

Conflict Transformation and Democratic Consolidation: A Nepali 'Post-Conflict'?

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Nepal took a huge leap of faith in April 2006. The people are still waiting for it to land, right side up in 2008. The past two years since the fall of the ancient regime has been an extreme roller coaster ride for the people with its wide swings between unbridled euphoria and deep pessimism. While the end of the king's 15-month-long direct rule and the peace deal with the Maoist party in its 10th year of 'people's war' brought immense relief and hope, the continuing low-intensity violence, severe energy crisis, supply shortages, and general lack of political direction has been testing the public's faith to its limit (Shah 2008).

The ruling alliance that came to power on the back of the 19-day general strike or janaandolan had declared through the reinstated parliament in May 2006 that holding of the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections and writing of a new constitution would be the major yardstick in Nepal's political transition following the fall of the king's government on April 24, 2006.

Despite the high priority given for a successful CA elections by the donors, UN, civil society, and the coalition government comprised of seven political parties and the Maoist rebels, the actual holding of elections proved to be tortuously elusive for a while. The Interim Constitution promulgated by the reinstated parliament had specified that the CA elections would be held on June 2007. The government, however, cancelled the polls on the grounds that conditions were not ripe for the elections. The CA elections were then moved to July but the Election Commission reported its inability to hold the election citing inadequate legal framework for the task.

Preempting democratic deliberation

After much acrimony and accusation, the government announced new poll dates for Nov.22, 2007. Before the rescheduled polls could take place, one of the ruling coalition partners the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoists (CPNM) launched a country-wide agitation setting new sets of demands including adoption of a full propositional representation election system and declaration of a federal republic before the CA election. The Maoist ministers in government resigned in masse on September 16, 2007 to pressurize the government. Realizing that the polls would not be possible without the Maoist participation, the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala again cancelled the polls. After many rounds of negotiations between the government, Maoists, and the caucus of the ruling parties, the government conceded to many of the Maoist demands and the new poll date was set for April 10, 2008.

No sooner had the Maoist party gotten on board the CA election schedule, it was the turn of the various parties and groups in the Terai to launch their own movement for regional autonomy and rights. Even though the Terai agitation had begun in earnest the previous winter with violent encounters between the police, Madhesi activists, and the Maoist militia, the

government had been able to defuse it with a 22-point deal signed with the Madesh Janadhikar Forum (MJF) on August 30, 2007. Claiming that the Interim Constitution had failed to address the fundamental grievances of the Madhesi population and the concessions made in the 22-point agreement had not been implemented, the *Samukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha* (United Democratic Madhesi Front, or UDMF) launched a regional *bandh* (shut-down) in the middle of February 2008. The UDMF – comprised of MJF, Terai Madesh Loktantrik Party, and Nepal Sadbhavana Party – was able to bring life in eastern and central terai to a complete stop and disrupt the vital supplies across the county by choking the national highways. The UDMF demanded regional autonomy, greater representation in all organs of the state including the military, and declaration of entire terai region as one federal unit. The UDMF threatened to disrupt the April polls if its demands were not met. After sixteen days of closure, demonstrations, curfews, and sporadic violence in which half a dozen people were killed on both sides, the government negotiated another deal with the UDMF on February 28, 2008. With some of its demands met and others to be fulfilled after the CA elections, the UDMF and other parties that had earlier boycotted the April elections finally joined the electoral fray. The government extended the dates so that these parties could file their candidates.

Two days after the agreement with the UDMF, the government signed another deal with the Federal Republican National Front that had also been in agitation mode threatening to obstruct the elections if its demands for regional autonomy for the various ethnic and regional groups were not met.

The two agreements cleared the last hurdles in the path of holding elections in April. Even if some of the smaller armed groups in the Terai vowed to boycott the polls, the much anticipated CA elections became finally possible on April 10, although nothing could have been said with certainty at the time in the background of Nepal's elusive trust with CA election since the 1950s.

By conducting the election, even if belatedly, the interim government not only performed one of the main tasks it had set for itself but also provided a sense of political direction that had been missing during the past two years. The CA election was one of the key indicators of political transition. Despite the various frictions and fissures that had begun to appear within the ruling alliance of the seven parties and the Maoists (SPAM), the holding of the CA elections certainly lifted the immediate crisis and helped to restore the sagging credibility of the new regime for the moment. After the election, the major challenge for the ruling coalition was how to maintain the political momentum going forward into the constitution writing process and improve the daily governance as well.

