



INDIAN APPROACHES TO SECURITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract:

This article analyses the inter-relationships between India's approach to conflict resolution at the global, regional and domestic levels, with a view to clarifying the most consistent positions of the Indian state. At the global level, while there have been some strategic silences reflecting realpolitik, India remains a strong support of UN peacekeeping and critical of armed intervention for humanitarian purposes. At a regional level traditional security approaches dominate. There is a rhetorical commitment to regional integration as a means of building better relationships with neighbours, but India's actions reflect a model of security and conflict resolution based on deterrence and military power-projection. At the domestic level India has a long tradition of managing internal conflicts through state formation and elite co-option. However, in the North East and in particular in Kashmir and in the Maoist conflicts there have been missed opportunities to de-escalate, when the positive conflict resolution experiences in other domestic cases have been crowded out by a highly securitized response.

Key words: India, Security, Conflict Resolution, Strategy, Kashmir, Maoist

Título en Castellano: Los enfoques de la India sobre seguridad y resolución de conflictos

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza las interrelaciones entre el enfoque de la India sobre la resolución de conflictos a nivel mundial, regional y nacional, con miras a aclarar las posiciones más consistentes del Estado indio. A nivel mundial, si bien ha habido algunos silencios estratégicos que reflejan la realpolitik, la India sigue constituyendo un fuerte apoyo en el mantenimiento de la paz de las Naciones Unidas y critica la intervención armada con fines humanitarios. A nivel regional dominan los enfoques tradicionales de seguridad. Hay un compromiso retórico con la integración regional como un medio para construir mejores relaciones con los vecinos, pero las acciones de la India reflejan un modelo de seguridad y resolución de conflictos basado en la disuasión y la proyección de poder militar. A nivel nacional, la India tiene una larga tradición de gestionar los conflictos internos a través de la conformación estatal y la co-optación de élites. Sin embargo, en el noreste y en particular en Cachemira y en los conflictos maoístas se han perdido las oportunidades de desescalar, desplazando las experiencias positivas de resolución de conflictos en otros casos domésticos por una respuesta altamente securitizada

Palabras Clave: India, Seguridad, Resolución de conflictos, Estrategia, Kashmir, Maoista.

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1. Introduction

Indian state approaches to security and conflict resolution are most often discussed within largely separated sub-disciplines, depending on whether the focus of the author is on global politics, the South Asia region, internal domestic conflict or the specifics of one Indian region. Indian foreign and security policy is also still largely discussed in its own historic context, as a part of a shift from a post-independence and /or Cold War non-alignment policy towards a more Realist (or not) contemporary policy, while internal conflicts are dominated by single case study work.² There are also differences of emphasis from inside and outside the region. Nuclear strategy in South Asia, for example, is discussed in the European and North American literature almost exclusively in terms of the India-Pakistan binary relationship.³ This is understandable from the perspective of those analysing the issues from outside the region. The history of armed conflict and three full-scale wars between India and Pakistan creates a context where *The Economist* headline of 2011 ‘The world’s most dangerous border’⁴ is reflective of a wide concern that an Indo-Pakistan nuclear conflict is not impossible. However, when the detail of the nuclear weapons proliferation in the region is reviewed it is impossible to do so without taking account of the triangular relationship between China, India and Pakistan, and the wider global context and therefore the literature which comes out of South Asia, quite naturally, focuses strongly on China.⁵ As an interesting aside, the Chinese specialist literature is much less focused on India.⁶ This article seeks to build on the strengths of these separate debates and offer an analysis, which highlights the inter-relationships between India’s approach to conflict resolution at the global, regional and domestic levels, with a view to clarifying the most consistent dimensions of the contemporary positions of the Indian state.

2. Indian security and conflict resolution: The global level

Globally, India’s perspective on conflict resolution is most strongly seen in its strong support for the United Nations, and especially in its very long-standing, high-level commitment to providing troops for UN peacekeeping missions. In recent years this has typically been at a level of approximately 7,000 troops and police officers – placing it in the top five troop contributing countries in the world. India’s perspective on peace-keeping is however focused on traditional models. Troops have been deployed in recent years in large contingents in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, Syria and Haiti. The only large-scale mission, operating in 2018, without significant Indian presence was MINUSMA in Mali where the mission has a wider mandate with implied counter-insurgency aims. Although they deployed on the primary peacekeeping mission MONUSCO in the DRC, Indian diplomats expressed concern over the recent tendency to deploy both traditional peace-keeping and more interventionist forces in the same country at the same time.⁷ Indian discourse tends to focus on a neutral disposition of forces, and opposes intervention without the acquiescence, if not support of, recognised governments.

² Mitra, Subrata K and Schöttli, Jivanta (2016): *India: Statecraft and Foreign Policy*, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

³ Quinlan, M.: “How robust is India-Pakistan deterrence?”, *Survival*, vol. 42, nº 4 (2000), pp. 141-154.

⁴ *The Economist*, 19 May 2011.

⁵ For example, Pant, H. V.: “India’s Nuclear Doctrine and Command Structure: Implications for Civil-Military Relations in India”, *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 33 nº 2 (2007), pp. 238–264; Zafar Nawaz Jaspal: “Towards Nuclear Zero in South Asia: a Realistic Narrative”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 22 (2011), pp. 75-97.

⁶ Garver, John: “Asymmetrical Indian and Chinese threat perceptions”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 25, nº 4 (2002), p. 113.

⁷ For example, Indian contribution to UN General Assembly 4th Committee meeting on peacekeeping, 4 November 2015.



India's traditional position is generally one of opposition to the use of external military intervention in 'internal' conflicts within states. Ganguly however, has argued that this classic summation of the Indian position as opposing all such interventions is not entirely accurate, as during the Cold War, India was in practice much more critical of US military intervention, for example in Vietnam, than it was about Soviet intervention in Hungary or Afghanistan.⁸ As the international debate on humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect developed in the 1990s and beyond, India, however, maintained a position of sceptical opposition, even before those international debates ran into the ground in the aftermath of the chaos in post invasion Iraq.

