The Long Decolonisation of the Assam highlands, 1942-1972.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

India's northeast is regularly viewed as unique, because of its complex amalgamation of conflict dynamics. This thesis rejects prevailing assumptions that this exceptionalism is autochthonous to the region. The northeast became an exceptional region through an observable historical process. This thesis argues that the northeast's exceptionalism was dependent on the first decades after independence. In short, it suggests that 'long decolonisation' (1942-72) established three transferable trends that were critical for the northeast's long-term stability. First, the Indian state developed a perception of relative weakness, when confronted with armed groups. Second, distinct regional identity claims became juxtaposed to grander visions for national unity. Third, precedents for how to conduct successful insurgency were established. Furthermore, these trends were forged within a particular part of the northeast, the 'Assam highlands'. Therefore, the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands established key transferable trends that dictated the long-term stability of India's northeast.

This argument is a significant departure from previous research. It uses idiosyncratic conceptions of time (the long decolonisation) and space (the Assam highlands) to provide an explanation for the northeast's instability. This is methodologically unique, when framed against norms in conflict research. Consequently, the thesis provides insights for interdisciplinary expansion. Additionally, this methodological innovation is forged using widely overlooked historical records from archives spanning three continents. Altogether, the thesis intersects with a wide array of literature, especially research focused on borderlands, decolonisation, violence, insurgency and intrastate conflict. This relevance for wider research frames India's northeast – widely overlooked as a marginal region – as anything but peripheral.

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List of Abbreviations

All Tripura People's Liberation Organization (ATPLO)

All Tripura Tribal Front (ATTF)

All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC)

Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA)

Assam Disturbed Areas Act (ADAA)

Assam Language Act (ALA)

Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act (AMPOA)

Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC)

Assam Rifles (AR)

Autonomous Hill District (AHD)

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

Border Security Force (BSF)

China-Burma-India Theatre (CBI)

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)

Counterinsurgency (COIN)

Counterinsurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS)

Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations (DSCO)

East India Tribal Union (EITU)

Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN)

Garo National Council (GNC)

Indian Civil Service (ICS)

Indian National Congress (INC)

Kachin Independence Army (KIA)

Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)

Kuki National Front (KNF)

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

Mizo District Congress Committee (MDCC)

Mizo District Council (MDC)

Mizo Hills District (MHD)

Mizo National Front (MNF)

Mizo National Volunteers (MNV)

Mizo Union (MU)

Naga Hills District (NHD)

Naga Hills Tribal Area (NHTA)

Naga Home Guards (NHG)

Naga National Council (NNC)

Naga People's Convention (NPC)

Nagaland Peace Mission (NPM)

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)

North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)

North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT)

North Eastern Council (NEC)

People's Liberation Army, Manipur (PLA)

People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)

Protected Progressive Village (PPV)

Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM)

Revolutionary People's Front (RPF)

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

States Reorganisation Commission (SRC)

Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB)

Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)

Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Union (TTSU)

Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS)

United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)

United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO)

United National Liberation Front (UNLF)

Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)

Young Lushai Association (YLA)

Introduction: Conceptualising India's northeast.

India's northeast: A unique region?

India's northeast has routinely been described as an exceptional – perhaps even unique – part of the Republic.[1] Descriptions such as the 'fractured frontier' and the 'frontier in ferment' perpetuate this idea of an extraordinary site of chaos on India's eastern periphery.[2] In a review of an influential book recently published on the northeast, Sankaran Krishna summarised an Indian 'mainstream' conception of the region:

> In our imagination, the Northeast is a hyper-securitised space of tribals, insurgencies, violence, occupation by the Indian army, a site of illegal immigration and border conflicts and, mainly, of people who look and are different from the rest of 'us'.[3]

Recent scholarly literature on the northeast is less prone to the traditional essentialisms that Krishna criticises, but the logic of uniqueness still conditions how the region is understood.[4]

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[1] Bhagat Oinam and Dhiren A. Sadokpam, 'Introduction', in *Northeast India: A Reader*, ed. by Bhagat Oinam and Dhiren A. Sadokpam (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-25 (p. 5).

[2] Binalakshmi Nepram, *South Asia's Fractured Frontier: Armed Conflict, Narcotics and Small Arms Proliferation in India's North East* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications 2002); *Frontier in Flames: North East India in Turmoil*, ed. by Jaideep Saikia (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007); Prakash Singh, *India's Northeast: The Frontier in Ferment* (Hurlburt Field: JSOU Press, 2008).

[3] Sankaran Krishna, 'Book Review: In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43.6 (2021), 1232-34.

[4] There has been an upsurgence in academic literature on the northeast since the turn of the century. This research has confronted stereotypes perpetuated about the communities of the northeast, but flawed assumptions remain. For an example which retains clear paternalistic and nationalistic overtones, see, Dinesh Kotwal, 'The Naga Insurgency: The Past and the Future', *Strategic Analysis*, 24.4 (2000), 751–72.

This sense of exceptionalism reinforces teleological assumptions about the history of the northeast. These narratives are fundamentally misleading.

In the first decades after independence the northeast was neither exceptional nor unique.[5] Significant challenges followed the hangover of colonial rule, but these quandaries were not altogether dissimilar to those faced elsewhere in India.[6] A critical assessment of the northeast's early post-colonial[7] history sits uneasily with the sense of exception posited for the region. This thesis argues that a transition occurred, from a relatively unexceptional post-colonial border space into an exceptional region of volatility. The transition has important implications.

To understand these implications, it is essential to stress that an exceptional environment did appear from the late 1970s. Nearly all leading scholars on the northeast agree that the region has become home to a peculiar amalgamation of conflict dynamics and instability.[8] Conceptions such as the 'durable disorder' and the 'insurgency environment' have

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[5] The parallels between the northeast and the rest of the subcontinent are drawn out in the 'Assam highlands' section of this introduction. For some background reading on Partition and its aftermath in the northeast, see, Sanjib Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), pp. 47-75; Anindita Dasgupta, 'Denial and Resistance: Sylheti Partition "refugees" in Assam', *Contemporary South Asia*, 10.3 (2001), 343–60; Udayon Misra, *Burden of History: Assam and the Partition—Unresolved Issues* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017); Udayon Misra, *India's North-East: Identity Movements, State, and Civil Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 38-73; Willem Van Schendel, 'Contested, Vertical, Fragmenting: De-Partitioning "Northeast India"', in *Geographies of Difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian Studies*, ed. by Mélanie Vandenhelsken, Meenaxi Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and Bengt G. Karlsson (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2017).

[6] As shown later, issues such as identity, citizenship, migration and administration – core aspects of the partition process nationally – were also evident in the northeast.

[7] The term post-colonial is used throughout this thesis in its descriptive sense, indicating the timeframe after formal colonial rule, hence the hyphen. It is not to be confused with the various interpretations of postcolonial theory, as identified in – for example – Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

[8] Sanjib Baruah, in his latest work, framed the northeast as an 'anomalous zone' within the Indian Union. Subir Bhaumik, whilst critical of Baruah's conception of a 'durable disorder', has still accepted that both the proliferation of insurgency and the readiness of ethnic movements to resort to armed conflict signify a unique environment. In the revised 2012 edition of S. K. Chaube's *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, he reneged on his

described this milieu.[9] There are some persuasive indicators to support this logic. Ten of the twelve 'ethnic' rebellions in India since 1947 happened in the northeast.[10] By the mid-2000s, it was suggested that up to forty or fifty armed groups operated in the region.[11] Parts of the northeast are effectively administered by rebel groups that have established effective parallel governance institutions.[12] This is before delving into the complex, contentious politics

earlier viewpoint to accept that violence had become 'endemic' to northeast Indian political life. Namrata Goswami argued aspects of colonial governance and closeness to international borders enforced the uniqueness of the region. In the introductory notes to Sanjoy Hazarika's pioneering *Strangers of the Mist*, he begins with a narration of exceptionality of the northeast, ultimately suggesting that 'the people of the Northeast are the guardians of its most precious asset: its uniqueness'. Bethany Lacina noted that the duration of the northeast's conflicts is 'exceptional', and that the proliferation of insurgency is also an 'outlier by world standards'. Finally, K.S. Subramanian has further enforced the idea that the background to the 'violent situation' is 'unique'. This framing is also applied to localised studies. John Parratt, for example, argued that part of the explanation for the proliferation in insurgency in Manipur was due to the 'very distinctiveness of the region, which has engendered a sense of alienation from India as a whole'. See, Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. ix; Subir Bhaumik, *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009), p. 89; S. K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, 3rd edn (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2012), p. x; Namrata Goswami, 'Insurgencies in India', in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, ed. by Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp. 208–17; Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1995), p. xx; Bethany Lacina, 'Rethinking Delhi's Northeast India Policy: Why Neither Counter-Insurgency nor Winning Hearts and Minds Is the Way Forward', in *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, ed. by Sanjib Baruah, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 329–42; John Parratt, *Wounded Land: Politics and Identity in Modern Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), p. 1; K. S. Subramanian, *Political Violence and the Police in India* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, 2007), pp. 191–219.

[9] Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lawrence E. Cline, 'The Insurgency Environment in Northeast India', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 17.2 (2006), 126–47. Baruah's conception was more clearly identified. He suggested that an 'insurgency' vs 'mainstream' dichotomy was too reductionist and curtailed scholarship. Hence, he conceptualized the durable disorder as a composite idea that encompassed aspects of 'ethnic militias, counter-insurgency operations, state-backed militias, developmentalist practices and deformed institutions of democratic governance'. These aspects therefore fed into the 'coherent whole' which made-up India's northeast. Cline's coinage of the 'insurgency environment' was less specific, meant more as a catch-all term.

[10] Therése Pettersson and Peter Wallensteen, 'Armed Conflicts, 1946–2014', *Journal of Peace Research*, 52.4 (2015), 536–50; Anoop Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion, Ethnicity, and Insurgent Mobilization: Evidence from India', *World Politics*, 73.1 (2021), 82–127 (p. 91). This figure is derived from research presented in the *Journal of Peace Research*, from information provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

[11] Cline, 'Insurgency Environment', p. 127.

[12] Shalaka Thakur and Rajesh Venugopal, 'Parallel Governance and Political Order in Contested Territory: Evidence from the Indo-Naga Ceasefire', *Asian Security*, 15.3 (2019), 285–303.

concerned with language, land, legislation, immigration and indigenous rights.[13] The northeast *has* become home to a peculiar amalgamation of conflict dynamics and instability.

This uniqueness developed from the late 1970s onwards.[14] It is critical to note that this was not a predestined affair; an insurgent environment was created through an observable historical process. A major aim of this thesis is to demonstrate this transition. Just because the northeast became exceptional, does not mean this was always the case. This teleological assumption undermines the quest to explain the northeast's instability, a key concern in academic and Indian public life.[15]

Teleological assumptions are detrimental because they imply a sense of esoterism for the northeast; it is framed as an oddity within the Republic that is defined by violence and in a perpetual state of flux.[16] This anomalous framing makes analytical comparisons difficult,

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[13] For research which is not rigorously interrogated here, but still provides valuable insight into the northeast's complexities, see, Dolly Kikon, *Living with Oil and Coal: Resource Politics and Militarization in Northeast India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019); Arkotong Longkumer, *The Greater India Experiment: Hindutva and the Northeast* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Vandenhelsken et al, *Geographies of Difference*.

[14] The trajectories that developed during this period are examined in the conclusion of this thesis.

[15] In academic analysis, there has been a shift towards interrogating how trends in the northeast have emerged rather than taking their existence for granted as a mere foregone conclusion. In a special issue introduced by Åshild Kolås in 2017, this ambition was central. In press reports, the quandary of instability is a recurring theme. For example, in a recent analysis of newly formed insurgent group – the Dimasa National Liberation Army (DNLA) – a report noted how 'Army officials say the DNLA resorted to extortion and kidnappings to generate money… What mystified them was the ease with which the group operated in an area controlled by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)'. The peculiar conflict dynamics of the northeast regularly establishes events that are difficult to explain. See, Åshild Kolås, 'Northeast Indian Enigmas', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 42.3 (2017), 99–106; Sandeep Unnithan, 'Proxy guns of the Northeast: Why the NSCN (IM) is a perennial problem', *India Today*, 5 May 2020. <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/notheast-insurgency-dimasa-national-liberation-army-nscn-1674592-2020-05-05> [accessed 25 June 2021].

[16] Oinam and Sadokpam, 'Introduction', p. 5. Oinam and Sadokpam noted the conceptual issues that derive from the exceptionality thesis. They suggested this has set the northeast 'beyond the purview of any comparative framework'.

whilst explanations for the environment have a tendency towards 'catch all' explanations.[17] But, as with studies of other 'exceptional' events, such as Partition or the Holocaust, a change in mindset can alter this framing.[18] These events, though difficult to understand, can be explained rather than being swept aside as moments of historical tragedy without any coherence or internal logic.[19] Exceptional historical processes can be understood. In this thesis, to demonstrate the transition in the northeast, the period before the exceptional environment takes centre stage.

In short, the thesis asserts that the timeframe between 1942-72 was critical for the long-term stability of the northeast. Two paradigms frame this argument, one temporal and one

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[17] Even some of the most potent analysis – such as Sanjib Baruah's three-pronged approach to conflict dynamics – is best deployed as an introduction to the northeast's idiosyncrasies rather than an explanation for them. Baruah invited readers to think about civil conflict in the northeast through three dynamics: 'structural' conditions, the state and individual agency. Adapted in parts from wider literature on conflict, the first aspect of structural conditions included baseline indicators such as poverty and (under)development. For the state, Baruah was keen to interrogate the actions of 'weak' states, for instance through the strategies of political elites eager to consolidate power. Finally, through individual agency, Baruah was interested in understanding the role of ground-level actors in shifting discourses away from peaceful rhetoric and towards violent action. See, Sanjib Baruah, 'Introduction', in Baruah, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 1-21 (p. 12). Meanwhile, in relatively short overviews provided for a general audience there is a tendency to provide classic 'catch-all' explanations. These tend to include such a variety of factors that the usefulness of the analysis becomes diluted. See, for example, Scott Gates and Kaushik Roy, *Unconventional Warfare in South Asia: Shadow Warriors and Counterinsurgency* (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2016), pp. 39–64.

[18] Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, in their reflections on the historiography of Partition, noted how there remains a tendency to continue to treat Partition as a unique historical event. They suggest this, in turn, may be why Partition has at times been parochialized in wider comparative studies. Partition may have witnessed some uniquely significant processes, but this does not mean that it cannot be understood as a historical phenomenon. See Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 24.

[19] For the former, Dan Stone noted how 'the vocabulary of colonialism and imperialism' provided useful comparative insight for studies of the Holocaust. He suggested that 'from tracing lines of continuity (in personnel, military practices or ideas about cultural superiority) from the German colonies, especially southwest Africa, where the Herero and Nama people were victims of genocide in the war of 1904–8, to analysing Hitler's admiration for British rule in India or westward expansion in the United States, the Holocaust is increasingly set within a world-historical framework. Although some fear that this process will lead to the Holocaust losing its supposed 'uniqueness', the cohort of historians that has done the most to advance comparative genocide studies in recent years… is careful to stress that, even if one can establish broad frameworks for understanding, this need not come at the expense of the specificity of any particular event. The argument about colonialism is meant to supplement, not replace, other sources for understanding the forces that drove the Holocaust'. See Dan Stone, 'Beyond the "Auschwitz Syndrome": Holocaust Historiography after the Cold War', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 44.5 (2010), 454–68 (pp. 465-66).

spatial. The temporal aspect pioneers the idea of 'the long decolonisation', a term adapted from the literature on decolonisation and applied to the northeast. The long decolonisation, from 1942-72, was paramount. Furthermore, it was the long decolonisation of a specific region that was significant. The 'Assam highlands' is the term coined to describe this region. The long decolonisation of the Assam highlands established some core trends – related to state perception, identity formation and insurgency – that became fundamental to the instability of the northeast.

The central argument of this thesis is that the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands established three transferable trends, which were critical for the long-term conflict dynamics of the northeast. The long decolonisation:

1) Embedded the belief that the Indian state was relatively weak, when confronting armed movements in its northeast
2) Failed to reconcile regional identity claims with pluralistic visions for Indian nationalism
3) Created a series of precedents for how armed groups could successfully challenge state authority

The first facet developed on the one hand because the Indian state could not resolve conflicts that emerged in the Naga and Mizo Hills, either militarily or diplomatically. On the other hand, it was underpinned by problematic post-colonial state-building. State-building – as applied here – refers to the physical construction of state apparatus and rule, mirroring the literal interpretation used by historians elsewhere.[20] The inability to conduct a successful state-

[20] This includes initiatives such as the implementation of governance structures, alongside the physical construction of key facets associated with the state, such as infrastructure, medical facilities and administrative buildings. This is not to be confused with the more niche conceptualisation of state-building in international relations, defined as a peacekeeping initiative in post-conflict states that is usually conducted by external nations.

building drive in a region defined by a lack of state presence during colonial rule contributed to this perception about the Indian state's capabilities.

If the first trend is partly related to state-building, the second is concerned with nation-building. Nation-building is the construction of nationalism, national identity, or nationhood within a nation-state.[21] A clear separation between Indian nationhood and regional identity was enforced and solidified during decolonisation, providing the ideological foundations for separatist challenges to state authority. The inability to reconcile regional identity claims within grander visions for Indian unity established a precedent with recurrent purchase throughout the northeast.

Neither of the first two aspects are particularly controversial, when the northeast's insurgency environment in the past four decades is understood. Sanjib Baruah has opined, mirroring the first trend, that:

> While mainland Indians are not used to thinking of the Indian state as weak and incapable of providing every-day security to its citizens… in at least many parts of north-east India, something like [a] security dilemma is at work which leads rival ethnic groups to form their own ragtag bands of liberation armies.[22]

For a note on the distinction between the two, see, Hideaki Shinoda, 'Peace-Building and State- Building from the Perspective of the Historical Development of International Society', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 18.1 (2018), 25–43.

[21] Also referred to as nation-making, it is essentially the ideological construction of the nation. This works in tandem with the physical construction of the state within state-building. For some recent literature on nation-building, see, Natividad Gutierrez, 'Indigenous Myths and Nation Building in Latin America', *Nations and Nationalism*, 24.2 (2018), 271–80; Miles Larmer, 'Nation-Making at the Border: Zambian Diplomacy in the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 61.1 (2020), 145–75; Andreas Wimmer, 'Nation Building: Why Some Countries Come Together While Others Fall Apart', *Survival*, 60.4 (2018), 151–64. Note that, for example, Wimmer has his own interpretation of nation-building, of which the second aspect is effectively the ideological creation of the attachment to the nation-state. Scholars invariably have slight distinctions in how they conceptualise and deploy nation- and state- building. Here the distinction is quite simple. The former is ideological, the latter is practical.

[22] Sanjib Baruah, 'Gulliver's Troubles: State and Militants in North-East India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37.41 (2002), 4178–82 (p. 4180).

But this thesis' importance stems from the explanation for these trends. The argument presented here – that both state perception and identity formation developed through an identifiable genealogy during the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands – is a new explanation for generally accepted phenomena.

The logic of state weakness, as identified by Baruah, must be understood against the backdrop of events between 1942-72. The claim that Indian nationalism has struggled to hold ideological weight in a region replete with separatist insurgency is also something of a truism. But, again, the long decolonisation was critical in forging this ideological disconnect. The highlands did not operate in a vacuum. Local processes spread across the highlands during the long decolonisation and had significant weighting on the broader northeast in its transition towards an exceptional space.

The final aspect of the long decolonisation set a series of precedents – akin to a guidebook – for insurgency in the northeast. This facet is not as obvious, because of the lack of archival research conducted on the northeast's conflicts between 1942-72.[23] But there were clear lessons developed, firstly in the acquisition and utilisation of modern weapons, and the disproportionate successes they provided against state forces. Secondly, the exploitation of the region's topography, both internally and internationally, established crucial lessons for how insurgent outfits could move, operate, and survive. Thirdly, the pursuance of relationships beyond India's internal boundaries, particularly in Pakistan and China, ensured the manipulation of international relations for local gain. Together, these trends were critical both

[23] Historical literature on the northeast has utilised the archives more in the past decade, as the bibliography of this thesis demonstrates. This is still, however, against the grain of general approaches, which tend more towards datasets or interviews. The use of data is covered in greater detail later in this introduction.

for the short-term survival of movements in the Assam highlands and, especially, in the longer-term for the wider northeast.

This framework is methodologically distinctive from orthodox investigations of intrastate conflict and insurgency. It utilises some core elements of social science research – covered shortly – but retains a central focus on historical interrogations of violence.[24] Rather than looking towards baseline indicators in the production of conflict, the thesis focuses upon the longer-term structuring factors which create the conditions for violent uprisings. The northeast's exceptionality is best understood by interrogating how the region became an exceptional space. The long decolonisation of the Assam highlands was pivotal in this sense, creating conditions for an environment conducive for separatist insurgency.

The rest of the introductory chapter is organised into three main sections. The first section analyses how research into political violence, intrastate conflict and insurgencies has been framed, and how this has conditioned research on the northeast. It suggests that finding the conditions which favour insurgency is a critical task for scholars, a core aspect missing from the literature on India's northeast. The second section explains the concept of the long decolonisation, offering an alternative approach to identifying conditions that favour insurgency. The third section then explains the importance of the Assam highlands. This area – traditionally understood as a remote zone within an already peripheral region – created key

[24] There are several, divergent approaches to violence within the historical discipline. A recent special issue within *History and Theory* offers just one example of this. Philip Dwyer and Joy Damousi identified how historians have struggled to theorize violence, which resulted in their attempts to create a coherent sub-field. From an alternate – but arguably more persuasive – standpoint historians such as Kim Wagner have sought to cut across temporal compartmentalisations of violence. His reflections on the Amritsar massacre, for example, are insightful. He argued that presenting historical events within a longue durée framing of violence, rather than within shorter historic moments – such as imperial anxieties – provides greater reflection on how violence is formed, framed and justified. See, Philip Dwyer and Joy Damousi, 'Theorizing Histories of Violence', *History and Theory*, 56.4 (2017), 3-6; Kim A. Wagner, '"Calculated to Strike Terror": The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence', *Past & Present*, 233.1 (2016), 185–225.

structural trends for the wider northeast by the late 1970s.[25] The introduction then closes with a note on source material and chapter structure.

Intrastate conflict research.

Conflict dynamics are a primary theme in academic literature on the northeast.[26] The study of conflict is wide-ranging, and many avenues have been explored by scholars. In the northeast, conflict primarily materialised in the form of insurgency and civil war. Therefore, an essential starting point for understanding the northeast is the subfield of intrastate conflict and civil war, largely dominated by the social sciences.

The first intrastate conflicts in the Naga and Mizo Hills, in the 1950s and 1960s respectively, were 'territorial' civil wars.[27] Rebel groups pushed for secession from the Indian Union and utilised guerrilla warfare. These struggles were defined as 'irregular' conflicts.[28] From the late 1970s onwards, insurgencies – i.e., rebel groups that started intrastate conflict to forge political change and operated in irregular, fluid fashion, from rural or geographically difficult zones[29] – burgeoned across the northeast. Bethany Lacina has also suggested that, in

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[25] The lack of focus on the region within traditional monographs on India's post-1947 dynamics, for example, is an obvious example of this peripheral perception within mainstream academia.

[26] To offer one of a plethora of examples to demonstrate this, Archana Upadhyay described the centrality of conflict in the northeast when noting that conflicts have 'spread across a wide canvas, have engulfed almost the entire region, mainly manifesting as multiple insurgencies with terrorism as its defining feature.' Upadhyay went on to note that the northeast is 'undisputedly Asia's oldest trouble spot.' See Archana Upadhyay, *India's Fragile Borderlands: The Dynamics of Terrorism in North East India* (London: IB Tauris & Co, 2009), pp. 24-29.

[27] On distinguishing between types of conflict and definitional specificity, the Upsala Conflict Data Program is a useful resource. For example, see, 'UCDP Definitions' <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#tocjump_15774091523659373_11> [accessed 12 March 2021].

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] John Mackinlay, *Globalisation and Insurgency* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 12-13.

addition to classic, mass-based rural insurgencies, a proliferation of institutions more closely resembling criminal enterprises has happened since the 1990s.[30] The region has, therefore, become particularly conducive for armed groups.

Globally, studies of intrastate conflicts and civil wars have blossomed since the turn of the century. Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel identified an 'explosion' in research by 2010.[31] When Lars-Erik Cederman and Manuel Vogt wrote their historiographical appraisal of the field in 2017, they argued that the study of intrastate conflict had become one of the most vibrant literatures for political scientists.[32] This literature is crucial for understanding conflict dynamics, and how they have developed in the northeast, since scholars of the northeast have utilised aspects of this research in their own work.

