearance.

The analysis section will be in two parts. Firstly it will examine permanent factors that do not change with time and remain constant throughout the conflict. These factors do not account for changes in the conflicts' dynamics, but set parameters within which the dynamics fluctuate. Secondly, it will examine the variable factors that change over time and how they drive the conflicts' dynamics. It will then finish with some reflection on this analysis, and tackle one of the key points that emerges: namely, why was the situation in the Punjab Crisis so different to that in the Naga Insurgency or the Moro rebellion? Why was the state able to de-escalate the conflict so completely in the Punjab? It will then go on to draw key conclusions from the analysis of the three conflicts.

## BACKGROUND PARAMETERS

Whilst some factors change over time, and as they change drive the dynamics of the conflicts, there are other factors that do not change; they are permanent and pre-existing to the conflict. The importance of this group of factors is that they set the parameters within which the conflict can escalate. As such they determine the possibilities of how it can develop.

### Physical geography

The nature of the regions' terrain had direct implications on the evolution of the separatist struggles. Regions that contain remote or inaccessible terrain such as dense jungle or mountain ranges offer separatist groups places to hide from the government forces. Terrain like this protects the groups from the overwhelming military capacity of the state, providing locations which favour guerrilla forces over modern security forces. These areas of relative safety allow the groups to develop and grow in size, and importantly to control territory, allowing them to pursue a strategy of insurgency.

The key difference between the three cases is that whilst both Mindanao and Nagaland had an abundance of remote and inaccessible

land, including dense jungle, marshes and mountainous regions, the very opposite was true with the Punjab. In contrast, the Punjab is an area of open rolling plains. The region's physical geography offered very little in terms of protection from the state; the net result was that in such an environment it would be impossible for the fledgling separatist groups to successfully adopt the strategy of insurgency. Even at the height of the conflict and the groups' strength, they were not able to hold any territory and there were never any no-go areas for the state security forces. The groups may have been opting for an insurgent strategy, but the lay of the land limited its applicability, and helps to explain why the groups resorted to terrorism (either as tactic or strategy).

In Nagaland and Mindanao, the terrain allowed the groups to develop protected from the state and to successfully follow a strategy of insurgency. In both conflicts the groups managed to control territory, as the nature of the terrain made it hard for the state to dominate it and to control the population.<sup>262</sup> For both Nagaland and Mindanao, the nature of the physical geography meant that pursuing a strategy of insurgency was a viable option. In this way the topography of the region can determine the strategy options.

It is not just the type of terrain that can give safety to separatist groups; equally important is the accessibility of friendly international borders. By crossing a border into a friendly nation, groups can operate in safety from the state's security forces. Each of the conflicts took place in regions along international borders, presenting the groups with the possibility of finding a sanctuary from which to operate. A foreign sanctuary is, however, different from a domestic sanctuary within the group's own region, which allows them to control territory, build up the structures and amass the support base necessary to implement a successful independence struggle.

In the Punjab, despite enjoying no protection from the terrain, the groups could easily slip across the border to Pakistan. For the Naga groups their territory straddled the border with India and Burma, as well as having access to East Pakistan/Bangladesh and China. Despite

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<sup>262</sup> One of the key reasons for the Indian Army's counter-insurgency success in Nagaland during stage 4 was that they learnt from their previous mistakes and managed to saturate and control the terrain.

being an island nation with no land borders, the islands of Muslim Mindanao were very close to the Sabah state of Malaysia. The groups were able to exploit their location by finding sanctuary across the borders, using them as training camps, bases and supply routes. The protection that such sanctuary offered the groups made it increasingly hard for the state to take on and eliminate them. The implication is that this factor plays a significant role in allowing the separatist groups to sustain an armed struggle.

### Human geography

Human geography outlines the population make-up of the regions, including the social cleavages that can serve as points of friction. The population make-up is fundamentally important to the nature of the conflicts; without the existence of a minority group there would not be a separatist struggle in the first place. However, there are further factors, such as other social cleavages, that can influence the evolution of the conflict.

The Nagas, far from being a homogeneous group, consist of up to 50 tribes. These tribal divisions and competing loyalties provided plenty of friction that drove internal conflicts, further complicated by clan and village loyalties. In addition, many of the Nagas' areas are shared or disputed with other ethnic groups, which saw in the latter stages the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence. Similarly, in Mindanao the Muslim population is made up of a number of tribes. These tribal divisions again were partly the drivers behind the factionalisation of the movement. Likewise, the Sikh population in the Punjab had so many divisions and fractures that it is little surprise the movement was unable to maintain a united front and splintered into dozens of gangs.

The central point here is that as the conflict progressed, points of friction developed along pre-existing cleavages in society. For example, if Mindanao and Nagaland were not tribal societies, tribal dynamics could not have played a role in driving the violence. In this way the human geography puts parameters around the way in which the conflict could progress. However, as we have seen, some cleavages are created during the conflict and in turn influence its dynamics.

## History

The seeds of all three conflicts were sown in the preceding few hundred years of history. Events of the past continue to shape the future; in many ways, these are conflicts that cannot escape their past. There is a key historical parallel that runs through each of the cases. Each is a conflict regarding an ethnic group that is fighting to separate themselves from a nation state they do not feel a part of. The process through which this happened in all three cases is colonisation. The reason why this history still affects the present is because the result of de-colonisation was to create an unstable situation, which like a dormant volcano remains volatile and ready to erupt. The imposition of colonial boundaries over ethnic groupings created artificial boundaries, maintaining an underlying friction that would drive conflict. In doing so it created a wound that would not heal.

The Nagas had historically been unconnected with India, whom they found themselves absorbed into. Furthermore, the colonial boundaries actually divided the Naga territories between India and Burma. Similarly, the Moros had resisted more than 300 years of Spanish colonialism only to find themselves colonised by the slight of the pen as the Spanish sold the Philippines to America, who then integrated them by force into the nation state of the Philippines. The Sikh Empire of the Punjab was one of the last parts of the subcontinent to be absorbed into British India. When the British left and the Raj was partitioned between India and Pakistan, the dividing line was right through the middle of the Punjab, causing millions to emigrate across the new border following the ethnic violence it induced. It left a Sikh population with their traditional lands divided, and suffering from an identity crisis as they adjusted to their new position in India. The Sikh situation, however, was different from that of the Nagas and the Moros. Although a distinct religious minority, they were not an ethnic minority in the same way, and were much more integrated within India. They were always a minority within India rather than an ethnic minority concentrated on the fringes of a nation in the way that the Nagas and the Moros were. This created in some an identity crisis and a minority persecution complex, but not the same desire for actual separation. However, it still created a simmering, volatile situation.

All three situations had their roots in colonisation; conversely the nation state legacy of de-colonisation and the borders it enshrined made resolving this point of tension almost impossible. Any redrawing of national boundaries was unlikely.

## Culture

The unique culture of ethnic groups can also play a role in the development of the conflicts. It is no small coincidence the ethnic groups in each of these conflicts has a martial or warrior culture. As such, fighting for their beliefs and making war were part of their historical heritage. In essence, resorting to an armed struggle was revered in their culture; a trait that would no doubt increase the likelihood of escalation as compared to ethnic groups without such traditions.

The Sikhs are a martial race, and see themselves as warriors. This plays a central part in their religious identity and is also compounded by centuries of military exploits. The Nagas and Moros are both feared warrior tribes on the edge of empires that had fought off oppressors for centuries. For them, making war was a part of life.

## VARIABLE FACTORS

This section investigates the factors that vary over the duration of the conflict, which as they change drive the escalation or de-escalation processes of the conflict. To this end, below are three tables, one for each conflict. Along the vertical axis are the stages of the conflict in chronological order, and along the horizontal axis are all the factors that drive the conflicts. The factors are grouped together in the trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors.

**CONTEXT:** Social cleavages; popular support; grievances; local politics; national politics; international politics

## ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

**STATE ACTORS:** State action – coercive force; state action – policy solution; state capacity; strong/weak government

**NON-STATE ACTORS:** Strategy of armed groups; capacity of armed groups; factionalisation; criminalisation

For each stage, the factors that drove the conflict in that stage are highlighted, showing clearly how the factors driving the conflict changed. A factor that drove an escalation is shaded dark grey and a factor that drove de-escalation is shaded light grey. Factors are only marked if they were one of the primary factors driving the escalation or de-escalation in that stage. Through comparison of all three tables, any patterns or similarities will be identified.

### FACTORS OVER STAGES

1: NAGA INSURGENCY	CONTEXT				STATE			NON-STATE							
	Social cleavages	Popular support	Grievances	Local politics	National politics	International politics	State action – coercive force	State action – policy solution	State capacity	Strong government	Weak government	Strategy	Capacity	Factionalisation	Criminalisation
Phase 1 1947-58															
Phase 2 1958-64															
Phase 3 1964-68															
Phase 4 1968-75															
Phase 5 1975-88															
Phase 6 1988-97															
Phase 7 1997-2001															



*Factors that maintained the conflict*

*Factors that de-escalated the conflict*

## UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT DYNAMICS

	CONTEXT					STATE			NON-STATE						
	Social cleavages	Popular support	Grievances	Local politics	National politics	International politics	State action – coercive force	State action – policy solution	State capacity	Strong government	Weak government	Strategy	Capacity	Factionalism	Criminalisation
Phase 1 1984															
Phase 2 1985-87															
Phase 3 1987-89															
Phase 4 1989-91															
Phase 5 1991-95															

	CONTEXT					STATE			NON-STATE						
	Social cleavages	Popular support	Grievances	Local politics	National politics	International politics	State action - coercive force	State action - policy solution	State capacity	Strong government	Weak government	Strategy	Capacity	Factionalism	Criminalisation
Phase 1 1960s-72															
Phase 2 1972-76															
Phase 3 1976-86															
Phase 4 1986-92															
Phase 5 1992-98															



*Factors that maintained the conflict*  
*Factors that de-escalated the conflict*

## CONTEXT

### Social cleavages

All societies are subdivided by many different social cleavages, both horizontally and vertically. These cleavages represent lines along which societies are prone to fissure – points of potential conflict. Fundamentally, each of the conflicts as ethno-separatist conflicts were spawned along the fissure of a social cleavage. However, there were more cleavages beneath the surfaces of the ethnic groups which often became points of friction that changed or drove the conflict.

In Mindanao, the violence in Stage 1 was driven by conflict along a number of cleavages; not just sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians, manipulated by warring political clans, but also class cleavages, with violence between the Christian and Muslim elites and the Christian and Muslim peasant farmers they were exploiting. On top of this, the key social change that would take place in Stage 1 – the formation of a counter-elite within the Muslim population – would be the foundation upon which the separatist movement would be built, driving the conflict in Stage 2 and onwards. In the next stage, following the Tripoli Agreement, the MNLF began to fracture along the cleavages of tribe, secular/Islamic and social revolutionary/conservative.

From the beginning, Naga politics has been a fractious affair, divided by numerous competing tribal loyalties. In Stage 2, when the first divisions within the Nagas emerged between the moderates and extremists, this was partially driven by the undercurrent of tribal divisions. In the next stage the first factional division was led by the Sema tribe breaking away to form the RGN. The later split into the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) was largely along tribal lines. However, the most important cleavage, in terms of driving the conflict, was between those tribes which resided within Nagaland State and those which were left out. After the creation of the state, it was those tribes that were left out and enjoyed none of the benefits of statehood who continued the insurgency. Similarly, in Stages 4 and 5, the conflict expanded along ethnic cleavages between the Nagas outside the state and other ethnic groups with whom they were competing for territory.

In the Punjab, the Sikh militancy partially arose out of divisions within the Sikh political community, and the rise of the militancy can be viewed, in part, as a consequence of the struggle for political control within this community. The separatist movement was united behind the Panthic Committee in Stage 2, but the decapitation of its leadership in Stage 3 allowed the emergence of factions led by pre-existing divisions which had been kept subdued, most notably with the rise of the Babbar Khalsa International. The reality was that the Sikh community was so internally divided along multiple cleavages that it was impossible to establish a unified movement to fight for Khalistan. Instead, the movement continued to fracture into ever more competing groups.

The conflict dynamics were driven both by pre-existing social cleavages such as tribe and class, and also emerging ones such as the creation of a counter-elite (as in Mindanao) or the division between those inside or outside of Nagaland State. The progression of the conflict could thus create new cleavages that in turn drove the conflict.

### Popular support

Popular support holds a unique and central place in the dynamics of each conflict; achieving the support of the population is crucial to the success of both the state and non-state actors. Insurgency and counter-insurgency is often described, for these reasons, as a war amongst the people for the people. In all three cases, in the early stages, the militants had popular support on their side, which allowed them to launch the campaign. However, it is not as straightforward as that. When the separatist groups initially emerged, none of them enjoyed from the outset the necessary popular support. The game changer was the state's initial reaction to the groups, which in each case succeeded in alienating the population and driving them straight into the hands of the militants. Whether it was by design or accident, the state had fallen into the classic provocation trap.

Popular support, as mentioned above, is fundamental for either side to win in the conflict. One of the key changes in the dynamics of the Punjab Crisis was the movement's loss of the population's support: as

the Sikh population became the main victims of the militants' violence, the groups began to lose their legitimacy. When the population came off the fence in Stage 5 and actively sided with the security forces, the militants' days were numbered. A key difference with the other two conflicts is that, to a certain degree, the insurgents always maintained the support of the population. The people never turned against them in the manner in which they did in the Punjab.

