

Week in Nepal - six months on



Six months ago Professor Paul Jackson visited Nepal as part of a long term project for the UK's Department for International Development and an international NGO, Saferworld. As an adviser to the secretariat he was charged with managing the Maoist combatants following the ten year war in Nepal. Professor Jackson had previously spent a [week in Nepal in March/April 2011](#) ([/research/impact/perspective/blogs/nepal.aspx](#)), the following blog is concerning his return to the country.

Since the Comprehensive peace Agreement in 2006, the Maoist Army has been held in cantonments and, as part of the peace agreement, there have been discussions about what to do with them. Essentially there are two main options to deal with: firstly, if any of the combatants wish to be integrated into the security army - namely the army - then it is necessary to define what that process might look like; and secondly, if combatants wish to go back in to civilian life, how they might do that, what support they may need and where they might go. This is very simple on first glance, but it is a deeply political, sensitive and divisive process. Even though around 60% of the Maoists have said that they wish to return to civilian life, they all say that if they do not get most of their demands met over access to education, employment and opportunities then they would return to the forest and continue fighting.

Week in Nepal WITH PROFESSOR PAUL JACKSON



The Devil is in the detail - Thursday 10 November 04.30 (GMT)

A day of meetings today as I recover from yesterday's whirlwind. A major seminar with senior members of all of the political parties and an old friend, the deputy commander of the Maoist army, (who once asked me if I had ever

been an insurgent because I asked such detailed question!), who is now the Minister of Finance.

Finally, after two years we have a workable agreement and a good spirit behind it. We also made good progress on the actual implementation of the agreement which is always the most difficult thing - the Devil is in the detail.

I am particularly pleased that this is a truly Nepali - led process and hasn't been imposed by the international community. It has been the result of domestic negotiation and discussion with some input from me and others around the periphery. As a Nepali agreement it has a much better chance of success than the earlier, unsuccessful UN-led approaches. This is not so much a function of the UN, as of the strength of Nepali politics.

Hopefully, once the integration and rehabilitation programmes begin, these minds can be turned to the other vexed issues within Nepal, including the huge inequalities that last week placed the country as the only state in South Asia below Afghanistan in the Human Development Index.

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Driving madness - Wednesday 9 November 03.48 (GMT)

Still here in Kathmandu!

Three little words would really improve life in Kathmandu City: 'mirror, signal, manoeuvre'. In Kathmandu the traffic is dominated by small cars, occasional buses, usually falling apart, small Japanese minibuses and, above all, crazy motorcyclists. The rules of the road are bizarre. Sticking your arm out appears to mean either that you are immune to being run over - in that 'I am standing in the road and sticking my arm out, which means that you now can't run me over'; or, alternatively this may also mean: 'I am sitting in a van so I randomly stick my arm out, therefore this gives me the right to veer in any direction I wish including into oncoming traffic'. If you are in any sort of vehicle, looking before you pull out is just unnecessary. You just go and this means that everyone else has an obligation to stop. If you are on a motorcycle this can further mean that you may go in any direction you wish, including through objects which appear at first sight to be solid. Flashing your lights when on the wrong side of the road shows your disapproval at traffic which on the face of it is actually just driving along legally.

All of this sounds terribly amusing, but it is deadly serious. More people are killed on the road in Nepal than in any other way. The planes are dangerous in Nepal with a combination of mountains and mist, but even most guidebooks say that they are safer than driving anywhere. On the road to the south of the country, which was built by the Chinese as the main highway from Kathmandu to the Indian border, there are memorials on every bend and even most straights where cars have just fallen off the side of the mountain. This road has a rocky cliff on one side going up and another on the other side going down. There is no space for error, and yet the rules outlined above still seem to apply, resulting in an alarming number of cars and other vehicles that keep going straight when the road bends, ending in disaster.

Fortunately I am safely in Kathmandu! Yesterday was a debriefing with the Ambassador, DFID and the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy. Fortunately I know all of them well and in fact the two DFID people I know from my work in Sierra Leone and the ambassador I get along with. His previous posting was as deputy ambassador to Iraq, so Nepal is relatively quiet for him. His experience is, however, invaluable.

