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Introduction to the Proceedings of the ANHS Pre- Conference 2002 War on Terrorism, War as Terrorism: The Maoist Rebellion in Nepal

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANHS PRE-CONFERENCE 2002
WAR ON TERRORISM, WAR AS TERRORISM:
THE MAOIST REBELLION IN NEPAL

In mid-October 2001, barely a month after the Al Qaeda attacks, Himalaya/HRB editor Barbara Brower and I came a day early to the South Asian Conference in Madison to talk about the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies. We planned a one day Pre-Conference for the 2002 Madison meetings which would explore how the "war on terrorism" was affecting High Asia.

Of course, "wars on terrorism" had been being waged in Kashmir, in Nepal, and in Afghanistan long before 9/11. By October 2001, as we walked through the falling leaves along the Madison lakeshore, the US was already preparing to invade Afghanistan and elements of the Bush administration were searching for evidence to justify their upcoming invasion of Iraq.

The Afghan wars exemplified the ambiguities that we perceived and the ambivalence we felt. The very use of the term "terrorism" almost always seems to have a political base; "terrorists" are our enemies, and "freedom fighters" are our allies. In Afghanistan this ambiguity was painfully obvious as former "freedom fighters" were now the "terrorists" attacking us.

With the withdrawal of the Soviets the US abandoned Afghanistan to the forces it had armed and the contending regional states--Pakistan, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia-- who came to support the various factions in the ensuing civil wars. These wars were perhaps even more devastating to Afghanistan's people and meager infrastructure than the Soviet war and prepared the way for the Taliban takeover in the mid 1990s.

Terrorism, however, can have an objective definition: the killing of civilian non-combatants as a war strategy. That definition makes all modern wars "terrorism." Even in the "good" World War II the US and allies attacked civilian targets like Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki. In Vietnam US bombing killed at least one million, 40-50% of whom were children under sixteen. We expressed our ambiguity to the War on Terrorism in the Pre-Conference title: War on Terrorism, War as Terrorism.

We proposed the Pre-Conference at our membership meeting, and the Association embraced the plan. My Presidential term ended and Arjun Gueneratne became President, so I took on the task of organizing the Pre-Conference. We had envisioned sessions on the wars in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Nepal. As I sought to recruit Afghan scholars, I found that the limited number of US based specialists on the Hindu Kush were already heavily booked into the multitude of conferences the 9/11 attacks had elicited. I was sufficiently fortunate to line up two presenters: Zalmay Chishti of Harold Washington College and Elena Bashir, of the University of Chicago.

On the Kashmir civil war we were able to induce Julia Flowerday of University of North Carolina, Gabriella deBergh Robinson of Cornell, and Haley Duschinski of Harvard to present papers on their work. We drew on our strong base of Nepal scholars to pull together five presentations on the Maoist "People's War" in Nepal. I was extremely lucky to have Sara Schneiderman, who was writing her dissertation at Cornell, do virtually all the organizing of these Nepal sessions. Her thorough and good natured efforts were an invaluable help.

This first issue of our transformed flagship journal, Himalaya presents the revised conference papers on the Maoist civil war, plus comments by our discussant at the conference, Susan Hanger and a transcript of the two-hour "Roundtable" discussion that the audience had with the presenters and each other on the evening of the conference.

The "People's War" has profoundly challenged all of us who have personal connections to Nepal. The papers in this issue describe the rebellious impact on areas the authors have been studying and seek to untangle the many factors which have interacted to produce this war. In the first paper Judith Pettigree gives a poignantly nuanced description, first, of how the random appearances and departures of Maoist rebels in a Gurung village have created ever present danger and pervasive fear within the village, and second, how the villagers have created new cultural

forms to monitor the danger, communicate its severity, and manage its stress.

The other papers explore the factors that have contributed to emergence and escalation of the "People's War." They all acknowledge that no definitive explanation is possible at this time. The strength of the group comes from the ways they complement each other. The authors suggest three dialectically interacting components of the rebellion. First, there are the social and political-economic conditions that have induced the revolution. Second and third are the vanguard leadership and the villager cadres of the revolution.