The description 'popular support' may not be the most accurate term. 'Population control' may be a better description, i.e. whoever has control of the population. It is hard to determine how much of the population supported one side or another, and how much the population was simply intimidated or dominated by one side. The crucial point, though, is that they were not actively helping the other side. In the Punjab, the groups had lost the active support of the population by Stage 3, but it was not until Stage 5 when the people actively began to support the police against the militants. In between, the population was controlled through fear by the militants, where the militants appeared stronger than the police, in what K. P. S. Gill describes as a 'societal Stockholm syndrome'. For both Nagaland and Mindanao, the people remained supportive of the idea of their separate ethnic identity as Nagas and Moros, and of some level of independence/autonomy. However, how much the population supported the insurgent groups or was controlled by them is harder to assess. Either way, the population did not switch sides to support the state in the way that happened in the Punjab.

Popular support of the wider domestic audience (i.e. the support of the population outside of the ethnic minority fighting the separatist insurgency) also matters. Ultimately the choice of policies that the state can follow is limited by the national political situation, which depends on the support of the population. In all three conflicts, the state's choice of action was framed by the national political context. In Mindanao the situation went further. A major hindrance to achieving a resolution to the conflict in Stages 4 and 5 was the open hostility from the Christian population. Part of the reason for the failure of the implementation of a satisfactory autonomous region, under both Marcos and Aquino, was that the Christian population voted not to be included in it, thus

reducing the autonomous region to those few regions that still had a Muslim majority. In a similar vein, the view of populations in the states adjoining Nagaland that contained Naga minorities affected the viability of being able to integrate these areas into a 'Greater Nagaland'. The result was the Naga struggle becoming entangled in a wider regional inter-ethnic conflict. Likewise in the Punjab Crisis, the Indian government had to consider that how they chose to address the conflict would affect their electoral chances across the country, particularly in relation to the neighbouring states which would be directly affected by certain aspects of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and nationally for the Congress Party as it chased the Hindu bloc vote.

### Grievances

In each of the conflicts there was a particular set of grievances that helped to create a context in which a popular separatist insurgency could develop. Ethnic identity and nationalism were fundamental to the separatist movement's ideologies in all of the cases. However, nationalism was also fuelled by more physical concerns such as poverty and discrimination. One difference in the cases is that in Nagaland nationalism came first. The grievance at the root of the conflict is entirely political; the Nagas do not see themselves as Indian and wish to be independent. Grievances against state misrule and discrimination came later, and further drove nationalism. In the Punjab and Mindanao, on the other hand, the rise of nationalism followed periods of state misrule and discrimination, implying that nationalism may have been a response to such grievances, rather than the primary cause. However, which came first is a chicken-and-egg question, and the direction of causality is not clear-cut. Is the self-determination desired in itself, or as the proposed solution to other grievances? Which, then, needs to be addressed first? If the other grievances are the real key, the desire for self-determination may dissipate if they are addressed first. In other cases, however, self-determination may be the primary grievance to be addressed.

Although grievances played a crucial role in the ignition of the conflict, they were not the only factor that drove the violence. The

initial heavy-handed state response soon became more important in uniting the population behind the separatists in each of the three cases. In Nagaland and Mindanao, grievances that set the initial context for the conflict remained throughout its duration, acting as a sustaining dynamic. However, they were not the only factors sustaining the violence and not necessarily the most important drivers. Nevertheless they remained unresolved, setting the context within which the conflicts were played out. In the Punjab, the situation was different; as the conflict progressed, the alleged grievances became less important, and the groups themselves became the sustaining dynamic of the violence. In reality the majority of the population did not share the grievances of the separatists; what had united them was the initial state violence, driving them into the hands of the extremists and temporarily buying their narrative of Khalistan. This in part explains why the conflict ended without the state making any political concessions.

The key points are that not only do grievances vary over the duration of the conflict, but some grievances are the result of the conflict itself. As such, the progression of the conflict can produce grievances – such as a heavy-handed state response – that then drive or sustain the conflict. The situation in the Punjab also highlighted the difference between the grievances that the groups are espousing, and those that have genuine popular support.

### Local politics

Local political dynamics frequently played a role in driving the violence in each of the conflicts, often interlocking with wider national political dynamics. In the Punjab, the militancy emerged out of the campaign for Sikh rights. This was further driven by interference at the national level by the Congress Party, who covertly backed the militant faction of Sant Bhindranwale in the hope of splitting the Sikh vote and allowing Congress electoral victory in the state. The situation was further undermined by power struggles within both the Congress and Akali Dal parties. In Mindanao the violence in the first stage evolved out of power struggles by the various political clans, which soon took on a

sectarian nature. These were further driven by the national political struggle between the two major political parties, who fought out their national struggle in Mindanao via proxies by backing competing political clans. In this way a national power struggle poured fuel on the flames of a local power struggle; as the two combined it escalated the conflict. In Nagaland, the conflict emerged following the takeover of the NNC by the extremist wing under Phizo. From the beginning, the undercurrent of tribal politics would play a key role in the emerging conflict's dynamics. However, it was the creation of Nagaland State that brought the political dynamic central to the conflict in what developed into the powerful politician-insurgent nexus, forming a symbiotic relationship.

Although the advent of or return to democratic rule is usually seen as a priority and a core part of conflict resolution, the electoral process itself often becomes a key driver of escalation. When elections are called, militant organisations and the state seek to exert their power in order to control the elections and hence the result. Alternatively, they may try to derail the elections if their aims are furthered by preventing the elections from taking place. In short, elections provide something worth fighting for, and act as a destabilising factor in the short-term. In both Punjab and Mindanao, cycles of violence were driven by the electoral process, where the staging of elections became a major driver of the escalation in violence. In the final stage of the Punjab, the state learnt from its previous mistakes, and launched the counterterrorism campaign first to ensure that elections were held only after security had been restored.

### National politics

Throughout the duration of the conflicts, unrelated political dynamics at a national level often had an effect on the progression of the conflict. In the Punjab, Rajiv Gandhi's decision to fight the national elections at the end of Stage 3 on a security ticket saw a delay in negotiating with the militants, allowing the situation to reverse itself. This was compounded by the resulting political instability the election result brought in Stage 4. In the Philippines, Marcos's decision in Stage 2 to declare martial law

ignited the insurgency, but that decision was driven largely by factors taking place elsewhere in the Philippines. Similarly, the People Power Revolution in Stage 3 that removed Marcos from power brought the hope that a political solution could be reached. However, the political instability during Stage 4 of President Aquino's term in office meant she was unable to deliver the hoped-for peace deal. In Nagaland, the economic liberalisation of the 1990s and the Asian economic boom led to the Indian government's formation of the Look East policy, which overnight changed the strategic importance of the Indian Northeast.

Besides these fluctuations in national political dynamics which had the knock-on effect of escalating or de-escalating the conflicts, the conflicts themselves were trapped within the parameters of their political context. In India, following the trauma of partition, any further ceding of territory was politically impossible. Any political party that was contemplating a solution to the conflicts that involved separation was committing political suicide. As such it was never a real option. A similar situation existed in the Philippines, where the vast majority of the population is Christian. As such, any government must be careful not to lose its electoral support with the majority population while resolving the Moro question. All of the conflicts were caught within the political parameters of their countries.

### International politics

Despite being localised conflicts, all three were intertwined with wider regional and international political dynamics. In each case the militants received direct support in terms of funding, weapons, training and sanctuaries, as well as diplomatic and moral support, from outside parties. The impact of foreign support was to dramatically increase the capabilities of the groups and hence escalate the conflicts. All three cases saw an escalation when they began to receive foreign backing and also a corresponding de-escalation when foreign support declined.

The role of foreign support can manifest itself in the conflicts in many different ways. In both the Punjab and Mindanao, it played a part in incubating the fledgling insurgencies. In the Punjab, the initial

foreign support in Stage 2 came from the Sikh diaspora, which provided ideological, financial and moral support. In Mindanao, the MNLF grew out of the covert training and financing from the Malaysian and Libyan governments which it received in Stage 1. In all three cases, the emergence of a major foreign backer dramatically escalated the conflict once it had begun: in the Punjab, when Pakistan came off the fence in Stage 3 and backed the Khalistani militants; in Nagaland when Pakistan and China entered the fray in Stages 2 and 3 respectively; and in Mindanao with the entrance of Libyan support in Stages 1-2. There were corresponding de-escalations when foreign support ended after the Bangladeshi War of Independence in Nagaland in Stage 4 and after the OIC-sponsored Tripoli Accord in Mindanao in Stage 3. In the Punjab, Pakistan continued to support the groups, but a key part of the successful counterterrorism campaign was securing the border.

As some of the groups became so dependent on foreign support, the foreign powers were also able to influence their strategies and aims. In the Punjab, Pakistani support is partially behind the factionalisation and descent into random violence. Pakistan's aims were to use the groups to create as much chaos and violence in India as possible, rather than to support a successful campaign for Khalistan. In Mindanao, the OIC was instrumental in the MNLF changing its aims from independence to autonomy.

Foreign support was not just in the form of direct aid, such as funding or training. A crucial part was the availability of a foreign sanctuary from which the groups could operate, safe from attack from the state security forces. In all three cases the groups had access to a safe foreign sanctuary, sometimes with direct support from the host nation, but not always. In the Punjab the Khalistani groups had easy access across the porous Pakistan border; the Nagas could transverse the borders into Burma, China and East Pakistan/Bangladesh; and the Moro groups were a short sail from the Malaysian state of Sabah. What was important was the existence of an international border across which they could hide, out of reach of the state security forces.

As the groups had some level of foreign backing in each conflict, it meant that the conflicts were entwined in the wider international context. Pakistan's support of the Khalistani groups, and Pakistan

and China's support of the Naga groups were a result of the regional tensions between India and her neighbours, whereby they sought to fight India via proxies by supporting the armed groups. Similarly, Malaysian support for the MNLF was supposedly influenced by the Malaysian-Philippine tension over Sabah. However, wider changes in the international system could also have had direct effects on the conflicts. Libyan and OIC support for the MNLF was not due to any conflict with the Philippines, but rather a result of Libya's efforts to portray itself as a protector of Muslims, and the political awakening of the Muslim world after the burning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which led to the formation of the OIC. Similarly, the end of foreign support to the Naga groups was due to the secession of East Pakistan following the Bangladeshi War of Independence.

However, foreign support was to a certain extent a poisoned chalice to the groups. Their foreign backers did not share their objectives of achieving independence; instead they sought to exploit the groups to achieve their own objectives, thus creating a paradox in which the groups owed their strength and success in large part to their foreign backers, who at the same time would never provide the groups with the support they needed to achieve their real objective of independence. It is not surprising that the second-generation groups, the NSCN (IM) and MILF, adopted a specific strategy of self-reliance.

## STATE ACTORS

### State action – coercive force

The role that state military action played in each of the three case studies is controversial. However, what is clear is that in the initial phases of the conflict, state military action, far from serving its purpose of de-escalating the conflict, had the opposite effect. Its action transformed what were in comparison (to later) relatively low-level conflicts into large-scale separatist conflicts, with the state military action itself becoming the catalyst driving the escalation. In the Punjab Crisis, the Indian Army's ill-fated Operation Blue Star in

Stage 1, although successful in driving the militants out of the Golden Temple, was a public relations disaster that united the Sikh population behind a cause that so far had been significant but of limited scope. This was then compounded by the mopping-up exercise, Operation Woodrose. In Nagaland, there was a similar turn of events in Stage 1 with the brutality of the Indian Army's scorched earth policy, uniting the Nagas behind the nationalist campaign of Phizo and the NNC. In both cases the military violence served to unite a sceptical population behind the separatist insurgents.

The process was slightly different in Mindanao. In Stage 1, the partisan nature of the police alienated the Muslim population from the Christian-dominated government. Then in Stage 2 the declaration of martial law forced the fledgling MNLF to bring forward its plans, transforming a period of sectarian violence into a full-blown civil war on the island. Moreover, the accumulative abuses under military rule united Muslim support under the MNLF banner. In all three, the state military action backfired and escalated the conflicts, with the military action itself now becoming a 'root cause' of the conflict.

The use of state violence, however, was not always as counterproductive as it was during the initial stages of the conflicts. Military action was used in the later stages of all of the campaigns, achieving different results. In the Punjab Crisis, the first counterterrorism campaign under K. P. S. Gill in Stage 3 proved successful in reducing the militant violence, whilst the second campaign in Stage 5 ended the conflict permanently. Similarly, the Indian Army crushed the NNC with their counter-insurgency campaign in Stage 4, although the conflict would re-emerge under the NSCN. In the Philippines, the armed forces were never able to defeat the MNLF or MILF, but they were able to prevent them from achieving their goals, forcing them into a stalemate and bringing them to the negotiating table.

A key difference in how the state applied coercive force in the three conflicts was that in the Punjab the police force became the primary tool used to fight the insurgency. The comparison of the use of the Punjab police force against the early use of the Army in the Punjab, and the use of the Army in the other cases serves to highlight the benefits of the police over the Army in counter-insurgency. The military

is a blunt instrument, trained primarily to destroy a foreign enemy; although it has the firepower it often lacks the knowledge and training to fight a different sort of conflict amongst its own people. The police have the benefits of coming from the local area, and as such having a better knowledge of the human and physical terrain. Their pre-existing network of criminal informers provides an excellent base for the collection of intelligence. Also, whilst Army soldiers would be sent to a region for a tour of duty, the police recruited locally would have a stake in the outcome of the conflict. Furthermore, sending in national troops to fight a local insurgency reinforces the centre-periphery framing of the insurgents. On the other hand, the use of a local police force from the same ethnic group can help to internalise the conflict. Nonetheless, in the initial stages the police in all three conflicts lacked the capacity to contain the conflict, leaving no option but to send in the Army.

#### State action – policy solutions

In each of the conflicts the state attempted to deliver a political solution, but with varying degrees of success. Importantly, the first attempt at a political solution was a failure in all three cases. In the Punjab, the Indian government failed to deliver on the Rajiv-Longowal Accord in Stage 2/3; in Nagaland the prime-ministerial negotiations of Stage 3 failed to produce a solution; and in Mindanao Marcos deliberately set about undermining the 1976 Tripoli Accord in Stage 3. The impact of the failure of the political solutions was to strengthen the extremists over the moderates within the militant movements, who could then argue that an armed struggle was the only means to achieve their aims. As such the collapse of a peace process served to provide new impetus to the conflicts, and drive their escalation. On the flip side the collapse of peace talks would also deepen the divisions within the non-state actors, which was possibly the state's aim.