There is nuance in India's position which assumptions of consistent and straightforward opposition to armed intervention do not capture. Choedon points out that India supported the UN intervention in Somalia on the grounds that it was an 'extraordinary situation, with no Government in control, [which] demands an immediate and exceptional response from the international community'.⁹ India justified its support as an intervention which was not taking place against the wishes of a sovereign government, as no such government existed. In other cases, where India, in essence, opposed intervention it often chose to abstain in votes and also chose to remain relatively silent in international debates. For example, India abstained on the vote on UN Security Council resolution 688, which was later used to justify the no-fly zone over Iraq, even though the actual wording did not authorise force.¹⁰ Nonetheless it did not actively campaign against the later no-fly zone imposed by the US, UK and France.¹¹ India also abstained on UNSC resolution 1973, in March 2011 on a no-fly zone over Libya, diplomats arguing that there was insufficient information on who would enforce the resolution and insufficient analysis of the potential negative consequences, but yet India did not vote or actively campaign against the resolution.¹²

Notwithstanding these examples of restrained Indian diplomacy and even though India's relationship with the USA has very significantly improved, in the last decade or so, India remains very sceptical of the use of military force against sovereign states, arguing that the costs involved in the threat to the broader international order out-weigh any perceived benefits that might arise from a specific intervention against the wishes of the government of a sovereign state. This more traditional view was seen very strongly in the case of NATO intervention against Serbia regarding Kosovo, where India was very vocal in its opposition to the air bombing campaign. India co-sponsored a resolution condemning the NATO attack along with the Russian Federation and Belarus, which ultimately was defeated with only China, Namibia and the Russian Federation voting in its favour and all other 12 members voting against.¹³

The key themes from this global level that are visible in Indian policy are the emphasis on the rights of sovereign governments, a general reluctance to support armed intervention (while not ruling it out in principle), and a continuing desire to place India as a United Nations

⁸ Ganguly, Sumit: "India in the liberal order", *Transatlantic Academy* (2013), pp. 18, at

http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Ganguly_IndiaLiberalOrder_Nov13_0.pdf

⁹ Choedon, Yeshi: "India on Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect: Shifting Nuances", *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 73, n° 4 (2017), pp. 430-453.

¹⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 688, 5 April 1991, at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/688>

¹¹ Jaganathan, Madhan Mohan and Kurtz, Gerrit: "Singing the tune of sovereignty? India and the responsibility to protect", *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 14, n° 4 (2014), pp. 461-487, p.467.

¹² "Security Council Approves 'No-Fly Zone' over Libya, Authorizing 'All Necessary Measures' to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favour with 5 Abstentions", 17 March 2011, at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm#Resolution>

¹³ "Security Council Rejects Demand for Cessation of Use of Force against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", 26 March 1999, at <https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990326.sc6659.html>



supporting, emerging power, a 'representative' of the Global South and post-colonial states, and an opponent of continuing 'western' armed intervention and interference in the Global South.¹⁴ This is counter-balanced by the more Realist elements of India's traditional foreign policy, seen in India's desire to be recognised as a large and powerful state, with a desire for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, perhaps explaining why India's critique of 'humanitarian intervention' has been somewhat muted in more recent years.

3. Indian security and conflict resolution: the regional level

The regional dimension of India's approach to security and conflict resolution in some respects reflects the global level, but also in parts contradicts it. There is naturally a significant focus on traditional security concerns. Three wars with neighbour Pakistan, a more limited border war with China and frequent political tensions with Bangladesh and Myanmar have placed traditional security concerns and nuclear strategy at the heart of India's regional security policy. While a traditional large-scale territorial war, most likely triggered by an escalation of one of the frequent cross-border exchanges of fire with Pakistan, cannot be ruled out, its relatively low probability makes other aspects of the regional dynamics more interesting for analysts – the attitude of India to military intervention short of total war against its neighbours, the place of nuclear weapons in India's wider regional security policy and the place of security within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

3.1 Regional Intervention

Despite India's well-established scepticism about 'humanitarian intervention', India's own military action in East Pakistan / Bangladesh is often described as humanitarian intervention even if that description is contested, and the Sri Lanka intervention of 1987 is also analysed in those terms.¹⁵ India in its own discourse both in 1971 and afterwards has occasionally justified the third India-Pakistan war in humanitarian terms. Pratap Bhanu Mehta claims that the 1971 intervention "is widely and fairly regarded as one of the world's most successful cases of humanitarian intervention against genocide. Indeed, India in effect applied what we would now call the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) principle and applied it well".¹⁶

This interpretation is however not universally accepted by either analysts or India's security elites. Cordera among many others argues that the national security interests of India were paramount and the humanitarian dimension was been overlaid in later accounts.¹⁷

If there was ambiguity in the official discourse used to describe India's intervention in (then) East Pakistan, India's second most recent military intervention in the region – the peacekeeping force in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990, was described and deployed in a manner as close as possible to a United Nations peacekeeping mission in an attempt to both make it more acceptable to the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil rebels but also to avoid accusations of 'western style' interventionism. The changes over the years in India's policy on Sri Lanka and the Tamil national question and the extent of its relationship to domestic Indian politics in Tamil Nadu have been well discussed elsewhere.¹⁸ For the purposes of this article,

¹⁴ Chakrabarti, Shantanu: "Global South rhetoric in India's policy projection", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 38, nº 8 (2017), pp. 1909-1920.

¹⁵ Cordera, Sonia: "India's response to the 1971 East Pakistan crisis: hidden and open reasons for intervention", *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 17 no. 1 (2015), pp. 45-62; Raghavan, Srinath (2013): *1971: a global history of the creation of Bangladesh*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

¹⁶ Mehta, Pratap Bhanu: "Do New Democracies Support Democracy? Reluctant India", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 22, nº 4 (October 2011), pp. 97-109, p. 104 cited in Bass, Gary J.: "The Indian Way of Humanitarian Intervention" in *The Yale Journal of International Law*, vol. 40, nº 2 (2015), p. 228-294, p.334.

¹⁷ Cordera, *op. cit.*, p.46.

¹⁸ Spencer, Jonathan (ed.). (1990): *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of the Conflict*, London, Routledge.



the lead up to the decision to deploy in July 1987, the escalation from peacekeeping to full-scale conflict and the ultimate withdrawal are the key issues to explore in terms of India's attitude to conflict resolution and its links to regional and national security.

India's traditional position on the Tamil question was one of non-interference in the internal affairs of a neighbour and as the war escalated one of seeking a 'peaceful solution'. However domestic pressure from senior political actors in Tamil Nadu, especially, but not only, when they were supporting Union governments in New Delhi, led to India adopting a position of de-facto if largely covert, support for the Tamil insurgency in the mid-1980s.¹⁹ This was most publicly seen in the air-dropping of supplies to the LTTE held area of Jaffna in June 1987. Described as a 'mercy mission' due to the rising civilian casualties, nonetheless India made it clear that any attempt by Sri Lanka to resist would be met by force. Sri Lanka did not resist militarily, restricting itself to diplomatic objections, nonetheless India made it clear that it was willing to use its hegemonic regional power to impose its view, that the Tamil insurgency should not be, or even could not be, crushed militarily, and if required India would use military force to allow it send humanitarian supplies.²⁰ India also had clear strategic reasons for intervening. The increasing involvement of Pakistan and Israel in supporting the Sri Lanka government and fears that the USA would get naval facilities in the strategic port of Trincomalee were key factors. The related exchange of letters between the two governments supports this interpretation, as Sri Lanka promised to both consult New Delhi regarding the use of foreign military advisers and to deny the use of Trincomalee Harbour to any military use prejudicial to India's interests.²¹

Continuing fighting and the failure of all attempts at conflict resolution, along with continuing domestic pressure, led to the Indian decision to deploy a large-scale military force to try and stop the conflict. The Sri Lankan government was wary but had failed militarily in its attempt to defeat the LTTE and now feared a more active Indian policy of support for the Tamil movement. India did not want to enter Sri Lanka without the formal invitation of the sovereign government - reflecting its position on UN peacekeeping forces and intervention more generally. The signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord in July 1987 – announcing a ceasefire, a commitment to regional devolution in Sri Lanka and the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force to disarm Tamils, allowed India to say it was deploying at the request and with the agreement of the recognised sovereign government. The LTTE were not represented at the talks and they refused to disarm. However, much Sri Lanka felt forced into the accord, India could deploy its force under its terms and 10,000 troops were initially sent to Sri Lanka. The failure to include the Tamils in the talks, and the relatively modest reforms promised by the Sri Lankan government led, however, to an escalating conflict between India and the LTTE, which saw troop numbers increase to almost 80,000 at their peak and led ultimately to 1,200 deaths on the Indian side and an unknown number of LTTE and Tamil civilian deaths, before the forces were withdrawn in 1990.