The radical surprise

The conduct and the outcome of the CA elections appeared to have complicated the ruling challenges in unexpected ways. Despite everyone's worst fears and some reports of killings, violence, and irregularities, the "international community" that had come to assist, monitor, and observe the elections judged it to have been conducted in a "free and fair" manner. Considering the prevailing electoral standards in the Third World, especially South Asia and Nepal itself, the assessment can be considered accurate. If the actual holding of the elections - and that too largely peaceful - came as a relieved surprise to many, the actual electoral outcome flabbergasted political pundits and experts – both native and alien – who had consistently projected an easy victory for the liberal democratic camp and a near rout for the Maoist rebels.

The liberal optimism was premised on the two counts. First, since the Maoists had never contested the elections, it was assumed that their military-political organization would not be adroit enough for an electoral maneuver – an area that was considered to be the forte of the major parliamentary parties such as NC and UML. This belief was also buttressed by the fact that the major component of the Maoist manpower was already housed in UN-supervised cantonments and thus technically unavailable for poll mobilization. Some quarters credited UML with having the most dense and vibrant nation-wide network of grassroots organization that was expected to steal the radical thunder from under the Maoists. Others projected a clear victory for NC; UML as a close second; and a distant third position for the Maoists. The liberal democratic turn in the country and the world-at-large was expected to accrue dividends to NC which after all had successfully led the final battle against the monarchy, steered the interim government, and was holding the first ever CA elections under the towering leadership of Girija Prasad Koirala.

More importantly, the rebel's past reputation and the present position was considered enough of a liability to guarantee an easy victory for NC and UML. After all, the past decade of Maoist insurgency had wrought untold suffering and misery on hundreds of thousands of people across the country, especially in the rural areas where a large majority of the Nepali population still lives. It was assumed that the masses would remember their recent grievances and collectively turn this into a negative vote against the Maoist, thus ensuring a liberal victory by default. However compelling, this line of proved to be erroneous on several counts.

Even if the people had suffered during the people's war, they had usually done so alone. During the insurgency years, most of the parliamentary parties had been forced to vacate the rural hinterland and thus were not in direct touch with the trials and tribulations of the masses during the decade of war. While the village and district level party cadres faced death and violence, the higher echelons in the parties had always maintained an ambivalent relationship with the Maoist rebels, especially when out of power. The general politics of expediency had engendered an environment of cynicism even among the party faithful at the grassroots level. The assumption that the voters had no where else to turn to but to rally around their old leaders after a decade of forced separation proved to be a tad presumptuous.

In subtle and not so subtle ways, the twelve years of conflict in the country had altered the basic realities and relations of the political and social landscape. If people can not have what they want, they come to adjust with what they have. In the midst of the violence, fear, and suffering, a new 'normal' had already begun to take shape with a power that could not just be wished away. So when the Maoists emerged as the largest party in the CA elections with NC and UML trailing as distant second and third, it was as if there had been a polar reversal in the Nepali politics. In the 601-seat assembly, the Maoists had won 229 seats compared to the 115 for NC and 108 for UML. The ordinary voters had confounded the most learned pundits in Kathmandu.

In the immediate aftermath of the poll results, a whole slew of rationalizations were proffered to explain for the great reversal. Inability of the mainstream parties to rebuild their party organizations in the rural areas in time for the elections; the selection of old and discredited candidates to contest the elections; greater motivation and dedication among the Maoists campaign workers in comparison to other parties; and intimidations by Maoist affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) were some of the major reasons cited for the debacle of NC and UML. Two other explanations also figured prominently in the post-election analysis. One, having lived through the misrule of other parties in the past, the people wanted to see what difference the Maoists would make. Second, fearing that the Maoists would return back to insurgency if they

lost at the ballots, the electorate simply went for the lesser evil. While all of these factors contributed to the overall poll outcome, this did not occur in any straightforward linear manner.