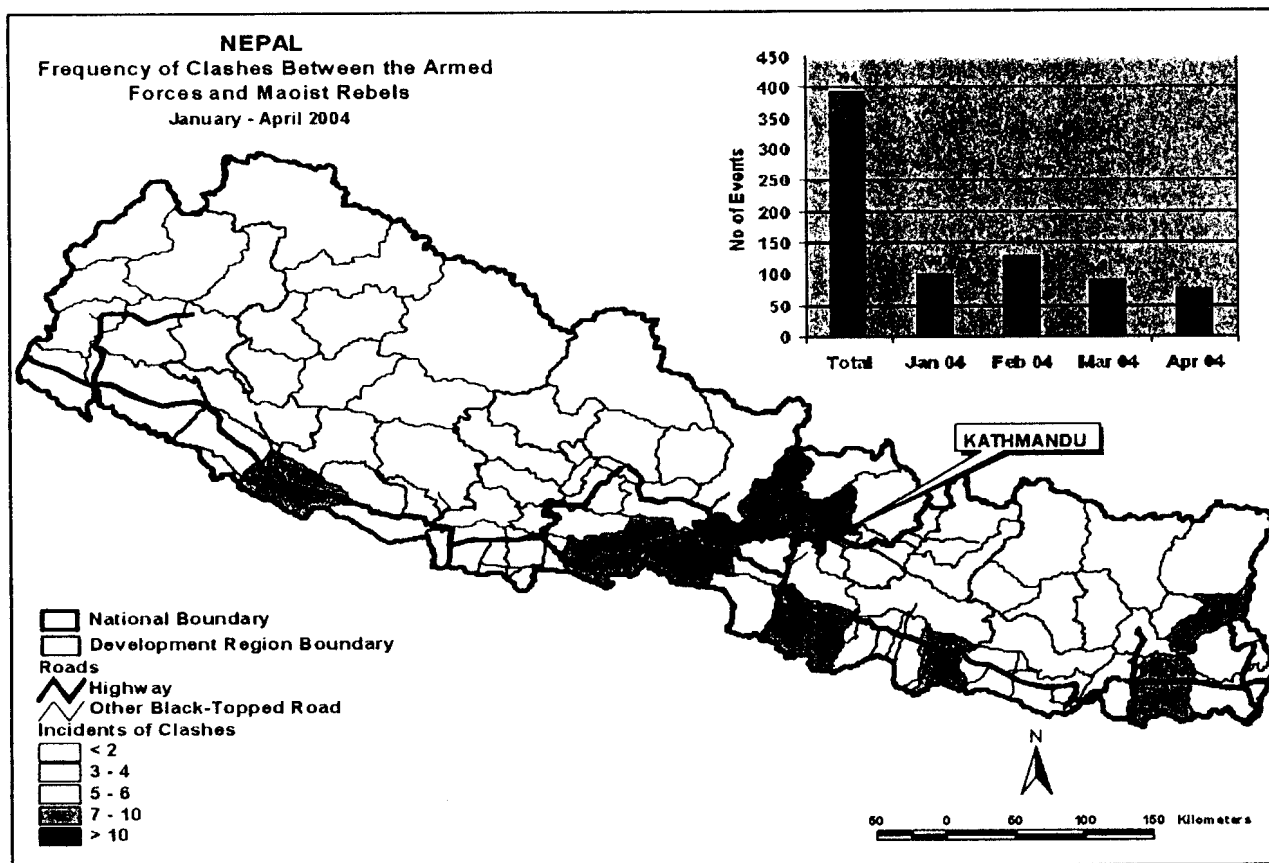
Richard Bownas' paper uses the longer history of the Maoist Naxalite rebellions in India to identify the factors that may affect the success of Nepal's Maoist. He examines the interactions between ideologically sophisticated, vanguard leaders of Maoist rebellions and the villager masses who do the fighting and identifies three configurations: vanguard aloof from masses, acting without engaging locals; vanguard with strong connections to local community seeks to build local movement and inspire it with an historical and international vision; vanguard settles completely into local, abandoning broader political project to focus on survival.

Fujikura, Lawoti, and Shneiderman provide accounts of the

historical exploitation and oppression that permeate Nepal. Fujikura's overview leads to his discussion of how development discourses and activities have produced changes in consciousness that have facilitated the Maoist's revolution. Lawoti explores in detail the failures of the 1990 constitution and the state it engendered and thereby raises the key question of how to create the institutional structure of effective democracy.

Fujikura and Shneiderman emphasize local cadres as responsible actors in the revolution and seek to counter the widespread assumption that they are dupes. They both are interested in the consciousness of local revolutionaries, and Fujikura's "collective imagination" seems to correspond partially to Shneiderman's "practical" and "theoretical" ideologies.

Taken together these papers expand our appreciation of the complex challenges confronting the people of Nepal. As Shneiderman argues, violence has permeated the entire history of the Nepalese state. What is changed is that some of the traditional victims are now resisting with their own organized violence. We shall have to wait to see whether this struggle will lead to improved lives for most Nepalis.