This episode, though now over 30 years past, is worth summarising for its long-term impacts on India's policy towards its neighbours in the region. It has strengthened the norm of non-interventionism in Indian conflict resolution policy and weakened more Realist tendencies towards expressing India's unrivalled power in the region via military projection. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 effectively ended any remaining sympathy for the LTTE among Indian elites and made it almost impossible for domestic supporters of the LTTE in

¹⁹ Hagerty, Devin T.: "India's Regional Security Doctrine", *Asian Survey*, vol. 31, nº 4 (April 1991), pp. 351-363, p.353.

²⁰ David Carment, Patrick James, Zeynep Taydas (2006): *Who Intervenes?: Ethnic Conflict and Interstate Crisis*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, pp.54-6.

²¹ Hagerty, *op. cit.*, p.356.



Tamil Nadu to mobilise any government action. However rather than strengthening non-military attempts to resolve the Tamil war, it led to a period of relative Indian inaction. In the late 1990s and early 2000's India's position shifted from inaction to one of gradually becoming more supportive of the Sri Lankan government while maintaining a public position of seeking a political solution. A range of factors influenced India at this time. The LTTE were more isolated internationally in the era of the 'war on terror'; India feared growing Chinese investment in and influence in Sri Lanka – seeing a potential encirclement via the 'string of pearls'.²² There is compelling evidence that India was more active over this period in intercepting Tamil Tigers arms imports and in supplying intelligence and probably military material to Sri Lanka. Ultimately India was among the group of states who had signalled they would not intervene to save the LTTE from military annihilation; would offer some diplomatic cover to the Sri Lanka government; and would supply arms and equipment to Sri Lanka. This position was contested by notable civil society activists but did not seem to cause the Indian government any major domestic problems.²³ When speaking of the end of the Sri Lanka war, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh welcomed the 'decimation' of the LTTE, but also said that the 'problem does not disappear with the defeat of the LTTE. The Tamil population has legitimate grievances ... have been reduced over the years to second class citizens'.²⁴ This position could be analysed as an example of an Indian government prioritising its national security interests (balancing China) over its desire to see a sustainable conflict resolution process in Sri Lanka. Alternatively, it may highlight the links between regional and domestic strategies as a replication of one self-image of its own Punjab strategy (as defined by KPS Gill and others) that the insurgency in Punjab was defeated because it was ruthlessly crushed, rather than due to other political decisions and negotiations.²⁵

3.2 Regional Nuclear Strategy

India's nuclear strategy also provides some interesting insights into how it balances security and conflict resolution norms against other national security goals. The decision to test a nuclear weapon in 1974 was not forced by any immediate crisis. India's conventional military advantage over Pakistan was made clear by its victory in the 1971 war and the creation of Bangladesh. The threat from China after the humiliating loss in the 1962 border war seemed to have receded, even if relations did not improve. India perhaps thought that it could gain some international leverage and some deterrence against China, whose own capacities and intentions were unclear. Whatever the reasons for the decision to test in 1974, it did not lead to an intensification of nuclear strategy or weapons development and seemed for many years to have been a one-off gesture, over-shadowed by India's wider commitments to the United Nations and its calls for nuclear disarmament by the major nuclear powers.²⁶

Notwithstanding its high-level support for the United Nations as a central pillar of international peace and security, India opposed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Indian

²² David Brewster: "Beyond the 'String of Pearls': is there really a Sino-Indian security dilemma in the Indian Ocean?", *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, vol. 10 n° 2 (2014), pp. 133-149; Schottli, Jivanta, "Power, politics and maritime governance in the Indian Ocean", *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, vol. 9, n° 1 (2013), pp. 1-5.

²³ e.g. Arundhati Roy: 'This is not a war on terror. It is a racist war on all Tamils', *The Guardian*, 1 April 2009; Arundhati Roy: 'The Silent Horror Of The War In Sri Lanka', *The Times of India* <https://www.outlookindia.com/blog/story/arundhati-roy-the-silent-horror-of-the-war-in-sri-lanka/1670/?next>; Fernando, Jude Lal: "Negotiated peace versus victor's peace: the geopolitics of peace and conflict in Sri Lanka", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 27, n° 2 (2014), pp. 206-225.

²⁴ Interaction between PM and Newspaper editors 29 June 2011, at <http://pmindia.nic.in/pressrel.htm>,

²⁵ Gill, Kanwar Pal Singh (1997): *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, New Delhi, Har Anand Publications.

²⁶ Douglas, Jason and Doyle, John", "China and India's Nuclear Strategies", *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 25 (2014), pp. 73-88.



government argued that the NPT institutionalised nuclear discrimination, by preventing its full development by emerging powers, while requiring very little from the five declared nuclear states towards disarmament. Indeed, India maintains this position until the present and in 1996, it refused to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on the same basis.²⁷

The 1998 nuclear tests in India, followed within days by tests in Pakistan, brought the nuclear ‘stand-off’ into international public discourse. Pakistan could not have a ‘no first use policy’, as the objective of its nuclear strategy was to counter India’s conventional military superiority. India’s reasons for deployment were more complex and only partly to counter conventional superiority by China. In any case, China was seen by India as a much lower threat than Pakistan’s perception of India. India sought to counter a possible Chinese nuclear use, to declare its own ‘great power status’ and to offer a possible strategy of nuclear retaliation, after a nuclear attack. India was confident it could readily defeat a conventional attack by Pakistan. While less confident in the Chinese case, it did not really see a conventional Chinese attack as likely. All of their priority strategic aims could therefore be achieved even with a declared no first use policy. The BJP Government led by Vajpayee in 1998 made such a ‘no first use’ statement and said its doctrine was one of minimum deterrence.