The desire to understand why intrastate warfare happens is a central pillar of the field.[33] Paul Collier's work is a fundamental starting point. He argued that 'greed' and 'opportunities'

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[30] Bethany Lacina, 'Does Counterinsurgency Theory Apply in Northeast India?', *India Review*, 6.3 (2007), 165–83. Lacina suggested that from the early 1990s a new phase emerged for the northeast. She argued it was characterised by a decrease in operations against the state and rebel group organizational coherence, but also one that witnessed the expansion of armed groups. This has meant that some of the more traditional methods of counterinsurgency may not be as relevant for the post-1990s period as they would have been from the late 1970s onwards. If Lacina's conclusions are to be believed, then it would periodise the post-colonial history of the northeast into three timeframes. First would be the long decolonisation covered in this thesis, from 1947 until the early 1970s. Second would be the emergence of the unique conflict dynamics from the late 1970s into the early 1990s. Third would be Lacina's conception from the 1990s onwards.

[31] Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel, 'Civil War', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 48.1 (2010), 3–57.

[32] Lars-Erik Cederman and Manuel Vogt, 'Dynamics and Logics of Civil War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61.9 (2017), 1992–2016.

[33] The 'onset' of civil wars is one of three traditional scopes of investigation, alongside secondly duration and wartime dynamics and thirdly termination or post-conflict reoccurrence. See, Daina Chiba, Nils W. Metternich, and Michael D. Ward, 'Every Story Has a Beginning, Middle, and an End (but Not Always in That Order): Predicting Duration Dynamics in a Unified Framework', *Political Science Research and Methods*, 3.3 (2015), 515–41. Some scholars have found this framing too rigid. For instance, Joel Blaxland has attempted to forge a further concept of 'incubation'. However, the traditional modes of thought are useful as a starting point to investigate the dynamics of intrastate warfare. See, Joel Blaxland, 'Thinking Outside the (Temporal) Box to Explain Protracted Intrastate Conflict'*, Journal of Peace Research*, (2021), 1–13. For key works which established baseline methods for the second strand, duration, see, Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Måns Söderbom, 'On the Duration of Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 41.3 (2004), 253–73; James D. Fearon, 'Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer than Others?', *Journal of Peace Research*, 41.3 (2004), 275–301. For conflict

are two core features in the onset of conflicts.[34] This argument suggested that civil wars emerged when ground-level actors sensed favourable possibilities in pursuing armed confrontations. Collier's work added another dimension to the 'grievance' narrative which suggested that – at heart – intrastate conflict was the product of perceived injustices, evident in various forms.[35] Whether explicitly incorporating this research, or implicitly invoking its basic premise, numerous studies until the late 2000s explained the northeast's conflict dynamics through the prism of grievances.[36]

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termination, see, Laia Balcells and Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58.8 (2014), 1390–1418; Lesley-Ann Daniels, 'How and When Amnesty during Conflict Affects Conflict Termination', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.9 (2020), 1612–37; Lise Morjé Howard and Alexandra Stark, 'How Civil Wars End: The International System, Norms, and the Role of External Actors', *International Security*, 42.3 (2017), 127–71; Nerve V. Macaspac, 'Insurgent Peace: Community-Led Peacebuilding of Indigenous Peoples in Sagada, Philippines', *Geopolitics*, 24.4 (2019), 839–77; Anna O. Pechenkina and Jakana L. Thomas, 'Battle Stalemates and Rebel Negotiation Attempts in Civil Wars', *Security Studies*, 29.1 (2020), 64–91; Barbara F. Walter, 'The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement', *International Organization*, 51.3 (1997), 335–64.

[34] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56.4 (2004), 563–95; Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Nicholas Sambanis, 'The Collier-Hoeffler Model of Civil War Onset and the Case Study Project Research Design', in *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis, Volume 1. Africa*, ed. by Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005), pp. 1–34.

[35] David Keen, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *International Affairs*, 88.4 (2012), 757–77. Keen, for example, was critical of Collier's 'greed' thesis, suggesting it prevented interrogation of the motivations of ground-level actors. He suggested that a greater focus on the multiplicity of grievances that can occur, ranging across economic and political concerns, offered a more useful method of understanding the onset of civil wars.

[36] Wasbir Hussain, for example, suggested that state strategies of negotiation have ensured 'little hope for the smaller outfits or more moderate tribal groupings to get their grievances redressed'. See Wasbir Hussain, 'Ethno-Nationalism and the Politics of Terror in India's Northeast', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30.1 (2007), 93–110. It should be noted that some research in the past decade, which has incorporated various evolving historiographies, has advanced more sophisticated analyses of how grievances manifest in the northeast. Despite these offering only partial conclusions about the region's instability, they have nonetheless proved crucial for research. This research has probed how political and economic grievances motivate ground-level actors to rebel, how state policies have failed to resolve ethnic-based grievance, how a cultural isolation from an Indian 'mainstream' has unfolded and how security and legislative frameworks have produced cultures of terror and ground-level backlashes. For each theme respectively, see Krishna Chaitanya Vadlamannati, 'Why Indian Men Rebel? Explaining Armed Rebellion in the Northeastern States of India, 1970-2007', *Journal of Peace Research*, 48.5 (2011), 605-19; Komol Singha, 'Understanding Ethnicity-Based Autonomy Movements in India's Northeastern Region', *Nationalities Papers*, 45.4 (2017), 687–706; Ajay Darshan Behera, 'Conflict to Co-Option? Experiences of Dealing with the Insurgencies in India's Northeast', in *Wars from Within: Understanding and Managing Insurgent Movements*, ed. by Albrecht Schnabel and Rohan Gunaratna (London: Imperial College Press, 2015), pp. 227–72; Dolly Kikon, 'The Predicament of Justice: Fifty Years of Armed Forces Special Powers Act in India', *Contemporary South Asia*, 17.3 (2009), 271–82.

It should be noted, however, that the grievance vs greed dynamic is controversial. From an early point, scholars such as James Fearon and David Laitin rejected the approach. They suggested that looking for the conditions that favour insurgency was more useful than invoking baseline indicators such as grievance.[37] Their conclusion that civil conflicts were more likely in 'weak' states was mirrored in research on the northeast, as leading scholars began to systematically scrutinise the state from the mid-2000s onwards.[38] M. Sajjad Hassan's work was particularly noteworthy. He suggested that by 'extending the logic of the cultural [grievance] argument, it would be easy to fall prey to the fallacy that heterogeneous societies are doomed to conflicts and violence'.[39] This is a core critique of the grievance paradigm and highlights the pitfalls in seeking catch-all indicators of conflict.

The turn towards the state, though necessary, did not provide any fundamental explanations for the northeast's peculiar insurgency environment.[40] Specific state policies and the structure of the state helped to explain the immediate turn towards violence in certain regions, but overall, an explanation for the northeast's idiosyncratic nature remained elusive. This led to a final – and very recent – development in the literature on the northeast, which

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[37] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War', *American Political Science* Review, 97.1 (2003), 75–90.

[38] Baruah, 'Introduction', pp. 4-7.

[39] M. Sajjad Hassan, *Building Legitimacy: Exploring State-Society Relations in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 10.

[40] Hassan favoured a Weberian-style approach to state analysis, concluding that conflicts occurred where the state was unable to attain a monopoly over legitimate forms of violence. Through a comparative study of Mizoram and Manipur, Hassan forged his state-failure thesis. There are limitations to Hassan's conclusions, but his contribution to the literature was an important one.

incorporated a particular research avenue from the civil wars sub-field. The avenue is widely referred to as the 'micro-analytical turn', evident from the mid-2000s onwards.[41]

The micro-analytical turn advanced beyond large-N studies that sought broad conclusions about conflict. Instead, it focused on investigating ground-level dynamics. Scholars such as Stathis Kalyvas and Jeremy Weinstein led this wave of research, which provided key insights for the field.[42] Paul Staniland and Anoop Sarbahi have applied this approach for the northeast.[43] The latter – for instance – suggested that the Mizo uprising can be explained by the Mizo National Front's (MNF) ability to tap into the 'enhanced structural connectivity' of Mizo society. In short, Mizo society was particularly well integrated because of the influence of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and the MNF exploited this cohesion to start civil conflict.[44] This provided a nuanced appraisal of the immediate turn towards violence in the Mizo Hills between 1961-66, but its utility for investigating the broader conflict dynamics of the northeast was limited, as shown shortly.

Altogether, developments within the civil wars sub-field have been influential for research on the northeast. These developments provided a platform to explore grievances and

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[41] Sidney Tarrow, 'Inside Insurgencies: Politics and Violence in an Age of Civil War', *Perspectives on Politics*, 5.3 (2007), 587–600.

[42] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Kalyvas found that the contours of civil war violence were a continuation of pre-war social dynamics, while Weinstein suggested that the composition of an armed group (especially its economic capabilities) were indicators about levels of violence implemented and the durability of commitment of rebel volunteers.

[43] A central concern for Staniland's research was to understand how pre-war networks determined rebel group organisation and his subsequent work – especially on Nagaland – has provided insightful analysis for framing 'orders' of conflict. See, Paul Staniland, 'Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia', *International Security*, 37.1 (2012), 142–77; Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014); Paul Staniland, 'Armed Politics and the Study of Intrastate Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, 54.4 (2017), 459–67.

[44] Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion'.

greed, followed by an interrogation of the role of the state and finally a bottom-up approach to conflict dynamics. However, clear gaps still exist. The primary motivation of this thesis is to fill these gaps by providing a more robust explanation for the northeast's distinctive nature in the past four decades.

The grievance and greed paradigms have been critiqued for some time, whilst analysis of the state has led to partial conclusions. The former can oversimplify the nature of civil wars. Grievances exist in myriad forms, across multiple societies that do not lead to armed violence. They often offer partial explanations at best. The Naga uprising, for example, did involve grievances against the state, but they do not alone explain the emergence of an armed nationalist movement. Chapter II of the thesis demonstrates this. State decisions and administrative structures are also important, but they leave several questions unanswered about how a rebel group operates within such conditions. There are still significant steps that need to be taken before a 'weak' state is faced with an insurgent movement.[45] These approaches provide partial answers, but alone are insufficient.

This basic logic motivated the microanalytical turn, but even this turn has its drawbacks. Sarbahi's work, for example, offers a strong elucidation of how the MNF could mount an armed challenge between 1961-66. Less apparent is how an environment emerged where a nationalist movement could arise, and the MNF's ability to attain popular support for a separatist cause that would entail significant suffering and sacrifice for Mizo citizens. It remains unclear why this region was so supportive of a separatist movement, and how the Mizo Hills became such

[45] This is before considering the usefulness of the 'weak' state paradigm, which can oversimplify how states exercise control whilst producing overly-dichotomic research agendas. For some ruminations on the idea of the weak state, see Sara Fregonese, 'Beyond the "Weak State": Hybrid Sovereignties in Beirut', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30.4 (2012), 655–74; Agustina Giraudy, 'Conceptualizing State Strength: Moving beyond Strong and Weak States', *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 32.3 (2012), 599–611.

a hotbed for insurgency. Therefore, the structural factors behind this idiosyncratic amalgamation of conflict dynamics in the northeast remains unexplained.

This thesis offers an explanation. In doing so, it begins with Fearon and Laitin's basic premise. Their article's raison d'être was to find the conditions that favoured insurgency; the ability to identify environments conducive for conflict leads, naturally, to more comprehensive explanations for violence. The same premise is incorporated here, but with a radically different approach. Intrastate conflict literature too often neglects both temporal and spatial dimensions. Rather than analysing static indicators – such as weak states – the thesis embarks on a concerted geo-historical analysis of a particular region. Each of the three core themes noted previously – related to state perception, identity-building and the precedents of insurgency – developed over time and became structural problems during decolonisation. Therefore, the thesis allows temporal and spatial factors to take precedence when providing an explanation for the northeast's volatility.

The long decolonisation.

Temporally, this thesis is focused on the decolonisation process. It argues that the ramifications of this unfolding process were fundamental in the production of the northeast's 'exceptional' instability. Decolonisation – as understood here – unfolded over a protracted period and embedded key challenges, in both the short- and long- term, for the region.

From the outset, this framing could be seen as problematic. Christopher J. Lee has noted how decolonisation 'poses fundamental challenges for the historian. From an empirical standpoint, it is both a contingent moment of political independence *and* a long-standing

process with deep roots…'.[46] Decolonisation is understood in various guises; it can be conceptualised both as a cultural manifestation and an observable historic process.[47] This thesis focuses on the latter. It does not deny the former but suggests that continuing to analyse decolonisation as a process has critical scholarly value. As Lee has further identified,

> Frederick Cooper… has pointed to empirical gaps in recent work that has assigned postcolonial blame on past colonial projects, a common approach that can often obscure the importance of the late colonial and early postcolonial period in shaping the era that followed. In this way, it is important to re-examine the events and features of decolonization in order to restore the competing strategies and complex visions that not only sought to achieve future outcomes, but at the time sought to inventively reshape the legacies of the past to serve such present endeavours.[48]

It is important to understand decolonisation as a cultural manifestation that provides clear contemporary challenges.[49] But this should not obscure the potency of historical enquiry, when focused on decolonisation as a process. Lee and Cooper are right to suggest that overlooking decolonisation can lead to flawed historical understandings and this starting point is crucial for the argument proposed in this thesis.[50]

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[46] Christopher J. Lee, 'Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung', in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. by Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 1–44 (p. 5).

[47] Additionally, for a recent discussion about whether decolonisation constitutes a 'method' of historical enquiry, see Nilanjan Sarkar et al, *Tough Talk 3: Decolonising History: Method or Fact?*, YouTube, 7 October 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqAf_9O32NM> [accessed 20 October 2021].

[48] Lee, 'Between a Moment', pp. 9-10.

[49] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1.1 (2012), 1-40. Tuck and Yang were particularly keen to ensure it does not become a buzzword, exploited in policy and education to the point of diluting the entire premise of critiquing power structures established by 'settler colonialism'.

[50] More generally, there is a risk in obscuring – or even moving away from – decolonisation as an observable historical process. Just because decolonisation is rarely – if ever – wholly complete does not mean the political, economic, and social changes that accompany decolonisation have no impact. To obscure the notion of decolonisation into abstraction is particularly dangerous because it can lead to oversimplified narratives. This is, in essence, the point made by both Cooper and Lee. For the northeast, the ramifications of colonial rule were

In this sense, then, decolonisation is understood as an unfolding process rather than a singular event. This claim is not particularly novel.[51] But it is worth highlighting that research into the moment of Pakistan and India's 'flag independence' of 14-15 August 1947 has converged around a similar understanding.[52] The partition of British India is now widely viewed as a process rather than an event.[53] Similarly, a wealth of research focused on South Asia[54] and further afield also subscribes to this temporal sensitivity when approaching

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obviously significant, as outlined in chapter I. But they do not, alone, explain the northeast's volatility. The process of decolonisation was critical.

[51] Virtually all the major readers, edited collections and special issues focused on decolonisation identify this baseline starting point; decolonisation was a lengthy process. Indeed, Fanon highlighted this reality at the very beginning of *The Wretched of the Earth.* See, for example, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 2; Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*, translated by Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 1-34; Farina Mir, 'AHR Roundtable: The Archives of Decolonization. Introduction', *The American Historical Review*, 120.3 (2015), 844–51; Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006).

[52] The term 'flag independence' is used frequently in the literature on decolonisation to distinguish between the specific decolonial moment, and the broader processes of decolonisation which provide the more useful prisms of historical enquiry. See, for example, Andrew Thompson and Martin Thomas, 'Rethinking Decolonization: A New Research Agenda for the Twenty-First Century', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, ed. by Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1–22.

[53] New directions in partition studies helped usher a shift away from 'high politics' and towards a reinterrogation of what had actually occurred. Works by Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Khamla Bhasin were particularly influential in this regard. See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (London: C. Hurst, 2000); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1998). As part of a desire to synthesise the fundamental questions about why partition happened, alongside attaining a clearer picture of what unfolded at ground-level, several studies have been published in the past two decades which attempt to understand this wider partition 'process'. This framing of Partition as a process is a core aspect of the field today. For two particularly useful texts in this regard, see, Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India*.

[54] Sarah Ansari, *Life after Partition: Migration, Community and Strife in Sindh, 1947-1962* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Sarah Ansari and William Gould, *Boundaries of Belonging: Localities, Citizenship and Rights in India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Sanjib Baruah, 'The Partition's Long Shadow: The Ambiguities of Citizenship in Assam, India', *Citizenship Studies*, 13.6 (2009), 593–606; *Partition: The Long Shadow*, ed. by Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Zubaan Books, 2015); Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship, 1946-1970', *The Historical Journal*, 55.4 (2012), 1049-1071; Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947-1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947-1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, ed. by Suvir Kaul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007); *Constitution Making in Asia: Decolonisation and State-Building in the Aftermath of the British Empire*, ed. by Harshan Kumarasingham (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Gyan Prakash, Nikhil Menon, and Michael Laffan (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).*From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday*

decolonisation.[55] Yet, greater reflection on this protracted, irregular 'disaggregation' of the colonial order into its post-colonial variants is important to understand the northeast's conflict dynamics.[56]

Decolonisation had many layers. For example, relevant literature has identified how migration and movement often provided a key challenge for decolonising states, especially within those witnessing boundary changes.[57] Migration invariably entailed questions of citizenship, necessitating standardised conceptions of the nation to provide a distinct line between citizen and (im)migrant.[58] Confronting questions of citizenship and providing national unity was a cornerstone of nation-making for any post-colonial state, yet solutions were never

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State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970, ed. by Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould, and Sarah Ansari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); *Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics*, ed. by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer, and Rahul K. Gairola (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016); Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[55] For notes on historiographical developments regarding decolonisation in Africa, see Jean Allman, 'Between the Present and History: African Nationalism and Decolonization', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, ed. by John Parker and Richard Reid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 225–37; Michael Collins, 'Nation, State and Agency: Evolving Historiographies of African Decolonization', in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?*, ed. by Andrew W.M Smith and Chris Jeppesen (London: UCL Press, 2017), pp. 17–42. For an example of this idea in practice, Frederick Cooper's analysis of the multiple imaginings of decolonisation over a fifteen-year period offers a useful recent illustration. See, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[56] Joya Chatterji, 'Decolonization in South Asia: The Long View', in Thomas and Thompson, *Ends of Empire*, pp. 251–69 (p. 252).

[57] Uditi Sen's work offers a clear starting point for the refugee crisis sparked by the partition of British India. See, Uditi Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For studies that interrogate migration dynamics in the metropole, see, Stephen Ashe, Satnam Virdee, and Laurence Brown, 'Striking Back against Racist Violence in the East End of London, 1968–1970', *Race & Class*, 58.1 (2016), 34–54; Sharif Gemie, *French Muslims: New Voices in Contemporary France* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 66–85; Kennetta Hammond Perry, 'Black Britain and the Politics of Race in the 20th Century', *History Compass*, 12.8 (2014), 651–63.

[58] For overviews of citizenship dynamics in a South Asian context, see, Chatterji, 'Histories of Citizenship'; Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 150–95; Zamindar, *The Long Partition*. For an overview of similar questions of citizenship in Africa, see, Frederick Cooper, 'Decolonization and citizenship: Africa between empires and a world of nations', in *Beyond Empire and Nation: The Decolonization of African and Asian Societies, 1930s-1960s*, ed. by Els Bogaerts and Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), pp. 39-67.

straightforward.[59] State-building has proved to be as critical as nation-making: a principal task for any post-colonial government that rarely unfolded without tension.[60] The two, it must be stressed, were not always exclusive and at times directly contradicted one another.[61] Further critical components of decolonisation can be found in the use of colonial forms of violence in post-colonial states.[62] The desire to attain a monopoly over legitimate forms of violence often led to such practices.[63] Culturally, decolonisation has produced myriad effects, ranging from inclusivity in sports, to displays in museums and the organisation of archives.[64]

In short, the fissures of decolonisation are manifold, providing a complex canvas from which to work. It is within this literature that the tripartite trends that anchor this thesis – related

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[59] For example, nation-making has often intertwined with conventional international norms about how far alternate nationalist imaginaries can – and cannot – be advanced. See, Lydia Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making', *Past & Present*, 242.1 (2019), 227–64. The international arena itself has produced a variety of effects, in relation to globalisation and international relations. See, John T. Sidel, 'Nationalism in Post-Independence Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis', in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. by John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 472–90; Martin Thomas and Andrew Thompson, 'Empire and Globalization: From High Imperialism to Decolonization', *The International History Review*, 36 (2014), 142–70.

[60] Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-65* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 13-17.

[61] Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, 'Nation-Building or State-Making? India's North-East Frontier and the Ambiguities of Nehruvian Developmentalism, 1950–1959', *Contemporary South Asia*, 21.1 (2013), 22–37; Willem van Schendel, 'Stateless in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61.1 (2002), 115–47.

[62] For an introductory overview of the uses of violence in decolonisation, see Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless, 'Introduction: Decolonization, Conflict and Counter-insurgency', in *Decolonization and Conflict: Colonial Comparisons and Legacies*, ed. by Martin Thomas and Gareth Curless (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 1-21. For greater reflection on the distinctions (and lack of) drawn between colonial and post-colonial forms of violence, see, Kim A. Wagner, 'Seeing Like a Soldier: The Amritsar Massacre and the Politics of Military History', in Thomas and Curless, *Decolonization and Conflict*, pp. 23–37; Ajay Verghese, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[63] *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures: 'Science as a Vocation', 'Politics as a Vocation'*, ed. by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004).

[64] For notes on each of the topics respectively, see, Boria Majumdar, 'Cricket in India: Representative Playing Field to Restrictive Preserve', in Chakrabarty et al, *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial*, pp. 159–81; Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020); Jordanna Bailkin, 'Where Did the Empire Go? Archives and Decolonization in Britain', *The American Historical Review*, 120.3 (2015), 884–99.

to state, nation and insurgency – have been formed. The former two have been extensively researched, offering an intellectual platform to build upon. The latter has developed here independently as a further paradigm to add into the convoluted stew of decolonisation trends. Sensitivity to relevant processes within decolonisation has, therefore, provided a framework in which to operate. But in addition to creating this thematic framework, this literature has also raised further important questions about the temporal scale and ultimately totality of decolonisation as a frame for this thesis.

Starting with temporal scale, the evolution of research into decolonisation begged a fundamental question: when does a state become post-colonial?[65] Dipesh Chakrabarty argued that in South Asia the 'shedding' of colonial rule was a prolonged process, stretching from the 1920s until the end of the Nehruvian era.[66] As he noted, 'the transition, it seemed to us, was a long one'.[67] Chakrabarty's notion of the long decolonisation is incorporated here, but quite a different timeframe is suggested for the northeast. Based on insights from the literature, it is argued here that decolonisation in the northeast began in the early 1940s – as the effects of war instigated the breakdown of colonial governance – and lasted until the early 1970s.[68] It is important to stress that decolonisation was not total. Based on the discussions identified earlier, it is debatable whether any society can ever become wholly decolonised.[69] But by 1972, the

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[65] Thompson and Thomas, 'Rethinking Decolonization', p. 3.

[66] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition', in Chakrabarty et al, *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial*, pp. 1-10.

[67] *Ibid*, p. 3.

[68] The 1942 start date is drawn out in greater detail in chapter I. In short, it suggests that the fall of Rangoon kick-started the demise of colonial power in the northeast, as it became a key staging post within the CBI Theatre of war.

[69] For some reflections beyond South Asia about the multifaceted ways in which forms of colonial control persist – beyond those cited above and below – see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition, Indigenous Americas* (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization', *South*

Indian state had created a political and economic structure for the northeast that differed markedly from its colonial counterpart. This politico-economic decolonisation provides the temporal scope of the thesis.

The political map of India's northeast differed little from its colonial predecessor until federal reorganisation in 1972. The core polity remained largely intact as the old Assam province provided the template for the post-independence state of Assam. This mirrored the retention of the colonial 'imprint' elsewhere in India in the first decades after independence.[70] The former princely states of Manipur and Tripura were integrated first as part C states, then later as union territories, with little tangible regional power granted.[71] The only significant changes – in the Naga Hills in 1957 and 1963 – were a reaction to the threat of the Naga separatist movement and only emphasised the problems inherent to the old colonial model that the Indian nation-state still clung to. Therefore, the map of the northeast changed little before 1972. It was only as the state recognised that the old colonial template – which still conditioned the federal structure of the region – was fundamentally impractical in an independent, democratic nation-state that political decolonisation began.

If federal restructuring took decades to implement, then efforts to provide greater levels of democratic governance were more forthcoming. However, the aim to provide autonomy in regional administration in Assam's borderlands was hindered by practical problems. The Sixth

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Atlantic Quarterly, 111.1 (2012), 95–109; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (Oxford: African Books Collective, 2013).

[70] Louise Tillin, *Remapping India: New States and Their Political Origins* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), pp. 29-31.

[71] Rani Pathak Das has suggested that this delay in granting political concessions, through the empty gestures of part C and later UT status, was an explanatory factor in the origins of militancy in Manipur. See Rani Pathak Das, 'Militancy in Manipur: Origin, Dynamics and Future', *Asia Europe Journal*, 6 (2008), 561–74.