What was perhaps omitted from the whole CA election analysis was the behavior of the seven parliamentary parties in creating a certain political and moral environment that favored the Maoists. Right from the day the seven parties and the Maoists formally opened a joint front in November 2005 in Delhi to fight against King Gyanendra's rule through the instrument of the 12-point agreement signed, it had been felt that the armed rebels, who had been officially labeled as "terrorists" by Nepal, India, and USA, had been able to gain political legitimacy without conceding much in return to their new allies. This is how the parties had made their separate peace with Maoists. In the public perception, this set the stage for the moral ascendancy of the Maoists over the other political parties because the agreement was a tacit acknowledgement that Nepal's regime change and democratic transformation would not be possible without Maoist participation.

The mass uprising against the royal regime in 2006 and the subsequent developments till the holding of the CA election had further strengthened the public perception that the Maoists were the real motive force behind the momentous political changes. Not only had the other political parties come around to accepting the Maoist programs for republicanism, secularism, and federalism after the collapse of the king's rule, the interim government headed by Koirala was seen to be conceding to every demand of the Maoist partners without receiving any quid pro quo such as the return of private and public property seized during the war, disarmament, and demobilization of People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops. Not only did they not demobilize their PLA and various front organizations, the Maoist in fact brought into existence a new force called the Young Communist League (YCL) during the same period against weak and ineffectual protests from the government. Within its short period, the YCL became a force to reckon with not only for the other parties but also for the state's police force itself.

Pyrrhic victory?

While the Koirala government might have shown great patience and flexibility towards the Maoists to keep them in good humor and thus prevent them from walking out of the peace process, the actions, or non-actions of the government began to be read as signs of bankruptcy and weakness by the public. In contrast, the Maoists came to be viewed as the only potent force in the country that could bend anyone including the state to their will. It is with the strong that the Nepali people seek safety and succor. All other parties, including the government, were without original plans or visions and began to be seen as merely reacting to the Maoist initiatives whether it was federalism, secularism, proportionate representation, or republicanism. Even if NC's Koirala was the head of state and government during 2006-8, the ideological leadership of the "New Nepal" project had been clearly usurped by the Maoists during the same period. Like the proverbial Pyrrhic victory, the peace Koirala had bargained so hard for proved to be a bit costly at the end to his clan and party.¹

¹ Immediately after the fall of the royal government and the formation of the interim government in 2006, the Maoists had apparently begun assuring Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala that they would support him as Nepal's first president after the country was declared a republic. It was this offer of personal historic legacy, according to many, which made Koirala government overly indulgent of the Maoist activities right up to the CA election. Only after being spurned by the Maoists during the presidential election, newspapers reported that Koirala accused the Maoists of *dhokà*, or betrayal.

If the mainstream parties and their leadership - the potential rivals to the Maoists for political position and ideological alternative - could collaborate and coexist with the former rebels without much difficulty, the common people had even less qualm in accepting the Maoist leadership. Although unintended and more out of deeds than words, it would thus be fair to conclude that the parties themselves provided the initial acceptability of the Maoists as electoral choices and offered them with crucial endorsement that became the deciding factor when imitated by grassroots party cadres and general voters alike. After all, if Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Kumar Nepal, and Sher Bahadur Deuba could sit together and do business with the Maoists, the masses could certainly accommodate with the Maoist chief at the local level. It was thus rather disingenuous of the political and social elites in Kathmandu to expect the common people to maintain the liberal bulwark and remember the old war wounds when they themselves were sleeping - so to speak - with the radical enemy at the centre.

The successful holding of the CA election was an important milestone in Nepal's political transition and conflict transformation. The process that had started with the 12-point Delhi pact in 2005 arrived at a definite stage with the formation of the constituent assembly. Popularly elected members would not only govern the country but also write up a constitution for the new federal democratic republic. The success in both of these important political objectives is going to flow from the nature of the electoral result and the emerging state alliance. While the constituent assembly is no doubt the key node in Nepal's political transition, it will be as efficacious as the rest of the political and administrative edifice of the Nepali state. In an effort to generate enthusiasm for the CA election, the CA election at times was presented as the panacea for Nepal's political, economic, and social problems. The failure of the CA to address all the claims and demands can lead to further dissatisfaction and instability in the future.

Some of the post election challenges are specific to the nature of the CA composition itself while others pertain to the viability and competence of the Nepali state to envision and implement successful political transition, democratic consolidation and state restructuring.