While India (and Pakistan) suffered some minor short-term sanctions after the 1998 tests, the Kargil dispute with Pakistan, which was largely blamed on Pakistan internationally, followed by the narrative of the ‘war on terror’ after the 9-11 attacks in the USA, led to ever closer ties with the USA and Europe. President Clinton’s 2000 visit to South Asia, where he spent five days in India and a (reluctant) few hours in Pakistan, showed that the nuclear tests were not a barrier to deepening relations. India’s inclusion into the group of ‘acceptable’ nuclear weapons states in US policy and later internationally was confirmed with the 2005 US-India civil nuclear programme which allowed India access US civil technologies and supplies without joining either the NPT or the CTBT. This was the first time a known nuclear weapons state, outside of the UN Security Council permanent membership was allowed to engage in official international nuclear trade.²⁸ The deal was opposed by the left in India – not from an anti-nuclear perspective but because they opposed closer ties with the USA. The ultimate ratification of this deal in the 2008 Hyde Act in the US Congress included a provision for cancellation if India conducted a nuclear test – in effect binding India to the CTBT.

A new nuclear doctrine was adopted in 2003, which included a ‘no first use’ policy but altered it to allow a nuclear response to a chemical or biological attack as well as a nuclear one.²⁹ In 2013, Shyam Saran, Chairman of India’s National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), summed up India’s nuclear doctrine as support for global nuclear disarmament, but with a commitment to a ‘robust nuclear deterrence in the meantime’. He also said that in his personal view any Indian response to a nuclear attack would be ‘massive’ designed to inflict ‘unacceptable’ damage on an attacker – as in his view a limited nuclear exchange was ‘contradiction in terms’.³⁰ Despite some pressure from the military policy community for a more assertive policy there has been no further revision of nuclear strategy. Prime Minister Modi, during the 2014 Indian general election said that any government led by him would

²⁷ Ghose, Arundhati.: “Negotiating the CTBT: India’s Security Concerns and Nuclear Disarmament”, *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 51, nº 1 (1997), pp. 239-261.

²⁸ Tripathy, Amulya K. and Mohapatra, Jayanta K. (eds.) (2012): *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia and the United States: Issues and Dynamics*, New Delhi, Reference Press.

²⁹ Indian Government Nuclear Doctrine (adopted 3 Jan 2003), at <http://www.ipcs.org/Indias-Nuclear-Doctrine.pdf>

³⁰ Interview with Shyam Saran, *India Strategic*, May 2013, at http://www.indiastrategic.in/topstories2009_No_distinction_between_a_small_or_big_Nuclear_attack.htm



maintain a ‘no first use’ and minimum deterrence policy as a reflection of India’s ‘cultural inheritance’.³¹

An analysis of nuclear weapons strategy is a useful lens through which to look at India’s regional security policy. While India is an active participant in global debates on nuclear disarmament, its strategy is clearly regional. It also highlights how important China is in the regional context – an aspect not sufficiently included in literature dominated by the India-Pakistan relationship. Despite its military dominance of its close neighbourhood, poor relations with China and the ever-present fear of an attack from Pakistan, have seen very significant investment in a nuclear weapons deterrence strategy. India did not bow to global ‘norms’ around non-proliferation, rather it prioritised its own threat perception and a national security response, with the most potent of weapons. Active diplomatic strategies, with Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in particular seek to complement nuclear deterrence and while relationships have had their very difficult periods there have also been notable successes in improving relations and avoiding cross border conflict. The 2015 border land swap with Bangladesh, for example, resolved a dispute going back to partition.³² Such successes mean India also seeks to use trade and diplomatic means to lower tensions, however, ultimately traditional security concerns and approaches are very dominant in its regional security strategy. The potential of regionalism however remains an active public debate, notwithstanding the weakness of SAARC.

3.3 Regionalism and Conflict Resolution

Discussion on the potential or lack of potential for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in regional conflict resolution is almost always framed by a direct or indirect comparison with the European Union (EU). The EU’s role as a peace-building organization is in turn, a significant theme in the literature on European integration and in the public discourse of the European Commission and leading European politicians.³ The discourse of political and Commission elites in particular often conflates the historic experience of the early period of European integration, the claim that war is now “unthinkable” between major European allies with previously conflictual relationships, the European agreed “security complex” and the EU’s modern role in external affairs including the development of its foreign, security and defence policies. While there is an extensive critical literature on the limited external engagement of the EU and the difficulties in agreeing to a more comprehensive foreign and security policy, there has been less focus on the weaknesses of the Union in dealing with the limited number of intensive serious conflicts within its own borders. The limits of this literature combined with the strength of EU official discourse on the “success” of European integration as a “peace-building project” has led to an exaggerated role for the EU’s potential to mediate conflict between its own member states, being internalised in the discourse from other regions, with consequent over ambitious hopes being set out for other regional organizations by external observers.

In the case of SAARC, it is often stated that the strong commitment to state sovereignty is a product of the relatively recent independence of states, compared to most EU Member States and that this combined with the relative weakness of SAARC, even compared to the Association of South East Association Nations (ASEAN) and not only the EU, has made inter-state security rivalries more intense and peace-building more difficult, compared to the modern European experience. However, notwithstanding the clearly underdeveloped role of SAARC, these critiques are not making appropriate comparisons with the EU. Armed conflict between

³¹ Busvine, Douglas: ‘Modi says committed to no first use of nuclear weapons’, *Reuters*, 17 April 2014. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/04/16/uk-india-election-nuclear-idINKBN0D20QB20140416>.

³² *Times of India*, 6 June 2015.



EU member states was in all cases ended before and not during EU membership. While no armed dispute has broken out after membership, it is a stretch of historical causality to say that this is a direct result of European integration – even if there are many other direct and indirect benefits. More crucially the EU's important role in conflict resolution has been external to its borders at any given point. Insisting on final agreements on borders before membership certainly made border disputes less likely following the Eastern enlargement and the failure to resolve the Cypriot dispute before membership seriously weakened EU leverage in that case. The EU has in fact struggled to deal with internal conflicts in any significant manner. It played a very limited role in the Northern Ireland conflict and no role of any consequence in the Basque conflict.³³ Indeed as was shown during the 2017 Catalan crisis, even at a level of 'conflict' below that of armed action, the inter-governmental aspects of the EU tend to take precedence over the supra-national ones. If this is the political reality for the European Union after a process of over 60 years of gradually deepening integration, then it is unrealistic to expect SAARC to play any active institutional role in cases such as Kashmir, the Indian North East or the Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka.

Conceptually it is possible to think of different ways in which a regional organisation might help in conflict resolution. Just as Ireland was joining the then European Economic Community, Irish Foreign Minister and later Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Dr. Garret FitzGerald, who was a strong supporter of European integration, set out what he believed to be the most important potential influences of EEC membership on the Northern Ireland conflict and on wider relations between the Irish and British Governments.³⁴ FitzGerald believed there would be positive (if not dramatic) impacts in a number of ways; at the ideological level he thought it would strengthen a more cosmopolitan form of politics; at a functionalist level he believed that it would promote north-south cooperation within Ireland on issues such as agriculture, which would then assist other more political developments and finally he argued it would change the nature of sovereignty more generally and lower the direct relevance of competing ethno-nationalist claims in Northern Ireland. He did not seem to envisage any form of direct EC / EU involvement in the conflict. These four potential areas of impact - ideological, direct intervention, functional and on the perceptions of sovereignty, provide a useful framework within which to explore the potential role of SAARC in conflict resolution.