Schedule of the Indian constitution signified a departure from colonial norms of governance in the hills, but the powers of the district councils were too limited to implement meaningful change.[72] On the northern border, in the old North East Frontier Tracts, rule was still centralised in the hands of the Governor in the early years after independence, whilst the provisions for regional administration in Tripura and Manipur were weak until the passing of statehood.[73] The state attempted to create local forms of democratic governance, but before the 1972 reorganisation the internal logic of political control still rested on colonial precedents. Power was still concentrated in the Assam Legislative Assembly and within the hands of the Governor – who answered directly to the central government – until greater changes were issued after the 1972 reorganisation. After 1972, the post-colonial approach to local governance became clearer, even if – as chapter V identifies – this new model fared little better than its colonial predecessor.

In the economic sphere, a similarly cumbersome crawl towards the post-colonial was evident. The centralised planning of the Nehruvian era did not explicitly account for the northeastern borderlands and socio-economic stagnation was a prominent conclusion of the Pataskar Report produced in the mid-1960s.[74] The report clearly stated that little had changed for Assam's hills since 1947, noting a prevalent feeling that development issues were

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[72] Bengt G. Karlsson, 'Sovereignty through Indigenous Governance: Reviving "traditional Political Institutions" in Northeast India', in *The Politics of Belonging in India: Becoming Adivasi*, ed. by Daniel J Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 141–53; David Stuligross, 'Autonomous Councils in Northeast India: Theory and Practice', *Alternatives*, 24.4 (1999), 497–526.

[73] This followed with a clear chain of command in the NEFA by 1956, after the establishment of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service. Directly below the Governor was an advisor, who in turn oversaw an administrative and development branch. Specially trained Political Officers were tasked with administrative issues, whilst development schemes fell in the domain of a Development Commissioner (who had several specialist departments to consult). See Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States: India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 105-6.

[74] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), pp. 9-12, 20-30.

subordinated to the needs of the plains: an acutely colonial outlook.[75] It was only with the establishment of the North Eastern Council (NEC) – again in the early 1970s – that a concertedly post-colonial economic conception of the region was born. Again, this economic reorganisation was racked with contradictions – as shown in chapter V and argued elsewhere[76] – but it was a shift away from the colonial imprint which lingered in economic planning after 1947.

This politico-economic decolonisation resolves the challenge of temporal scale, but in terms of totality a glaring question remains. Was this decolonisation apparent for all? 1972 was a fundamental point, when most state officials felt a notable change had occurred. But this was not necessarily the case for everyone; a Subaltern lens would be particularly critical of this top-down framing.[77] For many local communities, these politico-economic changes resulted in marginal – at best – ground-level ramifications.[78] 1972 would be similarly contested by virtually all the separatist leadership identified in this thesis. A core narrative of the Naga and Mizo independence movements was that colonialism merely changed its metropolitan centre

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[75] Though it should be stressed that recent research has looked at the ways indigenous communities sought to resist colonial practices of isolation. The literature accepts that isolation was a core theme but aims to nuance to the isolation and assimilation binary. See, Kyle Jackson, 'Globalizing an Indian Borderland Environment: Aijal, Mizoram, 1890–1919', *Studies in History*, 32.1 (2016), 39-71.

[76] Elisabeth Leake, 'Where National and International Meet: Borders and Border Regions in Postcolonial India', *The International History Review* (2021), 1–18.

[77] U. Chandra, 'Rethinking Subaltern Resistance', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 45.4 (2015), 563–73; Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); David Ludden, 'A Brief History of Subalternity', in *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, ed. by David Ludden (London: Anthem, 2002), pp. 1–39.

[78] Indeed, for swathes of the Mizo populace, the changes of 1972 were a completely abstract unfolding as the civil war continued to unfold. For instance, a report produced by the Mizo Hills police superintendent for the village of Maubuang in 1974 is insightful. As the report suggested, MNF forces had outlined troop movements as well as justice and taxation policies for the village which made a mockery of the politico-economic changes for the wider northeast. See Aizawl, Mizoram State Archives (hereafter 'MSA') Gen 1434/119. Report of Superintendent of Police SB & CID, Mizoram, 1 July 1974.

in 1947, from London to New Delhi.[79] The politico-economic changes by 1972 did not pacify these separatist movements and, by extension, did not come close to removing the perceived colonial continuity in the northeast.

The question of totality, therefore, provides a key point of qualification for the decolonisation process outlined in this thesis. This process was fundamental; it was a period that created lasting challenges for the northeast's instability. But it was not total, and 1972 should be viewed as a key moment in the northeast's history. It should not, however, be seen as a complete end point to decolonisation, a clean cut between the colonial and post-colonial order. Decolonisation is nowhere this clear-cut, but this does not negate the importance of the period between 1942-72.

Considering the above, it is clear why the decolonisation of the northeast should be viewed as a protracted process, rather than a singular event, and why decolonisation as a historical process is important for scholarly enquiry. Furthermore, although the lingering ramifications of colonial rule still affect the contemporary northeast – especially in a legislative and cultural sense – a top-down politico-economic decolonisation did unfold by 1972, one clearly recognised by state officials.[80] As Sanjib Baruah has suggested, from 1972 the area was

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[79] Thus, as Walker has identified, this seizure of the infrastructure of colonial rule by the dominant anti-colonial elements – in this case Congress – actively curtailed Naga independence claims on the world stage. See, Lydia Walker, 'Who Deserves Independence?', *Past & Present*, 2019 <https://pastandpresent.org.uk/who-deserves-independence/> [accessed 4 March 2022].

[80] In a legislative sense, this is clearest in the use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. This is a form of emergency legislation that had clearer forerunners during British rule, as identified in greater detail in chapter II. For a brief overview of the colonial origins of the AFSPA, see Sanjib Baruah, 'AFSPA: Legacy of Colonial Constitutionalism', 2010 <https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615_sanjib_baruah.htm> [accessed 28 June 2021]. In a cultural sense, this is eloquently articulated by Dolly Kikon's reflections on Naga nationalism. She essentially suggested that colonial experience led to the conceptual creation of blank spaces, inhabited by 'primordial savages'. This institutionalisation – through spatial categories and enforced by power-knowledge practices such as map-making – formed part of the colonial habitus: the cultural act of othering borderland communities. She then suggested this provided the top-down template for the post-colonial (Indian) state to perpetuate the colonial psyche. See Dolly Kikon, 'From Loincloth, Suits, to Battle Greens: Politics of Clothing the "Naked" Nagas', in Baruah, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 81–100.

a ‘postcolonial coinage… an artefact of deliberate policy’.[81] This statement holds weight. Just because the post-colonial model after 1972 was ineffective, does not mean that it was not a significant departure from political and economic imperatives of colonialism. Within this timeframe – from 1942 until 1972 – core trends were established that affected the long-term stability of India’s northeast. Thus, the long decolonisation was critical.

The Assam highlands.

The long decolonisation was crucially important in a specific region of the northeast. This region is referred to as the ‘Assam highlands’, shown in map 1. The space is a fluid one, a common trait for borderland imaginations.[82] It has been forged as an analytical tool through a combination of geo-historical and political observations.

[81] Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, pp. 1, 25-46.

[82] Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, ‘Special Section: Borders, Borderlands and Theory: An Introduction’, *Geopolitics*, 16.1 (2011), 1–6.

Map 1: The Assam highlands[83]

[83] Map template taken from Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. xiii.

This construct - the Assam highlands – rejects an implicit acceptance of the 'northeast' as a useful analytical paradigm. Udayon Misra was among those to criticise the generic use of this 'umbrella' term. He argued its use as a shorthand betrayed the diversity of the region.[84] Several scholars have agreed. Research avenues have been established to provide more rigorous spatial conceptualisations, especially those that delve into the apparent dichotomy between hill and valley.[85] The transition from the colonial to the post-colonial involved radically different trajectories across the northeast. Therefore, greater reflection on spatial parameters is key.

In the Assam Valley, the upheavals witnessed during the partition process were similar to what unfolded in the more well-known case-studies of Bengal and Punjab.[86] Communal violence was a recurring theme in the reports compiled by Assam's colonial Governor, as the politics of religion affected the Brahmaputra plains.[87] In the Barak Valley, partition lines produced an international boundary as Sylhet was incorporated into East Pakistan whilst Cachar remained part of Assam, ensuring confused migratory patterns akin to other parts of the subcontinent.[88] The integration of the princely states of Manipur and Tripura mirrored the

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[84] Misra, *India's North-East*, p. 8.

[85] David Gellner's edited collection, for example, proposed a subregion called 'Northern South Asia', which included parts of the northeast. Some of the contributions to the edited collection were focused on Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. The first issue of the *Highlander* journal had a similarly innovative approach to space. See, *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, ed. by, David N. Gellner (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Arkotong Longkumer and Michael Heneise, 'The Highlander: An Introduction to Highland Asia', *The Highlander*, 1.1 (2019), 1–18.

[86] Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*, 1st Indian paperback (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988).

[87] London, The British Library (hereafter 'BL') IOR L PJ/5/140. A. G. Clow to Lord Mountbatten, 3 April 1947; A. G. Clow to Lord Mountbatten, 2 May 1947.

[88] Anindita Dasgupta, 'Denial and Resistance'.

at times chaotic incorporation of princely state elsewhere in India.[89] In the borderlands, another series of trajectories emerged.

The hill regions of Assam largely fell under the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Order, established by the 1935 Government of India Act.[90] The Assam highlands was wholly engulfed within this administrative remit. The political climate in the highlands was largely more benign in 1947 than the Assam Valley, despite smaller scale clashes and the embryonic signs of alternative nationalist imaginaries.[91] In many places, 15 August 1947 passed without note.[92] Yet, by the end of the long decolonisation the Assam highlands had witnessed widespread political activism and two separate civil wars. This space was the first to witness insurgency in the northeast, faced the greatest levels of insecurity during decolonisation and produced the most concerted challenge to Indian sovereignty. Without the trends established

[89] For the Nizam of Hyderabad's declaration of independence, and the subsequent 'Police Action' by the state, for example, see Sunil Purushotham, 'Internal Violence: The "Police Action" in Hyderabad', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57.2 (2015), 435–66; Taylor C. Sherman, 'The Integration of the Princely State of Hyderabad and the Making of the Postcolonial State in India, 1948–56', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 44.4 (2007), 489–516. Meanwhile, for a good overview evident in the archive for the ground-level intricacies in the former princely states around independence, see, BL IOR L PS/13/1003. E. T. D. Lambert, 'Special Report: Manipur State', 14 September 1948.

[90] BL IOR L PS 12/3115A. Act No. CLXVI of 1936, 'The Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936'.

[91] MSA Gen 717/58. L. L. Peters to G. E. D. Walker, 4 March 1948.

[92] Mildred Archer's tour diaries provided insight into the mood of the Naga Hills in August 1947. Archer reflected that 'most people in England saw this phase of history from the point of view of Delhi and those areas where there was trouble - the North West Frontier Province, the Punjab, and Calcutta. They did not see it from the point of view of the remote districts nor did they see how it affected the life of the ordinary villager'. The notes she made in her journal whilst touring the Mokokchung Subdivision in the summer of 1947 offered a valuable alternate perspective. She spent 15 August at the town of Sanis, and wrote that 'today seemed just like any other day'. See, The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'British Colonial Administration in the Naga Hills', December 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67005.html> [accessed 20 March 2018]; The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'Trip to Kohima - Independence Day at Sanis', 15 August 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67083.html> [accessed 21 March 2018].

during the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands, the conflict dynamics of the broader northeast would not have unfolded as they did.

To understand this spatial conception, Willem van Schendel's concept of Zomia is a fundamental starting point.[93] This idea was adapted by James C. Scott, who argued that the inaccessible regions of the 'Southeast Asian massif' historically constituted a discernible landmass. These hill regions were home to a variety of cultures and languages and had far more in common with each other than the plains regions of their respective states. Zomia therefore formed a 'shatter zone' home to 'non-state spaces' that actively resisted the encroachment of the modern state.[94] The geographic scope of Zomia is shown in map 2.

[93] Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', *Environment and Planning D - Society & Space*, 20.6 (2002), 647–68.

[94] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 1-40.

Map 2: Zomia[95]

Scott's use of the Zomian shatter zone is a starting point for understanding the notion of the Assam highlands, but further expansion is necessary.

The Assam highlands was a zone of active resistance, a collection of non-state spaces. However, this space was also conditioned by colonial initiatives and administrative practices. The enforced isolationism of the highlands and the psychological boundaries created by colonial rule are expanded upon in chapter I, largely under the conception of 'frontier governmentality' advanced by Benjamin D. Hopkins. But at this point it is important to note that colonial policies such as the Inner Line Permit were critical.[96] A space of active resistance was conditioned by British rule which created artificial boundaries for the highlands, largely

[95] *Ibid.,* p. 17.

[96] Debojyoti Das, 'Understanding Margins, State Power, Space and Territoriality in the Naga Hills', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 29.1 (2014), 63–80.

cutting them off from their surrounding geographies.[97] Therefore, Scott's conception of Zomia provides a gateway into understanding the Assam highlands, but the two are not synonymous.[98]

The space is both a geo-historical and political conception. But it has further been theorised through empirical reasoning. Table 1 – which gives an overview of the Excluded and Partially Excluded Legislation – demonstrates this.

Table 1: ***The Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936.***[99]

Excluded Areas	**Partially Excluded Areas**
Lushai (Mizo) Hills District	Garo Hills
Naga Hills District	Khasi and Jaintia Hills (British portion, excluding Shillong Municipality)
North Cachar Hills (Subdivision)	
North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT)	Mikir Hills

The NEFT would technically fit the spatial framing thus far. It was a classic non-state space that fell under the Excluded Areas Order. But from an analytical standpoint, it offers less for

[97] The term 'largely' is used because colonial administrative boundaries did not create a definitive border between the highlands and its neighbouring regions. Rather, communities in the highlands sought ways to sidestep colonial administrative boundaries with varying levels of success. Overall, it does not contradict the isolation thesis, but indicates that there was more movement within the highlands than may be assumed by a rigid adherence to the ideas of Scott, Hopkins or in the argument presented in this thesis. See, Bengt G. Karlsson, 'Evading the State: Ethnicity in Northeast India through the Lens of James Scott', *Asian Ethnology*, 72.2 (2013), 321–31; Yengkhom Jilangamba, 'Beyond the Ethno-Territorial Binary: Evidencing the Hill and Valley Peoples in Manipur', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38.2 (2015), 276–89; Jelle J. P. Wouters, 'Keeping the Hill Tribes at Bay: A Critique from India's Northeast of James C. Scott's Paradigm of State Evasion', *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 39 (2011), 41–65.

[98] For some further discussions about the utility of Zomia as a theoretical construct, see Bernard Formoso, 'Zomian or Zombies? What future exists for the peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif?', *Journal of Global History*, 5.2 (2010), 313-332; Victor Lieberman, 'A zone of refuge in Southeast Asia? Reconceptualizing interior spaces', *Journal of Global History*, 5.2 (2010), 333-346; Jean Michaud, 'Editorial – Zomia and beyond', *Journal of Global History*, 5.2 (2010), 187-214; Sara Shneiderman, 'Are the Central Himalayas in Zomia? Some Scholarly and Political Considerations across Time and Space', *Journal of Global History*, 5.2 (2010), 289–31.

[99] BL IOR L PS 12/3115A. Act No. CLXVI of 1936, 'The Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936'.

understanding conflict dynamics in the northeast.[100] The demographics of the NEFT ensured that resolute identity movements did not emerge as they did in the highlands.[101] Crucially, the NEFT was administered by the central government after independence, rather than the provincial Assam government.[102] This politico-administrative reality compounds the differing dynamics surrounding identity politics in the NEFT and indicates why the region does not fall under the remit of the Assam highlands. The Assam highlands all evolved with reference to the Assam government and its administration.

The other outliers are the Mikir and North Cachar Hills, which ultimately became one political space by the early 1950s.[103] As with the NEFT, the levels of political agitation were low, suggesting why they do not belong with the spatial imagining proposed here.[104] What defined the Assam highlands was its geo-historical formations and political-administrative history alongside the existence of distinctive, powerful identity movements that developed significantly during decolonisation.

Therefore, the Assam highlands is a construct that builds upon the scholarly advances of van Schendel and Scott but incorporates the political and ethno-cultural developments of the

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[100] This, of course, does not mean that studying the spaces of present-day Arunachal Pradesh is a forlorn pursuit. Bérénice Guyot-Réchard's analysis, for example, demonstrates the significance of the region to international politics as a site of contestation between India and China. See Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States.*

[101] Though, as shown in chapter II, the Naga communities within the NEFT formed a core area of support for the NNC, especially in its early days.

[102] Leake, 'Where National and International Meet', p. 5.

[103] Arvind K. Sharma, 'District Councils in the North-East', *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 43.3 (1997): 783-793.

[104] The presence of Congress was much stronger here, which proved crucial. The eventual decline of the INC's power in the Mikir Hills – later Karbi Anglong – and the North Cachar region was a notable factor in the later emergence of political demands for autonomy. See Monirul Hussain, 'Tribal Movement for Autonomous State in Assam', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22.32 (1987), 1329–32.

northeast. From these observations, a clear spatial core of the highlands emerges. The Garo, Khasi and Jaintia, Lushai (Mizo) and Naga Hills are central, with an appreciation that the highlands was still a fluid unit with 'fuzzy' edges.[105] The interrelation of geo-historical, political and ethno-cultural developments outlines why this region should be understand as the *Assam* highlands, despite the clear disconnect to *Assamese* culture and society in the highlands. For instance, the Assamese language has been largely shunned in the highlands and the claim that the border regions form part of a 'natural' Assamese space is a discourse pioneered solely by Assam nationalists – a discourse opposed especially from within the highlands.[106] The Assam highlands is, therefore, a geo-political and cultural space, but not one that aligns with Assamese culture and identity.

The Assam highlands was not pre-determined to create a serious challenge to Indian sovereignty, but the dynamics of violence and political activism during the long decolonisation established some key long-term structuring factors for the northeast. The area – with its complex historical background – faced several challenges as independence loomed. These challenges were not insurmountable but required resolution. The inability to provide a lasting solution to challenges presented in state-building, nation-building and in confronting insurgency ensured that the processes felt in the highlands had ramifications beyond its own borders.

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[105] Leake, *The Defiant Border*, p. 2; Arkotong Longkumer, 'Rice-Beer, Purification and Debates over Religion and Culture in Northeast India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39.2 (2016), 444–61 (p. 459); Thompson and Thomas, 'Rethinking Decolonization', pp. 2-3.

[106] During the period covered in this thesis, the number of Assamese speakers in – for instance – the Mizo Hills numbered in the hundreds. Around seventy-nine per cent of the population spoke Mizo as their primary language, whilst there were more Nepali speakers than the combined total of people who listed Assamese or Bengali as their mother tongue. See, E. H. Pakyntein, *Census of India, Volume III: Assam. Part II-C: Cultural and Migration Tables* (Gauhati: Indian Administrative Service, 1965), pp. 74-89.

The perception that the Indian state was weak was a motivating factor for the northeast's insurgencies from the late 1970s onwards. The inability to reconcile regional identity movements within a broader national consciousness resonated in other parts of the northeast lacking an ideological attachment to the nation. The precedents established by the Naga underground and the Mizo separatist movement provided a clear set of instructions in how to successfully challenge the Indian state. Other groups aiming to contest the authority of the Republic had a ready-made guidebook to work from. Together, this theorisation of time and space provides the platform to understand how an insurgency environment is forged.

Scholarship on the northeast, source material and thesis structure.

The argument produced here has notable implications for scholarship on India's northeast. In a recently published review article – focused on histories of the region – Anandaroop Sen identified how the influence of the Zomian paradigm led to a 'reorientation of scales' in research as Partition became a central theme.[107] Compared to the general dearth of research that preceded it, the past two decades have seen greater focus on both Partition and the broader decolonisation of the northeast.[108]

A recurrent trend in the literature that predated this shift was the penchant for viewing the northeast solely within nationalist narratives. As Sajal Nag wrote, 'unless the stories of [the] north east are integrated with the history of the rest of the country, a *true national history* can never be achieved. Historiographical integration has to be a prerequisite to national

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[107] Anandaroop Sen, 'Genealogies of Exception: Writing Histories of North-East India', *History Compass*, 20.2 (2022), e12710 (p. 7).

[108] Though, of course, Partition was not completed ignored. For instance, the eighth chapter of Amalendu Guha's seminal work on the northeast focuses on independence, but this is framed primarily within the broader freedom struggle. See, Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, 2nd edn (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1988), pp. 306-333.

integration.'[109] This framing of the northeast's history squarely within a nation-centric lens hindered enquiry, but the Zomian frame that Sen identified produced less nationalist inclined histories.[110]

A key work by van Schendel – who coined Zomia – took a spatial approach to Partition and decolonisation that invited scholars to think about the northeast in four ways. He suggested the northeast needed to be understood as a 'new' space – considering the Partition lines of 1947 – and a 'contested' space. He further framed the region as a 'vertical' space – literally one where social inequality emerged from 'differences in land altitude' – and a 'fragmenting' space due to the ongoing boundary changes after 1947.[111] This spatial imagining was one of several newer works at odds with nation-centric approaches that opened new vistas for research. Within this complex spatial imagining of how decolonisation unfolded, there is one core commonality that links most research.

The major point of convergence has been to identify the continuation of colonial trends after 1947. Bodhisattva Kar – for example – has questioned whether coloniality has ever ceased.[112] He suggested the contemporary focus on the northeast's future, couched in the language of development and capital, is framed squarely as an extension of colonial

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[109] Sajal Nag, *India and North-East India: Mind, Politics and the Process of Integration, 1946-1950* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1998), p. 6.

[110] It should be noted that Nag had identified some key processes to interrogate, despite the nation-centric critique noted above. For instance, he identified the contestation between nationalist pan-Indian sentiment and 'separatist tendencies' as a core aspect of decolonisation. This line of enquiry has more recently been interrogated by Lydia Walker, who focused on 'the peoples for whom 1960s global decolonization did not mean national liberation'. See, Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s'; Walker, 'Who Deserves Independence?'.

[111] Willem Van Schendel, 'Contested, Vertical, Fragmenting', pp. 272–88.

[112] Bodhisattva Kar, 'Can the Postcolonial Begin? Deprovincializing Assam', in *Handbook of Modernity in South Asia: Modern Makeovers*, ed. by Saurabh Dube (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 43–58; Bodhisattva Kar, 'When Was the Postcolonial? A History of Policing Impossible Lines', in Baruah, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 49–77.

discourses.[113] While not all scholars go as far as Kar, the continuation of colonial trends is a recurrent theme in some of the core works in the literature. This is the case for Marcus Franke, who argued that the Indian state merely carried on from where the British left off in the violent subjugation of Naga communities.[114] What this has produced is a variety of works dealing with core themes – especially concerning identity and citizenship, governance and the state, the rule and nature of the law and discourses surrounding the northeast – that have grappled with the murky, fragmented shift from the colonial regime to the Indian state.

The conclusions of this thesis align with the general logic within this research, even if there are minor points of contention within the details of the northeast's history. Minor points can be found in contestations about the relative strength and reach of the state after 1947 and the relationship between conflict and governance. For the former, Bérénice Guyot-Réchard has suggested the state strengthened its grip in the northeast and for the latter Baruah argued that incessant conflict shaped the 'peculiar' governance of the northeast.[115] This thesis argues that state control was significantly weakened in the 1940-50s, as shown in chapters I and II. Meanwhile a more cyclical relationship is proposed here between conflict and governance. In short, colonial, and post-colonial forms of control established the parameters for conflict, which *then* had helped to create the 'peculiar' governance that Baruah identified. However, the

[113] He argued that 'opening tea gardens in the Singpho territories was always seen as the most useful mechanism of turning the Singphos into 'peaceable subjects'', something which resonates with how the Asian Development Bank has framed development for the contemporary northeast. See, Kar, 'When Was the Postcolonial', p. 77.

[114] Marcus Franke, 'Wars without End: The Case of the Naga Hills', *Diogenes*, 53.4 (2006), 69–84; Marcus Franke, *War and Nationalism in South Asia: The Indian State and the Nagas* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[115] Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, pp. 1-24; Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, 'Reordering a Border Space: Relief, Rehabilitation, and Nation-Building in Northeastern India after the 1950 Assam Earthquake', *Modern Asian Studies*, 49.4 (2015), 931–32; Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, pp. 95-162;

general thrust of the thesis aligns with the basic recognition about the blurred lines between the colonial and the post-colonial.

To hammer home this murkiness, chapter 2 – for instance – offers one of the clearest examples of how colonial forms of legislation were implemented by the Indian state from the 1950s onwards. There is far-reaching evidence to suggest the continuation of the colonial imprint after 1947. The 1942-72 timeframe used here is somewhat peculiar because of the framing of decolonisation – primarily analysed in a top-down, politico-economic sense – but generally this thesis converges with the broad logic of the literature. However, moving beyond this broad convergence, the conclusions offered here have significant implications for future research avenues.