The value of any election system, whether for Constituent Assembly or for parliament, depends on the degree of consensus on the purpose, procedure, and outcome of the election among the major parties in the contest. In the context of the CA elections, achieving minimum agreement on the fundamental principle of Constituent Assembly continued to be a challenge. To start with, there was no consensus on the purpose of the CA election itself. Some saw the election outcome as the measure of their share on the state power; for others the polls were to legitimate the regime change; while a few even presented it as electing Nepal's first president. The procedural aspect of CA election has been as contested whether it is in redrawing the primary constituencies, contestation between proportional representation and first-past-the-post systems, and in setting the reservation numbers for women, Dalits, and ethnic and regional groups. More ominously, there was not even principled agreement to respect the outcome of the elections. For example, Maoist leaders had reiterated in public that they would not be obliged to accept the outcome of the polls should it fail to be to their liking.

In sum, these differences meant that CA process was accepted not unequivocally as a rational process to frame the new constitution in a dispassionate and inclusive manner but as a battle to be seized by any means. The sharpened antagonism, animosity, and use of money and violent tactics even between SPAM partners diluted the moral sanctity of the constituent assembly even if the process and the outcome retained political legitimacy. As historian Eric Hobsbawm (2004) has pointed out, electoral majorities in themselves can mean very little if there is no shared moral field encapsulating the whole political process and the contestants.

The post election challenges

The actual procedure for writing up the constitution is not clearly laid out nor agreed upon. If the past two years of coalition collaboration on a range of issues including the CA poll is any indication, the actual writing process could be even more contentious as the various constituencies fight over each word and clause in the constitution. This is all the more likely due to a number of specific reasons.

The CA composition and its ideological character present a paradoxical situation. When combined together, the various left parties including the Maoists command close to a 60 percent majority in the CA. During the first parliamentary elections in 1959, the communists had won less than 5 percent of the seats in the House. The phenomenal growth is a testament to the deep resonance left ideology finds among the masses in Nepal. Communism, as a faith, finally came of age in Nepal in 2008.

The actual politics, however, is not as simple as what the electoral numbers indicate. First of all, the various communist parties are deeply divided and a common ideological front does not appear immanent. Secondly, 2008 elections will also be remembered for sending the maximum number of bourgeoisie into the parliament as well. Many scions of top trading and business houses were nominated to the CA, ironically, on various communist party tickets, including the Maoists. The paradox is as startling as it is revealing: it is as if the 10 years of people's war fought on the backs of the peasantry had gone on to produce a comprador-bourgeoisie flowering at the top. It is too early to predict the ideological and political outcome of the left-bourgeoisie alliance, but the challenges of yoking the interests of the peasantry with the capitalists will prove substantial enough.

Ironic still, the numerical growth of the leftist base is not even matched by commensurate communist rhetoric. Arguably, at the precise moment when Nepal has become the most red, the primacy of class as an analytic and political category has been replaced by identity and ethnicity. It is this drift which directly bears on the present challenges of the federalizing the unitary state.

While CA is the official locus of democratic deliberation and decision making, the current political circumstances have led that sovereign function to be dispersed into closed partisan rooms where party bosses decide on the major issues of the day to be later endorsed as *fait accompli* by the constituent assembly members without due deliberation. Even if the democratic deficit in the parliamentary process is justified as the political necessity of a transitional period, the restriction of voice and publicly transparent debate can seriously undermine the integrity of the democratic system.

In order to hold the CA election "at any cost", many of the difficult concessions made out to the ethnic and regional left to the Constituent Assembly to sort out. When these groups come to ask for the implementation of the agreements made by the previous government, the demands may overwhelm the Constituent Assembly. Rather than being able to draft a new constitution in a reasonably calm and rational manner, the Constituent Assembly is likely to be a site of partisan posturing and strife and thus become bogged down in day to day politics. This is all the more so because the 601 constituent assembly is also to function as a regular parliament as well.

With the benefit of hindsight, many of the agreements reached within the SPAM coalition since the 12-point pact in New Delhi appear to have been contingent conveniences rather than long-term good faith agreements. This became particularly apparent after the passing of monarchy. After the demise of the common foe, the bitter intra-party rivalries and frictions began to resurface that had been glossed over while the fight against the king still lasted. Except other

than self-preservation, no other higher vision or purpose seems to holding the allies together after the elections for the president and the prime minister.

Because of the highly polarized and fragmented political environment in which the CA will be working in, it will be difficult to aggregate the divergent interests into a cohesive and workable constitution. One major challenge will be to reconcile the heightened regional and ethnic aspirations for autonomy and federalism within a viable state.