In Nagaland, the state's first attempt at a political solution would have a much more profound effect, changing the nature of the struggle and becoming itself one of the major drivers of the rest of the conflict.

The decision to create the new Nagaland State in Stage 2 might have seemed an elegant compromise solution providing meaningful autonomy within the Indian Union, but it would have disastrous consequences. The boundaries of the new state, whilst including the majority of the tribes that had been most active in the early stages of the conflict, left out many other Naga tribes. Leadership of the struggle now passed to these tribes outside of Nagaland, who enjoyed none of the benefits of statehood and remained minorities in their own states. The creation of a Greater Nagaland then became a central objective; however, this then embroiled the Naga conflict into a wider ethnic conflict in Stages 6 and 7, as the ethnic groups of adjoining states fought against losing any more territory to Nagaland State.

Ultimately, political solutions were to play a role in partially de-escalating the conflicts in both Nagaland and Mindanao. The Punjab Crisis stands out as being the only one in which the conflict was completely ended, and without any political solution. In Nagaland, the Indian state has successfully maintained a ceasefire with both factions since Stage 7, although negotiations for a political solution are ongoing. However, the ceasefire had two unintended consequences: firstly it ignited inter-factional fighting in Stage 7, and secondly it strengthened the groups who were able to expand their criminal activities unchecked. In Mindanao, the 1996 peace deal successfully ended the conflict with the MNLF, but not the conflict as a whole. The previously smaller MILF picked up the torch of the separatist struggle in Stage 5, at the same time absorbing those MNLF fighters who disagreed with the peace deal. The struggle continued under a different banner.

### State capacity

It was important not just whether the state chose to use military action, but also whether it had the capacity or ability to achieve its goals through such means. In the early stages the states often lacked the experience and know-how, as well as the sheer military capacity, to be able to deal with the emerging insurgent threat. In each case study there was a clear pattern. The local police, paramilitary and

intelligence apparatus were woefully inadequate to contain the armed struggle as it arose. As the state apparatus was unable to ‘nip in the bud’ the emerging violence, the insurgent groups were able to grow to a stage where they overwhelmed the local state security forces. As a result the national armies were called in as the situation escalated out of control. The Army, without the experience and knowledge of how to confront a popular insurgency, acted as a blunt instrument (rather than using targeted intelligence-based operations). The subsequent military violence and associated human rights abuses failed to destroy the insurgents, while at the same time alienating the population and driving them into the arms of the insurgents.

It would then take the security forces several years to be able to both build up their capacity and to learn from their mistakes, and so be able to develop a winning strategy. As such the security forces went through a learning curve – in terms of know-how and resources and structure – until they were able to effectively take on the militants. The result was that in the early stages, a military solution was not a realistic option. However, there then came a point where if the learning curve had been steep enough, the security forces could effectively take on the militants. This can be seen in the Punjab with K. P. S. Gill’s second counterterrorism campaigns in Stage 5, and in the counter-insurgency campaign leading to the Shillong Accord in Stage 4 of the Naga Insurgency. Both campaigns learnt from previous experiences and destroyed the insurgents militarily. Whilst this ended the conflict in the Punjab, it would later reignite in Nagaland. The reasons why a military approach worked in one and not in another will be discussed later. In Mindanao the military was never in a position to destroy the insurgents militarily, but was able to hold them to a strategic stalemate.

#### Strong/weak government

Even if a state pursues the right policy, having the capability to deliver it is another matter. Equally important is whether the government has the political will or necessary political capital to see its policies

through. A weak or strong government at the Centre can determine the ultimate success of state action. In the Punjab the weak national governments of Stage 4 undermined the existing counterterrorism campaign and subsequently emboldened the militants to abandon talks and press on with an armed struggle. The police, feeling that they lacked the necessary political support, stepped back. In the Philippines the peace talks under President Aquino in Stage 4 collapsed as the president was not in a strong enough position to see them through. Her government was plagued by military coups, as well as facing a resurgent NPA threat and struggling to rebuild a nation after Marcos's downfall.

Conversely, a strong government was crucial in ending both of these conflicts. It was the new government of Prime Minister Rao that brought back K. P. S. Gill and provided the police with the necessary political support and resources to deliver the winning counterterrorism campaign. Similarly, the 1996 peace deal with the MNLF was only possible due to the political capital enjoyed by President Ramos, who was determined to see a peace deal through. As a former Army chief and a popular president, he was able to provide the energy and make the concessions necessary to deliver a deal.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

### Strategy of armed groups

The outbreak of armed conflict in all three cases is essentially rooted in the groups' decisions to adopt the strategy of armed struggle to achieve their objectives. However, there are also times where the groups have chosen to pursue different strategies which then became the driving force behind the escalation.

In Mindanao, the dramatic escalation to a full-blown conventional conflict in Stage 2 was driven by the MNLF's decision to launch an all-out blitzkrieg-like offensive with the hope of taking control of Mindanao. From Stage 4 onwards the emergence of the MILF as a distinct power with their entirely different four-stage strategy began to change the

nature of the conflict, although this did not come to prominence until after the peace treaty with the MNLF in 1996.

The NNC's decision to view the NPC as traitors and to declare war against the Nagaland State government in Stage 2 escalated the conflict along another axis. Now the violence was not just between the NNC and the Indian state, but also within the Naga population, between the NNC and the Naga State government. The most dramatic impact of a change of strategy, however, was seen with the arrival of the NSCN (IM) in Stage 4 and their re-conceptualisation of the conflict as a protracted struggle, in particular their adoption of the Maoist concept of the 'United Front', leading to the escalation of insurgencies across the Northeast through the NSCN (IM)'s 'mother insurgency' strategy. Similarly, other strategic changes such as 'self-reliance' and 'urban insurgency' changed the nature of the conflict. Furthermore, the pursuit of a Greater Nagaland policy precipitated ethnic violence with neighbouring populations.

In the Punjab, as the militants regrouped after Operation Blue Star in Stage 2, the decision to adopt the ideology of Khalistan and to pursue this by armed struggle ensured the progression and escalation of the conflict. Later, in Stage 4, the massive escalation in violence was partly driven by the introduction of new strategies, such as enforcement of social edicts, mass mobilisation of the population, election boycotts and the fateful decision to target police families.

Conversely, changes in the groups' strategies have also been important aspects of the de-escalations. This is most notably the case in Mindanao: first with the signing of the Tripoli Agreement, later with the ceasefire under President Aquino, and crucially also when the MNLF decided to maintain the ceasefire despite the breakdown of the talks. The MNLF chose to maintain the ceasefire for a decade until it finally signed the 1996 peace agreement, ensuring that the conflict never returned to the levels of violence seen in the 1970s. In addition the MILF took the decision not to undermine both sets of talks despite not being included and to give a political solution a chance, even if ultimately it rejected the agreement. Similarly in Nagaland, the NSCN (IM) made the decision to seek a political solution and to enter a ceasefire with the Indian state in 1997, a ceasefire that it has chosen to maintain through

15 years of negotiation. This case is not perhaps as clear-cut, however, as the ceasefire then ignited inter-Naga factional fighting. The Punjab Crisis was different; although the groups flirted with negotiation, there was at no stage a change in strategy to de-escalate the violence and to pursue a political solution.

### Capacity of armed groups

The groups' ability to deliver their strategy depended largely on their capacity, or simply their ability to fight. The outbreak of the conflict would not have been possible without the groups having the ability to launch an armed struggle. However the capacity of the groups would vary over the course of the struggle, and would affect their ability to escalate the conflict.

Across the stages 1-4, the Khalistani groups saw a continuous increase in capacity that fuelled their ever-increasing levels of violence. Stage 2 saw the movement regroup and form its official armed wing, spurred on by the influx of money from the Sikh diaspora. Following the entrance of Pakistan into the conflict, the groups made a big step forward in capacity, particularly with regard to the sophistication of their weapons – the introduction of the AK-47 was a landmark step. Across Stages 3 and 4, the groups' capacity swelled under Pakistani support, with a continued rise in the lethality of the weaponry and training. The success of the groups and the money they were making from criminal activities also swelled their ranks, as many young men were attracted by their power and wealth. As the groups' sizes and fighting capability increased, so did the levels of violence.

In Nagaland, the NNC went through a period of increased capacity and professionalisation in Stages 2 and 3 following the inflow of support from Pakistan and China, allowing the groups to escalate the conflicts. Conversely, as the foreign support dried up following the Bangladeshi War of Independence, the NNC's capacity declined, contributing to their defeat following the Indian Army's counter-insurgency campaign in Stage 4. The conflict then only re-escalated against the Indian forces in Stage 6 as the NSCN (IM) rebuilt its capacity through its strategy of

self-reliance, including establishing new supply routes for armaments not reliant on foreign sponsors.

In Mindanao, the MNLF emerged in Stage 2 with significant capacity, enabled by its foreign backers, in particular Libya, to launch a full-scale assault to take control of Mindanao. However, Stage 2 was the high point of the MNLF's strength. Although the group chose to return to armed struggle after the collapse of the Tripoli Accord, it was never again able to regain its strength and capacity. As such, in the subsequent stages the war remained a low-intensity conflict consisting of pocket wars and guerrilla warfare. However, although they no longer possessed the capacity to win independence by armed struggle, they still retained a significant capacity that could not be ignored or defeated militarily, eventually forcing a negotiated settlement. Meanwhile, the MILF quietly and efficiently continued to build its strength. After the 1996 peace accord, when the group picked up the torch of the armed struggle, they then presented the major threat.

### Factionalisation

One feature that all the conflicts shared was factionalisation: as the conflict progressed, the original united front fractured, with the emergence of splinter groups. Although this happened in each case, its impact was different in each of the conflicts. In the Punjab, after the first splits came into the open, the separatist movement went through a process of almost continual subdivision, creating in the end dozens of groups. This undermined its ability to lead a cohesive and centrally controlled campaign for Khalistan. The result was a descent into chaos and violence, and a dramatic escalation of violence. Although the factionalism escalated the conflict, it ultimately undermined the movement. In Nagaland factionalism resulted in severe inter-factional fighting, verging on a civil war at times. This was first between the RGN and the NNC, and then between the pro- and anti-accordist wings of the NNC, and then later still between the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). Factionalism changed the nature of the conflict from the Nagas fighting against India to include a new axis of Naga vs. Naga

inter-factional violence. In Mindanao the situation was again different. After the failure of the Tripoli Accord, the MNLF-Reformists and the MILF split away from the MNLF. This weakened the movement; although the MNLF remained by far the dominant group. Importantly there was no significant inter-factional fighting and the groups retained good relations. The key implication came with the 1996 peace accord, as the MILF had been left outside the process. Whilst the MNLF signed on for peace, the torch of armed struggle passed to the MILF. In addition, the competition between the groups created a political dynamic which helped drive their actions. One of the reasons that the MNLF pressed ahead with the peace talks with President Ramos was the hope of delivering a peace agreement before its support dissipated to groups with more radical agendas.

The process of factionalisation also had another more positive effect on the groups, with inter-factional competition acting as a catalyst to spur on their development. Noticeably, the second-generation groups often learnt from the mistakes of the earlier groups, adopting new strategies which were harder for the state to combat. In a way they went through a process of evolution to adapt to the state's capabilities. These new strategies also served to escalate the conflicts. In Nagaland, the NSCN (IM) adopted its 'mother insurgency' strategy, as well as moving to an urban insurgency strategy and adapting a diplomatic strategy to internationalise the conflict. In Mindanao, the MILF adopted its grass roots strategy of creating Islamic communities in the areas it controlled. Interestingly, both eschewed foreign support after witnessing their former groups' over-reliance on it. The net result was a new wave of groups which were more self-sufficient and pursued strategies that addressed the weaknesses of their former groups. The insurgents had gone through their own learning curve and come out stronger.

### Criminalisation

Another dynamic that is often associated with factionalism is that of criminalisation. Criminalisation affected all of the conflicts, but again

in different ways. Its impact is essentially twofold. Firstly, it is a means of revenue-raising: it brings in additional funding that can be used to fuel the conflict. Secondly, it can change the nature of the conflicts: criminal activities, not independence, become the motivation, and the violence is maintained or escalated to serve these ends.

In the Punjab, following the ongoing factionalisation of the movement, the militancy by Stage 3 had become increasingly criminalised, so much so that many criminals had simply moved sideways into the groups. On the one hand, this fuelled the violence as the groups increasingly used violence for criminal aims. On the other hand it provided the means to sustain and expand the conflict. The huge sums of money that the groups were making from their activities acted as a powerful recruiting tool, as many young men were attracted by the wealth and power that membership of the groups offered. This created a vicious cycle that swelled the ranks of the militancy driving the violence. The insurgency became a cover under which criminal gangs exploited the power vacuum for profit.

It was not until Stage 6 that criminalisation became an important factor in the Naga Insurgency. What started as fundraising through the collection of revolutionary taxes then transformed into industrial-scale criminal activity. The level of criminal activity exploded in the last stage following the ceasefire with the Indian government, as this removed the only restraint over the groups' activities. This had three implications: firstly the groups were able to rebuild their strength on the back of the funds generated by their criminal activities; secondly, it drove in part the inter-factional and inter-ethnic violence as the groups fought it out for control of criminal activities; thirdly, the power and wealth that these activities generated presented a powerful incentive to preserve the status quo and thus became an impediment to peace.