There are two main advances – specifically for the literature on the northeast – that result from the conclusions of this thesis. Both relate to the transferability and interconnectedness central to the northeast's conflict dynamics. Firstly, the interconnections identified here between identity movements – both those which turned violent and those which did not – provide the first major implication. There is a tendency to compartmentalise how conflict and identity is understood in the northeast along dividing lines such as ethnicity or politics. Whilst the explorations of particular movements or federal spaces have been enlightening, the Assam highlands frame provides a route to explore the interconnections central to the conflict dynamics of the northeast. Though plenty of works have provided *comparative* studies of movements, this thesis suggests that greater *interactive* analysis should be crucial for developing how conflict and identity politics are understood during the northeast's decolonisation.

The second advance relates to the thematic frames applied to scholarship on the northeast. Rather than implementing static themes – such as state capacity or the strength of

discourses – it may be more fruitful to understand the transferability and effects of these thematic approaches. For instance, instead of asking whether the state is strong or weak – as scholars like Hassan have done – it is potentially more insightful to ask whether the state is perceived to be strong or weak by relevant ground-level actors, and then understand the ramifications of these attitudes. Similarly, it is possible to move beyond the findings of Longkumer and Roluahpuia – about how particular nationalisms emerge – to interrogate how anti-state nationalist discourses operated alongside parallel identity-framed critiques of Indian nationhood. The core transferable trends within the long decolonisation that anchor this thesis, therefore, indicate ways to develop the thematic approaches currently adopted for the northeast.

At heart, what this thesis suggests is the need for more deeply intertwined and interconnected histories of the region. Transferability is key aspect of this thesis' central argument, and a core method of investigation for future scholars of the northeast to build upon. It is also worth highlighting that the work here does not claim to be exhaustive. Transnational linkages – both ideationally and physically – provide a relatively clear further avenue for future research. But what the thesis does do is provide a platform to begin these explorations, through the notion of transference.

For this line of enquiry to unfold, the thesis employs the archive as the primary source of data. This is relatively uncommon for studies of violence in the northeast, which tend towards either interviews derived from fieldwork or global datasets on conflict.[116] Five key archives are interrogated in this thesis drawn from across three continents, with their insights

[116] Both Staniland and Sarbahi have identified problems stemming from the use of databases for research on the northeast. Both argued that it has distorted how conflicts in the northeast have been perceived as part of broader research into conflict dynamics. See Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion', pp. 91-93; Paul Staniland, 'Armed Politics', pp. 461-63.

providing a wide variety of material.[117] This material provides the foundation for interrogating the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands.

Beyond empirical notes, there is also the need to reflect on the methodological approach to the archive. The Assam highlands is primarily a region of indigenous communities. As van Schendel has noted, the study of indigeneity is not an exploration of specific cultural traits and inherent biological similarities.[118] Rather, it is a study a shared historical experience, conditioned especially by colonialism.[119] The key challenge for any archival history of indigeneity – a term preferred to either 'Adivasi' or 'tribal', following the logic outlined by scholars such as Uday Chandra[120] – is the lack of representation. As Prathama Banerjee has

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[117] In India, the regional archives in the northeast are especially useful. The Assam State Archives provides the most material for the thesis, with the Mizoram State Archives providing key insights into developments in the Mizo Hills, especially useful in chapter IV. In the UK, the British Library and the National Archives are particularly useful. The former is generally better for pre-1947 material, with the latter taking precedence after India's independence. In the US, the National Archives repository at College Park, Maryland, laid the foundations for understanding the scale, breadth and impact of weapons proliferation in the northeast during WWII, a key aspect of chapter I. Additionally, various other forms of primary material are utilised, from databases and media reports to government publications and diaries.

[118] Willem van Schendel, 'The dangers of belonging: tribes, indigenous peoples and homelands in South Asia', in Rycroft and Dasgupta, *The Politics of Belonging*, pp. 19-43.

[119] As Ajay Skaria identified, colonialism was a paramount historical phenomenon in the framing of indigenous communities. Skaria's work provided a theoretical foundation for how to approach indigenous communities in a more historically analytical way than had previously been envisaged. Skaria suggested colonial classifications institutionalised 'tribes' in an anachronistic sense, providing a civilisational scale with European civilisation at the summit and indigenous societies at the bottom. In short, colonialism engineered the conception primitiveness. This institutionalisation has since manifested in various forms in the post-colonial state. See Ajay Skaria, 'Shades of Wildness: Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 56.3 (1997), 726–45.

[120] When considering terminology, there are two important points to note. The first is grounded in pragmatism. The term 'Adivasi' does not translate as smoothly into the northeast Indian context. Whilst elsewhere in the subcontinent, the term is shorthand for indigenous communities in general, in the northeast it refers to the specific communities who migrated from central India to work on Assam's tea gardens. Hence, using the term would only add unnecessary complication in an academic sense. For a clear overview of the distinct use of the term in the northeast, see, Sriram Ananthanarayanan, 'Scheduled Tribe Status for Adivasis in Assam', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 33.2 (2010), 290–303. The second point is an intellectual one but also the most pertinent. Adivasi was a term born out of Indian nationalist terminology, a modern Hindu translation of the English 'aboriginal' (see, Indrani Chatterjee, 'Adivasis, tribes and other neologisms for erasing precolonial pasts: An example from Northeast India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53.1 (2016), 9-40). The term has problematic connotations, being conditioned by a nationalist conception of the 'tribal' which suffers from similar notions of superiority inherent in the original colonial iteration. 'Indigenous' is not a perfect term but offers a more rigorous signifier without the level of baggage that 'Adivasi' offers. This is especially true for studies which seek to move beyond nation-centric boundaries, since the term 'Adivasi' has little traction in

noted, a core issue is that indigenous communities 'are almost always invisible in modern state archives, where they surface only as objects of counter-insurgency and/or policy'.[121] Despite these limitations,[122] it is still possible to draw together a history from a mixture of top-down source material, inference and archival techniques, alongside the more uncommon but especially crucial sources which display a subaltern perspective.[123]

Virtually any reader on archival techniques has some recognition that the archive is no longer understood merely as an institution of truth waiting for excavation.[124] Some core techniques for archival research are employed in this thesis to move beyond positivist suggestions of objectivity.[125] Archival silence is particularly deafening in chapter IV, when

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Pakistan or Bangladesh, where the terms 'Qaum' and 'Upojati' respectively are more common. As Uday Chandra noted, anthropologists working on the northeast are likely to prefer the term indigeneity and it seems a logical continuation for historians to do the same. For a note on these wider discussions, see, Uday Chandra, 'Towards Adivasi Studies: New Perspectives on "Tribal" Margins of Modern India', *Studies in History*, 31.1 (2015), 122–27; Daniel J. Rycroft and Sangeeta Dasgupta, 'Indigenous Pasts and the Politics of Belonging', in Rycroft and Dasgupta, *The Politics of Belonging*, pp. 1–13; Tanika Sarkar, 'View from Outside the Field: An Afterword', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 53.1 (2016), 155–57; Willem van Schendel, 'Dangers of Belonging', pp. 19–43.

[121] Prathama Banerjee, 'Writing the Adivasi: Some historiographical notes', *Indian Social and Economic Review*, 53.1 (2016), 131-153.

[122] These limitations are further complicated by the nature of how archives are formed. State and official archives are underpinned by spatial and jurisdictional parameters established by the modern state. Hence, the very nature of the official archive is itself state-centric. As with the notes below on archival methodology, this does not make research impossible, but it is a further obstacle to confront. Yet, this state-centrism also offers opportunity. For example, Jonathan Saha has found how – in the colonial archive - 'examining the contradictions of paperwork can reveal some of the deeper structures of the archive and the anxieties that engendered them'. Therefore, the internal logic of the archive can itself be revealing, when utilising the logic applied by those such as Saha. See Jonathan Saha, 'Devious Documents: Corruption and Paperwork in Colonial Burma, c. 1900', in *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World*, ed. by Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 167-84 (p. 170).

[123] Some of the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau files utilised in this thesis provide useful ground-level assessments, for example. Police interrogations of citizens of the highlands and personal correspondence also provide some crucial ground-level perspectives.

[124] Peter Claus and John Marriott, *History: An Introduction to Theory, Method and Practice* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2012), pp. 386-404.

[125] Alexandra Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe', *Past & Present*, 230.1 (2016), 9–48.

analysing counterinsurgency operations in the Mizo Hills.[126] Many of the offences that occurred were not officially recorded, but this was part of the broader process of ineffective counterinsurgency efforts to win hearts and minds. In this guise, utilising factual reports on what did occur offers a base-level of knowledge to work out from.

This method of inference is similarly utilised in chapter I, when extrapolating an estimate about the level of arms proliferation in the northeast during the Second World War. Research on illicit or uncontrolled weapons diffusion is defined by a lack of source material, but baseline indicators can be particularly useful.[127] Working out from a sample size provided in the US national archives, it is possible to estimate the breadth of weapons proliferation, a key process at the onset of the long decolonisation. Accepting that the archives are produced through their own 'political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures',[128] reading along the archival grain[129] and a sensitivity to the 'minutiae and banality' of everyday violence all similarly underpin the research within the thesis.[130]

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[126] Rodney G. S. Carter, 'Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence', *Archivaria*, 61.1 (2006), 215–33; Will Jackson, 'Not Seeking Certain Proof: Interracial Sex and Archival Haze in High-Imperial Natal', in Jackson and Manktelow, *Subverting Empire*, pp. 185-204. The archival 'haze' is a similarly useful construct, tracing the remnants that 'cling' to official records.

[127] *Controlling Small Arms: Consolidation, Innovation and Relevance in Research and Policy*, ed. by Peter Batchelor and Kai Michael Kenkel (London: Routledge, 2014); Rachel J. Stohl, Matt Schroeder, and Dan Smith, *The Small Arms Trade: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007).

[128] Antoinette Burton, 'Archive Fever, Archive Stories', in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1-24 (p. 6).

[129] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[130] Jonathan Saha, 'Histories of Everyday Violence in British India', *History Compass*, 9.11 (2011), 844-53. Jonathan's Saha's work formed part of a broader inspection of quotidian forms of violence in a colonial setting, with other research in this guise offering similarly insightful techniques for historical research. See Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Taylor C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India* (London: Routledge, 2010).

In short, several techniques are implemented, both explicitly and implicitly, throughout the thesis to sidestep an acceptance of archival material at face-value. More important are the opportunities afforded by archival holdings. When drawn together, the plethora of information provides much needed source material, whose dearth has often limited research on the northeast. The inclination to accept mythologies – such as the Naga rebel movement as a minority uprising[131] or the northeast's issues stemming primarily from outside interference[132] – is untenable when the holdings of the archive are presented. Ultimately, the potential within this vast array of material is significant and requires even further excavation as research on the northeast evolves.

With this data in place, the thesis unfolds through five chapters. The first begins with the onset of the long decolonisation in 1942. Relatively stable power structures had emerged in the highlands by 1942, but these were shattered by the effects of war and independence. The chapter argues that the threat of war – and Assam's role within the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre – instigated a breakdown of colonial governance and led to a proliferation of modern firearms across the region. This was compounded by the institutionalisation of identity-based politics as independence loomed. These three factors provided a critical foundation for the long decolonisation, as the post-colonial state had to deal with the fallout of the events between 1942-47.

The second chapter then looks towards the unrest in the Naga Hills after independence. Building on the processes identified in chapter I, a cohesive and relatively popular institution

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[131] 'The History of SC Jamir's Conspiracies', *The Nagaland Post*, 1 May 2021 <https://www.nagalandpost.com/the-history-of-sc-jamir-s-conspiracies/226900.html> [accessed 8 September 2021].

[132] Kotwal, 'Naga Insurgency'.

– the Naga National Council (NNC) – challenged the sovereignty of the Indian state. The colonial approach of both provincial and central governments to the Naga challenge began to indicate the limitations of state capacity in the highlands. The centrality of Naga identity to the NNC – established in contestation to Indian nationhood – was a similarly problematic issue for the early post-colonial state. The tactics implemented by the NNC also outlined some forerunner precedents for successful challenges to state authority. Together, the war in the Naga Hills began to establish the core trends of the long decolonisation, but these trends were not contained in this district alone.

The Naga uprising was the only case of armed civil conflict in the northeast in the first decade after independence. Chapter III interrogates how the rest of the highlands were affected by the early years of Indian rule. It details how a relatively benign start to life as part of India was replaced by widespread political activism after the late 1950s. This transformation was conditioned by problematic state- and nation- building practices. These processes – impacted by regional, national and international developments – created conditions favourable for insurgency across the highlands by the early 1960s. Added to this was the survival of the Naga rebel movement, which demonstrated how to confront emergency legislation and exploit India's problematic international relations. Together, this period saw trends central to the long decolonisation spread beyond the Naga Hills to the wider highlands.

Chapter IV then delves into the Mizo civil war. Its chief concern is the effectiveness of Indian counterinsurgency operations in the Mizo Hills. The chapter argues that operations, contrary to popular belief, were a comprehensive failure. This failure – evident at humanitarian, operational and ideological levels – was important, as it compounded the growing perception of state weakness first established during the Naga civil war. In addition, the nature of counterinsurgency operations crystallised the disconnect between Indian nationalism and Mizo

identity. Finally, the Mizo rebel movement utilised aspects of the NNC's tactical repertoire and furthered the precedents established for insurgencies in the northeast, proving the Naga challenge was not an anomalous undertaking. The longevity of the Mizo civil war meant the Naga conflict could not be explained away as an esoteric security concern. Together, the lessons from the highlands' civil wars were critical for the prospects for peace in the broader northeast.

The final chapter then looks towards two developments which offered the state the potential to resolve some of the challenges established during the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands. The first was the Naga ceasefire between 1964-72. The second was the political and economic reorganisation of the northeast in 1972. Both provided opportunities for the state. The former through demonstrating its political capacity to resolve a persistent conflict by negotiation, the latter in providing a more robust politico-economic model than the colonial template that framed the highlands until the early 1970s. Ineffectiveness on both fronts displayed the inability to capitalise on opportunities to stem the short- and long- term effects established by the long decolonisation of the highlands. Indeed, both processes only enabled the northeast's transition towards an exceptional space.

The thesis rounds off with a conclusion, which demonstrates how the core themes of decolonisation – state perception, identity formation and the nature of insurgency – became engrained in the broader northeast from the 1970s onwards. The challenge to state authority undertaken by the United Liberation Front of Assam, the identity movements in Manipur and Tripura and the tactics evident in the budding insurgencies of the late 1970s were not spontaneous processes. They built upon the foundations established during the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands. The inability of the post-colonial state to confront the challenges established throughout decolonisation, therefore, had significant ramifications for

the conflict dynamics of the northeast. This transition was pivotal in crafting the unique environment the northeast became. The conclusion rounds off with some reflections on what the findings in this thesis indicate, especially for understanding post-1947 India, borderlands, decolonisation and conflict.

Chapter I: War and Independence in the Assam highlands, 1942-47.

Introduction.

The long decolonisation of the Assam highlands did not begin with flag independence in August 1947. It began amidst war, the direct result of external forces. The fall of Rangoon in March 1942 heightened the prospect of an invasion of British India.[133] India's eastern periphery, bordering Burma, was acutely vulnerable to this threat.[134] The fallout from this vulnerability instigated the start of the long decolonisation.

The prospect of Japanese invasion began the unravelling of colonialism in the highlands, five years before official independence. This chapter argues that war and independence initiated seismic changes. First, war sparked the breakdown of colonial governance. Second, it led to a vast proliferation of modern weapons. On the one hand this created a security dilemma. On the other, it provided greater agency for the region's inhabitants. Third, a political mobilisation unfolded as independence loomed, that established the ideological aspirations of local elites. Together, these processes created a sizeable challenge for the Indian state to confront after 1947.

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[133] Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambleton Continuum, 2006), p. 354.

[134] Christopher Alan Bayly and Timothy Norman Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 197. As Bayly and Harper noted, 'all the British efforts at gerrymandering and political balancing in India's hill regions were blown apart in 1942 when the hills and the forest became the main arena of warfare throughout the whole region'.

The challenge of incorporating colonial frontier zones into an independent nation-state is often problematic. This 'postcolonial headache' – to borrow a term used by Elisabeth Leake – was apparent in the Assam highlands.[135] But rather than a headache, the effects of war and independence created a veritable migraine for the Indian state to resolve. War initiated the breakdown of colonial governance, whilst the proliferation of modern weapons compounded this breakdown. The result was a power vacuum by the eve of independence. In this vacuum, the political mobilisation of the highlands constituted a tangible force. Between weak state control and rising ideological aspirations, this post-colonial migraine defined the opening parameters of decolonisation in the highlands.

The Assam highlands by the late 1930s.

By the late 1930s, colonial control over the Assam highlands had reached its peak. Over a century of British interest in the region produced a system of governance with relative stability.[136] The expansion of control over the highlands since the early 1800s produced several major conflicts, and a quotidian stream of smaller-scale clashes. But by the close of the 1930s, colonial power was established in the highlands.

Across the 1930s, the turbulence in British India provided the impetus for the 1935 Act.[137] For the highlands, the Act signalled the apex of administrative control as the Excluded

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[135] Leake, *The Defiant Border*, p. 15.

[136] Arkotong Longkumer, *Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India* (London: Continuum, 2010). The term 'relative' is used because resistance still existed. For example, the Heraka/Zeliangrong movement persisted despite the execution of Jadonang in 1931.

[137] The Act was primarily an attempt by the British to reconcile the growing nationalist challenge in the subcontinent – intensified by global economic turmoil – with the broader desire for colonial control. The Act created the 'blueprint' for India's federal system but was so heavily restrained to be considered a viable federal model. The Act was widely discredited in British India by key political figures. Gandhi was more conciliatory than most when he suggested 'the Government of India Act is universally regarded as wholly unsatisfactory for achieving India's freedom. But it is possible to construe it as an attempt, however limited and feeble, to replace

and Partially Excluded Areas Order was passed in the following year.[138] All of the highlands fell under the 1936 Order, which was the zenith of a long genealogy of colonial legislation that established the boundaries of the northeastern frontier. By the 1870s legislation had loosely identified 'unadministered' and 'scheduled' zones, whilst initiatives such as the Inner Line System provided practical governance tools for the region.[139] The 1919 Act advanced administrative control further with the establishment of the 'Backward Tracts'.[140] The Backwards Tracts formed the lineal antecedents for the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Order.[141]

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the rule of the sword by the rule of the majority'. See Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World 1915-1948* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 526; Louise Tillin, 'Building a National Economy: Origins of Centralized Federalism in India', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 51.2 (2021), 161–85.

[138] The Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas section can be found in Chapter V of Part III of the 1935 Act. It provided the powers to be able to define excluded and partially excluded areas and institutionalised the scope of governance for those regions. See, Government of India Act, 1935, pp. 60-61. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1935/2/pdfs/ukpga_19350002_en.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2021].

[139] The appropriation of regions – such as the highlands – as 'unadministered' developed with the East India (Laws and Regulations) Act passed in 1870 and the Scheduled Districts Act passed four years later. For the Acts, see House of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: East India (Laws And Regulations) Bill—Bill 27* (18 February 1870, volume 199) [online] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1870-02-18/debates/aeb5a295-a250-4a4f-9c62-19c11d4de554/EastIndia(LawsAndRegulations)Bill—Bill27> [accessed 26 August 2021]; Act No. XIV of 1874, 'The Scheduled Districts Act, 1874'. For a note on the how both worked in practice, see House of Lords. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936* (25 February 1936, volume 99, columns 734-43) [online] <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1936/feb/25/government-of-india-excluded-and> [accessed 26 August 2021]; TNA UK DO 196/60. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to the Earl of Home, 20 July 1960.

[140] House of Lords. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Government of India Bill* (16 December 1919, volume 38, columns 111-202) [online] <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1919/dec/16/government-of-india-bill#S5LV0038P0_19191216_HOL_530> [accessed 26 August 2021]. On the declaration of Backward Tracts and their exemption from legislation, clause fifteen stated: 'The Governor-General in Council may declare any territory in British India to be a "backward tract,"… Where the Governor-General in Council has, by notification, directed as aforesaid, he may… direct that any Act of the Indian Legislature shall not apply to the territory in question or any part thereof, or shall apply to the territory or any part thereof subject to such exceptions or modifications as the Governor-General thinks fit, or may authorise the governor in council to give similar directions as respects any Act of the local legislature'.

[141] Robert Reid, 'The Excluded Areas of Assam', *The Geographical Journal*, 103.1/2 (1944), 18–29.

Understanding this administrative evolution is important. As identified in the postmodern turn in studies of empire, categories, codification and boundaries created tangible power structures.[142] Assam's borderlands were fashioned as part of a colonial imaginary, a 'savage' frontier space inhabited by 'tribes' with 'primitive' cultures.[143] By the time of the 1936 Order, this was a space ruled as a textbook frontier zone, where the colonial state avoided ground-level administration and prioritised a macro-level modicum of control.[144] In practice, the 1936 Order gave Assam's Governor ultimate power in the excluded and partially excluded areas, despite the latter areas being granted representation in the Assam provincial government as a token political gesture.[145]

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[142] Sarah Gandee and William Gould referred to this literature as the 'postcolonial studies orthodoxy', which focused on the essentialising nature of colonial forms of knowledge. Bernard Cohn's work was amongst the most influential, as he delved into the political power that followed from the hegemony of knowledge. His conception of 'investigative modalities' was particularly persuasive, whilst James Hevia followed a similar route for military studies. As Gandee and Gould suggested, this approach is not without its limitations, and indeed framed their special edition – on 'Caste, "Tribe" and Criminality in South Asia' – as an advance from the postcolonial studies orthodoxy. They essentially suggested that this approach is susceptible to overlooking quotidian processes and individual agency in shaping institutionalised forms of knowledge. See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Sarah Gandee and William Gould, 'Introduction: Margins and the State—Caste, "Tribe" and Criminality in South Asia', *Studies in History*, 36.1 (2020), 7–19; James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[143] Consistent with Skaria's research on the impact of colonialism in framing indigenous societies, press reports were replete with this language. In reporting on the conflict in Manipur in 1891, for example, the *Manchester Guardian* reported how 'a British force [was] cut to pieces by some of the savage tribes of Manipur', whilst claiming the 'Manipuris [were] famous as much for their treachery and cunning as for their bravery and indifference to danger'. See, 'A British Force Annihilated in Manipur', *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 March 1891, p. 8. Similarly, in a review of Lieutenant Woodthorpe's account of the 1871-2 expedition to the Lushai Hills, the following passage was published: 'Wherever the Indian frontiers abut on savage or semi-savage tribes, no matter whether they be pagans or Mahomedans, not [in]frequent appeals to arms are inevitable. North Eastern and Northern Bengal have furnished abundant illustrations of this truth. What happens is that the hillmen, who see no harm in forays, not only for plunder, but skulls and slaves, disregard the fact that their neighbours have become the subjects of a strong Power, and continue their customary onsets just as is the British were not within reach'. See R. J. Woodthorpe, 'Literature: The Lushai Expedition', *The Observer*, 23 February 1873.

[144] Shaunna Rodrigues, 'Excluded Areas as the Limit of the Political: The Murky Boundaries of Scheduled Areas in India', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 25.7 (2021), 1126–47.

[145] Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj*, p. 218.

This system of control in the highlands is best understood through Benjamin Hopkins' concept of 'frontier governmentality', a strategy which 'quarantined the chaos' of the frontier.[146] Hopkins argued that frontier governmentality contained a legal component – usually a code or regulation – alongside a 'man on the spot' to enforce these legal parameters and ground-level enablers of the system, usually those in positions of local power.[147] Rather than an exceptional form of control, this was 'an integral, and in truth pedestrian, part of state design'.[148] This widespread approach to colonial frontiers provides an anchor to understand colonial power structures in the Assam highlands.

The façade of state power established by the 1930s was over a century in the making, especially motivated because the frontier signalled a threat to Assam's burgeoning tea industry.[149] The expansion of colonial sovereignty into the highlands involved a vague patchwork of agreements with local elites in addition to military expeditions, a symbolic gesture of British power.[150] The preference for military incursions led to mass organised

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[146] Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of the Modern State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 4.

[147] *Ibid,* pp. 5, 13-26.

[148] *Ibid*, pp. 6-7. This taps into the broader debate on the nature of British rule, as either as an empire defined by panic in a constant state of flux or a more stable polity underpinned by varying degrees of violence. Colonial rule in the highlands aligns with the latter, as British rule was somewhat stable because of the violent, repressive tactics it could enforce. For the recent developments in this debate, see Mark Condos, *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Joshua Ehrlich, 'Anxiety, Chaos, and the Raj', *The Historical Journal*, 63.3 (2020), 777–87; Durba Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

[149] Gunnel Cederlöf, *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers 1790-1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj*.

