

# EXPLAINING PRACHANDA: Nepalese People's War Follows Classic Formula

By Dr. Thomas A. Marks

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Nearly simultaneous release of the latest thoughts from Osama bin Laden and the Maoist leadership in Nepal is revealing in the way coincidences often are.

Bin Laden put out but a single statement, while the CPN(M) leadership of Prachanda and Bhattarai engaged in a veritable psywar blitz, granting interviews to all comers and publishing position pieces for good measure. What the statements of the Islamofascist bin Laden share with the Maoist duo is logic internally consistent but persuasive only if one accepts their flawed external analyses of the world.

Both claim that American imperialism is the true enemy of mankind. And both claim that criticisms of their intentions are incorrect, since "imperialists" (such as myself) can not see the "real picture." Most tragically, they deny the heinous crimes committed in the name of their respective ideologies and seek to blame the victims for what they, the insurgents, have actually done.

The Maoist interviews and statements were truly extraordinary in the sense that they provided a little bit of something for everyone. They were very close to the statements issued historically by earlier Maoist groups, from Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) in Peru to the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP -- the Philippine Maoists).

What is ostensibly presented is an offer by the CPN(M) to give up being Maoists in practice but continue to be Maoists in faith, in goals. This is what the legal Maoists in India purport to do. Yet a visit to the website of the latter reveals the same odious "death to imperialism and America (and everyone else except killers)" as spouted by the illegal Maoists. The only difference is that the legal Maoists claim they are destroying the system from within -- even while governing!

In the Nepali case, if the conversion were sincere, how and why such a transformation has taken place would need to be answered. Prachanda and Bhattarai claim it is due to analysis of past mistakes.

Of course, everything hinges upon whether such conversion is real. There never has been such a switch in the history of Maoism -- ever. That doesn't mean it's impossible, but it certainly makes one suspicious. More likely is that words, for the Maoists, do not mean the same as they do for the rest of us.

## **Textbook Maoist Approach**

Let's look at things theoretically for a moment. In people's war terms, what has occurred is textbook. In

waging insurgency, all Maoist movements have before them a "play book" of five major campaigns:

- *mass line* -- functioning as a political party.
- *united front* -- getting others to share tactical and operational actions even while perhaps disagreeing strategically (which normally means ideologically).
- *military* -- using violence to facilitate political action.
- *political warfare* -- using nonviolent means (such as talks) to facilitate violence.
- *international action* -- using international sub-state and state actors to apply pressure in such manner as to advance the internal struggle.

Any Maoist movement weights these elements, moving back and forth among them. The Nepali Maoists certainly do.

In claiming they have examined their mistakes, what the Maoists mean is that they recognize militarism has brought them to an impasse. The essence of the earlier Prachanda-Bhattarai debate was over just this issue: whether military action (violence) must lead, or if the path can be forged by any of the other (four) campaign elements above.

The present correlation of forces strategically would tell a good Maoist to shift gears, to use violence not in the lead but to support the mass line, the united front, political warfare, and international action as the leading elements. In order, then:

- *Mass line* -- The Maoists have consolidated a political base in the west. It has been achieved by armed political action. Terror, always important, can now give way to *menace*. The base areas were consolidated relatively quickly and at acceptable cost. Though the numbers are awful enough, what has been lost in the entire conflict in Nepal is probably just shy of what Sri Lanka lost in the six months of the 1971 Maoist JVP episode. Yet the Maoists have found it increasingly tough going to do anything decisive strategically from those base areas.
- *United front* -- February 2005 has provided the chance for a strategically decisive shift by delivering the political parties into the Maoist hands. That the political parties are making a "mistake" is quite irrelevant to the fact that the mistake is being made. A combination of "ceaseless waves" protest inside with armed action outside, all held together by dramatically enhanced use of terror against the state and security forces (especially through IEDs and unconventional actions) is seen as an unbeatable combination (it always is -- and will be unless countered).

The most significant element in Prachanda's various statements was his advancing the next step in the united front process: he proposes that the political parties jointly form an army with the Maoists, sharing all positions and authority. He further proposes that democratic elements within the RNA join with the Maoists and the parties. He raises the question as to who controls whom, monarch or RNA. The bottom line is the same: the Maoists recognize that the RNA is the lynchpin. If it can be neutralized, the game is over.