In Mindanao criminal activity played an important but different role. Whereas in the Punjab and Nagaland the conflicts became criminalised as the criminally minded sought to take advantage of the chaos and power vacuum the conflict created, in Mindanao the conflict arose out of a situation of chaos and lawlessness, where political clans and other criminal gangs competed for power. Unlike in either of the other conflicts,

neither of the main groups, the MNLF or MILF, made the transformation from freedom fighters to mafia-style criminal organisations (the exception being the ASG, which transformed from its jihadi roots to become essentially a ‘criminal kidnap for ransom’ gang). Although neither of the main groups became criminal organisations, they nevertheless were interconnected with them. This was often through kin and clan connections, with the groups providing, directly or indirectly, protection to these organisations. However, the power vacuum that the conflict maintained provided the perfect environment for criminal activity and corruption by all sides to flourish, again providing a strong incentive to many to maintain the status quo. After the 1996 peace accord, the MILF may have continued the conflict, but violence in Mindanao was also driven by the vortex of political clans and criminal gangs. As such, lawlessness, and the criminal activities that thrived on it and drove it, would ensure that the violence was far from over.

## SO WHY WAS THE PUNJAB DIFFERENT?

The most obvious outstanding question from the analysis of the three cases is: why was the state able to completely end the conflict in the Punjab; why did a pure military approach work without any political concessions?

The answer to the question is in two parts. Firstly, the Punjab was one of the rare cases in which a military approach could work. Secondly, a number of factors came together to make sure that the counterterrorism campaign was a success.

Why was the Punjab a situation in which a military approach could work?

The key difference between the Punjab and the other two cases was that the grievances and objectives of the militancy’s leadership were not shared by the majority of the population. Unlike in Mindanao and Nagaland, there was not the same demand for some form of independence/ autonomy. The Sikh population was far more integrated into

Indian life and history,<sup>263</sup> whereas the Nagas and Moros were distinct ethnic groups largely outside of the national mainstream. It was the state's heavy-handed initial response, – starting with Operation Blue Star and the spiral of violence it invoked leading to the anti-Sikh riots – which alienated the population and drove them to support the militants. Previously, the ideology of Khalistan had been a relatively limited extremist position; now it became mainstream. However, over the next few years as the initial rage over the events of 1984 subsided, the separatist groups became increasingly criminalised and the Sikh population became the victims of their violence, the movement lost credibility and the dream of Khalistan lost public support.

Nevertheless the armed struggle continued to escalate, despite the lack of popular support. The groups themselves now became the sustaining dynamic of the conflict, kept alive on a cocktail of foreign support and criminality. In reality the Punjab became a power vacuum where chaos and lawlessness thrived, and created a vicious circle. At this stage the initial grievances were not driving the conflict; it was purely the groups that were sustaining it. This is why the Punjab was one of those rare cases where a military approach could end the conflict – as the groups were the sustaining dynamic, eliminating them would end the armed struggle. This is in contrast to Nagaland or Mindanao, where the groups were not the sole sustaining dynamic of the conflicts. There are underlying issues which have popular support, and these continue to drive the conflict.

In short, as the Punjab Crisis descended into a situation in which the political objectives of the groups were no longer supported by the population, a political solution would not have been possible. Moreover, as the groups descended into criminality and senseless violence, it became a law and order problem and not a political problem. In Nagaland and Mindanao, on the other hand, these are situations with political problems that need a political solution, and without one, they will continue (the difficulties in delivering a political solution help to explain their persistent nature). The Punjab was thus a situation in

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<sup>263</sup> The tradition in the Punjab of many Hindu families had been for the first male child to convert to Sikhism. The links were close and intimate.

which a military approach could work, if it successfully eliminated<sup>264</sup> the sustaining dynamic of the conflict – the groups.

Importantly here, eliminating the sustaining dynamic of the groups was not the whole story. The subsequent return of security to the Punjab also allowed the return of ‘normal’ political processes to the state. With the militants unable to disrupt the elections and use their coercive power to decide the result, free and fair elections saw political power return from the extremists to the moderates. The key was the imposition of security first to allow a truly democratic election, and not one determined by the militants.

### Why did the military approach work in practice?

Just because this was a situation in which a military approach could be successfully applied does not mean that it would be. After all, the disastrous military operations at the beginning of the conflict drove the escalation of the conflict. A state needs to not only choose the right policy, but also apply it correctly. There are a number of reasons why this worked.

Firstly, the security services and in particular the Punjab police had learned from their mistakes, and after going through a steep learning curve they not only became a force capable of taking on the militants but developed the necessary strategy and resources to do this. Key to this was that the campaign was police-led, with the police having the necessary knowledge and experience to lead an intelligence-based targeting campaign, whilst the Army provided the necessary firepower.

Secondly, after the return of a strong and stable government in 1991, there was the necessary political support to see the operation through. The security forces had the full backing of the government,

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<sup>264</sup> By elimination, the author does not mean the killing of militants, but the elimination of the groups as a functional threat. This is not expressing support for the brutal manner in which this was done in the Punjab; the brutality of the Punjab campaign is not in this author’s eyes the key to its success, and this strategy could have been delivered through other means. A question for further research is how this can be achieved in a manner that would fit within a modern human rights position.

and they knew it. This also reinforced the first point by providing the police with the necessary resources.

Thirdly, the population came off the fence and sided with the police. Despite the movement losing popular support earlier in the conflict, the population remained passively supportive through fear, but in the last stage they started to actively support the police. This both starved the militants of a strategic resource and provided the security forces with the necessary actionable intelligence.

Finally, although the militants were at the height of their strength at this point, the transformation of the movement in the last two stages had left it internally flawed – it was a house of cards. The constant factionalisation of the movement had left it divided and incapable of waging a united armed struggle against the security forces. Furthermore, the criminalisation of the movement meant that the groups were full of recruits that cared more for power and money than for the ideology of Khalistan. As the campaign started to take its toll, the recruits dissipated. It would have been a different situation if the security forces were facing a disciplined and unified force made up from hardened, ideologically-driven fighters.

Thus the success of the campaign was down to two elements. The first was that it was the right situation to apply such an approach. The second was that there was the necessary confluence of factors to ensure that a military solution could be delivered successfully. Without these factors the military approach might well have failed, or even worsened the situation.

Why would a Punjab-style approach not work in Nagaland or Mindanao?

A Punjab-style approach would not work in either Nagaland or Mindanao because the conflicts are fundamentally different in their nature. The situation in both cases is not one in which a military approach would work. In the Punjab, the main sustaining dynamic of the conflict had by the later stages become the groups themselves. This is not the case in both Nagaland and Mindanao. Although the groups play a role in sustaining the conflicts, they are not the sole

driver; removing them from the equation would not automatically solve the conflict.

In both cases the separatist agenda of the insurgent groups maintained a substantial amount of popular support; there are underlying political problems that if not addressed will continue to propel the conflict. For the Naga Insurgency, the underlying issue is that the Naga population feel that they are Nagas and not Indians, and do not want to be a part of the Indian Union. Furthermore, the Indian government's attempt at a political solution, the creation of a largely autonomous Nagaland State, did not resolve the problem: firstly as it did not go far enough for many, but more importantly because much of the Naga population remains outside of the state and does not enjoy the benefits of statehood. Similarly, in Mindanao a large proportion of the Moros support the separatist view. The discrimination and economic marginalisation that helped drive this view are also still in place. As long as a substantial part of the populations in these regions support the separatist viewpoint, there will always be the context for a separatist struggle. The crucial difference with the Punjab Crisis is that the separatist view had no widespread support outside of the groups themselves. The groups had become the sustaining dynamic of the conflict.

In terms of background parameters, the two cases differed from that of the Punjab. In terms of identity, the Sikh population, although a minority, was significantly integrated into Indian life and enjoyed a long shared history. It was always more a question of how Sikh identity fitted into post-partition India rather than if the Sikhs should be separated from India. In Nagaland and Mindanao, the situation was different. These were distinct ethnic groups concentrated on the periphery of the nation, with a separate history and identity. Also, the geography of the Punjab differed from that of the other two cases. Whereas the Punjab has largely rolling plains, in Nagaland and Mindanao the insurgents enjoyed the advantage of many remote and inaccessible areas. This made a military solution far harder than in the Punjab in practical terms, and it also allowed the groups to develop to the level of insurgency and to control terrain, therefore increasing their control of the population.

The difference between the cases is highlighted particularly well by Stage 4 of the Naga Insurgency, during which the Indian government launched a counter-insurgency campaign that devastated the NNC and brought it to surrender. It was in effect a Punjab-style solution in which the Army had gone through a steep learning curve to develop a strategy to take on and defeat the NNC. Furthermore, the campaign was supported by the necessary resources and political will. The campaign was a success, and destroyed the NNC as a military force. However, it was not the end of the conflict, and the struggle soon continued under the successor group the NSCN. Although the NNC was eliminated, the underlying political problems remained, and the conflict simply re-kindled at a later date.

In these cases, at best a Punjab-style approach could remove the groups from the equation but not solve the conflict. The underlying political problem would still need to be resolved, although it could possibly provide the breathing space needed to implement such a political solution.

## DEMOCRACY: PART OF THE PROBLEM OR PART OF THE SOLUTION?

Democracy and the electoral process, although ultimately part of the resolution of conflicts, can also contribute to the escalation of violence. In a democracy the government is dependent on the electoral support of the population for their survival. Everything that an elected government (or indeed opposition political parties) does has to be analysed through the prism of electoral success. It is no different in the actions that governments take to tackle separatist conflicts; they always have one eye on the ballot box. The result is that state actions are bound by the political dynamics of the state, and often guided by political expediency rather than by the best course of action to resolve the conflict. On the one hand the government's actions can be limited by electoral considerations, as some options, such as allowing further partition in India, are simply off the table because they would be electoral suicide. Similarly, in the Philippines, whatever solution the state supported in Muslim Mindanao would have to be palatable to

the nationwide Christian population that made up the vast majority of the national electorate.

On the other hand there are numerous examples within the conflicts where state actors have taken actions for their political advantage that have only inflamed and escalated the situation. We saw in the Punjab how Bhindranwale was able to rise from obscurity in a context where all sides sought to leverage the Sikh militancy for their own political advantage. Ultimately, politicians' primary objective is to gain and maintain power, and not to resolve conflicts. Where the two clash, the former will always prevail. However, when they coincide the former can be a powerful incentive to deliver the latter.

Electoral cycles can also drive the violence and escalate the conflicts. In elections power is up for grabs, and this encourages armed groups to use their coercive force to help achieve the electoral outcome that they most desire. This was seen clearly in Stage 1 of the Mindanao conflict, where political clans used their private armies to coerce electoral victory. Similarly, in the Punjab Crisis the militants installed candidates of their choice. But also in the Punjab the same militant groups resorted to violence to derail elections, not to win them. Firstly, elections provide something worth fighting for: political power. Secondly, they create a limited time frame in which to act, forcing an escalation in violence, as armed actors have only until the election date to exert their coercive power. This combination drives an escalation in violence in the run-up to elections, which is normally followed by a lull in violence after the election, when the contest is either won or lost.

Following from the above paragraph, if the elections are perverted by armed groups they are not free and fair, making a mockery of democracy and undermining the very benefits of the democratic process. In the wrong context elections merely present armed groups with an opportunity to 'capture' power. The use and threat of violence can alter the political landscape, driving the moderates underground and leaving the political process in the hands of the extremists. This is not an argument against democracy, but rather highlights the necessity of ensuring sufficient security first before holding elections, in order to ensure that they are free and fair, represent the will of the people and are not hijacked by extremists.

If armed groups are able to capture the elections this will on the one hand deliver them the respectability and legitimacy of democratic office, as well as the perception of popular support. Furthermore, it can lead to the formation of an unholy alliance between politicians and armed groups. This creates a symbiotic relationship, where politicians rely on the militants' coercive force to maintain their power base, and the militants in return receive political protection and a share of profits from corruption and extortion. This mutually reinforcing relationship helps to sustain the conflict and creates a context where many profit from the continuance of the status quo. Moreover it undermines the institutions of government and the very legitimacy of the state. In addition this almost ensures that each election cycle will be filled with violence by competing factions.

## VACUUMS AND UMBRELLAS

This research has also helped to shed light upon the nature of the violence committed during the conflicts, through which it became apparent that much of the violence was not directly connected to the armed struggle for independence, but indirectly connected with (or a by-product of) the changing context that the conflict induced. A consequence of the militants challenging the state's monopoly of violence was the creation of a power vacuum in the affected regions. No longer did the state exert full control over the region, and the writ of law was no longer enforceable.<sup>265</sup> In a context of chaos and lawlessness, many seized the opportunity to use violence to achieve their aims. The key issue is that the armed struggle for independence can in the process induce a power vacuum that leads to a whole new dynamic of associated violence which takes advantage of the situation created.

In many ways the conflict acts as an umbrella under which a whole host of violent deeds can be hidden, whether it is the settling of old scores or family/clan feuds, or businessmen using the opportunity to intimidate a rival. In the absence of the rule of law, guns provide their

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<sup>265</sup> It could be argued that in both Mindanao and Nagaland the state never had a monopoly of force in the first place.

own law. This of course has its own escalating dynamic as one side resorts to violence and the other feels no option but to do the same for protection. The umbrella also extends to some of the groups, who have metamorphosed from freedom fighters to criminal enterprises or warlords. For them the ideology of a separatist struggle provides the perfect cover for their activities.

One of the key issues in both Nagaland and Mindanao is that despite the peace processes there still remains a power vacuum. In such a context the cult of lawlessness and the violence it produces continues. Furthermore, it allows the development of alliances between politicians and armed groups, perverting the democratic process and undermining the legitimacy of the state. It is precisely these volatile contexts that breed conflict. Much work still needs to be done to ensure the rule of law and good governance.