[150] For the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills see, Reeju Ray, 'Interrupted Sovereignties in the North-East Frontier of British India, 1787–1870', *Modern Asian Studies*, 53.2 (2019), 606–32. For some notes on the breadth of expeditions in the Naga Hills, see BL IOR L MIL 17/18/24. P. J. Maitland, *Detailed Report on the Naga Hills Expedition, 1879-80* (Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1880); BL IOR L PS 20/D201. *Military Report on the Naga Hills (including Routes)*, 2nd edn (Simla: Government Monotype Press, 1914). For the British incursion into the Lushai Hills after the 1871 raid on the Alexandrapore tea garden, see, S. Thangboi Zou,

resistance – such as the Jaintia rebellion in 1862 and the defence of Khonoma in 1879 – and persistent quotidian acts of resistance.[151] Yet, as British presence expanded, resistance was increasingly subdued by the 1900s, despite the lingering ramifications of the Anglo-Kuki war and the Zeliangrong uprising.[152]

The expansion of colonial interests did not produce harmoniousness. It did, however, create a degree of relative stability by the 1930s, as the breadth of resistance lessened. This stability rested on two initiatives. The first involved the development of administrative apparatus further into the interior. This was hardly an extensive administrative network. Yet it provided the platform for the second process: the production of state authority. State authority was enabled by the spectre of violence. Together, these two enterprises provided the practical tools to establish governance in the highlands.

The creation of outposts and the role of colonial personnel – Hopkins' 'man on the spot' – ensured a platform for expansion. In the Naga Hills, HQ shifted from a mere military outpost in 1866 to the more administratively conducive settlement of Kohima in 1881, followed by a subdivisional base at Mokokchung.[153] The first political officer in the Lushai Hills was posted

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'Riverine Bazaars, Trade and Chiefs in the Colonial Lushai Hills', *Asian Ethnicity*, 22.4 (2021), 563–82; BL IOR L PS 20/113. L. H. Baldwin, *Military report on the Lushai Hills* (Simla: Intelligence Branch, 1906).

[151] BL IOR L MIL 17/18/24. P. J. Maitland, *Detailed Report on the Naga Hills Expedition, 1879-80* (Simla: Government Central Branch Press, 1880), p. 38; P. N. Dutta, 'Jaintia Rebellion: (1862-1863)', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 38 (1977), 410–16; Shrutidev Goswami, 'A Fresh Look at the Jaintia Rebellion', *Social Scientist*, 13.2 (1985), 46–52.

[152] *The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917–1919: A Frontier Uprising against Imperialism during the First World War*, ed. by Jangkhomang Guite and Thongkholal Haokip (London: Routledge, 2018); John Thomas, 'Sending out the Spears: Zeliangrong Movement, Naga Club and a Nation in the Making', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 49.3 (2012), 399–437.

[153] Lipokmar Dzuvichu, 'Roads and the Raj: The politics of road building in colonial Naga Hills, 1860s–1910s', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50.4 (2013), 473–494 (p. 476). The 1866 base was at Samaguting.

in 1890, preceding the merger of the loose northern and southern polities into one district.[154] In the Khasi Hills, the prominence of Shillong as the provincial capital of Assam magnified the presence of the state, which also resonated into the neighbouring Garo and Jaintia Hills.[155] In short, the evolution of administrative bases and appointment of colonial officials provided the foundations for the expansion of control.

This expansion led to the creation of colonial authority, enforced through a diverse tactical repertoire reliant on the symbolism of force. Through military expeditions, the colonial state instigated oaths of loyalty,[156] acts of 'friendship',[157] exchange of gifts,[158] weapons demonstrations and the threat of violence.[159] A major purpose of the 1928 expedition into the Naga Hills, for example, was to establish 'friendly' relations with a chief who posed a problem for travel routes in the upper Chindwin region.[160] The friendly nature of the visit was laced

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[154] Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, from 1883-1941*, 2nd edn (Delhi: Eastern Publishing House, 1983), pp. 37-47.

[155] A. W. Rani, 'Traditional Institutions and Urban Governance in Meghalaya with Special Reference to Shillong City', in *Revisiting Traditional Institutions in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills*, ed. by Charles Reuben Lyngdoh (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 112-124. As A.W. Rani wrote, 'the process of urbanisation in Meghalaya… dates back to the emergence of Shillong as the capital of Assam province in 1864'.

[156] BL Mss Eur F229/38. C. H. Brownlow, to the Quarter-master General, Army HQ, Calcutta, 30 March 1872.

[157] BL Mss Eur E252/21. J. Mitchell, *Report on the Naga Hills (Upper Chindwin) Expedition for the Abolition of Human Sacrifice* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, 1928). See Chapter II: Concentration of Expedition at Hkamti Roads Tours.

[158] BL Mss Eur F116/83. Report and photographs of Sir Harcourt Butler's expedition to the Hukawng Valley and propositions to abolish slavery and human sacrifice there.

[159] This spectre often entailed a significant show of force as a broader example of the punishment that followed intransigence. Burned villages were a staple tactic, as was direct combat. During a tour in late 1928 and early 1929, the Assistant Superintendent noted the following: 'A real show of force had to be made only once – at Sograng on the 2nd February with immediately successful results'. The 'real' show provided the warning about operating in contestation to the sovereignty of the colonial state. See BL Mss Eur E252/21. J. Mitchell, *Report of the Naga Hills (Upper Chindwin) Expedition for the Release of Slaves and the Suppression of Human Sacrificing* (Maymyo: Government Branch Press, 1929).

[160] BL Mss Eur E252/21. J. Mitchell, *Report on the Naga Hills (Upper Chindwin) Expedition for the Abolition of Human Sacrifice* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, 1928). There was also the desire to abolish practices of human sacrifice as part of the 'civilizing mission'.

with the unspoken threat of military action. Expeditions often involved a significant military presence whilst demonstrations of modern weaponry were as much about displaying the power of the Raj as establishing cordial relations.[161] Each incursion had a specific purpose of furthering the psychological presence of the colonial state.[162]

By the 1930s – after decades of refining this psychological subjugation – the methods of projecting state power were well entrenched. Control was not all-encompassing, and boundaries were still expanding into the eastern frontier despite the 1936 Order. This is demonstrated in map 3, whose shaded areas indicated the expansion of the Naga Hills District across the 1920-40s. Yet, despite ongoing expansion, an equilibrium had emerged whereby the power of the colonial state was a tangible presence in the highlands.

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[161] The 1928 expedition included a Lewis Gun demonstration to six chiefs on 25 January. Such displays were a common tactic in the colonial repertoire. As part of the 1871-2 Lushai expedition, the comments of Rutton Pooea, a Kuki chief who served as a mediator on the tour, proved telling. As he suggested, 'you fire one gun out of another, who can fight against you'. Such an impression was not lost on colonial officials eager to present a manifestation of power in their weapons demonstrations. See BL Mss Eur F229/38. *Despatches of Brigadier General C. H. Brownlow, C. B., Aide-de-camp to the Queen, Commanding Chittagong Column, Looshai Expeditionary Force, 1871-72* (Calcutta: Fred Lewis, Calcutta Central Press Company, 1872).

[162] This interpretation is methodologically similar to David Gellner's ruminations on the study of the state. Rather than accepting the state as an assumptive, static unit of analysis, Gellner was keen to stress the diversified nature of state composition and effect. The study of 'state effect', therefore, provided fertile ground for academic enquiry. The sensitivity to the idea of the 'state', noted by Gellner and those working on quotidian interaction with the state, have enforced the conception provided here. See, *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. by C. J. Fuller and Véronique Bénéï (London: Hurst & Co., 2001); David N. Gellner, 'Northern South Asia's Diverse Borders', in Gellner, *Borderland Lives*, pp. 1–23; *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, ed. by Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

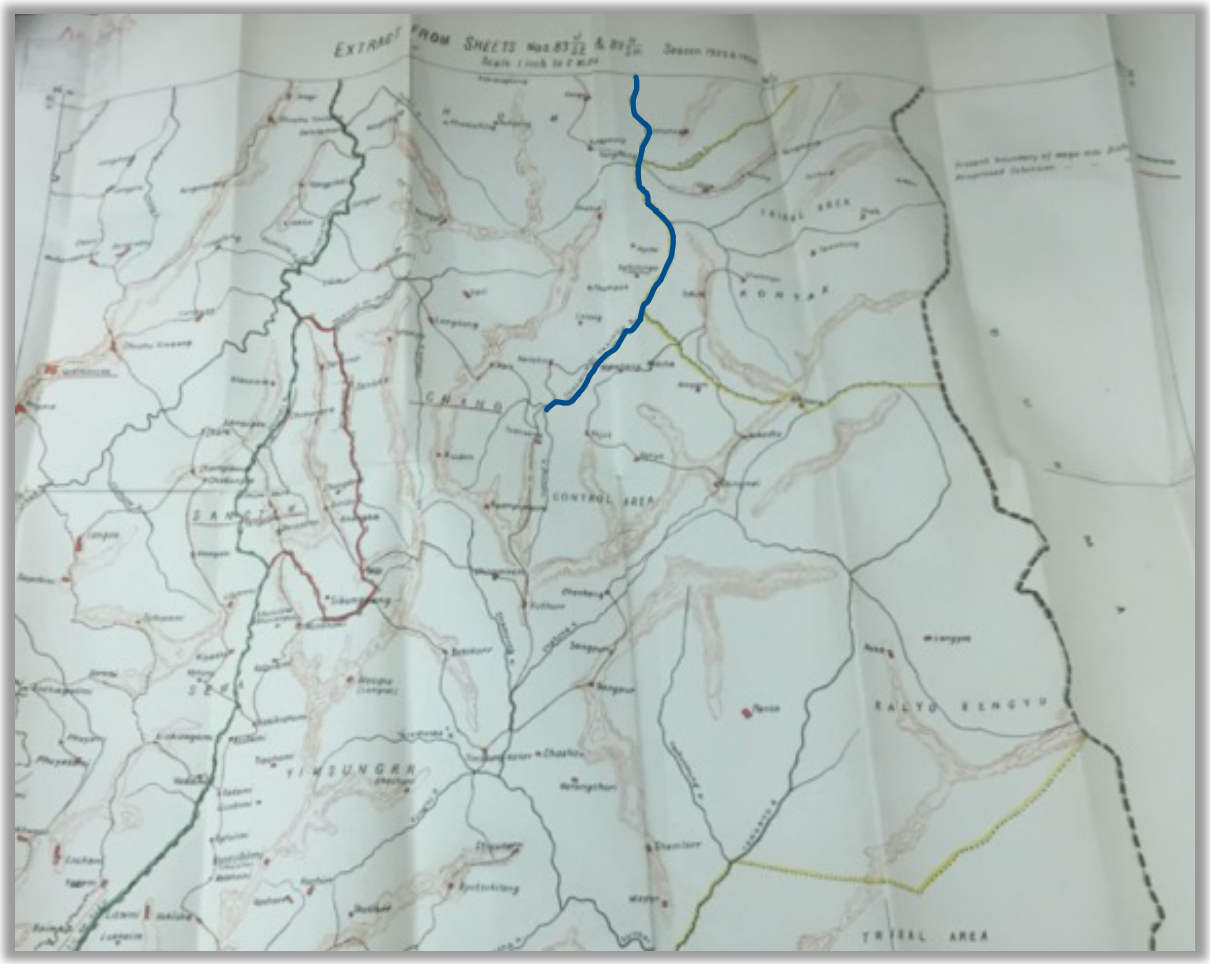
Map 3: British expansion into the Naga Hills, c.1920-40s[163]

An expedition to a series of frontier villages between the Naga Hills District and Burma in 1939 offers a useful summary prior to the long decolonisation. The expedition was considered a necessary response to a joint raid by inhabitants from Pangsha, Yungkao and Ukha villages.[164] The villages were situated on the eastern side of the Yangmun river, shown in blue in map 4. A raiding party from these villages had attacked another settlement within the colonial 'control area', that existed beyond the administrative boundaries of the Naga Hills

[163] BL IOR L PS/12/3114. 'North Eastern Frontier. Assam; Annual Reports on Frontier Tribes'. The map outlined the expansion of the eastern border of the Naga Hills District between 1927 and 1946. The four shaded areas represented regions that were incorporated into the district, from the older Naga Hills Tribal Area. These shaded areas thus came under direct British governance, within the NHD, between 1927-46. The large green region remained within the British sphere of influence, without being directly administered.

[164] BL IOR L PS 12/3116. R. Pawsey to the Commissioner of Divisions, Assam, 28 November 1939.

District, but still fell within the remit of the British sphere of influence. Thus, the raid was understood by Charles Pawsey – the Naga Hills' Deputy Commissioner – as an attack upon colonial sovereignty.



Map 4: British zone of control in the Naga Hills [165]

The control area around the Yangmun river was not a static construct. Rather, these British spatial projections of influence and administration evolved to the point where, by the

[165] Template taken from BL IOR PS 12/3116. Coll 22/7 Burma-Assam border: Naga Hills and Sirap Frontier Tract. The green line – to the west of the Yangmun – demarcated the eastern boundary of the Naga Hills District. The red line suggested plans for extending administrative boundaries in the mid-1920s. To the east of the Yangmun, the 'control area' existed.

late 1930s, the villages in question fell within the remit of colonial interests.[166] Because the raid – by the inhabitants of Pangsha, Yungkao and Ukha – occurred within a zone deemed to be within the British zone of control, a paradigmatic colonial response followed. A punitive expedition was undertaken, consisting of three Assam Rifles platoons and around four hundred labourers. It bore all the hallmarks of a typical (re)assertion of colonial power in the highlands.

Pangsha was burned and its livestock and crops were destroyed.[167] Where a village submitted 'unconditionally' to the expedition's forces, reprisals were lessened from physical destruction to fines.[168] Fines in the highlands were often administered in terms of commodities rather than currency, and invariably involved firearms.[169] With punishments enacted, the extent of colonial sovereignty was then clearly dictated to the villages in question as reminders were set about rules within the control zone.

The 1939 expedition was a relatively minor incursion into the frontier, but it demonstrated quite clearly the psychological subjugation that had occurred within the Assam highlands by the 1930s. The spectre of violence was a key aspect of the façade of state power, which was enacted through undertakings such as expeditions. It relied on the ability of the state

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[166] BL IOR L PS 12/3116. Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam to the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, 'Revision of the eastern boundary of the Naga Hills district'.

[167] For a detailed account of the expedition, see BL IOR L PS 12/3116. Tour Diary of C. R. Pawsey, Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, for the months of October and November 1939.

[168] *Ibid.*

[169] BL IOR L PS/12/3114. *Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the year 1939-40* (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1940), p. 2. This is a recurring theme littered throughout the colonial archive. The example in question involved a quarrel between two neighbouring villages in the Naga Hills, who were both fined 100 guns each after failing to resolve their dispute. It is important to note that these firearms were often locally made muzzle loaders. The trade in ammunition and material was a minor cause for concern for authorities, but the limited capacity of these muzzle loaders offered little threat from a security perspective. This would be radically altered when modern firearms disseminated throughout the region, as identified later in this chapter.

to react to transgressions with a show of force. It was a relatively rudimentary form of control, but it was nonetheless effective whilst the state retained military power.

Despite the production of relative stability by the British, their governance model rested on a precarious foundation. If the military power of the state declined, if the ground-level resistance capabilities of the communities of the highlands increased or if the underdeveloped administrative apparatus of the region was compromised, the entire model of control could be affected. As the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands began, the effects of war initiated the breakdown of this governance model.

The fallout of war, part I: state breakdown.

Between 1942 and 1945 relative stability in the highlands disappeared. The northeast's geostrategic importance in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre led to refugee and economic crises.[170] The militarisation of the region initiated physical destruction, affected labour dynamics and created social challenges. The governance model in the highlands was not equipped to deal with these widespread changes. Colonial power structures broke down, leaving behind a vacuum as war – mirroring its effects elsewhere in the subcontinent – 'badly cracked the foundational scaffolding of the Raj'.[171]

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[170] This importance culminated in the battles of Imphal and Kohima, which has produced a sizeable literature. See Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War 1941-45* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984), pp. 191-315; Bayly and Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, pp. 370-382; Arthur Campbell, *The Siege: A Story from Kohima* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956); Jackson, *British Empire*, pp. 351–404; Fergal Keane, *Road of Bones: The Siege of Kohima 1944* (London: HarperPress, 2010); Pum Khan Pau, 'Situating Local Events in Geo-Political Struggles between the British and Japanese Empires: The Politics of Zo Participation during the Second World War', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 42.2 (2014), 667–92; David Rooney, *Burma Victory: Imphal and Kohima, March 1944 to May 1945* (London: Cassell, 1992); Nicholas Tarling, *A Sudden Rampage: The Japanese Occupation of Southeast Asia, 1941-1945* (London: Hurst, 2001), pp. 110–16.

[171] Khan, *The Great Partition*, pp. 34-35.

Analysing the internal ramifications of World War II is somewhat against dominant historiographical norms. Scholarship on 1940s British India overwhelmingly gravitates towards independence.[172] But Yasmin Khan's *The Raj at War* recently reemphasised the need to take a longer view of the 1940s, following from Khan's realisation about the war's impact in her earlier ground-breaking work on Partition.[173] Recently, research on the northeast has shown signs of following this logic.[174] Both exceptional and quotidian events had fundamental ramifications for the northeast, ranging from the battles at Kohima and Imphal to the broader militarisation of the region. From the very outset – after the fall of Rangoon in 1942 – the effects of war were clear.

Refugees flooded across the Indo-Burmese frontier as Japanese forces swept across Southeast Asia. By April 1942, just under 46,000 people had passed through the borderlands of Assam.[175] The majority passed through the Manipur Road, but the routes taken by displaced

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[172] A significant array of scholarship has been produced by military historians on the war and the contributions made from within British India. However, there is far less study on the internal impact the war had. The Bengal famine has elicited the most attention in this regard, but beyond Khan's work highlighted below, there is a definitive lack of research interrogating the internal ramifications of war in South Asia. Some outliers to this trend include, William Mazzarella, 'A Torn Performative Dispensation: The Affective Politics of British Second World War Propaganda in India and the Problem of Legitimation in an Age of Mass Publics', *South Asian History and Culture*, 1.1 (2010), 1–24; Kaushik Roy, *India and World War II: War, Armed Forces, and Society, 1939–45* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 2: 'Military Industrialization in India'; Ian Talbot, 'The Second World War and Local Indian Politics: 1939-1947', *The International History Review*, 6.4 (1984), 592–610.

[173] Khan, *The Great Partition*, pp. 30-38; Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Vintage, 2016).

[174] Only a few select works have touched upon the impact that the Second World War had on the northeast, and these have been produced very recently. They have begun to reveal the significance of the war for the broader history of the northeast. See, Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, 'When Legions Thunder Past: The Second World War and India's Northeastern Frontier', *War in History*, 25.3 (2018), 328–60; Pum Khan Pau, 'Behind the Enemy Line: British-Led Guerrilla Operations in the Indo-Burma Frontier during the Second World War', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30.2 (2019), 307–34.

[175] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1942.

travellers was diverse, leading to notable traffic through the Assam highlands.[176] People intent on reaching the safety of Cachar, for example, travelled through the Lushai Hills rather than joining the vast currents traversing the Manipur Road.[177] The result was a notable flow of foot-traffic by the autumn of 1942.[178]

This movement of people at an unparalleled rate added extra responsibility for colonial officials who struggled to keep pace with these challenges. Even the one hundred and fifty or so people still passing through the Lushai Hills by the summer of 1944 was too much to handle, never mind the flows that had preceded them.[179] The food stores in the district were never plentiful and the influx of extra mouths to feed provided a practical problem. On the ground, some villages provided food and shelter to those fleeing the war in return for labour.[180] However, this harmoniousness was relatively isolated and sporadic. More common was unchecked movement through a region previously defined by its isolation.

By the Autumn of 1945 – long after the threat of war had receded – the issue of refugees scattered across the Champhai region in the east of the Lushai Hills was noted to be the most pressing problem in the district.[181] People that fled the war were still spread amongst the district and there was no clear-cut strategy in how to confront this. In such a large region refugee crises

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[176] This stream of movement continued through the war and remained after the battles of Imphal and Kohima. In the aftermath of Imphal a camp was established in the town to provide refugee for around 1,000 people displaced because of war. See BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of May 1944.

[177] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 'Report for Assam for the first half of October 1942', 17 October 1942.

[178] *Ibid.*

[179] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 5 July 1944.

[180] *Ibid.*

[181] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of September 1945.

revealed the spiralling decline of state control. Migratory crises initiated by the fall of Southeast Asia were, however, only one of several problems that affected colonial governance.

The broad contours of militarisation were similarly decisive. Physical damage created its own challenges. This was clearest after the Japanese invasion of British India began in March 1944.[182] In the Naga Hills, for example, it was estimated that around 2,500 homes were destroyed because of fighting in the district.[183] Whole regions – such as the Ukhrul subdivision of northern Manipur – were lost to advancing Japanese forces.[184] The scorched earth tactics that followed resulted in widespread devastation.[185]

The intense fighting in Kohima had a direct effect on governance in the Naga Hills District. The town was left virtually unrecognisable from its pre-war manifestation. The destruction meant that even Pawsey had trouble finding his way around ruined office buildings after the battle.[186] The devastation, therefore, affected administration in a direct way, effectively razing the administrative HQ of the Naga Hills District in the short-term. It also resulted in broader levels of destruction across the region, which required time, money and personnel to restore. All these luxuries were lacking as the war came to a close.

Although the most extensive physical destruction fell in the areas directly invaded by the Japanese, damage resulting from war was evident elsewhere. Because the Assam provincial

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[182] Jackson, *British Empire*, p. 397.

[183] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 18 November 1944.

[184] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of March 1944.

[185] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of April 1944.

[186] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 19 June 1944.

capital was based at Shillong, vast numbers of military personnel passed through the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and military practices became commonplace. Reports of accidents within training exercises were common. In the village of Smit, located in the Khasi Hills, nine people were killed with several others injured in September 1943 when a shell accidentally dropped in the middle of the town bazar.[187] Although this was a more exceptional case in terms of human casualties, the important point to note is the physical damage that accompanied the militarisation of the region.

The behaviour and actions of troops stationed within the region added a further problem resulting from militarisation. Clashes between civilian and military personnel were common. Incidents ranged from minor confrontations to serious harm. In an example of the former, a quarrel unfolded between British troops and Khasi villagers over the treatment of local girls.[188] The latter was demonstrated when an American sergeant killed one man and knocked another unconscious in a drunken rage.[189] Assam's Governor – Andrew Clow – noted a 'disturbing number of incidents' in this regard across the province.[190] The inability of the colonial regime to deal with the proliferation of incidents created disillusionment at ground-level.

The disillusionment was particularly noticeable in an incident in the summer of 1943. A civilian was killed after a collision with a military truck, but locals buried the deceased without notifying any authorities. When asked why they had kept the incident quiet, a family member suggested that, because the vehicle had been a military one, there was 'no use in

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[187] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 22 September 1943.

[188] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the second half of June 1942.

[189] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of May 1943.

[190] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 17 January 1944.

complaining'.[191] This resignation about the effectiveness of state authorities was telling. In this instance, the perceived lack of state efficacy ensured that villagers continued with life in spite of the colonial administration. Alone, this disillusion could have been attributed to the uniqueness of the wartime environment. However, this foundering perception of the legitimacy of the state became a recurrent theme.

The economic ramifications of war further compounded the breakdown of the colonial state's authority. The recruitment drive in the highlands resulted in an estimated 15,000 Garos, 10,000 Khasis and 9,000 Nagas in the Assam Civil Porter Corps alone.[192] These levels of employment were significant, since the wages on offer were unimaginable prior to the war.[193] To put the dislocation of wages into perspective, a basic labouring role in the military during the war offered a comparable rate to that paid by the colonial state to an individual charged with running an entire police outpost.[194] The monetary prospects for employment in military service far outstripped those within the colonial administration. This reality created fissures within the day-to-day workings of life in the highlands.

In the Lushai Hills, the at times 'rapid' employment of citizens for military purposes provided a clear indication of how labour dynamics affected regional administration.[195] In the summer of 1943, the inability to recruit labourers into the Indian Civil Service (ICS) was evident as many citizens had already secured greater economic security through employment

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[191] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of July 1943.

[192] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 3 March 1945.

[193] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 19 February 1942.

[194] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 18 June 1943.

[195] BL IOR L PS 12/3117. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the first half of December 1943.

in a military capacity.[196] The wages offered by the military ensured citizens were no longer reliant on the ad hoc employment of the colonial regime. The offshoot of this reality was greater economic agency at ground level and issues with day-to-day administration for the British.

The issues evident in recruitment were part of a wider economic continuum set in motion by the war. The result identified by Clow was a massive 'economic dislocation… especially felt in the hills'.[197] In addition to military wages, there were various other offshoots of this economic dislocation. Challenges in supplying rice and other foodstuffs created problems with black market exploitation, as traders charged significantly inflated prices.[198] The prices were completely out of sync with reasonable rates for citizens who had not engaged in military employment. Meanwhile, the sale of fabrics and equipment – particularly those used in a black-market trade that reached 'immense proportions' – further compounded economic instability.[199] As with the impact of migration and militarisation, the economic impact of war provided a significant obstacle for the colonial regime.

The crises of war instigated the breakdown of the colonial governance model. A model which previously relied on the spectre of violence and a façade of power was untenable in the face of such drastic change. Clow lamented how his staff were 'more suited to the slow tempo of the backwater that was Assam' rather than the intense and unpredictable region it rapidly became.[200] The anxiety of British officials in the highlands was widespread, as identified later

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[196] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of June 1943.

[197] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 2 April 1943.

