

Renegotiation with Maoists

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Mahatma Gandhi said, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent." Many proponents of good government from Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, and Erasmus, to John Locke, Jefferson, Horace Mann, John Dewey and Vaclav Havel are intent on assuring that those who govern would be prepared for that demanding, public spirited and morally attuned task.

When Prachanda, the Maoist chief, was asked by the BBC where the king will be in five years time, in the scheme of his protracted war, his answer was that he will be crushed: "The king I think will either be executed by the people's court or he might be exiled." A rebel who allegedly wants to wear a democratic jacket and who pleads for a constituent assembly able to decide the fate of this country does not think that he should wait for the legitimate representatives of the people to decide about an issue as important as this one.

This obviously owes to the culture of violence - a culture which always is set against that demanding, public spirited and morally attuned human task.

It is in this context that James F Moriarty, the American ambassador in Kathmandu, brought a commotion in the political circle of Nepal recently by bringing out a

straight forward foreign policy statement of his government on the violent aspects of the ongoing Maoist "People's war" and the India-assisted 12-point agenda agreed between parliamentary parties and the rebels to create an alternative political system.

On the 11th year of the Maoist violence and bloodshed, here is finally somebody in the diplomatic community of Katmandu, who is reminding the harsh truth that the Maoists took up arms in 1996 to attack a struggling parliamentary system, killing hundreds of party activists and chasing parties out of the countryside. He is not only saying that the 12-point understanding and the uneasy partnership between the parties and the Maoists as wrong headed, but is also finger-pointing that the "political terror by the Maoists, practiced with particular ferocity in the run up to the municipal elections, sets a fearsome precedent and could impair the democratic credentials of their political party partners."

Moriarty's remarks have revived a sort of introspection everywhere, and many politicians are already trying to respond him with a sort of vague denial. He has at once reminded many in the diplomatic circle in Kathmandu, and the international donors, that the United States stands for a democratic future of this country and does not accept their vacillating stance vis-a-vis the Maoists and the political parties (no matter where the joint movement is being negotiated from).

Based on his understanding, Moriarty has warned that (1) the Maoists are not committed to peace and democracy (and

will remain so in the future as well); (2) that the insurgents are only seeking to bring the parliamentary parties further into their sphere, and to the Maoists' advantage; and finally (3) that if the parties and Maoists were ever able to topple the current establishment, the parties and the people will be defenseless against ideological partners long used to settling arguments with a gun. It will just be a naïve pretension if some people think that the warning of Moriarty is prejudiced and in any case not based on the reports of the American security agencies.

Moriarty's overall suggestion is that "if the king and the parties reconcile, they can find a path back to genuine democracy, and an effective means to counter the insurgency. If the king and his government opt for greater repression, their attempts will ultimately fail and Nepal will suffer greater misery and bloodshed. And if the armed-Maoists and unarmed parties successfully implement Prachanda's and Baburam Bhattarai's vision of a violent revolution, the Maoists will ultimately seize power, and Nepal will suffer a disaster that will make its current problems pale in comparison."

Moriarty's speech is a stark reminder to the political parties that they themselves had repeatedly spoken in the past that they would not enter into any formal relationship with the Maoists, unless and until the Maoists firmly renounce violence, put down their weapons, and commit to supporting the democratic process.

Despite declaring a three month ceasefire in September 2005, and one additional month later, the Maoists have done nothing to indicate that

they are prepared to abandon violence in the long term, and abductions and extortion continue unabated. There are enough indications that the violent movement will continue (even if that means killing of little trained and unarmed civilian police in the isolated outposts of the state).

This is the time for the Maoists to clarify, and above all ensure that they are breaking the chain of violence. Ironical it may appear, Mao Zedong, their top aspiration, who ruled China as the chairman of the central committee of the Communist Party between 1945 and 1976, had never been able to have faith in peaceful means of change. Over confident of his approach, Mao led an intolerant communist state, fashioned an economic program called a Great Leap Forward and kicked off a cultural revolution that institutionalized violence in its blood and flesh and claimed the lives of 70 million Chinese over a period of twenty one years.

The Chinese civil war, based on a culture of a three-stage theory of guerilla warfare and the concept of the Sinified Marxism-Leninism (known as Maoism), is the living horror in the memory of one of the most ancient countries of the world - China.

The ultimate test of a politician is not where s/he stands in the moments of comfort and convenience, but where s/he stands at times of challenge and controversy. It is the misfortune of this country that it needs the American ambassador to tell the established political parties that violence is bad, and more demanding negotiation is necessary before you move ahead with the Maoists.

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