## ENDING CONFLICTS

At the heart of conflict resolution lie two important aspects. The first is de-escalation of the conflict, which relies on identifying the factors that prolong it – the sustaining dynamics – and applying policies that tackle these factors. If the sustaining dynamics of a conflict are removed, the forces that drive and maintain it are erased, and it will dissipate. Such an approach, though, is reliant for its success on a thorough analysis and understanding of the conflicts. It is of crucial importance to correctly identifying the sustaining dynamics, especially when the factors sustaining the conflict may be very different to the factors that caused it.<sup>266</sup> Each stage is driven by a different balance of factors; as such it is important that policies are devised for the current stage and not previous stages.

Each conflict is unique and the sustaining dynamics will vary extensively between conflicts. As discussed in the analysis, these dynamics

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<sup>266</sup> This perhaps is the greatest challenge. It is easier to analyse a conflict as an historian with the benefit of hindsight than as a government in the heat of battle. But wrong analysis will lead to the application of the wrong policies and the ultimate failure of the state's attempts to resolve the conflict.

are determined by the multitude of factors contained within the trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors. Hence most will have multiple sustaining dynamics that need to be addressed. Some will be contextual, such as foreign support for the groups that may require a diplomatic strategy. Some may be actions of the state itself, such as human rights abuses, for which the state will need to change its behaviour. And some may be the actions of the insurgent groups, which will need the application of successful counter-strategies by the state.

The second aspect is the restoration (or establishment) of good governance and of 'normal' political processes. This requires ensuring that the democratic political process returns to the centre ground and control of the moderates, in order to prevent it being captured by the extremists. In all three case studies, the violence emerged from a situation in which the 'normal' political process had broken down, and control moved from the centre ground to the extremists. For a political process to function properly it must represent the will of the people and not be captured by the extremists. In order to achieve this, the state needs to be able to implement good governance, and to ensure that it has the monopoly of force to provide sufficient security to prevent the extremist elements from using their coercive ability to pervert the democratic process and capture it from the people.<sup>267</sup>

In the Punjab, a key element to the permanent resolution of the conflict was that the security forces ensured sufficient security for the resumption of the democratic process, allowing the apparatus of political power to return to the moderate centre ground. The situation is different in Nagaland and Mindanao, where the state does not maintain the monopoly of force, and armed groups can use their coercive power to pervert the electoral process. This in turn leads to a symbiotic relationship between politicians and armed groups which becomes self-sustaining, providing strong incentives for the maintenance of the status quo. Fundamentally, where the state does not have a monopoly of force and a power vacuum exists, such a context is always going to breed violence.

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267 The key point is not who the people vote for, but that the vote is free and fair, so that the result represents the will of the people. If the people vote for independence that should be respected, and this should then happen as a political process rather than through armed conflict.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ANALYSIS

One of the key dimensions to come out of this research has been the conceptual framework, providing a new analytical tool with which to analyse conflicts. Firstly, conflicts are dynamic; they change over time, and as such their nature and the forces driving them change over time. The chronology of a conflict must be taken into consideration, for it is not just a question of which factors or mechanisms were driving the conflict, but also at what stage they were driving it. The causes of a conflict can be very different from the dynamics that sustain it. Like Frankenstein's monster, once created conflicts have a mind of their own. Although they change over time, for the purpose of analysis they can be broken down into discrete stages in which each stage is both distinct and interconnected. One conflict, but each stage is quite different with a different balance of factors driving it. To understand a conflict completely is to understand the individual stages, and how it is transformed from stage to stage.

Secondly, whilst each conflict is unique, conflicts can be understood and analysed as the interaction of the trinity of context, state actors and non-state actors. Each part of the trinity is made up of factors that vary over time, and as they change they drive the processes of escalation and de-escalation. Conflict dynamics can be understood by how the factors change over time, and how the three parts of the trinity interact with each other. Both the state actors and non-state actors are dynamic actors competing against each other in a changing context, which in turn affects both actors, as both actors in turn can affect the context.

As a dynamic actor the state is as much the solution to as it is the cause of conflicts. It is only through properly analysing and understanding each conflict that effective policies for de-escalation can be devised. There are no silver bullets, no correct policies for confronting a separatist conflict; although there are, correct contexts in which certain policies will work. Each conflict and each stage within a conflict is unique. Only careful analysis via the trinity of conflict dynamics can help determine the correct policy approach.

## State actors

One of the central points that came out of the research is that the state is a dynamic actor; it is as much the cause of as the solution to conflicts. The actions of the state are central to the dynamics of insurgencies, and equally its policies can escalate as well as de-escalate the conflict.

The greatest irony is that in each case the initial response of the state to contain the emerging conflict not only escalated it dramatically, but the action itself would become the main driver of the conflict. The state not only succeeded in transforming each conflict, but its actions became the primary reason for it. It is hard to imagine a more spectacular home goal. In the Punjab and Nagaland, we saw the violent response of the state uniting the people behind the militants, whilst in Mindanao the declaration of martial law became the trigger for the insurgency.

At the start of each of the conflicts the state lacked the knowledge, understanding and skills to effectively deal with the emerging conflict. As a result it did not know what the best approach was to take, and ended up taking action that would only worsen the situation. It would take it time to learn from its mistakes and learn how to tackle an insurgency. Similarly, the violence was able to escalate in the initial stage as the state lacked the capacity in its local security apparatus to contain the emerging threat. As the local forces collapsed in the face of rising violence, it had no option left but to send in the Army.

However, the Army is a blunt instrument, trained to fight foreign enemies and lacking the training and experience to contain an insurgency. A key point that is highlighted in the case-studies is that in comparison, properly trained and equipped police forces are much more suited to counter-insurgency. The police have the advantage of coming from the local area and understanding the people and the terrain, advantages that troops from outside the region surrender to the insurgents. Similarly, insurgency is a war amongst the people, and the police are much more used to working amongst the people and are best suited to this type of warfare. The intelligence-gathering and informant networks the police use for criminal investigations provide fertile ground for counter-insurgency intelligence gathering. Furthermore, a local police force has a stake in the conflict; they live in the region

and are not just there on a tour of duty, and as such have an added motivation to fight.

Perhaps the most important aspect is that sending in troops from outside of the region only reinforces the centre-periphery framing of the insurgents. Using a local police force to spearhead the counter-measures denies the insurgents this advantage. This can help lead to the internalisation of the conflict. An outside force will always be at a disadvantage in fighting a separatist insurgency; the state can gain significant advantage by using local forces to internalise the conflict within the ethnic group. This is not to say that the Army or national paramilitary forces have no role to play. Indeed they have a crucial role in providing manpower, firepower and specialist tactical advice, but their role should be a supportive one to a well trained and disciplined local police force.

The use of coercive force by the state is not a panacea for ending conflicts; it only works in specific contexts. The lesson from the Punjab is not that force works, but that force can work when applied in the correct context to address a sustaining dynamic. The point is that the use of coercive force on its own can only resolve a conflict in rare exceptions. The key is that conflicts are resolved by tackling the factors that sustain them. All conflicts are unique, and in some coercive force is the best tool for the state to use to tackle the sustaining dynamics. However, the use of force does have an important role to play in resolving most conflicts: in ensuring security. Whatever steps the state needs to take to resolve the sustaining dynamics, security is normally the first step to ensure the successful application of such policies. Security is also crucial to the restoration of normal political process; if it is insufficient, armed groups can use their coercive abilities to pervert the electoral process.

In the majority of conflicts, unlike in the Punjab, some form of political negotiation and compromise will be at the heart of resolving the conflict. Reaching a peaceful settlement acceptable to both sides is a long and tricky process. In each conflict, the state made several attempts at negotiating a peaceful settlement. However, the first attempts in each failed. The failure of the peace process had the unintended consequence of weakening the moderates and strengthening the extremists; the extremists were able to cite the failure of negotiations as proof that a

peaceful resolution was not possible, and that armed struggle was the only choice left. It is only when both sides feel they have more to gain through a peaceful solution than from a continued armed struggle that it becomes an achievable reality.

One of the major complexities of delivering a lasting peace is reaching agreement with multiple factions. The multitude of factions in the later stages of the Punjab Crisis made negotiations (while desirable) virtually impossible. In Nagaland and Mindanao, the state has been in ongoing peace talks with more than one insurgent group, and whilst they have reached bilateral agreements with individual groups, a final multilateral agreement has proved elusive, hampered by the continued threat of further factionalism and the conflict continuing under a new grouping. In the early stages the state often sought to pursue a ‘divide and rule’ policy, exploiting the inherent factionalism within the militants. Whilst in the short-term this may have weakened the movement, in the long-term such policies will come back to haunt the state, as the difficulties of negotiating with a multi-headed hydra become apparent.

Furthermore, whilst the peace talks may have led to the de-escalation or cessation of violence between the state and the groups, this is not necessarily the whole picture. We have seen in Nagaland how the peace process ignited inter-factional fighting and also allowed the NSCN (IM) to grow in strength. An overarching problem in both Nagaland and Mindanao is that the ceasefires and peace talks are undermined by the ongoing power vacuum and cult of lawlessness that results from the state’s inability to provide security and maintain the monopoly of violence. The major dilemma for the state is how to ensure security a context in which it has not defeated the insurgents.

By its very definition, if a state is negotiating a peaceful settlement, it does not have the monopoly over violence. It is such contexts that create power vacuums and lead to lawlessness. The question is how security can be ensured in order to implement a political solution when the state does not have complete control. Whilst security must come before a political solution to ensure its implementation, the state cannot enforce security before a political solution has been implemented. This is the paradox the state must overcome.

## Non-state actors

The non-state actors mirror the state actors in that they also start the conflict without the necessary skills, experience and know-how to fight an insurgency. Similarly, as the conflicts progress the groups have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Both Mindanao and Nagaland saw the emergence of second-generation groups which built on the mistakes of the first-generation groups to develop more effective strategies, in the process becoming more sophisticated adversaries.

All three conflicts were plagued by factionalism. This affected the conflict in a number of different ways. The first and obvious effect is the creation of divisions and weakening of the movement. This makes it much harder to form a united front to fight for independence, and decreases the prospects of a successful armed struggle. Importantly, this opens up a new inter-factional axis of violence, often leading to an escalation in the conflict as the different factions fight for control. This is somewhat of a paradox for the groups, where gaining dominance of the movement is a first crucial step but inter-factional violence runs the risk of alienating the population. The second and less obvious impact of factionalism is that as well as weakening the movement through inter-group fighting, it can be a source of motivation spur on the competition between the factions, encouraging them to develop their strategies and to increase their capacities. It is no coincidence that the more strategically sophisticated groups would emerge from the second generation following the factionalisation of the first generation.

The competition between the factions creates a political dynamic that can impact on their strategies. We saw in Mindanao how the MNLF was motivated to conclude a peace process before it lost support to the more radical position of the MILF. Multiple factions can also decrease the political space a group has to operate in; if a group appears to compromise too much it risks losing support to more radical factions. Multiple factions make it harder for both the groups and the state to reach a negotiated settlement.

As the conflicts progress, the armed groups often turn to forms

of criminal activities as a means of fundraising. This can provide the groups with the resources to escalate or sustain the conflict. Also, in some cases this can lead to the criminalisation of the groups in which the pursuit of wealth through criminal activities, rather than ideology, becomes the motivating factor. Criminalisation then becomes a sustaining dynamic of the conflict. Competition for control of criminal activities provides another driver for the escalation in violence. From the perspective of the state, addressing the issue of criminal activity and the lawless context in which it thrives can be a source of de-escalation.

In all three conflicts, foreign support played a key role in escalating the conflicts, especially in the early stages, by providing the groups with the resources and support they needed. Although foreign support seemed initially an attractive option, in the long run it was a poisoned chalice that only undermined the groups. Reliance on outside support makes groups less independent and dependent on their foreign backers, who are often using the groups to further their own aims, rather than helping the groups to achieve their objectives. This leaves the groups in a strange kind of limbo, dependent on foreign backers who will never support them enough to achieve their own object of independence. Similarly, the removal of foreign support played a role in de-escalating the conflicts. Furthermore, as with the case of the MNLF, their reliance on OIC support meant they were vulnerable to OIC pressure to give up the objective of independence and negotiate a peaceful settlement for autonomy. It is little surprise that the second-generation NSCN (IM) and MILF both adopted a strategy of self-reliance, realising that reliance on foreign support was a red herring.

Reliance on foreign support also conversely reduces the groups' reliance on the local population, as was seen in the Punjab when the groups were maintained on foreign support long after they had lost popular support. The influence of foreign supporters can affect the strategy of the groups as foreign backers seek to exploit them as proxies to serve their own agendas. This can be seen in the increasingly violent and counterproductive attacks of the Khalistani militants.

## The learning curve

It is apparent that on both sides of the fence, the state and non-state actors, went through a learning process throughout the conflicts. Each side learnt from its mistakes, and adapted or developed new strategies. Throughout the conflicts, the actors went through a series of strategy and counter-strategy changes as each adapted against the other. However, the actor that enjoys the steepest learning curve attains a clear competitive advantage. The dynamics of a conflict are determined by a series of factors, as discussed above; however, development of a winning strategy can be a decisive factor.

In each of the case studies, the state's initial operations made the situation worse rather than better, dramatically escalating the conflicts. It is clear that from this low base the states start learning from their mistakes, and through a process of trial and error the state's learning curve develops. The clearest examples are the Punjab police under K. P. S. Gill and the Indian Army in Stage 4 of the Naga conflict. Gill completely reorganised the police force from the ground up into a force capable of taking on the militants, and through a policy of best practice developed the strategies and technologies to defeat them. Similarly, in Stage 4 counter-insurgency operations in Nagaland the Indian forces learned from key mistakes of the past. This time they saturated the territory to deny the militants the advantage of the inaccessible terrain, in conjunction implementing a tribe-by-tribe, village-by-village policy of targeted concessions and incentives.