[198] BL IOR L PJ/5/136. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the first half of October 1943.

[199] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. A. G. Clow to Sir John Colville, 19 April 1945.

[200] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 'Report for Assam for the second half of September 1942', 2 October 1942.

in this chapter. The isolationism of frontier governmentality simply could not cope with the unprecedented scale of movement – and the various crises – war instigated. [201] As one official wrote, 'barriers of long-standing [were] rapidly being broken down'.[202] In place of the relatively stability that defined British governance in the highlands in the 1930s was a power vacuum by 1945.

Alone the breakdown in colonial governance may not have been terminal. State breakdown, in a physical and psychological sense, is commonplace in post-conflict societies.[203] But this breakdown went hand in hand with the increasing agency of highlands' communities. The vast proliferation of modern weapons gave greater options for resisting state power. Not only was the state faltering, but its colonised inhabitants had more options to challenge British governance. State breakdown created a power vacuum, but the proliferation of modern weapons intensified the seriousness of this breakdown.

The fallout of war, part II: the proliferation of modern weapons.

The proliferation of modern weapons across India's northeast is a largely overlooked phenomenon.[204] Its importance was two-fold. First, it provided an arsenal for the Naga

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[201] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of March 1942.

[202] BL IOR PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for the first half of October 1942.

[203] This led, for example, to the establishment of the 'peacebuilding' paradigm, which focused on the need to establish state apparatus in post-conflict societies. This, in theory, enabled states to develop political institutions to manage instability without resorting to violence. See Ana Cutter, 'Peace Building: A Literature Review', *Development in Practice*, 15.6 (2005), 778–84; John Heathershaw, 'Towards Better Theories of Peacebuilding: Beyond the Liberal Peace Debate', *Peacebuilding*, 1.2 (2013), 275–82.

[204] Scholarly analysis of weapons flows in the northeast often excludes the precedents established by the Second World War. There is a general recognition that war bolstered the strength of the Naga nationalist movement, but only Subir Bhaumik has interrogated this process with any conviction. See Bhaumik, *Troubled Periphery*, pp. 182-203; Anindita Dasgupta, 'Small Arms Proliferation in India's North-East: A Case Study of Assam', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36.1 (2001), 59–65; Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel, 'Armed Conflicts and Small Arms Proliferation in Northeast India', in *Search for Peace with Justice: Issues Around Conflicts in Northeast India*,

separatist movement in the 1950s, as explored in chapter II. Second, it embedded the crisis of colonial governance that war instigated. State power had already declined significantly by 1945, but the increasing agency of individuals in the highlands – enabled by the spread of firearms – compounded an already alarming situation. By the end of war, the reality was plain to see.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across India's northeast unfolded in a variety of ways,[205] and was the starting point for a long history of weapons diffusion.[206] Understanding the spread of SALW is a fundamentally difficult task, since it often involves negligence, malpractice and illicit trading. These trends can be difficult to trace and detect.[207] As Rachel Stohl and Suzette Grillot have suggested, the obvious scarcity of

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ed. by Walter Fernandes (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2008), pp. 85–97; S. P. Sinha, *Lost Opportunities: 50 Years of Insurgency in the North-East and India's Response* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2007), pp. 55-56. Only recently, by delving into the archives, has Bérénice Guyot-Réchard touched upon the broader significance of weapons proliferation in the northeast. See, Guyot-Réchard, 'Legions'.

[205] The methods through which firearms permeated into the region included negligence by military personnel, at times genuine but often with the implication that these were sold into illicit trade routes. The profit to be made in black market trading incentivised the loss of firearms for servicemen. In addition, unrecovered or lightly supervised arms dumps were a further source of permeation, whilst the inability to locate old dumps meant that they remained open to pilferage after the war concluded. See, Guwahati, Assam State Archives (hereafter 'ASA') Home Confidential 221 C/1945. Major General Jalakbari to the Secretary to the Governor of Assam, 'Battlefield Clearance', 26 August 1945. Both the British civil administration and the Japanese military were noted to arm citizens. The Kuki communities in the southern reaches of Manipur proved to be particularly conducive for the Japanese in this regard, considering their long history of resistance to colonisation. Altogether, this indicated various ways for proliferation to occur.

[206] There have been three broad historic processes stimulating the proliferation of weapons in the region. The first wave is dealt with here, directly resulting from wartime. The second came from external patronage for insurgent groups, especially from China and Pakistan. These dynamics are dealt with in chapters II-IV. Finally, weapons smuggled into the region through illicit means has been an increasingly common conundrum of the past few decades. Episodes such as the Chittagong arms haul in 2004 demonstrated the sheer numbers involved, as thousands of weapons intended to supply the ULFA were seized by authorities. For a brief note on some of these recent trends, see, Subir Bhaumik, 'Where do "Chinese" guns arming rebels really come from?', *BBC News*, 3 August 2010 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10626034> [accessed 20 April 2020].

[207] Despite the issues in outlining the breadth of proliferation, a sizeable amount of research has been conducted on the effects of weapons smuggling and the efforts to monitor illicit arms trading. This work has provided a useful overview of control dynamics, which in turn has provided a key platform for the study of weapons. See Simon Ball, 'The Battle of Dubai: Firearms on Britain's Arabian Frontier, 1906-15', in *A Cultural History of Firearms in the Age of Empire*, ed. by Karen R. Jones, Giacomo Macola, and David Welch (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); R. W. Beachey, 'The Arms Trade in East Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of African History*, 3.3 (1962), 451–67; John Berryman, 'Russia and the Illicit Arms Trade', *Crime, Law and Social Change*,

information makes research problematic.[208] It is not, however, impossible. For the Assam highlands, the data available from American military sources provides a baseline level of quantitative information. From this baseline, it is possible to extrapolate outwards to forge a keener understanding about the breadth of SALW proliferation.

Around 1,000 modern weapons were left behind in the CBI Theatre by US forces after the Second World War. American military officials became increasingly alarmed by reports of lost weapons as the war unfolded. Notices identified how 'the loss and theft of weapons in the hands of United States Army personnel in this Theater has reached serious proportions'.[209] Table 2 provides a US military estimate of the SALW lost by its personnel by the end of August 1944.

33.1 (2000), 85–104; R. M. Burrell, 'Arms and Afghans in Makrān: An Episode in Anglo-Persian Relations 1905–1912', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49.1 (1986), 8–24; James J. Cooke, 'Anglo-French Diplomacy and the Contraband Arms Trade in Colonial Africa, 1894-1897', *African Studies Review*, 17.1 (1974), 27–41; Christine Jojarth, *Crime, War, and Global Trafficking: Designing International Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Giacomo Macola, 'Reassessing the Significance of Firearms in Central Africa: The Case of North-Western Zambia to the 1920s', *The Journal of African History*, 51.3 (2010), 301–21; Abiodun Joseph Oluwadare, 'The Impact of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons on West African States: An Analysis of the Sierra Leone Civil War', *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*, 7.2 (2014), 189–209; David R. Stone, 'Imperialism and Sovereignty: The League of Nations' Drive to Control the Global Arms Trade', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35.2 (2000), 213–30.

[208] Rachel Stohl and Suzette Grillot, *The International Arms Trade* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), pp. 92-117.

[209] College Park, MD, The National Archives, United States of America (Hereafter 'TNA US') UD UP 127/773/385.2. Vernon Evans, Circular No. 19, APO 885, 18 February 1944.

Table 2: ***US Weapons lost or stolen in the CBI Theatre, as of August 1944 (officially reported).***[210]

Type	Lost/Stolen	Lost in Plane Crash	Combined
Pistol	248	169	417
Carbine	110	22	132
Rifle	40	2	42
Submachine Gun	40	49	89
Totals	438	242	680

The statistics corroborate the information provided in quarterly reports provided until that point.[211] Although no total overview is given by the end of US operations in 1945 a reliable estimate is possible from the remaining data available.

In total, the US military records suggest that around 1,500 SALW were reported as lost or stolen by September 1945.[212] This was accompanied by the tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition.[213] Across 1945 the recovery rates of these weapons ranged from just over fifteen per cent to just under thirty-seven per cent per quarter.[214] Even the highest bracket indicator of

[210] TNA US UD UP 127/773/385.2. 'Recapitulation of lost or stolen weapons as of 17 August 1944'.

[211] See reports until TNA US UD UP 127/773/385.2 'Recapitulation of lost or stolen weapons October 1, 1944 to January 1, 1945'.

[212] There is a slight overlap in records in the summer of 1944. The margins are small, but a conservative estimate is made by halving the number of recorded losses between July and October 1944, then adding this to the total losses between 1942 and August 1944. In this vein, the duplicate numbers for July 1944 are more than likely to be accounted for, producing an overall estimate of 1,473 losses from 1942-5. For the information provided after the summer 1944 assessment, see TNA US UD UP 127/773/385.2. Bernard Gladstein, 'Report of Lost, Stolen and Recovered Weapons', APO 885, 5 January 1945; Bernard Gladstein, 'Lost Stolen and Recovered Firearms', Circular No. 9, APO 885, 5 April 1945; Milton J. Weber, 'Lost Stolen and Recovered Firearms', Circular No. 21, APO 885, 30 July 1945; Milton J. Weber, 'Recapitulation Lost Stolen and Recovered Weapons, 1 July 1945 – 30 September 1945'.

[213] Between early 1944 and early 1945, 18,189 rounds of ammunition – largely for rifles and carbines – were noted to have been stolen.

[214] The individual statistics were as follows. Between January and March, the recovery rate was 27.17 per cent, between April and June, the recovery rate was 15.88 per cent and between July and September the recovery rate was 36.69 per cent.

weapon recovery rates leaves around 1,000 modern weapons circulating in the region. This – it must be stressed – is the most conservative estimate.

The CBI Theatre extended beyond the northeastern frontier of British India, leaving the question of how many of these c.1,000 firearms permeated specifically into the Assam province. To provide an insight into the levels lost in British India's northeast specifically, correlating data in the US archives with British administrative reports is useful. In a report to Archibald Wavell – British India's Viceroy – Clow noted the following in October 1944:

> A report has recently come in that during the last six months an estimated total of 400 carbines, pistols and sub-machine guns have been *lost by the American forces in Assam*. The matter is being investigated by our C.I.D. in collaboration with the Americans. The latter's slackness in the matter of security has been a source of disquiet for some time.[215]

Based on the US reports available, it is likely that Clow's assessment was derived from the August 1944 report produced by the American military and shown above in table 2.[216] Between Clow's assessment and the increasing cooperation between the British and Americans in combatting the losses of firearms, it can be inferred that a significant proportion of the recorded losses were filtering into the Assam province.[217] The summer 1944 estimate, for example, provided a permeation rate of just under fifty-nine per cent.

Applying the fifty-nine per cent Assam permeation rate to the total firearms diffusion in the CBI Theatre would be an overstretch. However, the number of guns caught up in the illicit markets directly involving Assam, which became even more extensive in 1945, suggested

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[215] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 19 October 1944. Emphasis own.

[216] By April 1944 only 352 firearms had been reported as missing by the US military and the next substantial report after the August appraisal was produced at the end of the year, after Clow's letter. The August appraisal therefore remains the most likely source for Clow's information.

[217] TNAUS UD UP 127/773/385.2. B. G. Ferris to JAG, 20 January 1945.

that a high proportion of missing weaponry in the region was likely maintained.[218] The archival evidence about the sheer breadth of weapons that remained in the Assam highlands in the post-independence period – demonstrated by the arsenal of the Naga underground – adds further support to the suggestion that a high proportion of SALW filtered into the northeast.

There is also further context to add to the conclusions established so far. There is the obvious issue with weapons 'officially' lost by US military personnel. This includes questions regarding rigorousness and reliability, but in lieu of any concrete evidence a second important point must be added. This second point is one that is enforced by source material. The US reports are used because the American military was the most efficient at producing paperwork about their own losses.[219] The US was not the only military operating in the region.

Figures on the other militaries in the CBI Theatre are less forthcoming. The archive does suggest, however, that all were liable to losing weapons. The British were reported to have lost firearms in Bengal in 1944 despite Clow's claim that it was mainly the Americans that were responsible for lax practices.[220] Chinese weapons were routinely noted in illicit smuggling routes and used by communities raiding in the North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT).[221] The prevalence of Japanese rifles in the Naga Hills after the 1944 invasion provides further evidence of the multiplicity of sources of firearms in the northeast.[222] What this suggests is

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[218] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of November 1944.

[219] Or, at least, have since been the most efficient in archiving this information.

[220] TNAUS UD UP 127/773/385.2. 'Note by Douglas Gordon'.

[221] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of November 1944; BL IOR L PS 12/3117. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the first half of April 1945.

[222] The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'Journey back to Mokokchung - relics of the Japanese invasion', 8 September 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67141.html> [21 March 2018].

that the c.1,000 weapons estimate provides a minimum baseline for the numbers that proliferated in the northeast. The reality is likely to be considerably higher.

With these figures in mind, the concerns of colonial officials about the spread of weaponry were altogether understandable. At the close of 1943, the frequent loss of arms was noted to be the 'chief source of anxiety' for district officers in the NEFT.[223] In the following autumn, Clow's secretary R. W. Godfrey identified a similarly bleak picture in Manipur, suggesting that 'vast quantities of abandoned arms and ammunition [are] scattered all over the State'.[224] Then, after the war concluded, discussions about the 'thousands' of firearms circulating in and around the Naga villages of northern Manipur revealed the extent of the obstacles that war had produced for the region.[225]

Framing the impact of this proliferation invokes the basic premise of several studies focused on the historical impact of weapons, published in the past decade and a half.[226] An inherent logic runs through this work, which suggests that arms have active impact on historical processes 'well beyond their immediate service functions'.[227] Placing SALW at the centre of historical enquiry aligns with broader research avenues focused on the history of objects,

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[223] BL IOR L PJ 5/136. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the first half of December 1943.

[224] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the first half of October 1944.

[225] ASA Home Confidential. 57C/1946. C. Gimson to R. W. Godfrey, 8 June 1946.

[226] Simon Ball, 'Britain and the Decline of the International Control of Small Arms in the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47.4 (2012), 812–37; Emrys Chew, *Arming the Periphery: The Arms Trade in the Indian Ocean during the Age of Global Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Jonathan A. Grant, *Rulers, Guns, and Money: The Global Arms Trade in the Age of Imperialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Lina Grip, 'History Never Repeats? Imports, Impact and Control of Small Arms in Africa', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36.1 (2015), 79–103; Jones et al, *Cultural History of Firearms*; Giacomo Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa: A History of Technology and Politics* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016); Priya Satia, *Empire of Guns: The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution* (London: Duckworth, 2018).

[227] Macola, *The Gun in Central Africa*, p. 3.

commodities and 'things', which suggests they have a causal impact which often goes undetected.[228] Being receptive to the extent of proliferation and the panic it caused amongst colonial officials strengthens the conclusion that SALW contributed to the breakdown of colonial governance in the highlands. By empowering citizens with greater physical tools to combat state subjugation, the diffusion of firearms was a key process in the history of the northeast.

Colonial officials were aware of the potential problems for state authority this proliferation signalled. A post-war drive was conducted to recover weapons, but the task was a gargantuan one. To achieve the recovery rates previously identified by the US military, 'salvage units' were deployed by the Americans. But these were 'so small in numbers that they [could] never adequately cover all areas'.[229] Both geography and numbers worked against the American drive to recover weapons. These issues would prove to be insurmountable obstacles for the British.

The British recovery drive began during the war as irregulars were deployed on salvage missions.[230] Results, however, were modest.[231] This continued after the war and was enforced

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[228] Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Leora Auslander, 'Beyond Words', *The American Historical Review*, 110.4 (2005), 1015–45; Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 21–45; Adam Budd, 'The Social History of Material Objects', in *The Modern Historiography Reader: Western Sources*, ed. by Adam Budd (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 467–507.

[229] TNA US UD UP 127/773. G. Symes to HQ ALFSEA, 'Security – Loss of Arms and Ammunition', 16 December 1944.

[230] BL IOR L PJ 5/137. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of December 1944.

[231] Arms return programmes were implemented before and after independence and offered clear rates of remuneration. Any automatic firearm, for example, was worth Rs. 300. One case yielded results, as Thangkhopao Kipgen was employed by the colonial regime to tour Kuki villages in southern Manipur. The archive suggests that over 2,000 – mostly Japanese – weapons were recovered. This was a hugely successful recovery drive but proved an anomalous undertaking. Without the ability to tap into local communities in the way Kipgen had, efforts elsewhere were considerably less successful. See New Delhi, The National Archives of India (Hereafter TNAI).

by the reluctance of communities to surrender weapons. A case study of the village of Irong Chesaba – about thirty kilometres south of Imphal – is informative in this regard. The village was located close to a major administrative centre and in a region noted for its loyalty during the war. Even with these favourable factors, recovery was difficult. When villagers were questioned by colonial officials about a nearby Japanese plane crash, no information was forthcoming.[232] It required a thorough inspection of the village to identify that military equipment was salvaged from the crash by villagers and stored in three houses. Military stores were desirable, whether for illicit resale, personal use, trophy hunting or broader political aims.[233] This inability to retrieve military equipment from a cordial village close to a central administrative hub, without having to actively conduct a search, indicated a bleak outlook for the recovery drive.

The nature of colonial governance ensured any recovery drive for unlicensed weapons was doomed to be a forlorn task. The colonial regime lacked both the ground-level apparatus to initiate a drive and the numbers to conduct active searches of villages. With these bleak prospects, a strategy was implemented to concentrate on recoveries closer to the major population centres.[234] Further into the interior of the highlands, the British effectively admitted

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'Press Communique', *The Assam Gazette*, 17 December 1947; ASA Home Confidential. 57C/1946. C. Gimson to R.W. Godfrey, 8 June 1946; C. Gimson to R.W. Godfrey, 19 June 1946.

[232] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the first half of May 1944.

[233] TNAUS UD UP 127/773. G. Symes to HQ ALFSEA, 'Security – Loss of Arms and Ammunition', 16 December 1944.

[234] ASA Home Confidential. 57C/1946. Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills to R.W. Godfrey, 18 July 1946.

defeat, especially with the added complication of insufficient official records about missing military equipment.[235] The SALW that proliferated during the war were there to stay.

The widespread access to SALW was evident in the post-war highlands, as shown in the next section. But altogether it is worth reiterating that war had a seismic impact on the northeast. The crises of war initiated a breakdown in colonial governance, as the façade of state power unravelled, and the viability of the frontier governmentality model diminished. The proliferation of SALW compounded this breakdown, providing greater ground-level agency that was apparent after 1945. But the post-war environment also witnessed a final trend that contributed to the post-colonial conundrum the Indian state faced in the highlands. Alongside the breakdown in governance, and the proliferation of weapons, the rising tide of political consciousness was a potent force as independence loomed.

Post-war: regional instability and political mobilisation.

The breakdown of colonial governance was a defining feature of the post-war highlands. The lack of control was clearest in widespread regional clashes, sparked by the proliferation of SALW across the northeast. The British administration's control in the 1930s disappeared, leaving behind a power vacuum for the Indian state. In addition, as talk turned towards the future of the subcontinent, a widespread political mobilisation unfolded in the highlands. In a region already characterised by weak state structures and easy access to modern weapons, political activism provided a final challenge for the post-colonial state by 1947.

[235] The lack of records led to an 'impossibility of verifying statements alleging that [certain] guns were returned' to certain units or places. See BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the first half of March 1945.

The breakdown of colonial control was reflected in correspondence between British officials. Panic defined this correspondence. Anxiety about 'danger spots' in the borderlands was evident in a report that worried about how local disputes could spread throughout Angami territory in the Naga Hills.[236] The effects this could have in the wider district enforced this sense of colonial angst.[237] The 'greatest danger spot in the hills' was identified at the confluence between the Naga Hills, northern Manipur and the North Cachar subdivision.[238] Local feuds threatened to escalate, but British officials had a startling lack of information about ground-level developments. For example, news of a meeting between several villages in Manipur – who had discussed raiding Naga villages to their north – did not reach colonial officials until long after the event. Additionally, it was Pawsey in the Naga Hills District who was notified about the meeting, not the relevant British official in Manipur. [239] The prospects for regional peace were bleak, and the colonial state lacked the capacity to intervene.

This unfolding reality was evident elsewhere, in the northern reaches of the Naga Hills, the NEFT and the broader Assam borderlands.[240] Weapons recovered from the war provided the arsenal for skirmishes that occurred without the state reprisals, which previously formed a cornerstone of colonial governance.[241] Historical rivalries and local boundary issues were some

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[236] ASA Home Confidential. 57C/1946. 'A note on Naga-Kuki tension in the Naga Hills, Manipur State and the North Cachar Hills'.

[237] *Ibid.*

[238] *Ibid.*

[239] ASA Home Confidential. 57C/1946. Assam Governor's Secretariat to C. Gimson, 24 May 1946.

[240] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 18 January 1945.

[241] See, for example, BL IOR L PS 12/3114 Report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the year ending 30 June 1947; BL IOR L PS 12/3117. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the second half of June 1947.

of the motivators behind these clashes.[242] The important point was how they reflected the breakdown of colonial power structures. The British simply could not enforce regional security in the manner it had prior to the war.

Before 1942 inter-village raiding within British zones of control was confronted with a show of military force. This formed part of the colonial habitus, which projected an imaginary of state power that served as a deterrent to future infringements. After 1942 militarised responses to perceived transgressions to colonial authority were difficult, as the foundations of British rule in the highlands cracked. US intelligence reports suggested that around seven hundred deaths were caused by inter-village clashes in the broader Assam borderlands by the close of 1946.[243] The persistent number of raids reported by the British – and their death tolls – suggested that the American estimate was likely a reasonable deduction.[244]

Although the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills did not witness the same raiding dynamics evident along the Indo-Burmese border and in the NEFT, an erosion of state power was clear. Colonial officials were aware of corruption fuelled by the wartime economy, but lacked the personnel and resources to confront the issue.[245] The faltering 'steel frame' of the ICS – evident elsewhere in post-war British India – was similarly noticeable in the Assam highlands.[246]

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[242] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 5 November 1942.

[243] *Conditions in North Burma* (Central Intelligence Agency, 21 January 1947), p. 1, CIA Online Library <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r000200810004-0> [accessed 4 November 2019].

[244] See, for example, BL IOR L PJ 5/139. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 6 January 1947; BL IOR L PS/12/3117. Fortnightly report on the Assam Tribal Areas for the first half of December 1946. In the former, sixty-six deaths occurred in two related raids, with fifty deaths in the latter.

[245] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 18 January 1945.

[246] David C. Potter, 'Manpower Shortage and the End of Colonialism: The Case of the Indian Civil Service', *Modern Asian Studies*, 7.1 (1973), 47–73.

Recruitment for the ICS in Assam had historically been a problem, as the province lacked the prestige of administrative posts elsewhere.[247] But the effects of war magnified these issues, with Clow particularly despondent.[248] The geography of the highlands, which made posting new officials difficult, was also magnified after the war in light of the breakdown of governance.[249]

The post-war landscape was a far cry from the relative self-assurance of colonial rule that characterised the 1939 expedition to the villages of Pangsha, Yungkao and Ukha. The transgression in 1939 which prompted the expedition – essentially the use of dated 'guns against Government orders' – was a common post-war occurrence which the colonial state could not confront.[250] The anxieties that defined correspondence and the reports of colonial officials remained until 14-15 August 1947.[251] The Assam highlands was a space defined by a lack of state control and regional insecurity by the time independence was achieved.

But as independence loomed, another key trend in the highlands emerged. That trend was political mobilisation. Prior to the 1940s, the colonial regime 'left no room for electoral processes and banned political activities' across the highlands.[252] Cultural organisations such

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[247] Kar, 'When Was the Postcolonial?', p. 50.

[248] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. A. G. Clow to Lord Linlithgow, 'Report for Assam for the second half of September 1942', 2 October 1942.

[249] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of August 1945.

[250] BL IOR L PS 12/3116. C. R. Pawsey to the Commissioner of Divisions, Assam, 28 November 1939, p. 2.

[251] BL IOR L PJ 5/140. A. G. Clow to Lord Mountbatten, 2 May 1947. Clow, for example, wrote to Mountbatten and identified the need to extend the zone of direct control once more, part of a futile effort to re-establish some semblance of state authority into Assam's borderlands.

[252] Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 246.

as the Naga Club and the Young Lushai Association (YLA) existed but lacked political clout.[253] But with changes on the horizon and British strength eroding, a notable mobilisation occurred from 1945-7.

Political mobilisation saw the birth of several institutions and had three distinct traits. First, an historic disconnect from the mainstream freedom struggle translated into apprehension about the national parties in British India. Second, the desire for autonomy for the indigenous communities in the highlands was a core tenet of political activism. Third, ethnicity was central to political mobilisation, as institutionalised markers of language, religion and culture all underpinned identity claims. This mobilisation was the final key factor at the onset of the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands.