Processing federalism

While the interim constitution has already decreed that Nepal to be a federal, democratic, republic, it has been left to the constituent assembly to work out the details of such a federal state. While local autonomy and federal framework had been raised as political demands by various regional groups in 1950 and again during the 1990 political upheaval, it became a specific program for the Maoist rebels.² The Maoist version of federalism based on ethnicity and language was an initiative that served two strategic objectives. While facilitating the creation of political and military bases in ethnic constituencies for the party, the federal principle also undermined the claim of the unitary kingdom to represent the cultural, regional, and ethnic diversity. Historically, monarchies are associated with unitary forms of state and the federal demand naturally challenged kingship's legitimacy at a fundamental level.

After the collapse of the royal government in 2006, parties that had hitherto remained wedded to the idea of a unitary state also embraced federalism as part of the new state restructuring project. Rather than genuine conviction or even conversion to the idea, the shift appears to have been occasioned by the fear that not doing so would cost dearly at the polls. The populist expediency has come to expose itself in recent months once the actual constitution writing process approaches near. Both in rhetoric and posture, the major parties that were just a few short months ago triumphantly claiming federalism now appear to be more circumspect on the issue. Even if not rejecting the whole idea, the earlier promises of federal local autonomy and self determination are now gradually being scaled back to administrative notions of decentralization and devolution of powers. Some quarters have even begun to warn of a threat of national disintegration from the federalist project.³

The unmistakable retreat is occasioned by two considerations. First, most of the major political parties - except for the Terai based ones – are centralized organizations built as mirror-images of the unitary Nepali state. Like the state, these organizations are dominated by high caste males from the central and eastern regions of the country. It is one thing to ask that the country to be carved up into units when someone else - in this case monarchy - is in charge, but quite another to do the same ones the reins of a centralized state are in one's own hands. The political parties that espoused federalism are now at the centre of the unitary state and there are several considerations that might second thoughts about carrying through with the promise of federalism. First, the instinct of self preservation, both institutionally and socially. As the MJF and TMLP have already shown, regional parties will gain prominence in a federal setup at the cost of centralized parties such as the NC, Maoist, and the UML. It is therefore likely that the mainstream parties will seek to dilute or backtrack on both the content and the form of federal structure. Secondly, the centralized parties and the state system have so far displayed a specific

² One of these examples is the Karnali Autonomous Region that was mooted during late 1990s, much earlier than the Maoist federal program.

³ One of the smaller left parties has formally opposed federalism even though it is already enshrined in the interim constitution.

caste, gender, and regional domination. Once the country is restructured along federal lines on the basis of ethnicity, language, and region, the basis of old political power and privilege will be significantly eroded. It will only be natural if the present state class seeks to delay or dilute such an eventuality.

The ambitious project of state restructuring begun in 2006 has perhaps not reflected adequately on the hyphenated relationship between the nation and the state. For what obtained before 2006 was not only a state, but a nation-state. The previous state had articulated the key foundations of the Nepali nation to be sanatanic Hindu ethos, monarchy, Nepali language, and the founding myth of unity and unification. The regime change has dismantled the old pillars of the Gorkhali nation: Hindu kingdom has become a secular state; monarchy has been replaced by a republic, and the preeminent position of Nepali language has been demoted both at the political and symbolic level. Most importantly, the earlier national narratives of Nepali unification and unity have been replaced with a counter-narrative of diversity and difference. The new revisionist zeitgeist sees the Gorkhali campaign not as one of unification but as a bloody imperial conquest. In essence, it becomes possible to argue that Nepal today is a state with a political apparatus over a territorial and demographic grid, but not a nation with a specific cultural identity and historicity. Nations and nations-in-the-making by definition require a cultural-historical discourse of commonality for their possibility, the espousal of irreconcilable difference goes against the very grain of the nation.