In terms of a comparison with the EU's own history, there is limited and contradictory evidence on the impact of European integration on nationalist ideological perspectives. Overwhelmingly survey evidence suggests that European citizens have added a sense of European identity to pre-existing national identities rather than allowing a European identity to replace or even weaken national identity. Direct EU involvement in the Northern Ireland or Basque conflicts was negligible, as both the UK and Spain would have used their membership to prevent any attempt to do so. While EU member states have shared "sovereignty" in many ways through European integration, member states still have a strong sense of their own vital national interests and an ability to pursue them. This is very clear in recent European debates on migration. It is perhaps in the area of functional cooperation that regional integration and peacebuilding are clearest. The costs of a serious dispute with another EU member state, or ultimately withdrawal from the EU have been made all too clear by the UK decision to leave, even if that decision was driven by domestic politics rather than a bilateral dispute.³⁵ However, crucially the causal direction between integration and conflict resolution is by no means mono-

³³ Doyle, John: "The European Union and Conflict Resolution", in Jain, Rajendra K. (ed.) (2015): *India, Europe and Conflict Resolution in South Asia*, New Delhi, KW Publishers., pp. 28-48.

³⁴ FitzGerald, Garret (1972): *Towards a New Ireland*, London: Charles Knight and Co.

³⁵ Doyle John and Connolly Eileen: 'Brexit and the Northern Ireland question' in Fabbrini, Federico (ed.) *The Law and Politics of Brexit*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 139-162.



directional and the European precedent offers very limited evidence to suggest trade or even wider regional integration would weaken national identity in South Asia.

India's approach to SAARC and bilateral relations has however often been to reflect somewhat uncritically the EU's own self-projection, in promoting a view that deeper regional cooperation, in particular in trade, would be a significant factor in improving bi-lateral relations with its neighbours, most especially Pakistan.³⁶ The academic literature on SAARC from within the region also tends to reflect this argument. It is difficult to judge the degree to which this public discourse is based on a firm belief by state elites that a higher level of trade with Pakistan would create an impetus for other forms of progress. It may also simply be a diversion tactic to promote a potential means of making progress which would avoid the difficult political decisions that any possible India-Pakistan deal on Kashmir would involve for example. The EEC emerged in a specific context of the defeat of Nazi Germany and the emergence of the Cold War. Notwithstanding painful memories of war, Germany was not a threat to any other European state in the 1950s and the development of the Cold War persuaded most European governments that Germany needed to be integrated into a Western political structure. These historic developments preceded European integration and were not caused by it. It is in turn difficult to see any serious progress in South Asian regional trade cooperation until there is a transformation of India-Pakistan relations. That ultimately is the most plausible causal direction.

There is little public evidence of India's thinking on the regional dimensions of the Kashmir issue. Public discourse is dominated by repetition of traditional positions and even when some bilateral discussions take place, they are cloaked under the diplomatic fig leaf of composite dialogue. However, there are some pieces of evidence that even in this most challenging case, India has in the past sought to explore the potential for an agreement that would go far beyond their stated public position. Nonetheless despite a very hard-line public position there is at least some evidence of a willingness to explore alternatives. All of these attempts moved forward a little, but all ultimately failed. Therefore, while there are frequent references to the potential of increased trade with SAARC to improve relationships and reduce tensions, there is little evidence that any significant efforts have been made in this regard. Furthermore, the European Union experience provides little evidence that SAARC as an institution can play any role in dealing with disputes such as that over Kashmir.

India's approach to conflict resolution in its region is dominated by traditional security concerns. The experience of Sri Lanka in 1987 has re-enforced an Indian 'norm' of non-intervention. Nuclear strategy is regionally focused with China at its heart and the poor relationship with Pakistan dominates all debate on Kashmir. There are some signs of integrated policy between diplomacy, trade and security that might be characterised as a 'comprehensive approach' in India's dealings with Bangladesh, but ultimately regional security strategy reflects a global position on non-intervention and a traditional model of security based on deterrence and significant military power.

4. Indian security and conflict resolution: the domestic level

India is an unusual, possibly even unique case, as it has faced at least one, and often more, armed insurrections within its territory continuously since independence, while maintaining a system of democratic rule and an independent judiciary with powers of government oversight throughout that period, with one brief exception – during the Indira Gandhi declared 'emergency' of 1975 to 1977.

³⁶ Jetly, Rajshree: "Conflict management strategies in ASEAN: perspectives for SAARC", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 16, nº 1 (2003), pp. 53-76.



The debates on India's response to domestic conflict are divided between those who emphasise an accommodationist approach and those who focus on excessive securitisation of political disputes.³⁷ Kohli argues that the institutional arrangements in India's federal polity allows for a greater willingness to negotiate and accommodate ethnic demands for self-determination, within an overall Indian Union.³⁸ In his analysis of self-determination movements, both regionally-defined and ethnically-defined he argues that effective institutions and willingness of the leadership of separatist groups to accommodate demands through some form of power-sharing and autonomy focused institutions has resolved many conflicts. These are issues that the Indian state has been very capable of delivering, in the creation of new states, in local power-sharing arrangements and in new forms of cooperation between the Union government in New Delhi and the periphery.

Talwar argued that the dominant interpretation of the Indian state's experience in Punjab, has been to focus on the 'success' of highly repressive security strategies and to downplay other factors, such as co-option and state reform and this has been used to justify the leading role of securitised approaches in other contexts including Kashmir and the Maoist conflicts.³⁹ Rajat Ganguly argues that the influence of Punjab is seen in a three stage process to other internal conflicts.⁴⁰ He argues the first step is highly militarised, a second step is the introduction of special and emergency laws and the restriction of civil and political rights, while the third phase involved an attempt to co-opt chosen insurgents into a peace accord. These accords contain measures to address grievances and protect political, cultural or economic rights but, he argues, these have either failed to tackle root causes in their planning and inception, or where they seem to address those issues, they have been weakly implemented.

In the case of the North East, Baruah argues that traditional border security has dominated India's approach and the Indian state has managed disorder at a level that it can live with, and therefore it lacks the political will to end the violence.⁴¹ Baruah also disputes the positive interpretation of state formation advanced by Kohli and others and argues that they have become ethnic homelands for particular ethnic groups and led to exclusionary politics, where the civil and human rights of local minorities have been sacrificed to buy off local insurgent elites.⁴² In discussing Kashmir, Ganguly and Bajpai argue that the Indian government acted as if Pakistan had invaded and the national state was at risk, with few challenges allowed at central government to this dominant interpretation of events.⁴³ In contrast Chadda's analysis, states that centralised state building was a necessary prelude to more flexible policies on decentralisation and autonomy.⁴⁴

³⁷ I am grateful for the insights from Priyanka Talwar for the analysis in this section in particular. Talwar, Priyanka: (2016) *Representing conflict: A study of the Indian Government's use of legitimisation and de-legitimisation in its internal security policy*. PhD thesis, Dublin City University. <http://doras.dcu.ie/20945/>

³⁸ Kohli, Atul: "Can democracies accommodate ethnic nationalism? Rise and decline of self-determination movements in India", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 56, n° 2 (1997), pp.325-344.