The militant groups also all went through a learning curve of adapting strategy. In the Punjab, the groups turned to a decentralised structure after Operation Black Thunder II in Stage 3, and in Stage 4 attempted to mobilise popular support, introduced terror edicts, among other modifications. In Mindanao, the MNLF changed from positional to guerrilla warfare in Stage 2 after it realised it was no match for the Army's firepower. After the introduction of Pakistani support in Stage 2, the NNC in Nagaland went through a process of professionalisation. However, despite these examples, the major learning curves were exhibited by the second-generation groups. In Nagaland and Mindanao, both the NSCN (IM) and MILF presented

major strategic leaps. Both had specifically learnt from the mistakes of their parent groups and had devised entirely new strategies to address the flaws and weaknesses of these groups. The NSCN (IM) adopted the ‘mother insurgency’ strategy, urban insurgency, self-reliance and diplomatic/internationalisation strategies. The MILF followed its grass roots ‘four point’ strategy to build up camps/communities that would form in their eyes an embryonic Islamic state.

One of the implications of the second-generation groups in Nagaland and Mindanao is that the conflicts are now led by groups that have gone through a very steep learning curve and have adopted strategies and structures specifically to address previous weaknesses. These groups present a far harder challenge now to the state than the original groups.<sup>268</sup> The original groups may have enjoyed more popular support, but these groups are better adapted to sustain the conflict. The situation in the Punjab was different: there was no emergence of such a second-generation group (except perhaps Babbar Khalsa), and the state was clearly the side that succeeded in following the steepest learning curve.

Analysis of the conflicts seems to imply that there is a window of opportunity for the state to defeat the militants before they survive long enough to learn and adapt to become a far more dangerous adversary. Like Pandora’s box, once the groups have developed the necessary knowledge and experience, it can be very hard to take it back. There is a key asymmetric nature to this learning struggle. Whilst the state wins only by defeating the insurgents, insurgents simply win by not being defeated by the state. The state has a limited amount of time to learn before insurgent groups themselves learn how to fight an insurgency and how to counter the counter-insurgency strategies of the state. Once the insurgents have learned the nature of asymmetric warfare they become very hard to defeat, and the conflict can descend into a protracted struggle.

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<sup>268</sup> The MNLF presented a greater military challenge with their large number of foreign-trained officers. However, the grass roots strategy of the MILF presented a group that was more embedded on the ground and as such harder to remove.



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS – THE NAGA INSURGENCY

<i>Angami</i>	Naga tribe to which Phizo belonged.
<i>Ao</i>	A Naga tribe: Inkonglba Ao led the NPC.
<i>CNP</i>	Council of Naga People, the Sema tribe splinter group from the NNC.
<i>FGN</i>	Federal Government of Nagaland, parallel government set up by the NNC.
<i>Kohima</i>	Capital of Nagaland State
<i>Konyak</i>	A Naga tribe to which S.S.Khaplang belongs.
<i>Kuki</i>	Major ethnic group in Naga-majority areas in northern Manipur.
<i>Naga Club</i>	The Nagas' first political entity, founded by returning WWI veterans.
<i>Nagaland</i>	The Indian State of Nagaland, created in 1963 after the Sixteen Point Agreement.
<i>Naga Underground</i>	Collective term for all subversive Naga groups.
<i>Nine Point Agreement</i>	The first attempt to resolve the Naga issue through a political solution. Signed on 29 June 1947 in the run up to Indian independence, between the Governor of Assam State Akbar Hydari, and NNC representatives from nine of the Naga tribes. The agreement recognised the NNC as the representative of the Naga people, ascribing it both legislative and executive powers.

## UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT DYNAMICS

NPC	Naga Peoples Convention, a series of three conventions of representatives of all the Naga tribes that lead to the Sixteen Point Agreement and the creation of the State of Nagaland. Led by Inkonglba Ao.
NNC	The National Naga Council, the political descendant of the Naga Club.
NFA	The Naga Federal Army – the NNC's armed wing.
<i>Northeast</i>	Made up of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura (collectively known as the Seven Sisters). Since 2003 the Indian Government has included Sikkim in the Northeast.
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland, anti-Shillong splinter group that broke off from the NNC to continue the fight for independence. Set up by Th. Muivah, Isak Swu and S.S. Khaplang.
NSCN (IM)	NSCN faction led by Th. Muivah and Isak Swu.
NSCN (K)	NSCN faction led by S.S. Khaplang.
<i>Peace Mission</i>	A peace initiative put together by the Baptist Church leader. Instrumental in the 1964 ceasefire.
<i>Phizo</i>	Charismatic president of the NNC who spearheaded the campaign for independence.
<i>Princely States</i>	Before the independence and partition of British India, there existed hundreds of 'princely states' within the subcontinent which were not part of British-administered India but came under British suzerainty. After independence they all either joined India or Pakistan, or were annexed.
RGN	Revolutionary Government of Nagaland, set up by the CNP.
<i>Sema</i>	A Naga tribe that broke away from the NNC to form the CNP/RGN.
<i>September Ban</i>	Crackdown on Naga secessionist groups in 1972 that was triggered by the attempted assassination of State Chief Minister Hokiše Sema. The Unlawful Activities Act 1967 was used to ban all underground or overground Naga secessionist groups.
<i>Shillong Accord</i>	Peace accord signed in 1975.
<i>16 Point Agreement</i>	Signed in July 1960, leading to the thirteenth amendment of the Indian constitution, and the creation of the State of Nagaland on 1 December 1963.
<i>Tangkhul</i>	A Naga tribe from Manipur, to which Th. Muivah belongs.

## APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY OF TERMS – THE PUNJAB CRISIS

<i>kali Dal</i>	The Akali Party, the main Sikh-orientated party.
<i>Babbar Khalsa</i>	One of the major militant groups, known for their religious fundamentalist views.
<i>Baisakhi Day</i>	One of the most important Sikh festivals, celebrating the creation of the Khalsa in 1669.
<i>Bhindranwale</i>	Radical Sikh preacher that led the initial rise of the Sikh militancy. Killed during Operation Blue Star in 1984.
<i>BSF</i>	Border Security Force. A paramilitary force set up to guard the Indo-Pakistan border.
<i>BTFK</i>	Bhindranwale Tiger Force for Khalistan. Founded by Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, who was originally in the KCF before leaving to form the BTFK.
<i>Cat Operations</i>	Term used to refer to pseudo-terrorist gang operations.
<i>CJJ</i>	<i>car jhujharu jathedar</i> – ‘The four groups of freedom fighters’. The name given to the collection of militant groups that split from the KCF, of which the dominant group was the Babbar Khalsa.
<i>CRPF</i>	Central Reserve Police Force, which can be deployed anywhere in India at the request of the State Government to assist the local police.
<i>Centre</i>	The Indian Union Government.
<i>Damdami Taksal</i>	A Sikh religious school where priests are trained. Bhindranwale was formerly its chief.
<i>Gill, K. P. S</i>	Director General of the Punjab Police, that lead the successful counter-terrorism campaign against the militants.
<i>Gurdwara</i>	A Sikh place of worship.
<i>Khalistan</i>	The Land of the Khalsa, the concept of an independent Sikh nation comprising of the modern Indian state of Punjab and some adjoining areas claimed by the militants.
<i>KCF</i>	Khalistan Commando Force – one of the major militant groups, and the original armed wing of the Panthic committee.
<i>KLF</i>	Khalistan Liberation Force, a splinter group of the KCF that became part of the CJJ.

## UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT DYNAMICS

<i>Jat</i>	The Jat people are an Indian ethnic group; traditionally they have been an agricultural tribe. The Sikh Jat community is the dominant Sikh community in the Punjab.
<i>Nirankaris</i>	A breakaway sect of Sikhism formed in 1929. They are considered heretical by many mainstream Sikhs, especially for their devotion to a living Guru.
<i>Panthic Committee</i>	A five-member group first set up in early 1986 by Gurbachan Singh Manochahal and Wassan Singh Zaffarwal to form a united front for the different militant groups. It later split into two committees, one lead by Zaffarwal and the other by Dr. Sohan Singh, the former Chief of Punjab Health Services. The latter became the strongest and differed in that it sought a theocratic state of Khalistan.
<i>Sikhism</i>	Founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak Guru and nine successive Sikh Gurus in fifteenth-century Punjab, it is the fifth-largest organised religion in the world. The emergence of Sikhism is often seen as a reaction against Orthodox Islam and Hinduism (i.e. rejection of the caste system: all men are equal), and at the same time a synthesis of the values of both the religions like the doctrine of Karma from Hinduism and oneness of God and congregation in worship from Islam. Under their tenth guru the Sikhs had gained distinct identities with the introduction of their five outward symbols – Kesch (uncut beard and hair), Kachha (wooden comb), Kanga (iron bracelet), Kada (undergarment) and Kripan (sword).
<i>SGPC</i>	Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), de facto parliament of the Sikhs set up by the Akali Dal.
<i>SPS</i>	Special Police Officers.
<i>VDS</i>	Village Defence Schemes.

## APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS – THE MORO REBELLION

ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
<i>Benigno Aquino</i>	Marcos era opposition leader, husband of future president Corazon Aquino.
<i>Corazon Aquino</i>	President of the Philippines 1986-1992, initially ruling as a revolutionary president following the ousting of Marcos in the EDSA revolution.
<i>Cotabato</i>	The vast central Mindanao Province and home to the Maguindanao tribe.
<i>EDSA revolution</i>	Also known as the People Power Revolution; brought down the Marcos regime in 1986.
<i>Hashim Salamat</i>	Founding member of the MNLF and leader of the breakaway MILF. A Maguindanaon from Cotabato.
<i>Ferdinand Marcos</i>	President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986.
<i>Maguindanao</i>	One of the three major Moro tribes, based in central Mindanao.
<i>Marano</i>	One of the three major Moro tribes, based in central Mindanao.
<i>MIM</i>	Muslim Independence Movement (MIM), formed in by Datu Udtog Matalam in May 1968, just six weeks after the Jabidah Massacre. Later renamed Mindanao Independence Movement.
<i>MNLF</i>	Moro National Liberation Front.
<i>MILF</i>	Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Founding leader Hashim Salamat broke away from the MNLF in 1984.
<i>MNLF-Reformist</i>	Broke away from the MNLF in 1982; led by Dimas Pundato.
<i>Nur Misuari</i>	A Tausūg from Sulu, founding leader of the MNLF.
<i>OIC</i>	Organisation of the Islamic Conference.
<i>Fidel V Ramos</i>	President of the Philippines from 1992 to 1998.
<i>Sabah</i>	A Malaysian state that was formerly part of the Sulu sultanate and is claimed by the Philippines.
<i>Sulu</i>	Island just south of the main Mindanao Island. Home to the Tausūg tribe and Nur Misuari's heartland.
<i>Tausūg</i>	The famous warrior tribe of Sulu, one of the three major Moro tribes.

## APPENDIX 4: PRIMARY SOURCES – THE NAGA INSURGENCY

### INTERVIEWS

#### Indian Army

- A1: Army Officer 1: retired former Lieutenant-Colonel who served in Nagaland, interviewed in Calcutta on 25 November 2009.
- A2: Army Officer 2: retired former general who served in Nagaland, interviewed in Calcutta on 26 November 2009.

#### Insurgents: NNC

- NNC1: NNC officials, interviewed at Peace Transit Camp, Kohima, Nagaland on 6 December 2009.
- NNC2: fourteen NNC veterans, interviewed in Kohima on 9 December 2009.
- NNC3: former NNC cadet, interviewed in Kohima on 6 December 2009.
- NNC4: former NNC senior officer, interviewed in Kohima on 7 December 2009.

#### Insurgents: NSCN (IM)

- IM1: current senior officer NSCN (IM), interviewed in Dimapur, Nagaland on 12 December 2009.
- IM2: current senior officer NSCN (IM), interviewed in Dimapur on 14 December 2009.

#### Insurgents: NSCN (K) (now NSCN-Unity)

- K1: NSCN (K) 1: two current officials, interviewed in Dimapur on 12 December 2009.

## Civil Society

- C1: senior Naga politician, interviewed on 5 December 2009.
- C2: village elder who lived through the duration of the conflict, interviewed on 8 December 2009.
- C3: NGO worker from eastern Naga area interviewed in Dimapur on 15 December 2009.
- C4: Naga peace and reconciliation worker, interviewed in Dimapur on 15 December 2009.
- C5: former Naga human rights activists, interviewed in Kohima on 2 December 2009.
- C6: NGO worker interviewed in Kohima on 9 December 2009.
- C7: Naga journalist, interviewed in Dimapur on 12 December 2009.
- C8: former senior Naga politician, interviewed on 22 December 2009.

## DOCUMENTS

- Document 1 (D1): *Statesman*, 23 December 1964.
- D2: *Pakistan Times*, 4 June 1963.
- D3: *The Observer*, 14 July 1963.
- D4: *Indian Express*, 28 May 1963.
- D5: *Times of India (Delhi)*, 26 November 1964.
- D6: *Times of India (Delhi)*, 21 November 1964.
- D7: NSCN (IM) Pamphlet – *New Phase of Indian State Terrorism in Nagaland* – Statement of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland. 18 September 1993.
- D8: NSCN (IM) Muivah, Mr Th., General Secretary, National Socialist Council of Nagalim. 6 June 1994. Pamphlet – *A rejoinder to the Indian Propaganda Stunt: ‘Does Violence Get A Mandate?’*
- D9: ‘The Hydari Agreements (Nine Point Agreement)’, reprinted in *IWGIA Document 56*, 1986, 198.
- D10: Committee of Border Affairs of Nagaland. *A Brief Account on Historical Sequences of Nagaland Assam Border Affairs*, Third Edition. Kohima: N.V. Press.