MAP BY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE INFORMATION SYSTEM, OBTAINED FROM RELIEFWEB (<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/map.nsf/home?openform>)

CHRONOLOGY: NEPAL'S POLITICAL HISTORY

- 1740-69 Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha attacks and finally subdues Newar kingdoms of Kathmandu Valley
- 1769-1810 P.N. Shah and successors expand Nepal from Sikkim to Himalayas north of Punjab
- 1815-16 Nepal and British East India Company armies fight. Brits barely defeat Nepal, take Tarai and western territory
- 1846 Jang Bahadur Kunwar and brothers massacre leading members of all competing noble families, lock Shah king in palace, establish family as hereditary Prime Ministers; change family name to Rana.
- 1857 Jang Bahadur leads army to free British hostages at Lucknow; helps Brits defeat army insurrection. Brits give back Tarai lands, guarantee Rana hegemony in Nepal. Begin heavy recruiting of Nepalese into "Gurkha" brigades.
- 1915-18 WWI, 200,000 Gurkhas fight, 20,000 killed
- 1919 Gurkha brigade massacres 1500 Congress Party demonstrators in Amritsar
- 1939-45 200,000 Gurkhas fight
- 1950-51 Rana oligarchy terminated with Indian assistance. King Tribhuvan regains power
- 1955 Tribhuvan dies; son, Mahendra, becomes king.
- 1958 Elections for parliamentary democracy Mahendra grants: Nepal Congress Party wins 74 of 107 seats. B.P. Koirala becomes Prime Minister
- 1959 Koirala abolishes "Birta" land grants in Tarai, lands granted to favored few by king
- 1960 Mahendra seizes power, terminates parliament, locks up Koirala for 8 years
- 1962 Mahendra establishes "Partyless Panchayat" system; is an elected parliament with 1 or 2 representatives elected from each district, based on population; 20% of MPs appointed by king; political parties prohibited, so no ideological base for cross-district organizing; development money trickles through elected leaders, making elections contests between district "Abig men" for control of development monies.
- 1971 Mahendra dies, son Birendra becomes king. Maoist rebellion in far southeast quickly suppressed by Royal Nepal Army.
- 1979 Agitation for return to party-based democracy
- 1980 Birendra holds national referendum on Partyless Panchayat system, which wins contested election
- 1985 Fifth convention of the Communist Party of Nepal. Party splits into two factions: the moderate group seeking role as political party in democratic state; a radical Maoist influenced group seeking a revolution.

1990	Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. New agitation for return to party based democracy leads to massive demonstrations, military repression, but King Birendra's agreement to a constitutional monarchy. New constitution written late in year.
1990-2001	Parliamentary democracy begins. United Left Front (ULF) is an alliance of 7 leftist parties contends with Nepal Congress Party. Neither can win majority, so series of 10 governments over the next 11 years.
1990-1995	Three of four Maoist parties form Communist Party of Nepal-Unity Center. Reject 1990 constitution, refine ideological position, purge dissenting members.
1995	CPN-Unity Center becomes Communist Party of Nepal - Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (CPNM). Begins preparing for "People's War"
1996	CPNM begins People's War. Government pulls back personnel to District Centres, giving countryside to Maobadi rebels. Perhaps 1000 attacks over next 5 years. Only ill-equipped police respond.
2001 June	King Birendra and family killed in palace. His son officially blamed, but virtually no one in Nepal believes. Birendra's brother Gyanendra becomes king. His son Paras greatly disliked.
2001 July	At Holeri in Rolpa District Maobadi overrun police post, capture 70 police. Royal Nepal Army troops surround, negotiate release
2001 July	First ceasefire begins. Negotiation for 4 months
2001 October	Maobadi end ceasefire with countrywide attacks on Royal Nepal Army (RNA)
2001 November	King declares "State of Emergency." RNA enters war.
2002	Prime Minister Deuba dismisses parliament.
2002 October	King fires elected Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, assumes control of state. Appoints Lok Bahadur Chand Prime Minister
2003 January	King ends "State of Emergency"
2003 February	Second ceasefire and negotiation begins
2003 May	PM Chand resigns. King appoints Surya Bahadur Thapa PM.
2003 August	Second ceasefire ends. Maoists attacks all over country
2004 April	Congress Party and Communist Party Nepal UML begin massive protests over king's seizure of power. Demand return to democracy. Met with force and thousands of arrests.
2004 May	PM Thapa resigns