³⁹ Talwar, Priyanka "Managing Punjab: A Discourse Analysis of the Management of the Punjab Conflict", *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 26 (2015), pp. 53-65.

⁴⁰ Ganguly, Rajat: "Democracy and Ethnic Conflict", in Ganguly, Sumit; Diamond, Larry and Plattner, Marc F. (eds.) (2007): *The State of India's Democracy*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press pp. 45-66.

⁴¹ Baruah, Sanjib (2005): *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of North East India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

⁴² Baruah, Sanjib: "Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, Homelands and the Crisis of Displacement in Northeast India", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 16, no.1 (2003), pp.44-66.

⁴³ Ganguly, Sumit and Bajpai, Kanti: "India and the Crisis in Kashmir", *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, n° 5 (1994), pp.401-416.

⁴⁴ Chadda, Maya: "Integration through Internal Reorganisation: Containing Ethnic Conflict in India", *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, vol. 2, n° 1 (2002), pp. 44-61.



Resolving these different interpretations, requires a strong appreciation of context and some change over time. Territorial conflicts, those conflicts that have at their core the demand for secession or greater autonomy, have been the most common type of armed conflict in India. British colonial rule included a large variety of local forms in India, including a large number of 'Princely states', with a degree of local sovereignty as long as they accepted and did not challenge the British empire. Territorial issues were most potent for the Indian state as it sought to avoid a repeat of the partition that led to the establishment of Pakistan and to maintain the sovereignty of the state.

The 'territorial' type disputes which have seen the most flexible response by the centre have been those characterised as "linguistic". The first such conflicts arose in the 1950s when the Congress Party elites in New Delhi sought to replace the colonial language English with Hindi as the language of the central state, of internal inter-state communication and of public schooling. There was widespread opposition and violence in the south in particular, where Hindi is not widely spoken and where it was seen as the language of the 'North' and at the height of the crisis, the demand for secession was raised. With the rise of the DMK in Tamil politics as a major political force and its calls for secession of southern states, the central state had to respond. Although political leaders were arrested and there was widespread police brutality and months of strikes and protests, the state never sought to characterise the conflict as an existential one and it was ultimately resolved with the maintenance of English as an official language and withdrawal of compulsory learning of Hindi in schools.

The conflicts with the most militarised responses have been those in border areas, such as Kashmir and those with a religious identity dimension such as Punjab. The Punjab strategy indeed became a by-word for a highly repressive response. The North East has characteristics of a borderland response as might be expected, with the deployment of large numbers of troops and paramilitaries and the use of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act, but it never reached the intensity of Kashmir, partly as Bangladesh's involvement was more intermittent and less serious and New Delhi generally assumed that they could resolve the internal disputes in a manner similar to earlier linguistic-based rebellions. The state response while more repressive than in the case of linguistic disputes in the South, included some similarities with new state formation, local elite co-option and financial transfers.

This ability by New Delhi to separate the linguistic issue from the demands for separatism and to respond with a linguistic solution, was to be a widely copied precedent which saw the reformulation of states throughout India on largely linguistic grounds and the later creation of new states and new official languages. The process of state formation in India is not over; new states have been created on various grounds, such as Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Chattisgarh and Telangana, and demands continue to be made in other places such as Gorkhaland, but the process of state machinery to deal with such demands has prevented such demands from becoming armed insurrections. Neither does the government of India see the demand for new states as an existential threat to the state. They may resist the demands, for political reasons, but the level of contestation is ultimately within the frame of normal politics, not outside it and there is no underlying fear that unrest and rioting will lead to full armed conflict.

The response by the Indian state to such demands for language-based states might on the one hand be seen as evidence of a measured response when there was no threat to national sovereignty. However, that is assuming that linguistic demands are self-evidently limited in this manner, in reality demands for separate statehood have multiple social constructions. Tamil identity is strongly rooted in language but not exclusively so. Much of the discourse around separate statehood has been rooted in identity politics and economic development as much as language rights narrowly defined. A highly repressive response could well have escalated any



of these conflicts into a more widely based demand for secession, as was briefly done in Tamil Nadu, and some, including Tamil Nadu, were large enough to make a claim for independent statehood. However, the India state ultimately in each case chose not to treat the demand for statehood as an existential threat. In other cases – on the borders – Kashmiri identity, though frequently expressed in cultural terms, has always been seen as a prelude to secession. Punjab was largely treated as a religiously-based secessionist attempt and therefore a fundamental threat to India's self-image as a secular and pluralist state. There have been few serious explorations as to whether a process of extensive autonomy short of secession might meet the demands of enough Kashmiri's for a deal to work. The Maoist conflict on the other hand was treated as a local and largely developmental problem for decades, before being elevated to a national security threat. These two most high-profile conflicts in the contemporary period – Kashmir and the Maoist conflict are worth exploring in a little more detail.

4.1 The Kashmir Conflict: the most challenging case?

While the dominant Indian historical narrative on Kashmir focuses on blaming Britain as the colonial power and Pakistan for cross border interventions and 'occupation' of part of the former princely state territory, India has also acknowledged Kashmir's special status in a number of ways, including an initial acceptance of a role for the United Nations and even a possible plebiscite⁴⁵ and in 1950 by the guarantee of a 'special status' under Article 370 of the Indian constitution such that the state of Jammu and Kashmir would have autonomy over all subjects except foreign affairs, defence and communications. Though there can be little doubt of Kashmiri's strong sense of identity, the special autonomy was ratified by an agreement signed between Nehru and the Kashmiri nationalist leader Abdullah in 1952, indicating that solutions other than independence may have been broadly acceptable at least at that time. However, the special status was more honoured in its breach than its implementation. A break down in relations with Abdullah, saw a puppet government pave the way for constitutional change which effectively allowed New Delhi to dominate. When in 1956 India reversed its position on a plebiscite offer, it cited this constitutional amendment as expressing the Kashmiri's decision to integrate into India. The dominant response to demands for political change over the past 60 years have been highly securitized, but there have been occasions when glimpses of other approaches have been seen. The 1977 elections were broadly seen as the fairest to have been run since the 1950s and brought to power a government led by the National Conference.⁴⁶ However their demands to revert to the pre-1953 status to ensure Kashmir's autonomy were rejected by New Delhi. The centre continued to dismiss governments at will and by the mid-1980s a policy of suspending governments and centralised rule was re-imposed, which dominated Indian policy on Kashmir through the armed insurrection of the 1980s and beyond to the mid 2000's.