- D11: *A Brief Account on Nagaland*. Prepared by Federal Government of Nagaland, June 2000.
- D12: ‘The Fate of the Naga People’, reprinted in D11.
- D13: ‘Is China Backing Indian Insurgents?’, *The Diplomat*, 22 March 2011. <http://thediplomat.com/2011/03/22/is-china-backing-indian-insurgents/> (last accessed 12 January 2013).
- D14: Pamphlet, *The Role of the Semas in Naga National Affairs*. March 2004. V. Phutoi Zhimomi.
- D15: Rio, Chief Minister Shri Neiphiu. 2009. ‘Keynote Address’. Delivered during the Naga Consultative Meet, Hotel Japfu, 5 March.
- D16: Rio, Chief Minister Shri Neiphiu. 2006. ‘Governance in troubled times – the Nagaland experience’. Lecture delivered at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, 18 February.
- D17: NSCN (IM) Government of the People’s Republic of Nagalim. Pamphlet. 8 January 2001. *The Legal Status of Naga National Armed Resistance: Right to self-determination under International law & Why and How the Nagas are not Terrorists*. Nagalim: Oking Publicity and Information Service.
- D18: Pamphlet, *Bedrock of Naga Society*. 2000. Published by the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee.

## APPENDIX 5: PRIMARY SOURCES – THE PUNJAB CRISIS

### INTERVIEWS

#### Punjab Police Officers

- PO1: interviewed in Jalandhar on 13 November 2009.
- PO2: interviewed in Chandigarh on 18 November 2009.
- PO3: interviewed in Chandigarh on 19 November 2009.
- PO4: interviewed in Chandigarh on 19 November 2009
- PO5: interviewed in New Delhi on 21 and 24 November 2009.
- PO6: interviewed in Mumbai on 21 December 2009.
- PO7: interviewed in New Delhi on 20 November 2009.

#### Militants

- M1: former militant from BKI, interviewed in Amritsar on 16 November 2009.
- M2: former Dam Dami Taksal and associate of Sant Bhindranwale, interviewed in Amritsar on 16 November 2009.
- M3: former senior KCF leader (part of the interview also contains a discussion with two members of the Indian Security Forces), interviewed in Amritsar on 17 November 2009.

#### Civil Society

- C9: academic interviewed in New Delhi on 3, 21 and 24 November 2009.
- C10: Sikh activist, interviewed in London on 27 July 2009.
- C11: Sikh activist, interviewed in Leicester on 24 August 2009.

## DOCUMENTS

- D19: *Freedom Post, mouth piece of Dal Khalsa*, vol.3, 26 November 2004.
- D20: *Dal Khalsa – 30 Years of Struggle*.
- D21: press release, North American Akali Dal, 12 June 1984.
- D22: Punjab Police (Jalandhar) press release, 24 December 2006.
- D23: *National Herald*, 10 December 1988.
- D24: *Tribune*, 24 January 1993.
- D25: *Hindustan Times*, 3 March 1993.
- D26: *Times of India*, 5 June 1988.
- D27: *Times of India*, 19 September 1989.
- D28: *Hindu Times*, 14 September 1988.
- D29: *Hindu Times*, 23 May 1989.
- D30: *Patriot*, 13 July 1988.
- D31: Asian Recorder , Vol. XXXIII, No. 24, June 11- 17, 1987
- D32: *Tribune*, 12 March 1987.
- D33: *Indian Express*, 14 June 1984.
- D34: *National Herald*, 31 July 1989.
- D35: ‘Elections and After’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Puri, Hari, 5 October 1985.
- D36: Hind Samachar Group of Newspapers’ documents, listing militant attacks against staff.

## APPENDIX 6: PRIMARY SOURCES – THE MORO REBELLION

### INTERVIEWS

#### Retired Army officers

- A3: retired Army officer who served in Mindanao, interviewed in Manila on 25 March 2011.
- A4: retired Army officer who served in Mindanao, interviewed in Cebu on 14 March 2011.

#### Former MNLF soldiers integrated into the AFP

- I1: Focus Group 1, MNLF Integrees, interviewed in Mindanao on 4 March 2011.

#### Moro rebels: civil and military

- M4: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 21 January 2011.
- M5: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 24 March 2011.
- M6: Moro rebel civilian adviser, interviewed in Manila on 23 March 2011.
- M7: former Moro rebel, interviewed in Manila on 29 March 2011.
- M8: Moro rebel civilian adviser, interviewed in Davao City on 11 March 2011.

#### Civil Society

- C12: academic, interviewed in Manila on 31 March 2011.
- C13: NGO worker, interviewed in Manila on 15 February 2011.
- C14: former negotiator, interviewed in Davao City on 4 March 2011.
- C15: former negotiator, interviewed in Manila on 23 March 2011.
- C16: political activist, interviewed in Manila on 28 March 2011.
- C17: political activist, interviewed in Manila on 28 March 2011.



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# SAMENVATTING VAN HET PROEFSCHRIFT

Dit proefschrift biedt een vergelijkende analyse van drie hedendaagse separatistische conflicten in Azië: de Naga opstand, de Punjab crisis en de Moro opstand. Het doel van deze dissertatie is inzicht te geven in de dynamiek van dit type conflict: hoe en waarom escaleren of de-escaleren conflicten na verloop van tijd? Eerder onderzoek richtte zich op de begin- en eindfases van conflicten, om te begrijpen hoe en waarom conflicten ontstaan en eindigen. In tegenstelling tot dit eerdere onderzoek heeft dit project een meer holistische visie op conflicten en wordt de dynamiek van escalatie en de-escalatie van het gehele conflict onderzocht. Ten behoeve van dit onderzoek is elk conflict opgedeeld in een reeks stadia, waardoor het verloop van deze conflicten kan worden geanalyseerd.

Door de focus van het onderzoek slechts op de begin- en eindfases van conflicten te leggen wordt een interpretatie in stand gehouden die de aard van deze conflicten als homogeen bestempeld. De aard van het conflict kan echter ook dynamisch zijn: gedurende het verloop kan de aard van het conflict – en derhalve ook de drijvende krachten erachter – veranderen. Door het conflict als dynamisch te beschouwen en door een beter begrip van de mechanismen achter deze dynamiek te verkrijgen, wordt het mogelijk om het veranderlijke karakter van het geweldsproces te onderzoeken – waardoor bovendien de drijvende krachten achter het conflict per stadium beter begrepen kunnen worden.

## DE PROBLEEMSTELLING EN ONDERZOEKSMETHODE

Het probleem waarop dit proefschrift zich richt is de vraag hoe de dynamiek van escalatie en de-escalatie van conflicten begrepen moet worden; niet slechts de oorzaken van conflicten of de tegenmaatregelen die staten moeten nemen om dergelijke conflicten te beëindigen, maar veeleer hoe we de veranderende niveaus van geweld gedurende het verloop van een conflict kunnen verklaren en wat de causale mechanismen zijn die deze dynamiek voortdrijven. Deze dissertatie heeft als doel de volgende vraag te beantwoorden: hoe kunnen de veranderende niveaus van geweld in de loop van deze conflicten verklaard worden?

Dit project is een verdiepende en vergelijkende studie van drie casestudies, waarbij gebruik wordt gemaakt van een historisch vergelijkende analyse.

Dit onderzoek bestaat uit twee onderdelen:

- 1) Diepgaand historisch onderzoek van de drie casestudies.
- 2) Vergelijkende analyse van zowel de individuele casus als de drie casestudies tezamen.

Het hoofddoel van het vergelijkend onderzoek is om hypotheses te ontwikkelen. Dit onderzoek wordt verrijkt door de toevoeging van een casestudy (de Punjab crisis) die afwijkt van de beide andere casus. Een bijkomend doel is het verzamelen van gegevens en nieuw materiaal betreffende deze onderbelichte casestudies, waardoor een breder begrip en betere interpretatie van de individuele zaken verkregen kunnen worden.

## DE CASESTUDIES

De eerste casus, de Naga opstand, is één van de langstdurende opstanden in de wereld en vindt plaats in een afgelegen noordoostelijke regio van India langs de Indisch-Birmese grens. Vanaf de vroege jaren vijftig van de twintigste eeuw voerden opstandelingen van de Naga-stammen een gewapende strijd voor een eigen soevereine natie, na hun opname

in de staat India, volgend op de verdeling van het Brits-Indische Rijk. Sinds 1997 is er sprake van een langdurig vredesproces met deelname van India en de belangrijkste opstandelingenfacties. Een permanente oplossing is evenwel nog niet bereikt.

De tweede casus is de Punjab crisis: de Sikh separatisten vochten voor een onafhankelijke Sikh natie binnen de Indiase staat Punjab, langs de Indiaas-Pakistaanse grens. Dit is het kortstdurende conflict van de drie casestudies en vond plaats vanaf de late jaren zeventig tot de vroege jaren negentig van de twintigste eeuw. Dit conflict is een van de zeldzame voorbeelden waarin een staat erin geslaagd is het geweld permanent te beëindigen door middel van geweldgebruik (en dient als zodanig als afwijkende casus binnen dit onderzoek).

De laatste casestudy is de Moro opstand op het Zuid-Filippijnse eiland Mindanao. Deze opstand startte in de late jaren zestig van de vorige eeuw en betreft de opstandelingen van de Islamitische Moro-stam, die langdurig strijd voerden om zich los te maken van de overwegend christelijke Filippijnen met het doel een onafhankelijke staat op te richten in het zuiden. Net zoals in de eerste casus zijn de bij dit conflict betrokken partijen nog steeds verwikkeld in een langdurig vredesproces.

## ANALYSE EN CONCLUSIES

Na afronding van het onderzoek met betrekking tot de drie casestudies en door middel van een vergelijkende analyse werd een theoretische structuur samengesteld, met behulp waarvan de dynamiek van escalatie en de-escalatie kon worden geanalyseerd. De belangrijkste factoren die escalatie bevorderen werden geïdentificeerd, geordend en vervolgens verdeeld over drie categorieën: context, statelijke actoren en niet-statelijke actoren. Deze drie-eenheid werd vervolgens onderworpen aan een analyse. De categorieën, die het analysekader vormden, zijn als volgt samengesteld:

**CONTEXT:** Sociale breuklijnen; steun van de bevolking; grieven; lokale politiek; nationale politiek; internationale politiek

**STATELIJKE ACTOREN:** Acties van de staat – geweldgebruik; acties van de staat – beleidsoplossingen; capaciteit van de staat; sterk/zwakke overhead

**NIET-STATELIJKE ACTOREN:** Strategieën van de gewapende groeperingen; capaciteit van de gewapende groeperingen; factievorming; criminalisering

## CONTEXT

In elk conflict bestond een unieke reeks grieven die bijdroegen aan de ontwikkeling van een context waarin een populaire separatistische groepering kon ontstaan. In alle drie de casus vormden etnische identiteit en nationalisme een fundamenteel onderdeel van de ideologieën van de afscheidingsgroeperingen. Nochtans werd het nationalisme ook gevoed door meer praktische factoren, zoals armoede en discriminatie. In Nagaland verscheen het nationalisme als eerste ten tonele. Grieven betreffende wanbestuur door de staat en discriminatie ontstonden later, wat het nationalisme verder voerde. In Punjab en Mindanao daarentegen volgde de groei van het nationalisme pas na periodes van wanbestuur en discriminatie, wat impliceert dat het nationalisme een reactie vormde op zulke grieven – en niet de voornaamste oorzaak hiervan was. Dit betreft echter een ‘kip of ei’-vraag en de richting van de causaliteit is niet geheel duidelijk: is zelfbeschikking op zichzelf gewenst, of als de voorgestelde oplossing voor andere grieven? Welk van de klachten dient als eerste aangepakt te worden? Als de andere grieven de werkelijke essentie vormen, kan het verlangen naar zelfbeschikking verdwijnen als deze grieven eerst aangepakt worden. In andere gevallen kan zelfbeschikking echter de voornaamste grief zijn die als eerste aangepakt dient te worden.

De dynamiek van escalatie en de-escalatie in elk conflict werd gedeeltelijk gevormd door de veelgelaagde politieke dynamiek waarin de conflicten verstrikten waren geraakt. De lokale politieke dynamiek speelde vaak een rol in de sturing van het geweld in elk conflict, aangezien lokale machtswijzen verweven raakten met de gewapende strijd voor

onafhankelijkheid, waarbij ook de bredere nationale politieke dynamiek betrokken raakte: nationale machtsconflicten konden uitgevochten worden door middel van lokale machthebbers. Aanvullend hadden verscheidene gebeurtenissen op het nationale toneel – niet gerelateerd aan de conflicten – een onbedoeld domino-effect, zoals veranderingen binnen de overheid of een crisis elders, die de aandacht van de overheid afleidde. Ook profiteerden alle groeperingen in elk conflict op verschillende momenten van buitenlandse steun, wat escalatie van het conflict mogelijk maakte. Omgekeerd zou het afnemen van buitenlandse steun een de-escalierend effect hebben. Als gevolg hiervan konden ‘lokale’ conflicten sterk beïnvloed worden door de dynamiek op internationaal niveau.

Democratie en het verkiezingsproces, hoewel uiteindelijk onderdeel van de oplossing, kunnen tevens bijdragen aan de escalatie van geweld. In een democratie is de overheid afhankelijk van de electorale steun van de bevolking voor haar voortbestaan. Aan de ene kant kan het overheidshandelen ingeperkt worden door electorale overwegingen, omdat sommige opties, zoals het toestaan van verdere territoriale opdeling of afsplitsing in India, simpelweg uitgesloten is omdat het electorale zelfmoord zou zijn. Aan de andere kant zijn er tal van voorbeelden, voortkomend uit de conflicten, waarin overheidsdienaren handelden uit eigenbelang, waardoor de situatie escaleerde.

