

Take note! Help circulate this widely! *The following is an open discussion of a Pinochet moment for Nepal — which would not just be a military coup but inevitably the creation of a death squad regime aimed at the massive decade-old revolutionary upsurge. Such a coup would require Indian and U.S. support — and this article is an ominous “trial balloon.”*

Readers outside Nepal, and especially in the U.S., should take this as a warning and a call — to step up our work, to spread knowledge of this revolution, and accelerate work to create a voice against U.S. intervention.

No coup in Nepal! U.S. Hands Off! Victory to the revolution in Nepal! [Introductory note by the Kasama website.]

MyRepublica

Getting Out Of the Quagmire

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December 20, 2009

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As things have evolved over the past three years, Nepal has become a fertile ground for a military takeover of the government, independently or under the shadow of a constitutional authority. Such a possibility has been talked about in a limited circle but been forced open by a delegation of some Nepali Congress (NC) leaders who recently urged President Ram Baran Yadav to consider imposing President’s Rule to help restore peace and enable the Constituent Assembly (CA) to complete writing the constitution before the expiry of deadline in five months. This is not an incredible or inappropriate suggestion, considering the marathon obstructions staged by Maoists to prevent the CA to open for business and carry out its mandate.

Even after losing the control of government in May this year over the enigmatic issue of civilian supremacy, Maoists have not softened their stance on the president’s action that re-instated the ex-army chief after his firing by the then Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. In order to further press on this issue, Maoists have announced formation of autonomous states in several parts of the country in defiance of the wishes of government, which also seems to challenge the constitution-making authority of CA. By doing so—unilaterally deciding to divide up the country into ethnic enclaves—Maoists have started the process of a slow dissolution of the State which they eventually would turn into an all-powerful proletarian dictatorship, making the country a one-party State. This particular perception of Maoists’ ultimate objective and long-term planning is not based on fancy or conjecture but comes straight out of their public declarations that claim the virtues of ‘fusion’ of ideologies and role of peoples’ war—jana yudhha—as means to capturing the State power.

The Maoist strategy of declaring autonomous states is probably the shrewdest means adopted until now to undercut the legitimacy of Maoist-version of a bourgeoisie State and assert people’s power under its own leadership. And this strategy would be highly appealing for the grassroots, who have had no great

admiration for all-powerful Kathmandu-based governments doing the dictates of generations of family dynasties and self-serving corrupt politicians. With the promises of self-rule allowed to ethnic majorities under the autonomous state system, ordinary people can see the benefits of localization of government authority, with a chance of liberating themselves from the tyrannies of centrist authoritarian rule.

Facing the challenge

Needless to say, government is at a loss on how to face up to the Maoist new challenge. The easiest course of action will be to ignore it—let them disrupt house-sitting, demonstrate on the street, put-up road blocks, spread anarchy, and declare more autonomous states, which can be viewed as no more than a symbolic defiance. However, by ignoring such threats to its authority, the government in power is unlikely to generate confidence and win sympathies, or hope that current impasse is going to end quietly and uneventfully. If Maoists continue with its present strategy of making the central government look irrelevant, indifferent, and detached from the basic functions of the State, there will be no need for them to make a forceful entry into the capital to capture power. This will come to them naturally and effortlessly—from the growing irrelevance of government at the center, aided by gradual shift of state functions to regional, autonomous states.

There should be nothing wrong with the slow dissolution and eventual disappearance of the traditional State and its replacement by a grassroots entity that is built-up from grounds up. Indeed, by forcing the dissolution of the State, Maoists would be making a bloodless coup, which would be entirely legitimate in an environment of deepening conflict, lack of direction, heightened uncertainty, and loss of control over critical government functions.

There is not much that the Maoist-less current coalition government can do to stop or even slowdown the country moving in this direction except if it chooses to force-stop the process by making a last-ditch effort and take one extreme measure, similar to the one advocated by NC leaders noted above—presidential rule backed by the army.

Given the limited options the current government has in outsmarting the Maoists, it may be attracted to do just that and the army would, most likely, choose to go along. The army's willingness to comply with such an option can be argued in two ways, the first being that it never got to use its full force to suppress Maoist rebels during their decade-old insurgency. Reportedly, the army was held back by palace orders, which had to come to think of Maoist challenge more as a counter to political parties than a threat to itself. Second, by making civilian supremacy a battle-cry, Maoists, once in power, will seek a quick dissolution of the army, which they view as the last hurdle on the road to complete victory.

Maoists have been in sort of an undeclared war with the army for some time now but it is becoming increasingly certain that the army will not just sit back and surrender. Rather, it may be getting ready for a showdown and final war with the Maoists—an opportunity it was looking for during king's regime but was repeatedly denied. Army's willingness to face up to the Maoists will be strengthened if its actions are given the legitimacy of enforcing presidential rule, which is allowed under the constitution.

A discouraging outlook

There are many ways in which the current conflict can get resolved and the much-lauded peace effort moved towards its logical conclusion—which is to get an agreement on the constitution, hold broad-based election, and usher in an era of constitutional rule that upholds people's sovereignty. However, the outlook for consensus building and restoration of normal conditions appear increasingly dim, even non-existent. The main reason for pessimism is that communism generally, and Maoism in particular, is now a ground reality in the country, reflecting not as much the smartness of ideology Maoists have brought to

bear upon the population but the utter incompetence, lack of vision, and unabashed dishonesty of the regimes that have governed Nepal for decades and centuries. In particular, all of them have failed to create glue that binds people together, encourage them to pursue a common goal, and motivate them to work for a better future, for themselves and their children.

The Maoists have taken advantage of this vacuum by creating grassroots organizations to bring the people together, partly by the force of their ideology but mostly by aligning people against the hereditary and traditional interests. Of course, the record of nine-month rule by Maoists has caused much disappointment and helped cool down enthusiasm for its long-term sustainability but they continue to remain in public consciousness as the last hope for people who consider themselves dispossessed and have not much to lose from serious anarchy and breakdown of the law and order. At least one half of the country's population would fit this category who seem united backing up Maoists' intention of winning over and destroying the bourgeoisie democracy.

Presidential rule or army takeover can eliminate some Maoists and subdue their backers but it will be incapable of winning the ideological war. At the same time, if the ideologically-hardened comrades in hundreds of thousands face up to the army onslaught and engage them in running battles, the situation can easily get out of hand and millions will flee to take shelter across the border in India. It is difficult to predict how India will respond to the emergence of calamitous situation across its 800-kilometer open border with Nepal, but it is hard to think that it will do nothing. Most likely, it will commit itself actively to prevent the spread of violence, including the stationing of its own peace-keeping force to keep order. Of course, such a move will have unknown consequences for Nepal's separate and independent existence.

There is little or nothing to take a bet on how the events are going to unfold over the coming months and years, but the present cat-and-mouse maneuverings by political parties and Maoists are likely to move the conflict to center-stage for a showdown. If this comes to pass, army will have a greater chance of claiming victory, provided that the conflict involves mostly the leadership on the top. Another big uncertainty is if Nepal has the good fortune of some strongmen rising to the occasion—the likes of Korea's Park Chung-He, Chile's Pinochet, Indonesia's Suharto—to take up the challenge of suppressing dissent and mobilizing the machinery of the State to focus on only one mission: Building a strong and prosperous nation.

With so many options tried over so many years to eradicate poverty and catch-up on the bandwagon of growth, opportunities and prosperity, this last option may just have a chance to succeed.

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