India clearly recognises that there is a stalemate in Kashmir. While there is very significant investment in programmes aimed at young Kashmiri's in particular – seeking to provide employment or move them out of the region to university, there is no sense that they are a serious attempt at conflict resolution. No one seriously thinks that they will push the situation into a different trajectory. At best they might assist in keeping a lid on things. The political and

⁴⁵ In a speech to the Constituent Assembly in November 1947, Indian Prime Minister Nehru justified the help extended to the Maharajah and his accession as follows, "We made it clear that as soon as law and order had been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invaders, the question of the State's accession should be settled by reference to the people." Nehru, Jawaharlal (1950): *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches 1946-1949*, New Delhi, Ayer Publishing.

⁴⁶ Sumantra Bose regards this as "the first reasonably fair democratic elections after thirty years of being a 'constituent unit' of a democratic republic. Bose, Sumantra 2005: *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, p.37.



security establishment seems to favour maintaining the stalemate over the risks of losing the only Muslim-majority state within India and a domino effect in other conflict prone regions of the state if they are perceived to have 'given in to terrorism'. There is little evidence of a change of approach but ultimately India's desire to play a more significant global role may require it change direction.

Judging the perspectives of the Kashmiri population is difficult, given the absence of open elections in Pakistan administered Kashmir and the history of boycotts by separatists and election rigging (in the past) in Indian controlled Kashmir. The high turnout in the 2008 election in Indian controlled Jammu and Kashmir was widely interpreted as evidence of war-weariness in the population and the decline of separatist forces. Radha Kumar, one of India's leading experts on the conflict saw 2008 as 'one of the ripest moments for settlement of the Kashmir dispute'.⁴⁷ However a series of events and a slow response by the Indian state saw the 2009 elections boycotted and renewed and heightened street clashes in 2010, and then the mass protests in 2016. The moderate nationalist National Conference is clearly open to talks but their leverage is weakened by the perception they will accept almost any deal, and in addition by widespread evidence of corruption when they were in government within Jammu and Kashmir. Support for independence versus joining Pakistan, or even support for the rival factions of the more militant All Party Hurriyat Conference, or the pro-independence JKLF is difficult to judge in the absence of their participation in elections, but it is widely accepted that no agreement is possible without their involvement. The appointment of interlocutors by the Indian government to see if a basis for talks might exist is clear evidence that this is now the India Government's view – even if most of the Hurriyat still refuse to talk to them (in public at least). While the armed attacks by ISI supported armed Islamist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba have grabbed headlines, most commentators do not believe they are veto players if Pakistan is involved in a future process and they do not have a sufficient popular base within Kashmir to out-flank Hurriyat. All these parties perceive a stalemate – but most do not seem to believe that it is sufficiently 'hurting' to motivate a higher level of readiness for talks. Kashmiri political parties' perceptions of both the cost of stalemate and the level of optimism about talks are not determined by Pakistan and India but they are so strongly influenced by them that there is no real prospect of an independent change in the political status quo without the endorsement of both India and Pakistan and their active engagement with Kashmiri groups.

Notwithstanding the absence of any substantial political progress it would be a mistake to conclude that there has been no activity or no dynamic towards peace that might form the basis of a conflict resolution strategy by the Indian state. In March 2003, *The Statesman* in India reported an attack on the Hurriyat from the pro-independence Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which explicitly looked to Northern Ireland.

The All Party Hurriyat Conference which has been advocating solving Kashmir issue on the basis of Northern Ireland or Nagaland has come under fire from the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front president, Mr Amanullah Khan, who has accused them of "misleading their nation thereby committing a treachery of high magnitude." Mr Khan said that "while the Irish type of solution of the Kashmir issue would deprive Kashmiris of their inherent, internationally recognised and pledged right to Independence, the Nagaland type of solution would make the J&K state a colony of India".⁴⁸

In 2007, just a year before the removal of President Musharraf, there was some evidence of a potential agreement to at least open serious talks – with optimistic 'noises' confirmed by

⁴⁷ Kumar, Radha (2010): *The Jammu and Kashmir conflict: a review of peacemaking*, Background paper Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

⁴⁸ *The Statesman*, 29 March 2003.



subsequent Wikileaks documents.⁴⁹ The subsequent transition in Pakistan, followed by the Mumbai attacks ended that particular round of talks. Musharaff, in an admittedly self-serving set of interviews in 2010 / 2011 talks up the degree to which the situation was ripe in 2007. Reuters, following their interview with him in January 2011 reported: “Diplomats say the agreement hinged on an acceptance by India and Pakistan that there would be no exchange of territory in disputed Kashmir, but they would work to make irrelevant the Line of Control which divides the region. There was also supposed to be a “joint mechanism” under which Indians, Pakistanis and Kashmiris would oversee areas of common interest. No one can agree, however, on far advanced the talks were. Some say the deal was ready for signing; others that there was still a long way to go. In particular, the two countries had yet to agree the nature of the “joint mechanism” and bring on board their own people and domestic constituencies in accepting the agreement”.⁵⁰

Hurriyat (M) chairman, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq claims he was briefed on the 2007 talks by Musharaff.⁵¹ Again this is after the fact and self-serving and needs to be treated with caution. This very public debate in 2011 and a desire to be associated with a near-deal is evidence that some actors were interested to signalling their desire to be involved. Neither was there any denial from other sources who were involved in either India or Pakistan.

In the context of the 2010 protests the Indian state sought to re-open talks with Pakistan on the one hand and with Kashmiri separatists on the other, though the appointment of three ‘Interlocutors’ and some reductions in the security presence.⁵²

Then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh raised the issue of autonomy so long as it was within the ambit of the constitution and was strongly criticised by the BJP for even going that far. The report of the interlocutors called for constitutionally guaranteed greater autonomy in Kashmir through devolution of power and limited the powers of the Centre to intervene in matters not pertaining to national security.⁵³ That report ultimately did not lead to any new initiative. The public mood has clearly changed radically since the 2016 protests after the killing of militant leader Burhan Wani. Leaders who previously signalled an openness to talks are again talking about “occupation”.

At present, India’s approach is dominated by the threat from Pakistan. There is insufficient engagement with Kashmiri’s in their own right and beyond a security-first policy, which is in danger of alienating ever larger sections of the population, and there is little evidence of a wider conflict resolution strategy, drawing on its own traditions in dealing with linguistic-based demands.

4.2 Naxal’s – the challenge of definition

The Maoist or Naxalite insurgency in India dates back to protests against the land ownership and tenure system, when in 1967 a group of peasants revolted and triggered a movement of peasants and landless labourers. This movement spread to other parts of the country as well and took its name from the district in which it started-Naxalbari. The Naxalite movement has had many phases of activity and been described as a developmental conflict, a law and order problem and a left wing (usually called Maoist) guerrilla movement. Naxalite groups now

⁴⁹ *The Hindu*, 1 December 2010.

⁵⁰ MacDonald Myra : “Musharraf’s Kashmir deal, mirage or oasis?”, 20 January 2011, at <http://blogs.reuters.com/pakistan/2011/01/20/musharraf-kashmir-deal-mirage-or-oasis/>

⁵¹ Only Kashmir, at <http://onlykashmir.blogspot.com/2011/02/k-resolution-was-closer-during.html>

⁵² *Hindustan Times*, 25 September 2010.