Other meetings were very interesting including one with the co-ordinator of the new Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This is a difficult and sensitive area and one that Nepal will have to face soon. During ten years of war there were several high and low profile instances of human rights abuses on both sides. Many of the perpetrators may have risen in the ranks and now be part of the establishment, so anyone within the commission will be under a certain amount of pressure. Establishing a commission to reconstruct the 'truth' and to develop an accepted narrative of the war requires balance with the desire to bring perpetrators to justice. The more the emphasis is on the latter, the fewer the potential witnesses, since those close to the war will fear reprisals if they give evidence. This balance between giving relatives of victims a clear story of what happened and the country a clear narrative of the war needs to be balanced against justice for the perpetration of rape, extortion, terrorism, torture, murder and theft. A very difficult choice to make.

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What an academic can do - Monday 7 November 17.23 (GMT)

talking theory with me, was my rather gentle start to a day that has encompassed politicians and Prime Ministers and ended with a five hour meeting with the head of the army and his staff over whisky (starting at 5pm!).

A full but extremely productive day has seen me involved in brokering a deal between the Maoists and the army and left with a formal proposal from the government that I am supposed to put to the UK ambassador, John Tucknott, tomorrow. Fortunately, John is used to it. The political parties here are comfortable going through people they trust and being an academic gives me a trustworthy position since I am valued for an opinion based on objective views - in Maoist parlance I am 'scientific'.

In the UK I am not sure that academics are valued in the same way, but here I am trusted sufficiently by all political parties and the military and they actually quote me! It is a lesson in what an academic approach allied to a bit of diplomacy can bring to a sensitive situation, and also in how free we are as academics to say what we think and be respected for it. Here part of my role is to say things to both sides that are difficult or uncomfortable. I get away with it because I am an academic and am voicing a 'learned' opinion, whereas others can't say it. A pretty useful role for academics I think and a rewarding way to deploy both research and experience.

Week in Nepal

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A big step forward - Sunday 6 November 03.28 (GMT)

Well two days out in the Southern Kathmandu Valley with the Secretariat that I advise and we have covered a lot of ground. Having prevaricated for four years, the political leaders of Nepal have developed an agreement that nominally solves all of the issues we have been discussing. It is very pleasing

to note that the agreement itself uses a lot of the language and phraseology that we have been explaining for the last two years, but it is particularly positive that this is a Nepali led process. The history of peace processes that are driven by external actors is not good, and in this process, the Nepalis have taken the lead and have produced something that is distinctively Nepali that is far more likely to succeed in this context.

One of the best things about the agreement is that everyone has given something up. At the end of a war that no-one won militarily and where there has been significant political upheaval, it has always been difficult to reconcile the needs and demands of the different political factions, let alone the two militaries. This agreement represents a move forward in that everyone has had to take some form of political risk and therefore they all have an interest in maintaining the agreement - something that has not really happened before.

Following this document, published on the day I landed, my task has now changed from advising on how to get an agreement, to advising on how to implement the agreement. This is a not always as easy as it sounds since there are some areas that remain vague and also contentious. The political leaders have handed over implementation to the army and also to the Secretariat, which must now come up with a plan by November 23rd. It is typical that having taken four years to reach this position, we effectively have three weeks to implement it. Of course, in reality no-one expects everything to be done by then, but they do expect that the process will get started. It includes such difficult issues as integrating 6500 fighters into the army, repatriating property stolen during the war and providing rehabilitation packages for those fighters wishing to re-enter society. Nepal still has some way to go, but we have taken a big step towards a real peace.

Week in Nepal

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A shard of enlightenment - Friday 4 November 16.33 (GMT)

A busy day today, starting with a meeting with the UN at 7.30. This is a peculiarly difficult meeting in Nepal given that the UN has a difficult reputation following a botched earlier attempt at demobilisation of child soldiers and the

Government asking for the removal of UNMIN, which was perceived to be heavily biased towards the Maoists. UN involvement in future rehabilitation programmes is therefore a hugely contentious act despite the fact that they have revamped their aid and have redesigned their intervention (partly following our model).

After this I actually had some time off, managing to get to the Monkey Temple, Pathan Durbar and the famous Pathan Museum, which has the most spectacular collection of Asian Art in Asia. It is truly spectacular.

Finally, a set of evening meetings beginning with the former PM Nepal, whom I know, which was excellent, and then going on to a member of the National Congress Party (NC). The NC member is also someone I have got to know and we talked until around 10pm despite the fact that he is off to New York tomorrow to discuss the status of Lumbini as a World Heritage Site.