Ook verkiezingsrondes kunnen het geweld sturen en het conflict laten escaleren. Tijdens verkiezingen ligt de macht voor het grijpen en dit stimuleert gewapende groeperingen om geweld te gebruiken om de verkiezingsuitkomst te bereiken die ze het meest verlangen. Ten eerste bieden verkiezingen iets dat een gevecht waard is: politieke macht. Ten tweede creëren verkiezingen een beperkt tijdsbestek waarin de groeperingen kunnen handelen, wat de escalatie van geweld forceert – aangezien gewapende actoren slechts tot de verkiezingsdag de tijd hebben om hun gewelddadige macht uit te oefenen.

Dit onderzoek heeft ook licht geworpen op de aard van het geweld, gepleegd tijdens de conflicten, waardoor duidelijk werd dat veel van dit geweld niet direct gerelateerd is aan de gewapende strijd voor onafhankelijkheid, maar veeleer indirect verbonden is met (of een bijproduct is van) de veranderende context die het conflict veroorzaakte. In een

context van chaos en wetteloosheid grepen velen hun kans om geweld te gebruiken om hun doeleinden te bereiken. Het belangrijkste probleem is dat de gewapende strijd voor onafhankelijkheid een machtsvacuüm kan creëren dat leidt tot een geheel nieuwe dynamiek van bijbehorend geweld dat inspeelt op de ontstane situatie.

In veel opzichten fungeert het conflict als een paraplu, waaronder een schare van gewelddadige acties verborgen kan worden – of het nu gaat om een oude vergelding of familievetes, of om ondernemers die de mogelijkheid om een rivaal te intimideren benutten. In de afwezigheid van een rechtsstaat, creëren wapens hun eigen recht. De paraplu strekt zich ook uit over sommige groeperingen die zijn getransformeerd van vrijheidsstrijders naar criminale ondernemingen of krijgsheren. Voor deze strijders biedt de ideologie van de onafhankelijkheidsstrijd de perfecte dekmantel voor hun activiteiten.

## ACTOREN AAN OVERHEIDSZIJDE

Een van de belangrijkste punten dat uit het onderzoek naar voren komt is dat de staat een dynamische speler is; de staat is zowel de oorzaak als de oplossing van conflicten. De acties van de staat zijn essentieel voor de dynamiek van opstanden en het staatsbeleid kan een conflict doen escaleren of de-escaleren.

Het is ironisch dat in de onderzochte gevallen de initiële reactie van de staat om het opkomende geweld te beperken niet slechts een dramatische escalatie van het conflict veroorzaakte, maar tevens dat deze reactie in zichzelf een drijvende kracht achter het conflict werd. De staat slaagde erin het conflict te transformeren, maar diens acties vormden tevens de voornaamste redenen voor het conflict. Een meer spectaculair schot in eigen voet is moeilijk voor te stellen. Punjab en Nagaland ondergingen de gewelddadige reactie van de staat die de militanten onderling verenigden, terwijl in Mindanao de verklaring van een staat van beleg de opstand teweegbracht.

Bij aanvang van elk van de genoemde conflicten ontbrak het de staat aan kennis, begrip en vaardigheden om op effectieve wijze het opkomende geweld aan te pakken. Als gevolg hiervan wist de staat niet

wat de beste aanpak was en nam uiteindelijk die maatregelen die de situatie juist verergerden. Zodra de lokale strijdkrachten van de overheid eenmaal instortten naar aanleiding van het toenemende geweld, had de staat geen andere optie dan het leger in te zetten. Het leger is echter een bot instrument, getraind om buitenlandse vijanden te bestrijden en het mist de training en ervaring die nodig is om een opstand in te perken. Een belangrijk punt dat wordt uitgelicht in de casestudies is dat, in vergelijking met het leger, correct getrainde en goed uitgeruste politiekrachten veel geschikter zijn voor een tegenaanval.

Het gebruik van geweld door de staat is geen wondermiddel voor het beëindigen van conflicten; het werkt slechts in een specifieke context. De les uit Punjab is niet dat geweld de juiste oplossing is, maar dat geweld kan werken wanneer het toegepast wordt in de juiste context van aanhoudende dynamiek. Het punt is dat overheidsgeweld in zichzelf alleen in exceptionele gevallen een conflict kan oplossen. Van essentieel belang is dat conflicten worden opgelost door het aanpakken van de onderliggende factoren die het conflict ondersteunen. Alle conflicten zijn uniek en in sommige gevallen is geweldgebruik de beste methode voor de staat om de aanhoudende dynamiek aan te pakken. Het gebruik van geweld speelt echter wel een belangrijke rol in het oplossen van de meeste conflicten: door het waarborgen van de veiligheid. Welke stappen de staat ook moet nemen om de aanhoudende dynamiek aan te pakken, veiligheid is normaliter de eerste stap om een geslaagde toepassing van dergelijk beleid te garanderen. Veiligheid is ook essentieel voor het herstel van het dagelijkse politieke proces; als de veiligheid onvoldoende gewaarborgd is, kunnen gewapende groeperingen hun dwangmiddelen inzetten om het verkiezingsproces te verstören.

In het merendeel van de conflicten wordt de oplossing geboden door politieke onderhandelingen en compromissen – in tegenstelling tot de situatie in Punjab. In elk genoemd conflict had de staat meerdere pogingen ondernomen om een vredesakkoord te bereiken. Een van de belangrijkste obstakels voor het bereiken van permanente vrede is het sluiten van een overeenkomst met meerdere facties. In de beginstadia volgde de staat vaak een ‘verdeel en heers’-tactiek waarbij misbruik gemaakt werd van de fractiestrijd binnen de milities. Op korte

termijn kan dit de groepering verzwakken, echter op lange termijn kan dergelijk beleid averechts werken, omdat de moeilijkheden zich vervolgens manifesteren in de vorm van onderhandelingen met een veelkoppig monster.

Bovendien – hoewel vredesbesprekingen mogelijk geleid hebben tot de-escalatie of beëindiging van het geweld tussen de staat en de groeperingen – biedt dit niet noodzakelijkerwijs het gehele plaatje. Een overkoepelend probleem is dat een staakt-het-vuren en vredesbesprekingen ondermijnd kunnen worden door een voortdurend machtsvacuüm en een context van wetteloosheid die het resultaat is van het onvermogen van de staat om de veiligheid te waarborgen en zijn geweldsmonopolie te behouden. Het grootste dilemma voor de staat is hoe de veiligheid gewaarborgd moet worden in een context waarin de opstandelingen nog niet verslagen zijn. Terwijl de veiligheid vóór een politieke oplossing komt die de uitvoering ervan garandeert, kan de staat de veiligheid niet garanderen voordat een dergelijke politieke oplossing geïmplementeerd is. Dit is de paradox die de staat moet zien te overwinnen.

## NIET-STATELIJKE ACTOREN

De niet-statelijke actoren spiegelen de statelijke actoren doordat zij tevens het conflict starten zonder de voor een gewapende strijd benodigde vaardigheden, ervaring en kennis. Net als de staat hebben de niet-statelijke groeperingen de mogelijkheid om te leren van hun fouten naarmate het conflict vordert. Zowel Mindanao als Nagaland zag de opkomst van tweede-generatie groeperingen die leerden van de fouten van de eerste-generatie groeperingen en aldus effectievere strategieën ontwikkelden, waardoor zij meer geavanceerde tegenstanders werden.

Elk van de voornoemde conflicten werd geplagd door fractiestrijd. Deze strijd beïnvloedde het conflict op verschillende wijzen. Een van de effecten is het ontstaan van verdeeldheid, wat het vormen van een eenheidsfront in de strijd voor onafhankelijkheid bemoeilijkt en de voorzichten voor een succesvolle gewapende strijd beperkt. Belangrijk is dat deze verdeeldheid leidt tot een nieuwe as van, ditmaal intern,

geweld, wat vaak leidt tot een escalatie van het conflict doordat de verschillende facties vechten om de macht.

Een tweede en minder voor de hand liggend effect van fractiestrijd is dat, naast het beperken van successen als gevolg van interne twist, zulke strijd een motiverende factor kan zijn: zij bevordert competitie tussen de facties – wat hen aanmoedigt om strategieën te ontwikkelen en hun capaciteit uit te breiden. Het is geen toeval dat de strategisch beter ontwikkelde groeperingen zich vormen uit de tweede generatie – ten gevolge van de fragmentatie van de eerste generatie.

Gedurende het conflict wenden gewapende groeperingen zich vaak tot criminale activiteiten om hun strijd te financieren. Deze activiteiten voorzien de groeperingen van de middelen benodigd voor deescalatie of voortgang van het conflict. Dit kan in sommige gevallen leiden tot criminalisering van de groeperingen, waardoor het streven naar rijkdom door middel van criminale activiteiten de motiverende factor wordt – in plaats van een ideologie. Criminalisering wordt vervolgens een aanhoudende dynamiek van het conflict. De strijd om de macht over de criminale activiteiten is dus een aanvullende factor die bijdraagt aan de escalatie van geweld. Gezien vanuit het perspectief van de staat kan het aanpakken van de criminale activiteiten en de omgeving van wetteloosheid een kwestie van de-escalatie zijn.

Buitenlandse steun speelde een essentiële rol in de escalatie van voornoemde conflicten – vooral in de beginfase – door de groeperingen de benodigde middelen en ondersteuning te bieden. Omgekeerd speelde het intrekken van deze buitenlandse steun een cruciale rol in de de-escalatie van de conflicten. Hoewel buitenlandse steun in beginsel een aantrekkelijke optie leek, bleek zij op lange termijn een paard van Troje, dat het functioneren van de groeperingen ondermijnde. Het vertrouwen in steun van buitenaf maakte hen afhankelijk van hun buitenlandse donateurs, die deze groeperingen vaak gebruikten om hun eigen doeleinden na te streven – in plaats van hen te helpen hun doelen te bereiken. Het is weinig verrassend dat tweede-generatie groeperingen, zoals de NSCN (IM) en de MILF, een strategie van zelfredzaamheid aannamen – zich realiserend dat deze buitenlandse hulp misleidend en alles behalve belangloos was.

## DE LEERCURVE

Het blijkt dat beide kanten – zowel de staat als de andere actoren – gedurende de conflicten een leerproces doormaakten. Beide zijden leerden van hun fouten en introduceerden of ontwikkelden nieuwe strategieën. Gedurende de conflicten ondergingen de partijen een aantal wijzigingen in hun strategieën en tegenstrategieën, aangezien beide partijen zich aanpasten aan elkaar. De speler die de steilste leercurve doormaakt verkrijgt echter een duidelijk competitief voordeel. De dynamiek van een conflict wordt bepaald door een aantal factoren – de ontwikkeling van een geslaagde strategie kan echter een doorslaggevende factor zijn.

In alle drie de casestudies verergerden de initiële operaties van de staat de situatie, waardoor de conflicten op dramatische wijze escaleerden. Het blijkt dat de staten juist vanuit dit dieptepunt leerden van hun fouten en dat er zich, door middel van een trial-and-error proces, een leercurve ontwikkelde. Ook de militanten maakten een leercurve door die leidde tot een aanpassing van hun strategieën. De belangrijkste ontwikkelingen werden echter zichtbaar bij de tweede-generatie groeperingen. In Nagaland en Mindanao lieten zowel de NSCN (IM) als de MILF belangrijke strategische sprongen voorwaarts zien. Beide groepen hadden geleerd van de fouten van hun voorgangers en hadden compleet nieuwe strategieën ontwikkeld om de gebreken en zwakheden van deze voorgaande groepen aan te pakken.

Een implicatie van deze tweede-generatie groeperingen in Nagaland en Mindanao is dat de conflicten nu geleid worden door groepen die een steile leercurve hebben doorgemaakt en die strategieën en structuren hebben aangenomen die specifiek gericht zijn op het verhelpen van eerdere zwakheden. Deze groepen stellen de staat daardoor voor een grotere uitdaging dan de originele groeperingen.<sup>269</sup>

Een analyse van de conflicten lijkt te impliceeren dat er wel degelijk een kans bestaat voor de staat om de strijdsters te verslaan voordat ze

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<sup>269</sup> De MNLF vormde een grotere militaire uitdaging dankzij een groot aantal in het buitenland opgeleide officieren. De basisstrategie van de MILF gaf evenwel het beeld van een groepering die sterk ingebet was in de gemeenschap en als zodanig moeilijker los te weken was uit deze gemeenschap.

lang genoeg kunnen voortbestaan om te leren en zich te ontwikkelen en zo uitgroeien tot een veel gevaarlijker tegenstander. Zodra de rebellen de benodigde kennis en ervaring ontwikkeld hebben kan het bijzonder moeilijk zijn om deze ontwikkeling terug te draaien. Deze ‘leerstrijd’ is essentieel asymmetrisch van aard. Terwijl de staat slechts kan winnen door het verslaan van de rebellen, kunnen de rebellen winnen door simpelweg niet verslagen te worden door de staat. De staat heeft slechts beperkt de tijd voordat de rebellen zelf begrijpen hoe zij een opstand ten uitvoer moeten brengen en hoe zij de strategieën van de staat met betrekking tot de rebellen kunnen tegengaan. Als de rebellen eenmaal de aard van asymmetrische oorlogsvoering hebben begrepen is de doos van Pandora geopend en zijn ze bijzonder moeilijk te verslaan, waardoor het conflict vervolgens kan uitmonden in een langdurige strijd.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

ALASTAIR REED was born in 1978 in the United Kingdom. He holds an M.Sci in Physics and Philosophy from Glasgow University and an MA in Political Science from Leiden University, where he wrote his dissertation on the impact of post 9/11 counter-terrorism legislation in the UK and USA on the balance between liberty and security. In 2008 he joined the research project *A History of Counter-Terrorism 1945-2005* at Utrecht University's Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC). As a PhD researcher Alastair conducted empirical research on ethno-separatist insurgencies in India and the Philippines, including interviews with former insurgents, security forces, civil society and specialists. He has presented his research at a number of international conferences, and lectures on Political and International History at Utrecht University.