⁵³ Swami, Praveen: ‘In Kashmir, Some Hot Potatoes’, *The Hindu*, 23 April 2012.



operate in over 200 districts and this ‘left-wing extremism’, as it is described by Indian elites, seems to be escalating rather than diminishing, notwithstanding prominent defections.

Despite its high profile in India the Maoist or Naxalite insurgencies have not received significant attention by academics outside of India. The underlying causes of the varied conflicts are hardly disputed – rooted in poverty, land-rights, land-grabbing and underdevelopment, but there remains a deep division in how they are characterised. Attempts were made to emphasise the Maoist involvement, initially blaming China in the aftermath of the 1962 border war and later the much larger Maoist movement in Nepal. However, these attempts by the state to blame external forces were never taken as seriously as similar allegations against Pakistan or even Bangladesh in the North East, and were usually seen as self-serving.

The dominant early discourse saw the protests as a local law and order problem, a resort to localised violence by poor and uneducated people against local landlords and those elements of the state, including police who they saw as upholding the position of wealthy landowners. There was even a certain sympathy for those involved on the assumption that local landlords in rural areas probably had abused their position. The left may have taken advantage, but the assumption was that the underlying issues were local and economic and capable of resolution without any threat to the Indian state (even if some elites would lose out economically). Armed conflict, it was argued, has become widespread due to the perception by such groups that they have no ability to influence decision-making and due to a long record of promised compensation in cash, when areas were deforested or taken over for large scale projects, and alternative land not being delivered on. This interpretation is articulated not simply by the hard left, but also by civil society groups focused on human rights and by prominent personalities such as Arundhati Roy.⁵⁴ Maoists in these circumstances have offered arms, some local leadership and a cadre able to articulate a message to outsiders and the media, but that is a very different role than that suggested by those who see the ‘cause’ of conflict as being ideologically inspired hopes of vanguard led revolution. It also suggests a response short of revolution might well resolve the armed insurgencies.

The recent discourse on Left Wing Extremism has increasingly securitised the issue.⁵⁵ Most famously the Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh called it the gravest internal security threat.⁵⁶ However, without diminishing the significant human rights issues raised by the much increased ‘anti-Maoist’ security operations, it is clear that a different approach is being taken in this case compared to the territorial conflicts in border areas, such as Kashmir or the North East. Coming from the opposite perspective even very moderately nationalist Kashmiri politicians, such as Omar Abdullah asked why India maintained the emergency legislation, the Armed Forces Special Powers act in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, when it did not think it needed to use such drastic measures in areas dominated by Naxalites.⁵⁷

The importance of developmental rhetoric in Indian government discourse from the early days of the state to the present also makes it more difficult to reject as unreasonable or threatening a demand for sustainable economic development or for protection of environment resources such as forest land.⁵⁸ In response to high profile campaigning by Indian civil society groups against army operations in Naxalite areas – commonly referred to in the media at the time as ‘Operation Greenhunt’ – Minister for State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri

⁵⁴ Roy, Arundhati. 2009: *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers*, Chicago Haymarket Books.

⁵⁵ Chakrabarty B., Kujur R. (2010): *Maoism in India*, London, Routledge.

⁵⁶ “Naxalism gravest internal security threat to nation: PM”, *The Indian Express*, 21 April 2010, at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/naxalism-gravest-internal-security-threat-to/609303/>

⁵⁷ *Times of India*, 22 April 2012.

⁵⁸ Navlakha, Gautam: ‘Maoists in India’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 41, n° 22 (2006), pp. 2186-2189.



Jintendra Singh, in written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha denied any such Operation Greenhunt existed.⁵⁹ On the other hand the perceived need to exploit mineral resources and hydro-electric opportunities has often escalated local tensions into armed rebellion, driving local youth into armed Maoist-led groups.

The lower level of securitisation in the past has however not led to any sustained engagement with Maoist leaders to de-escalate the situation or agree ceasefires. There have been some attempts at talks, but as Tanweer Fazal points out “all the three attempts at peace negotiations ended up with the assassination of one or the other important leaders of the Maoists who were entrusted with the task of negotiating or working out the modalities for peace”.⁶⁰ Despite his criticism of the state response Fazal focuses on some key issues that could form the basis for sufficient progress to shift the focus from armed rebellion to other forms of political activity – the non-implementation of the land-ceiling laws, designed to distribute land from huge estates to small farmers; the need for greater protections for forest dwellers; and the need to tackle poverty, with India performing worst among emerging economies on the measure of rising inequality. Dealing with these issues would require significant changes in public policy, but none of them could be regarded as a threat to national security. Indeed Fazal concludes his article by quoting a Supreme Court judgement that proscribed the state’s arming of vigilante groups against the Maoists: “The Directive Principles [of the Indian constitution] ...direct the State to utilize the material resources of the community for the common good of all, and not just of the rich and the powerful... Complete justice – social, economic and political -, is what our Constitution promises to each and every citizen. Such a promise, even in its weakest form and content, cannot condone policies that turn a blind eye to deliberate infliction of misery on large segments of our population”.⁶¹

This debate remains lively, the traditions of recognising the interconnections between development and conflict resolution are visible, but increasingly securitised responses to the Maoist conflicts are also clear.

5. Conclusion

India’s traditional approach to conflict resolution remains visible at all levels in the contemporary era. At the global level, while there have been some strategic silences reflecting realpolitik, India remains a strong supporter of UN peacekeeping and critical of armed intervention for humanitarian purposes. At a regional level traditional security approaches dominate. While there is a rhetorical commitment to regional integration as a means of building better relationships with neighbours, India’s actions reflect a model of security and conflict resolution based on deterrence and military power-projection. The negative experience of the 1987 Sri Lanka intervention has limited the influence of those seeking actual military intervention in the name of humanitarian action, nonetheless the decision to expand the nuclear arsenal and the significant investment in modernising military equipment reflects a prioritisation of deterrence over inter-dependence in India’s security strategy. At the domestic level India has a long tradition of managing internal conflicts through state formation, elite co-option and financial transfers, which continues to the present day. However in the North East and in particular in Kashmir and in the Maoist conflicts there have been missed opportunities to de-escalate, when the positive conflict resolution experiences in other domestic cases were crowded out by a narrative driven by a narrow interpretation of the “Punjab strategy” and an

⁵⁹ Interior Ministry press release, 23 August 2011, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=74906>

⁶⁰ Fazal, Tanweer: “ ‘Peace Talks’ as strategic deployment: the state, Maoists and political violence in India”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol 26 (2015), pp. 39-52.

⁶¹ Nandini Sundar and Ors vs the State of Chhattisgarh, writ petition (civil) n° 250 of 2007, Supreme Court of India Record of Proceedings, p. 12.



exclusive focus on Pakistan's interventions in Kashmir to the exclusion of treating the views of Kashmiri citizens more seriously.

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