It has been argued in some quarters that the new values of secularism, republicanism, and federalism adopted by the new state can also become the foundations of a new nation. What this suggestion ignores is the fact that nation and nationalism is largely particularizing, that is, it is tied to a particular place, experience, and people. In contrast, secularism, republicanism, and federalism are universalizing political ideals, usually connected to the Enlightenment project of rationality and science freed from any specific locale or cultural identity. The recent furor over the vice president's choice of dhoti-kurta, the prime minister's selection of topi-tie and the mayhem over the oath in Hindi are burning examples, literally, of the potential dangers of undigested coupling of the universal and the particular. For an effective and efficient system of governance, it is not necessary to have a state with a national character. The restructuring project will have to consciously decide whether Nepal will be restructured as a state only or whether it will continue as a nation-state in some form; and if so, with what specific identity? Ambiguity on this crucial relationship between the new state and the nation can have serious consequences as experienced by numerous countries across the world. Lack of clarity on the national issue is even more urgent because while the interim constituent has already defined the Nepali state as secular, the same constitutional process is on course to produce federal units on some basis of cultural, ethnic, religious, and regional constituencies. The tension between the universal ideals of citizenship and localized subjectivity can be potentially disruptive in state making processes.

The missing state

A major irony in Nepal at present is that despite the impressive governing alliance and the strong backing accorded to it by New Delhi and the Western powers, the government in Nepal has never been so weak. The judiciary has been put under the executive; the large Constituent Assembly has been reduced to a rubber stamp for the wishes of the ruling caucus; and there is acute demoralization in the civil service and the police. The military continues to be treated as a pariah by the new regime and the civil society. The fragmentation and weakening of the various organs of the Nepali state has several major implications for the democratic transition,

political stability, and economic growth. Internally, the failure to implement rule of law, curb spiraling crime wave, check the rising political violence in society, and ensuring the flow of essential supplies is leaving the population feeling insecure and vulnerable. The restoration of formal political freedom has not gone hand in hand with the reassurance of security and liberty at the individual and community level.

Externally, the new regime has become extremely susceptible to external pressures and influences. There is a general impression that no decisions or appointments are being taken without external approval. The direct involvement of the Indian Embassy in the deal reached between the UDMF and the government on February 28, 2008 and the subsequent handing over of Upper Karnali and Arun III river projects to India are examples of enfeeblement of the Nepali state which adds to the growing sense of insecurity, demoralization, and lack of direction.

The ongoing state disorder and public frustration has usually been explained away as unavoidable transitional pangs that will pass away as democracy consolidates in Nepal. While such a linear view of democratic transition appears intuitive and assuring, comparative study of political transitions after the collapse of authoritarian regimes does not appear to support this view (Linz and Stepan 2000, O' Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Bruce 2005). For example, after examining a large number of regime changes that occurred in the "third wave of democracy", Thomas Carothers (2000) concludes that a sequential move from regime collapse, transition, and democratic consolidation is not a historic eventuality. The sequence can be delayed, disrupted, or diverted by a number of factors chief of which are the absence of foundational consensus on the form and content of the nation-state, a "usable state" apparatus, and adequate security. In the Nepali context, all these three variables have become either absent or are under severe challenge. Between successful democratic consolidation and outright failure, Carothers posits that many of the cases enter the ambiguous "grey zone" where transition itself becomes the normal condition. If the present developments are any indication, the grey zone in Nepal is likely to have a dash of red as well.

The enfeeblement of the Nepali state, both internally and externally, will be a major handicap in ensuring successful conflict transformation, political transition, and democratic consolidation. Some of the worrying signs are the ongoing arms race among the political parties in setting up of and mobilization of youth squads framed around the paramilitary concept. After the Maoist set up the YCL, the UML launched its own Youth Force, and the NC has followed suit with Tarun Dasta who function as shock troops by employing coercive and intimidatory tactics. By taking the law into their own hands, these units often substitute for the state's legal process. The recent skirmish between the home minister and the Land Reform minister in Siraha is a case in point. The emerging fracture within the state apparatus is a serious trend. After the onset of the insurgency in Nepal in 1996, the conflict took on a bipolar form between the political parties and the Maoist rebels (Shah 2004). After the palace became active in the political process, Nepal's crisis took on a triangular character until the formation of the alliance between the political parties and the Maoists in 2005 to fight the king which again restored the bipolar nature of conflict. With the demise of monarchy in 2008, it is likely that Nepal is heading into a multipolar conflict scenario with the weakening state unable to regulate or moderate the different interests groups working both inside and outside of the constitutional framework. As the state capacity is gradually being eroded, individual political parties and groups are becoming stronger. When these practices are generalized and normalized, what will emerge is not a civil or liberal but a muscular democracy not very accessible or particularly friendly to the poor, excluded, or the marginalized.

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