Apprehension about British India's mainstream parties – especially Congress – was a clear trend in the highlands.[254] Historically there was little connection to the freedom struggle.[255] Anti-colonial activity was a regional undertaking, despite Congress' subsequent

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[253] The experiences of wartime service formed the basis for the Naga Club. John Thomas also suggested that the emergence of a middle class and emancipatory experiences in the wider world were significant factors behind the founding of the club. See, Thomas, 'Sending out the Spears', p. 418. For further coverage of service rendered by citizens of the northeast in WWI, see, Jangkhomang Guite, 'Rite of Passage in the Great War: The Long March of Northeast Indian Labourers to France, 1917–1918', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 57.3 (2020), 363–98. For some introductory notes on the establishment of the Young Lushai Association and its role as a 'forerunner' for Mizo political action, see, C. Nunthara, *Mizoram: Society and Polity* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1996), pp. 118-27; Pachuau and Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, pp. 245-52.

[254] This contrasted with the Brahmaputra Valley. Guwahati, for example, served as a 'principal centre of Congress activity'. Gopinath Bordoloi and Siddhinath Sarma – notable members of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee – were among those arrested by the colonial state in response to the Quit India movement. The League likewise enlisted significant support from the sizeable Muslim population in the province and communal clashes that emerged across British India in the 1940s were evident in the Assam Valley as well. See BL IOR L PJ 5/134. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the second half of March 1941; BL IOR L PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for the first half of August 1942; BL IOR L PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the second half of September 1942.

[255] Roluahpuia, 'Unsettled Autonomy: Ethnicity, Tribes and Subnational Politics in Mizoram, North-East India', *Nations and Nationalism*, 27.2 (2021), 412–26; V. Xaxa, 'Tribes and Indian National Identity: Location of Exclusion and Marginality', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 23.1 (2016), 223–37. This was a relatively consistent trait for indigenous communities elsewhere in British India

manipulation of narratives.[256] In the post-war period, the disassociation from national politics was demonstrated by Mao Naga leaders during an Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) visit. During the visit, the Mao Naga delegation 'confessed that they have heard the names of Gandhi and Nehru as the great men of India but knew nothing of the Congress or the League and wished to be associated with the other Hill Tribes in a N.E. India Federation'.[257] Despite repeated attempts by the APCC to garner support within the hills, the disconnect revealed by Mao Naga elites was a recurrent theme in the highlands.[258]

This disconnect was important because it fuelled the drive for autonomy amongst the highlands' political elite. Congress visions of national unity had little purchase. Autonomy was desired to combat the paternalism of the valley.[259] This mindset was widespread. In the Khasi hills, J. P. Mills – Clow's Tribal Advisor – noted from an early stage how:

> [Recent events have] turned the thoughts of some Khasis towards the amalgamation of their whole country, including the British area of Jowai Subdivision, into one State.

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[256] Rani Gaidinliu has remained a central figure in this regard. She was granted the title of 'Rani' by Nehru and received a succession of awards for her resistance to colonialism by the Indian government, such as the Padma Bhushan in 1981. But the attempts to shoehorn her anti-colonialism into a broader freedom struggle is problematic. See, Jangkhomang Guite, 'Monuments, Memory and Forgetting in Postcolonial North-East India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46.8 (2011), 56–64 (pp. 60-61); BL IOR L PS 13/1002. Note on Rani Gaidinliu, February 1947. More recently her struggles have been incorporated by the Sangh Parivar. See, Longkumer, *The Greater India Experiment*, chapter 6.

[257] BL IOR L PS/13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the latter half of November 1946.

[258] See, for example, BL IOR L PJ/5/138. Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of October 1945; Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of November 1944; BL IOR L PJ/5/139. Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of September 1946; Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of October 1946; BL IOR L PJ/5/140. A. G. Clow to Lord Mountbatten, 19 April 1947. Such efforts were met with varying problems. In the Lushai Hills, the superintendent took the unprecedented step of arresting and expelling students who attempted to rally Congress support, much to Clow's consternation about the backlash this would ensure from the APCC. But, more generally, a distinct lack of interest in Congress was noted in the highlands. In the Naga Hills, for example, Omeo Kumar Das' visit essentially produced no results. And in one case Congress emissaries were barred from a village altogether when they accidentally interrupted a religious ceremony.

[259] Walter Fernandes and Bhaswati Borgohain, *Rethinking Autonomy, Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Search for Peace in Northeast India* (Guwahati: North Eastern Social Research Centre, 2017), pp. 5-13.

> They are Indian in neither origin, language or culture, and, while not actively hostile to Indians, have always tended to resent Indian interference in their affairs.[260]

With talk turning towards a future free from colonialism, a sense of difference from an Indian 'other' was widespread.[261] This was evident, for example, in the Garo Hills in complaints of discrimination from the valley.[262] The disconnect from the mainstream anti-colonial freedom struggle went hand in hand with the desire for autonomy.

Autonomy therefore became a cornerstone of highland politics in the post-war period; its use as a practical tool to protect indigenous customs was increasingly championed as the end of colonial rule dawned. Alongside Khasi and Garo cases was a similar trajectory in the Naga Hills, evidenced in the summer of 1946 during a large meeting at Wokha in the Lotha region.[263] The meeting was attended by numerous elites who had divergent views on whether an independent Indian state had the right to rule over the Naga Hills.[264] But one clear point of unity was the desire for 'local autonomy and due safeguards for the interest of the Nagas'.[265]

The desire to secure autonomy concessions in part instigated the rapid creation of political institutions between 1945-7. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council that formed in

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[260] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the first half of August 1942.

[261] In the forging of identity formations, the invocation of an alien other has historically been a significant factor, and this held true in the highlands. Linda Colley's work – which suggested British national identity consolidated through an aversion to France – is a notable example in this regard. see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, revised edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[262] BL IOR L PJ 5/135. Fortnightly Report for the first half of November 1942.

[263] BL IOR L PJ 5/139. Fortnightly Report for Assam for the second half of June 1946.

[264] The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'NNC meeting at Wokha, June 1946', 18 July 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67024.html> [20 March 2018].

[265] *Ibid.*

February 1946 was the forerunner to the influential Naga National Council (NNC).[266] The Garo National Council (GNC) quickly became the dominant political organisation in the Garo Hills, though in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills a more fragmented picture emerged.[267] The Lushai Hills also witnessed a degree of contestation between its two major institutions established in the period: the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) and the Mizo Union (MU).[268] All these institutions, though, placed autonomy at the centre of their agendas.

The composition of these political institutions was important. Ethnicity was a defining feature. Ethnicity was understood through identifiers like language, culture and religion but was never static, nor a pre-destined marker for how political mobilisation unfolded. In March 1945, for example, the Assam Tribes and Races Federation was created.[269] Though short-lived, the organisation took indigeneity as its central ideological construction. It envisaged a broader political grouping than – for instance – the narrower focus on Naga identity pioneered by the NNC. Between 1945-7 indigeneity was compartmentalised into distinct ethnic institutions.

National imaginaries – such as Garo or Mizo – were not born in this period. Identity formation in the highlands had a far longer history.[270] Arkotong Longkumer's analysis of Naga nationalism identified a deep-rooted conception of identity related to land, experience and

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[266] Misra, *India's North-East*, p. 98.

[267] BL IOR L PJ 5/139. F. C. Bourne to Lord Wavell, 23 August 1946.

[268] BL IOR L PJ 5/139. Fortnightly report for Assam for the first half of October 1946.

[269] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. Fortnightly report for Assam for the second half of January 1945; A. G. Clow to Sir John Colville, 19 April 1945.

[270] Arkotong Longkumer, 'Bible, Guns and Land: Sovereignty and Nationalism amongst the Nagas of India', *Nations and Nationalism*, 24.4 (2018), 1097–1116.

religion that sat uneasily with modernist conceptions of nationalism.[271] Longkumer's conception mirrored the focus on the historic impact of symbols, rituals and local institutions pioneered elsewhere by Peter van der Veer, Tony Day and Anthony Smith.[272] Yet, the political mobilisation of the highlands between 1945-47 had a profound effect upon these national imaginaries. The institutionalisation of various highlands' nationalisms – evident in the birth of political parties – was pivotal for the trajectories of post-independence identity politics.[273]

In short, therefore, anxieties about the future – centred on apprehension about paternalistic practices towards indigenous communities – created the impetus for the political

[271] The modernist interpretation suggests that nationalism is a constructed modern phenomenon enabled by the emergence of print capitalism This definition essentially paraphrases the work of Benedict Anderson, who was at the forefront of the modernist wave of literature on nationalism. Similarly influential modernist approaches were also pioneered by Ernst Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger. Together, they published seminal research in 1983, leading a more recent scholar to refer to the year as *annus mirabilis* in nationalism studies. Debates about modernity have since shaped the contours of nationalism research, whilst the Euro-centric nature of the modernist school came under increasing scrutiny recently. For the core texts, see, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 20th printing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a general overview of the historiography, see, Eric Storm, 'A New Dawn in Nationalism Studies? Some Fresh Incentives to Overcome Historiographical Nationalism', *European History Quarterly*, 48.1 (2018), 113–29; Eric Storm, 'Nationalism: Toward a New Global Understanding', *History: Reviews of New Books*, 47.3 (2019), 47–50. For some of key debates, see, John Coakley, '"Primordialism" in Nationalism Studies: Theory or Ideology?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 24.2 (2018), 327–47.

[272] Tony Day, *Fluid Iron: State Formation in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 166–227; Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009); Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1–24; Peter van der Veer, 'Nationalism and Religion', in Breuilly, *History of Nationalism*, pp. 655–69.

[273] The debate about modernity and nationalism proved to be particularly influential in the Naga case. The primordial conception of identity is a cornerstone of separatist ideology. In the latest version of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization report, the section produced by the NSCN-IM has a section on historical context which notes how the Naga people – originally from Mongolia – migrated to the northeastern region of India around the tenth century BC and remained an independent nation until the arrival of the British. See, *Member Profile: Nagalim* (Brussels: The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, 2019), pp. 3-5. Challenges to this narrative have produced palpable tension. In 2000, S. C. Jamir – of the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee – openly questioned this belief in a pamphlet titled *The Bedrock of Naga Society*. Copies of *Bedrock* were publicly burned by the Naga Student Federation and the NSCN-IM labelled Jamir a traitor to the Naga people. See, Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, pp. 110-113; Longkumer, 'Bible, Guns and Land', p. 1103.

mobilisation of the highlands.[274] The nascent organisations were organised along ethnic lines and placed autonomy at the forefront of their political agendas. Ethnicity was a decisive mobiliser of support. In northern Manipur, for example, Naga communities looked towards the NNC rather than the Manipur state Durbar.[275] There were regional variants, such as the split in the Lushai Hills District over local power structures and the flirtation with Congress in the Khasi Hills as a practical means to ensure autonomy demands.[276] But a constant theme was the mobilising force that appeals to ethnic solidarity garnered.

The ground-level results of this mobilisation were detectable by the summer of 1946. At a British Hills Officers' Conference on 26 July it was noted how local-level administration was already changing, for instance with the establishment of village and district councils in the Naga Hills.[277] A similar story was evident in the Lushai Hills, whilst a general note was made about the calls for administrative and political changes across the highlands.[278] Altogether, the British were aware they could no longer 'keep our Hills districts and tribes in a water-tight compartment'.[279] This reflected the breakdown of colonial control, but also the potency of the

[274] For example, of the one hundred and eight seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly before 1947 only six were reserved for the 'hill tribes', with four more allocated for the 'plains tribals'. Political representation was disproportionately focused on the plains where indigenous communities had little clout, meaning that the aspirations of indigenous communities could fall by the wayside. For an insight into the composition of the Legislative Assembly in the last election before independence, see BL IOR L PJ 5/139. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 5 February 1946.

[275] BL IOR L PJ 5/138. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, Shillong, 4 July 1945.

[276] BL IOR L PS 13/1005. Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the first half of October 1945; Fortnightly report on states in political relationship with his excellency the Governor of Assam for the second half of November 1945.

[277] BL IOR L PJ 5/139. F. C. Bourne to Lord Wavell, 23 August 1946.

[278] *Ibid.*

[279] *Ibid.*

political mobilisation that was underway. Ground-level action was evident as highlands' institutions demanded new methods of governance.

By mid-1947, the 'Bordoloi Sub-Committee' hearings revealed what the politicisation of the highlands signalled for the Indian state after independence.[280] The Bordoloi Sub-Committee was part of the Constituent Assembly.[281] Headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, Assam's Premier, the Sub-Committee was tasked with ascertaining political aspirations in the highlands after the departure of the British. A keen attachment to identity formations and the desire for autonomy defined the hearings across the highlands. These ambitions for life after independence were, therefore, a significant challenge the post-colonial state would have to confront.

The hearings took place between April and July 1947.[282] In the Lushai Hills, from 18 April 1947, Reverend Zairema made persistent reference to 'the improvement of the position of the Mizo people', whilst Vanlawma similarly referred to 'our internal administration, our

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[280] Officially titled the North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee.

[281] Sandipto Dasgupta, 'Conflict, not consensus: towards a political economy of the making of the Indian Constitution', in *The Indian Constituent Assembly: Deliberations on Democracy*, ed. by Udit Bhatia (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 134; J. Zahluna, 'Constituent Assembly and the Sixth Schedule: With Special Reference to Mizoram', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 71.4 (2010), 1235–42. The Constituent Assembly, tasked with drafting a constitution for British India, sat for the first time in early December 1946. It consisted of several committees, charged with tasks ranging from negotiations with the princely states to deciding on a national flag. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee was a subsection of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas, established after a meeting at the close of February 1947.

[282] The composition of the Bordoloi Sub-Committee drew some criticism prior to its visit to the northeast. Aiding Bordoloi was A. V. Thakkar, Rupnath Brahma, J. J. M. Nichols-Roy and Mayang Nokcha, with R.K. Ramadhyani in the role of secretary and B. N. Rau assisting. Of these, only Nichols-Roy and Mayang Kokcha had intimate knowledge of the highlands, and the latter resigned shortly after accepting his post, stating his belief that he could do more for his people operating outside the Sub-Committee. Meanwhile, in the Naga Hills, Mildred Archer observed a general feeling that the Sub-Committee's primary aim was to ensure 'the Congress ideas of what the Nagas ought to want should prevail'. See BL IOR L PJ/5/140. A. G. Clow to Lord Wavell, 19 March 1947; The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'Sub-committee elected in Delhi to advise on the constitution of the Naga Hills, December 1946', 9 July 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67026.html> [20 March 2018].

laws, our customs…'.[283] When the MU representatives sat in the following day, a desire for 'territorial unity and solidarity of the whole Mizo population to be known henceforth as… Mizoram' was plainly stated.[284] Despite divergent ideas about the specifics – which included an appeal by Vanthuama for the right to secede from the Indian Union after ten years – the centrality of a Mizo conception of identity was paramount.[285] And, as noted above, this included demands for autonomy in various guises.[286]

In the Garo Hills, the internal cohesion of the GNC ensured a unified outlook by the time the Sub-Committee arrived.[287] As in the Lushai Hills, the appeals to a Garo sense of identity were clear, with the stated desire to 'bring in all Garos from all over Assam'.[288] A role within a federated India was more popular here than elsewhere in the highlands, but the GNC likewise identified autonomy demands as it outlined 'our special customs and manners which are different from other peoples of the Plains'.[289] Once more, the centrality of identity and the desire for autonomy was clear.

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[283] *North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Volume II (Evidence). Part I: Lushai, North-Cachar, Garo, Mikir and Naga Hills* (New Delhi: Constituent Assembly of India, 1947), pp. 2, 9.

[284] *Ibid*, p. 27.

[285] *Ibid*, pp. 27-28.

[286] A representative of Mizo Chiefs felt it was a given that the 'Lushai [would] take over the administration' in any future governance structure. An Ex-Servicemen's Association representative likewise noted how 'we have been in the army mixing with the Indians for 15 years and we were looked down upon. If such things happen, we don't like it'. And Zairema suggested to the Sub-Committee representatives that 'it seems that you are taking it for granted that we would like to join the Indian Union'. The core themes of political mobilisation were therefore core themes of the Sub-Committee hearings in the Lushai Hills.

[287] *North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Volume II (Evidence). Part I: Lushai, North-Cachar, Garo, Mikir and Naga Hills* (New Delhi: Constituent Assembly of India, 1947), p. 119.

[288] *Ibid*.

[289] *Ibid*, p. 123.

The meetings in the Naga Hills, from 19 May 1947, were more contentious than in the Garo Hills. Proceedings began in problematic circumstances with members of the Sub-Committee absent and Bordoloi's opening speech – conducted in Assamese – not understood by many Naga delegates in attendance.[290] Through the course of talks, the NNC secretary Aliba Imti mirrored Vanthuama's earlier emphasis on the ten-year interim principle, though a series of contrasting ideas about the future left Bordoloi frustrated and talks open-ended.[291] But the one clear trend to emerge – identified by Bordoloi – was the 'very broad idea that the Naga land should belong to the Naga people and… the Naga people will be governed by them in their own land'.[292] Once more, the core aspects of political mobilisation were apparent.

The final Sub-Committee hearings in the highlands were held in Shillong from 10 June 1947 to consider the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Despite the more convoluted political structure of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, a relatively coherent vision was put forward by delegates.[293] Before talks took place J. J. M. Nichols-Roy – an influential Khasi politician – submitted a draft constitution which gained popularity throughout the region. It recommended incorporating the Khasi and Jaintia Hills into Assam after independence, but as a distinct polity with control over local administration.[294] Unity for those who spoke the Khasi language – the dominant language

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[290] *Ibid,* pp. 181-82.

[291] *Ibid*, p. 198.

[292] *Ibid*, p. 214.

[293] The political composition of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was more complex than in the other districts of the highlands. The joint Khasi and Jaintia Hills were designated together as a single Partially Excluded Area, but the major town of Shillong was exempt from this jurisdiction in its function as the administrative centre of the Assam province. Meanwhile, the loose collection of treaties and agreements conditioned the Khasi Siemships effectively as princely states. For a brief note on the exceptionalism of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, compared to the other hill regions of Assam, see Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj*, pp. 320-28.

[294] The proposals termed the polity as the Khasi-Jaintia Federated State, split into two subdivisions governed from Shillong (for the Khasi Hills) and Jowai (for the Jaintia Hills). The federated state would then have a National Council, made up of twenty-nine members – four of which had to be women – to govern the region. The federated state would then have four elected members within the Assam Provincial Legislature, but no provincial legislation

in the region – was clear.[295] The old Siems similarly noted a desire for regional cooperation if they remained 'masters in our own house'.[296]The central aspects of autonomy and identity were once more cornerstones of the outlook from the highlands.

By the eve of independence, the political mobilisation of the highlands was a tangible presence. It added a final factor to the post-colonial migraine that the Indian state would have to confront. In addition to weak state governance and the proliferation of modern weapons, the inhabitants of the highlands had signalled their political aspirations within an independent subcontinent.

Conclusion.

War and independence instigated colossal change in the Assam highlands. The long decolonisation had begun, but it would be defined by the state's response to the challenges established in the 1940s. The breakdown of colonial governance left a power vacuum for the Indian state. The proliferation of SALW created a security dilemma, especially problematic for a region lacking ground-level governance apparatus. The political mobilisation of the highlands above all posed an ideological challenge. The state required a viable agenda to satisfy regional

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would be allowed in the federated state without approval from the National Council. Therefore, this was a polity firmly within the Assam administration but with distinct safeguards for autonomy.

[295] *North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Volume II (Evidence). Part 2: Margherita, Sadiya Frontier Tract, Balipara Frontier Tract, Khasi and Jaintia Hills and General* (New Delhi: Constituent Assembly of India, 1947), p. 75. The proposals received widespread purchase throughout the region, with substantial popular support from the Jaintia Hills. When questioned about whether any dissent existed within the Jaintia Hills about Nichols-Roy's draft constitution – from the minority Mikir population – a Jaintia representative invoked language as a primary marker underpinning the joint conception of identity. He noted that 'we make no difference between ourselves and the Mikirs. Our students also read the Khasi language. In the schools we teach the same language…'

[296] *Ibid,* p. 85.

identity movements whilst retaining a sense of national unity. These challenges required resolution.

The severity of the situation was not immediately evident as independence dawned in August 1947. The highlands did not witness the levels of volatility evident elsewhere in the subcontinent, but neither was there an outpouring of celebration. It was, rather, a relatively benign start to life after British rule. Yet, as Mildred Archer – based at Sanis in the Naga Hills on 15 August – noted, the calm evident in the region was 'slightly sinister. It is as if we are sitting waiting for a storm'.[297] Archer's comments were unnervingly prophetic.

It is to the Naga Hills, where Mildred Archer was based, that this thesis now turns. Elsewhere in the highlands the challenges presented by war and independence did not create an immediate crisis. But in the Naga Hills the Naga National Council's declaration of independence on 14 August 1947 set an ominous tone.[298] Within the NNC, several leading figures were ardent nationalists. They worked towards creating a cohesive, effective institution that could challenge Indian sovereignty and enact a separatist agenda. It was in the Naga Hills, therefore, that the most capricious and immediate response to the challenges established during the 1940s was evident.

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[297] The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'Trip to Kohima - Independence Day at Sanis', 15 August 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67083.html> [accessed 21 March 2018].

[298] *The Naga Chronicle*, ed. by V. K. Nuh and Wetshokhrolo Lasuh, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2016), pp. 119-121. Naga National Council to the Secretary General, United Nations, 'Declaration of Naga Independence', 14 August 1947.

Chapter II: A colonial approach to a post-colonial problem: the Indian state and the Naga conflict, 1947-58.

Introduction.

After independence, the formative stages of the Naga separatist uprising were critical. Key trends for the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands were established and structural challenges emerged for regional security in the northeast. This chapter analyses the shift from potentially challenging border space in 1947 to site of civil war and emergency legislation by 1958. In just over a decade, the state response to the Naga nationalist movement began to embed long-term problems not only for the Naga Hills, but the entire northeast.

The chapter identifies how both the provincial administration (1953-56), and central government (1956-58), invoked a colonial mindset to confront the Naga challenge. Rather than approaching the Naga nationalist movement in the guise of legitimate ideological aspirations, the state opted for a security-led militarised approach. The problem – for the state – was that the Naga rebel challenge emerged as a strong, coherent movement between 1947-52, in a region defined by weak state control. Hence, as unrest led to clashes and then civil war, state forces were not able to achieve victory. The inability to defeat the Naga movement in the field produced future quandaries.

This chapter demonstrates that the state response to the Naga challenge produced three adverse effects. First, it embedded the rift between Naga and Indian conceptions of nationality. This directly contradicted nation-building aspirations at the centre, which aimed to reconcile rather than juxtapose these visions of national identity. Second, it raised questions about the

capabilities of the state. The longer the state was unable to defeat the Naga rebel movement, the weaker it appeared. Third, the Naga movement established some key precedents for how to conduct operations against Indian forces. In response to militarised government initiatives, the rebel movement utilised its arsenal, geographic surroundings, and international neighbours to notable effect, ensuring its survival.

All three of these effects directly relate to the facets of the long decolonisation noted in the introduction. As demonstrated later in the thesis, these processes that began in the Naga Hills did not unfold in a contained space. They had wider ramifications in the short-term for the Assam highlands and the long-term for the security of the northeast. The early stages of the Naga conflict, therefore, were crucial in shaping the post-colonial history of India's northeast.

The consolidation of the Naga separatist movement, 1947-52.

The Indian state lacked both legitimacy and control in the Naga Hills after independence, a direct consequence of the power vacuum left by the British. Between 1947-52, the Naga separatist movement imposed itself in the hills. It established a presence unmatched by the state, which clung to colonial methods of governance. The Naga consolidation of power created the foundation for its separatist challenge, and the civil war that followed.

The region was fashioned as the Naga Hills District (NHD) within the Assam state after independence.[299] The NHD was the sole area of Assam to experience armed conflict in the 1950s. To understand how this occurred, the micro-analytical turn in conflict studies explains how the Naga separatist movement took control of the power vacuum left by the British.

[299] It was one of the AHDs, covered in greater detailed in chapter III.

In the 1950s, Indian politicians blamed the Naga uprising on a variety of external forces. These interpretations have long-since been rejected in serious academic literature. Figures such as Bishnuram Medhi – Assam's Chief Minister from August 1950 – were quick to blame the role of Christian missionaries and Pakistan's foreign policy objectives.[300] Udayon Misra disproved mythologies about the missionaries which persisted into the 1970s whilst the other explanations did not hold up to scrutiny.[301] Yet subsequent analysis has displayed shortcomings.

The suggestion that the leader of the Naga separatist movement – Zapu Phizo – 'hoodwinked' many 'innocent and simple' Nagas is as misleading as it is reductionist.[302] State-

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[300] London, The National Archives, United Kingdom (Hereafter 'TNA UK') DO 35/8891. Extract of enclosure to India Dept. no.129, 'Assam Hills Areas'. Medhi essentially outlined lingering colonial interests, the intrigues of missionaries, Pakistan's foreign policy objectives and the ambitions of radical parties within India as the key reasons for the Naga uprising. In short, anything that absolved his own government from culpability.