- *Political warfare* -- Here again, the present circumstances have delivered up to the Maoists a "blue chip" item, "peace." The longing for peace is so great, that the Maoists can use it as a term over and over to undermine the will of all concerned to continue the struggle. It matters not one whit that "peace" means nothing tangible. It matters not that the Maoists have created the present situation, that the political parties were the very ones who enabled their progress. The longing for "peace" can be used at all levels of war (strategic, operational, and tactical) to neutralize the ability of the government to continue.

- *International* -- What the Maoists see is a global situation where the trends are in their favor. Even those opposed to their dated, left wing Fascist views (aka Maoism) are unwilling to grapple with the situation due to their preoccupation with *Islamofascism* (which the Nepalese Maoists claim to support). As the CPN(M) sees it, everything is flowing its way. At least in part, the Party declared its ceasefire as a tactical gambit to see if it could neutralize government armed action. This did not happen, but strategically the government

took a black eye as the entity that wouldn't "give peace a chance." That the Maoists used the interim to prepare for operations is winked at, most particularly by certain foreign embassies.

India, as the prime offender, has decided that playing its usual version of "the great game" is preferable to supporting the Kathmandu government. Delhi is not totally committed negatively, but it seems to think it can contain the Nepali situation by fostering a "West Bengal solution" (i.e., legal Maoists participating in democratic governance). This is not viable, but that also is irrelevant to the fact that such an approach apparently has been adopted.

## **Government Situation**

Where does all this leave the government?

The situation is now at an interesting spot. From the insurgent standpoint, united fronts are always a preferable way of waging people's war, because they are less dangerous for the insurgents. No one in the Maoist movement wants to die (that's for *Salafist* fanatics seeking Paradise!). As to how matters will play themselves out on the ground, chaos already bears witness to how effective united fronts can be -- the system dies the death of the thousand cuts.

As always, the task at hand is to discern insurgent intentions. Bhattarai, in particular, has taken me to task (in Nepali) for misstating Maoist intentions. I think the point is rather, as above, that I have very accurately rendered just what the Maoists say to themselves and to the public. We only differ in that they claim what they say represents the legitimate forces of history.

The Maoists are portraying themselves as having had a change of heart. That is not true at all: they have simply chosen to lead with a different combination, to fall back upon a boxing metaphor.

What are they actually doing? During the "ceasefire," they did not stop preparing for war by training and stockpiling. This is entirely logical, because they see violence and nonviolence as complementary, just as did the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in its famous maxim that it would fight with a ballot in one hand, an *Armalite* in the other.

It may be recalled that when the PIRA moved to emphasize the ballot, the question was whether the shift was "real." The intelligence was very mixed. On the one hand, significant steps were taken that indicated a PIRA willingness to participate peacefully in politics. On the other hand, there were serious actions that demonstrated the armed option was not being foreclosed (such as working with FARC in Colombia).

In the event, the strength of the state and the willingness of the insurgents to reintegrate produced a tenuous peace. Neither of those factors is present in the Nepali case. To the contrary, in the Irish case, "reintegration" was the end-state. In Nepal, the Maoists are offering the terms of surrender -- and stating baldly that they intend to try the monarch when he submits his neck to the block.

Though they claim they are willing to accept the outcome of a vote on the future shape of the system, they refuse to allow political action that would create a level playing field. Instead, as the Sandinistas did in Nicaragua, they state, having altered the playing field and gained armed control of the areas which will produce the vote, they will allow "peaceful measures" to hold sway.

Though the Maoists state they will participate in the system if they lose a referendum on its future shape, there are two critical sticking points that make it unlikely such will happen.

First, it does not appear even the Maoist leadership could simply order the local elements of the movement to "go back inside the system."

Second, all Maoist internal discourse is predicated upon a belief that the present, united front course will deliver victory at less cost than the alternative, "violence leads," course. It is most unlikely a campaign setback (defeat in the united front effort) would lead to renunciation of the strategic approach (people's war),

because the other campaign elements offer ways to continue the struggle.

Indeed, this is what the members of the insurgency itself are being told. The cadres are stating that victory is at hand, that the united front alliance (common action with the political parties) will lead to a victory march in Kathmandu. They are being told that the present course is the best way "to get what we want."

The movement, in other words, is on Maoist auto-pilot: its strategy has not changed, only emphasized a different campaign element (or "weapons system," if you like). Violence and nonviolence are still just two sides of the same coin.

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*Dr. Thomas A. Marks is a political risk consultant based in Honolulu, Hawaii and a frequent visitor to Nepal. He has authored a number of benchmark works on Maoist insurgency.*