Those who have reached an early stage of enlightenment will realise that Lumbini is the birthplace of the historical Buddha (there are several real and not real, including some who became Buddhas before Buddha existed. My brain hurts...). Lumbini truly is one of the great religious places of the world and yet is virtually unknown in the West. A privilege to have visited.

Back to work tomorrow with a meeting with the Leader of the Maoists, Prachanda, and a residential workshop over the weekend with the technical secretariat charged with the implementation of the political peace agreement. Not a nice, easy weekend then.

Week in Nepal

WITH PROFESSOR PAUL JACKSON



Climbing a mountain - Thursday 3 November 16.34 (GMT)

Well, Kathmandu is extremely crowded again. October and November are the months of extreme tourism in Nepal when the usually very rich Europeans arrive to go trekking. The hotels are full of fit-looking 60 year old Germans and

French (mainly) who are all kitted out in the latest gear and spend their time buying 'ethnic' goods in local shops and wearing it around the hotels. This all amuses the locals who find the antics of some of these people a bit bizarre. People like me, we are working here, are reduced to hanging around in shadowy corners trying to avoid them, or continuing to have clandestine meetings with Maoist commanders in bars. In fact the local waiter here in my hotel is a Maoist Company Commander turned political activist and we spend much of our time decrying the downfall of western civilisation and the destructive nature of capitalism. A little light discussion about Marx's 'Surveys From Exile' and the role of imperialism never did anyone any harm.

Another full day today, starting with a very nice breakfast meeting with a good friend who also happens to be a Maoist. We were discussing the nature of factionalism within the current Maoist Party in the wake of the new phase of the peace agreement, which undertakes to disband the Maoist Army. These troops have been in camps for more than four years and unsurprisingly the announcement that they will be paid around £5000 - which is a good deal - for 'voluntary retirement' has been greeted very positively. The issue is that one faction within the Maoist Party, many of whom did not actually fight during the war, are agitating for continuing the armed struggle. This was further exacerbated today when the world organisation of Maoists announced that the Nepali Maoist Party, having fought a ten year war, overthrown the monarchy and brought about widespread change, was, in fact, betraying the revolution. Nepalese have been celebrating into the night here and guffawing loudly at this announcement since it apparently originates in that hotbed of Maoist radicalism - the US!





Well, another visit to Nepal, and more drama. Having arrived late on Monday I have a breakfast meeting with my collaborator, being briefed on the political situation, a morning meeting with the Ambassador, a lunch meeting with the

general who chairs the Secretariat that I support, an afternoon meeting with a Maoist General and then dinner (and whisky) with the Secretariat as a whole.

However, the morning paper - The Himalayan - also brings some excellent news. The main political parties have constructed an agreement outlining the model for integrating or disbanding the Maoist Army. It is also written in the same language and phraseology that we have been using for the last two years. In short, we have won a major political battle at the political level.

This document and the agreement is likely to dominate my current visit and the emphasis for me is shifting from principles and on to the practical implementation of the agreement. Everyone is very pleased here - from the Ambassador to the Maoists - and there is a mood of celebration on the streets. No pressure then.



Well here I am again off to Nepal. Currently sitting in Doha in a very crowded departure lounge, DFID only pays for economy class these days so I have been doing some stretching exercises. A seven hour first trip followed by a six hour second one, with three hours in between is a killing journey. I am also

aware that I will be going straight in to a meeting with the British Ambassador when I get there.

This trip follows a number of visits that have been slowly building up in terms of making progress in the peace talks. My role is to get the two sides to agree on a way forward for the Nepal Army and the Maoist Army.

In principle the Secretariat that I advise has agreed to integrate the two groups, but there are still disagreements over how to do this. Up until last week, I was to have been accompanied by a British General and two colleagues from the UK Stabilisation Unit, but sensitivities around foreigners getting involved mean that I am going on my own.

I, apparently, don't count as a foreigner. At least, my status as a 'UK academetician' gives me a reputation for being objective and neutral in the process. Indeed, I am not treated as a foreigner but as a member of the Secretariat.

My job this time is quiet diplomacy. I need to persuade those involved that the UK does not have a strategic interest in the talks, but is acting because it has the relevant expertise and is willing to help by using the Gurkha network we already have in place.

Lots of meetings with my friends on the Secretariat and lots of meetings with senior politicians behind the scenes to facilitate some movement at last.