[301] For Misra's critique of the Christian missionary thesis, see, Udayon Misra, 'The Naga National Question', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13.14 (1978), 618–24. Meanwhile, each of Medhi's assertions were problematic. Some colonial officials certainly enabled – even if not actively encouraging – anti-Indian sentiment as independence loomed. But this was evident throughout the borderlands and the actions of – for example – the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills who arrested Congress supporters raise a broader question. Why did the Naga Hills alone witness an uprising? If the machinations of colonial officials had any tangible impact, there should have logically been greater instability in the rest of the highlands after 1947. Indeed, the rumours about lingering colonial interest in the Assam highlands actively worked against the British after 1947, leading staff within British commissions in India to repeatedly distance themselves from the NNC. See TNA UK FO 371/106853. B. R. Pearn to CRO, Meeting Minutes, 18 June 1953; TNA UK FO 371/106853. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 'Nagas', 21 July 1953; *On the Edge of Empire: Four British Plans for North East India, 1941–1947*, ed. by David R. Syiemlieh (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2014). Although rogue missionaries did instigate significant trouble (see, TNA UK FO 371/106853. B. R. Pearn, Meeting Minutes, 25 August 1953.), their role in actively instigating a Naga rebellion has long since been dismissed as hyperbole, as noted above by Misra. Unsurprisingly, therefore, when missionaries were expelled from the Naga Hills in 1954, there was no impact on the trajectories of the Naga separatist movement (see, TNA UK DO/35/8891. Extract of enclosure to India Dept. no.129, 'Assam Hills Areas'.). Meanwhile, the Naga rebels did not establish contact with Pakistan until 1956, long after the rise of the separatist cause. The support the NNC enjoyed from Indian political parties – such as the Praja Socialist Party of the Communist Party of India – was fleeting in the early days and both eventually denounced the Naga separatist movement (see, TNA UK DO 35/8891. Extract from Calcutta Report, 5 April 1954.).

[302] Vivek Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts in India: An Analysis* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 284; N. K. Das, 'Naga Peace Parleys: Sociological Reflections and a Plea for Pragmatism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46.25 (2011), 70–77. Misleading in the sense that it overplays Phizo's individual resonance, reductionist due to the essentialising notions about indigenous communities such statements reflect. More insightful conclusions can be drawn when interrogating how Phizo was able to ascend to the NNC leadership and stabilize his own position, as suggested by Namrata Goswami. But this is insightful precisely because it seeks to move beyond the characteristics of individual personalities and towards the processes these personalities interacted with.

focused research has provided greater macro-level analysis of the Naga uprising.[303] Yet, beyond this literature, reflections are lacking about how the rebel movement organised an armed challenge so effectively against a vastly superior foe. This is where the micro-analytical turn is useful.[304] Insights from this literature are essential to understand the Naga uprising. Before the post-colonial state instigated state-building strategies, the Naga movement forged a cohesive nationalist movement.

Social networks and grassroots connections can be key indicators of rebel group success.[305] The Naga National Council (NNC) was proficient in both guises. Attaining

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See, Namrata Goswami, 'The Naga Narrative of Conflict: Envisioning a Resolution Roadmap', *Strategic Analysis*, 31.2 (2007), 287–313.

[303] For literature which offers keen insight into the role of the state in the Naga conflict, see, Franke, *War and Nationalism*, pp. 66-80. Elisabeth Leake, 'At the Nation-State's Edge: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-1947 South Asia', *The Historical Journal*, 59.2 (2016), 509–39.

[304] For examples of recent research to have utilised micro and meso level approaches to civil wars, see Luke Abbs, Govinda Clayton, and Andrew Thomson, 'The Ties That Bind: Ethnicity, Pro-Government Militia, and the Dynamics of Violence in Civil War', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.5 (2020), 903–932; Ana Arjona, 'Civilian Cooperation and Non-Cooperation with Non-State Armed Groups: The Centrality of Obedience and Resistance', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28.4–5 (2017), 755–78; Tricia Bacon, 'Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend? How Terrorist Groups Select Partners', *Security Studies*, 27.3 (2018), 345–78; Laia Balcells and Patricia Justino, 'Bridging Micro and Macro Approaches on Civil Wars and Political Violence: Issues, Challenges, and the Way Forward', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 58.8 (2014), 1343–59; Andrew M. Bell, 'Military Culture and Restraint toward Civilians in War: Examining the Ugandan Civil Wars', *Security Studies*, 25.3 (2016), 488–518; Daniel Bultmann, 'The Social Structure of Armed Groups. Reproduction and Change during and after Conflict', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29.4 (2018), 607–28; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, 'Actor Fragmentation and Civil War Bargaining: How Internal Divisions Generate Civil Conflict', *American Journal of Political Science*, 57.3 (2013), 659–72; Austin C. Doctor and John D. Willingham, 'Foreign Fighters, Rebel Command Structure, and Civilian Targeting in Civil War', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16 July 2020, 1–19; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, 'Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War', *American Journal of Political Science*, 52.2 (2008), 436–55; Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, 'How "Free" Is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, Insurgency and the Collective Action Problem', *World Politics*, 59.2 (2007), 177–216; Claire M. Metelits, 'Bourdieu's Capital and Insurgent Group Resilience: A Field-Theoretic Approach to the Polisario Front', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29.4 (2018), 680–708; Constantino Pischedda, 'Wars within Wars: Why Windows of Opportunity and Vulnerability Cause Inter-Rebel Fighting in Internal Conflicts', *International Security*, 43.1 (2018), 138–76; Michael A. Rubin, 'Rebel Territorial Control and Civilian Collective Action in Civil War: Evidence from the Communist Insurgency in the Philippines', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.2–3 (2020), 459–489; Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, 'Blood Revenge and Violent Mobilization: Evidence from the Chechen Wars', *International Security*, 40.2 (2015), 158–80; Barbara F. Walter, 'The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars', *International Security*, 42.2 (2017), 7–39.

[305] Aisha Ahmad, 'The Security Bazaar: Business Interests and Islamist Power in Civil War Somalia', *International Security*, 39.3 (2014), 89–117; Emily Kalah Gade, Michael Gabbay, and Mohammed M. Hafez, 'Networks of Cooperation: Rebel Alliances in Fragmented Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63.9 (2019), 2071–2097; Yuichi Kubota, 'Nonviolent Interference in Civic Life During Civil War: Rebel Service

legitimacy can be critical for a separatist movement, and the NNC was the bastion of legitimacy in the district by 1952.[306] Establishing parallel governance structures can be particularly vital for the functionality of a rebel group.[307] The NNC was effective in this vein. This vantage point explains how an institution described as little more than a group of 'tribal elders' effectively challenged state sovereignty.[308]

Forging a cohesive Naga nationalist movement was not straightforward. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee hearings of 1947 did highlight the consolidation of a sense of Naga nationalist identity, but it also reflected the broad scope of ideas about how identity issues should be resolved in practice. The NNC did not receive unanimous support and there was no central strategy that defined comparable institutions such as the Garo National Council.[309] As independence loomed, this divergent landscape was clear.

Provision and Postwar Norms of Interpersonal Trustworthiness in Sri Lanka', *Security Studies*, 27.3 (2018), 511–30; Bahar Leventoğlu and Nils W. Metternich, 'Born Weak, Growing Strong: Anti-Government Protests as a Signal of Rebel Strength in the Context of Civil Wars', *American Journal of Political Science*, 62.3 (2018), 581–96; Staniland, 'Organizing Insurgency'; Staniland, *Networks*; E. J. Wood, 'The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), 539–61.

[306] See, for example, the special issue introduced in, Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'Rebels & Legitimacy; An Introduction', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28.4–5 (2017), 669–85.

[307] *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, ed. by Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Modern International System* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham and Cyanne E. Loyle, 'Introduction to the Special Feature on Dynamic Processes of Rebel Governance', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65.1 (2021), 3–14; Bart Klem and Sidharthan Maunaguru, 'Insurgent Rule as Sovereign Mimicry and Mutation: Governance, Kingship, and Violence in Civil Wars', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59.3 (2017), 629–56; Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011); Niels Terpstra, 'Rebel Governance, Rebel Legitimacy, and External Intervention: Assessing Three Phases of Taliban Rule in Afghanistan', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 31.6 (2020), 1143–73.

[308] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to Alexander Clutterbuck, 6 April 1953.

[309] For example, an NNC delegate readily accepted that with 'the Nagas who live on the outskirts of the Naga area and who do not want to come into the NNC, we are not prepared to force them to come into NNC... it must be done by their voluntary desire and by consent of the people concerned'. But not all NNC delegates were so pacifistic in their outlook.When pressed about the possibility of a breakaway Naga faction consisting of Ao communities, Aliba Imti did not rule out the use of force to forge unity and collaboration. See, *North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Volume II (Evidence). Part I:*

Differing aims led to confused strategies. The NNC leadership on the one hand sought international recognition for its autonomy claims, sending correspondence to the leaders of Britain's major political parties and the Secretary General of the United Nations.[310] The latter declared that 'Nagas will be independent' and that they would 'not accept [the] Indian Constitution'.[311] On the other hand, an agreement was reached with Assam's Governor Akbar Hydari at the close of June 1947.[312] The so-called Nine Point Agreement kept the NHD within Assam but offered concessions in autonomy.[313] The confused outlook which involved calls for independence and – simultaneously – an agreement with the Indian Union, was reflective of the divided nature of the NNC in the summer of 1947.[314] But after August 1947, the separatist faction within the NNC gained ascendency.

Lushai, North-Cachar, Garo, Mikir and Naga Hills (New Delhi: Constituent Assembly of India, 1947), pp. 205-6.

[310] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 119-121. T. Sakhrie to Winston Churchill, 28 March 1947; T. Sakhrie to Clement Attlee, 29 March 1947; Naga National Council to the Secretary General, United Nations, 'Declaration of Naga Independence', 14 August 1947.

[311] *Ibid.*

[312] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 70-71. Naga-Akbar Hydari Accord (Nine Point Agreement), Kohima, 26-8 June 1947.

[313] For example, the agreement granted the NNC powers to oppose any central or provincial legislation in the NHD and take the initiative in areas such as agricultural development. The Nine Point Agreement would remain important because of the differing interpretations about its final clause, which read: 'The Governor of Assam as the Agent of the Government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the observance of the agreement, at the end of this period the Naga Council will be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of Naga people arrived at'. The debate centred on whether this provision gave the NNC an effective referendum on independence after ten years or merely the ability to strike an agreement with different terms, whilst remaining in the Indian Union.

[314] Jelle J. P. Wouters, 'Difficult Decolonization: Debates, Divisions and Deaths Within the Naga Uprising, 1944-1963', *Journal of North East India Studies*, 9.1 (2019), 1–28 (pp. 12-15).

Though independence day passed in parts of the NHD with little interest, separatist rhetoric soon abounded.[315] By mid-1948 Athiko Daiho – an influential Naga nationalist based in Manipur – was arrested after clashes with Assam Rifles personnel.[316] Daiho desired a merger of all Naga inhabited regions.[317] His intransigence was echoed elsewhere. In June another arrest was made of a Naga nationalist, this time an Angami Naga named Zapu Phizo. Phizo similarly campaigned for the Naga separatist cause and his release in December 1948 on compassionate grounds was a fundamental decision.[318]

Phizo became a focal point for the nationalist movement. He stood in contrast to the more moderate line of NNC figures such as Theyieu Sakhrie and Aliba Imti. Phizo was not content to negotiate for Naga sovereignty; he saw sovereignty as a fundamental right. Phizo's charged rhetoric was particularly well received after the Assam government was perceived to have displayed its insincerity. In 1949, Assam's Chief Minister informed an NNC delegation that the provincial government had never accepted the Nine Point Agreement.[319] It was not a rejection of NNC autonomy aspirations per se, but the subtlety of the point was lost in the Naga Hills and the apparent betrayal played into the hands of the separatist faction.[320] The regional

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[315] The Diary of Mildred Archer, 'Independence Day. Sanis'., 15 August 1947. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r67083.html> [21 March 2018]. For example, Mildred Archer noted how the day seemed 'just like any other day' in the village of Sanis. She went on to write how 'the Indian scene was distant and unreal. There the crowds were gathering in the towns, pulling down Union Jacks, hoisting Indian flags and indulging in excited celebrations. Here there was no excitement, but only the vast hills and forests that have taken no notice of the coming or going of any ruling power'.

[316] BL IOR L PS 12/3121. Calcutta Report 192.34 for the week ending 31 August 1948.

[317] For an overview of the various competing political factions in Manipur after independence, including notes on Daiho's separatist ambitions, see, BL IOR L PS 13/1003. E. T. D. Lambert, 'Special Report: Manipur State', 14 September 1948.

[318] Wouters, 'Difficult Decolonization'. Phizo was released from prison after the death of his son.

[319] Franke, 'Wars without End', p. 78.

[320] The Assam government's contention was that Hydari – as Governor – never had the authority to broker such an agreement. From this viewpoint, a democratically elected government had final say on matters, not the

administration's decision to renege on the Nine Point agreement widely translated as a sign that the government could not be trusted.[321] If democratic processes could not secure Naga ambitions, then an alternate method was required.

Phizo was elected leader of the NNC in 1949.[322] His personal travails suggested he was a durable figure that would pursue the issue of Naga autonomy with intractability, without susceptibility to weakness or corruption. He had defied colonial authorities, with a clear interest in securing Naga rights. For example, when quizzed on his apparent collaboration with the Japanese during WWII, he suggested that it 'had nothing to do with being antagonistic to the British or being pro-Japanese. His sole interest was to free his country from foreign domination'.[323] He ensured key allies – such as his private secretary Vilhume – became important members in the NNC as part of his consolidation of power.[324] His ascent to the leadership was an important step for the Naga nationalist movement.

After the separatist faction's ascendancy in the NNC, it positioned itself as the dominant bastion of legitimacy in the district. Forging social networks and attaining grassroots support were key tactics. This was a trans-regional undertaking. The Naga inhabitants of the North East Frontier Agency (NEFT) – especially in the Tuensang region – and the Tamenglong and Ukhrul

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Governor who was appointed by the centre. The contention was a fair one, but it could have been handled in a more sensitive manner at a time when the NNC leadership was fragmented.

[321] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to Alexander Clutterbuck, 6 April 1953.

[322] Misra, 'Naga National Question', p. 620.

[323] Pieter Steyn, *Zapuphizo: Voice of the Nagas* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 60.

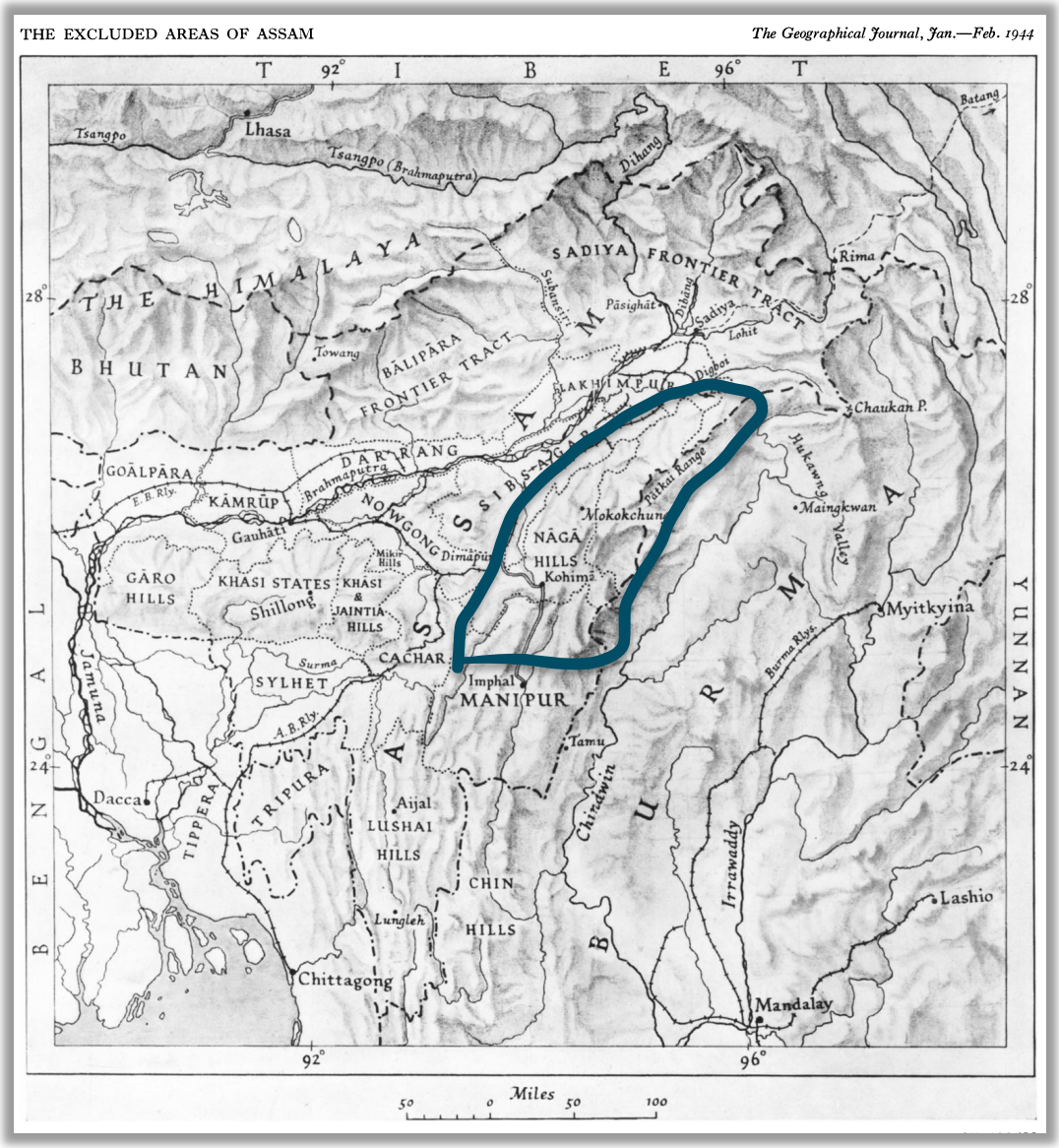
[324] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Monthly Summary, No. 5/56, 'Nagas', for period ending 30 May 1956.

subdivisions of Manipur were prominent zones for the NNC to exploit.[325] Bordering regions with Assam, such as the strategically important town of Dimapur, were similarly important.[326] Across the international border, there was a sizeable Naga population in Burma's north-western borderlands.[327] Map 5 gives a general indication of the areas the NNC targeted in its bid to enlist support for the nationalist cause, highlighted in bold.

[325] R. B. Vaghaiwalla, *Census of India, 1951. Volume XII: Assam, Manipur and Tripura, Part I-A* (Shillong: Municipal Printing Press, 1954), p. 413. Of the Manipuri population of 576,626, 95,528 were noted to speak a Naga dialect in the 1951 census. This put them as the second biggest linguistic group in Manipur, behind the dominant Manipuri/Meitei population.

[326] TNA UK FO 371/84250. Calcutta Special Report No. 64: Assam.

[327] E. R. Leach, 'The Frontiers of "Burma"', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3.1 (1960), 49–68.



Map 5: Naga inhabited areas targeted by the NNC[328]

NNC campaigns on both sides of the international border were soon identified in official reports.[329] Hazy international boundaries meant establishing links was a relatively straightforward undertaking and demonstrated the NNC far outmatched the reach of the state

[328] Map template taken from Reid, 'Excluded Areas of Assam'.

[329] TNA UK FO 371/84250. Calcutta Special Report No. 64: Assam.

in the eastern borderlands.[330] In addition to NNC campaigning strategies, their ability to tap into grassroots networks was a key aspect of their success. As scholars such as Paul Staniland have identified, pre-war networks can determine how a rebel movement operates and how effective its cohesion will be.[331] Staniland looked towards pre-existing institutions that rebel groups could utilise. In the Naga Hills, a similar undertaking was apparent.

As identified in chapter I, institution making was a relatively new phenomenon in the Assam highlands after the Second World War. In the NHD, the Naga Club was the one major organisation of note prior to the 1940s. But the establishment of institutions such as the Naga Youth Movement and Naga Women's Society after independence provided notable platforms for the NNC.[332] Whether these were merely ancillary institutions of the NNC or not is something of a moot point.[333] Their support as technically external organisations provided a vehicle to further the NNC agenda.[334] Connectivity within society was a core aspect of the Naga movement's operations and the role of civil society organisations in providing this connectivity was critical.

Tapping into civil society institutions ensured the spread of support for the NNC in the early days and contributed to its durability as conflict emerged, as identified later in this chapter. But the NNC's concerted effort to embed itself within the social fabric of Naga society

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[330] The historic fluidity across the borderlands outlined in the introduction persisted after 1947. For archival evidence in this period, see MSA Gen 838/68. R. V. Subrahmanian to S. Barkataki, 14 December 1950; ASA PS 221/52.II. S. M. Dutt to P. V. Bhaskaran, 24 July 1953.

[331] Staniland, *Networks*, pp. 11-25.

[332] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 90.

[333] Jagdish C. Johari, 'Creation of Nagaland: Triumph of Ebuillient Infra-Nationalism', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 36.1 (1975), 13–38 (p. 21).

[334] Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion'. This was later paralleled in the Mizo Hills.

was so successful because of the lack of state legitimacy. Whilst the NNC was forging networks and attaining support, the state invoked a short-term approach to governance which bore all the hallmarks of colonial rule.

Despite the lack of state presence in the Naga Hills, the evolving influence of the NNC was dismissed by the Assam government. There was a widespread belief that inter-community rivalries would prevent a strong, coherent nationalist movement materialising.[335] Historic enmity between Ao and Angami Nagas – two of the 'principal' communities in the NHD – underpinned this assumption.[336] In Indian political circles the potential for communist collaboration with hard-line Naga nationalists was the primary concern.[337] Even within the NHD, the Deputy Commissioner was noted to have not 'take[n] the Council very seriously' by the outset of the 1950s.[338] This skewed perception of the NNC was problematic, but the invocation of colonial governance – taken out of short-term expediency – ensured little ground-level affection for the nascent Indian state.[339]

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[335] TNA UK FO 371/84250. C. E. Diggines to S. J. L. Olver, 'N.E. Frontier, India', 6 November 1950.

[336] *District Census Handbook: Naga Hills*, ed. by R. B. Vaghaiwalla (Assam, 1951), pp. iv, 63-66.

[337] TNA UK FO 371/84250. B. R. Pearn, 'Report on Chinese interests in Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Assam', Foreign Office Department, 16 November 1950.

[338] TNA UK FO 371/92866. F. K. Roberts, 'Notes on a tour in North-Eastern India', 23 December 1950 – 7 January 1951.

[339] The regional government had a consistent problem with threat perception of rebel movements in the highlands. This was because of practices for information sharing between state organs. Correspondence between the Assam government and district officials demonstrated this persistence by the late 1960s, by which point two civil wars were underway. As A. C. Ray noted in the Mizo Hills, 'the SIB has a good network all over the district but they report only to Government of India and we do not get much information from them'. See ASA PLB 353/1967. A. C. Ray to Special Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 13 July 1970.

The continuation of colonial tactics after 1947 was evident – for example – in 1952 in the NHD, where a fine of four hundred rifles was handed out for bad behaviour.[340] This directly mirrored British governance in the region.[341] Further afield, in Tuensang, rule through military expeditions was still a primary strategy in the early 1950s.[342] Security-focused governance was the consequence of the lack of state presence in the Naga Hills. The inability of the regional government to begin state-building practices until the implementation of the district councils in 1952 – investigated in chapter III – therefore enabled the evolution of the Naga nationalist movement between 1947-52.[343]

When the state tried to unveil the district council in the Naga Hills for local governance, it was rejected by the NNC.[344] The council was refused because the NNC viewed itself as the legitimate authority in the region. It did not need a council granted by the Indian state. The notion of legitimacy – in the Weberian sense – can be a crucial factor when intrastate disputes unfold, especially in areas with weak state control.[345] This was the case in the Naga Hills in the 1950s. 'Charismatic' actions such as elections or pledges have been identified as cornerstones

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[340] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to Alexander Clutterbuck, 6 April 1953.

[341] The Diary of W. G. Archer, 'Order from W. G. Archer to Assam Rifles' post, Wakching', 27 January 1948. *University of Cambridge, Digital Himalaya Project* <http://linux02.lib.cam.ac.uk/nagas/record/r66435.html> [20 March 2018].

[342] *Report of the Ministry of External Affairs, 1950-51* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1951), p. 5.

[343] This was no easy task for the Assam government considering the power vacuum left by the late colonial state. The fact that 'no Indian officers had been allowed… under the British regime' added further practical issues of governance for the post-colonial regime to grapple with. See, TNA UK FO 371/92866. F. K. Roberts, 'Notes on a tour in North-Eastern India', 23 December 1950 - 7 January 1951.

[344] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), pp. 12-15.

[345] Sukanya Podder, 'Understanding the Legitimacy of Armed Groups: A Relational Perspective', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28.4–5 (2017), 686–708; Owen and Strong, *The Vocation Lectures*.

in the production of legitimacy.[346] As Isabelle Duyvesteyn has suggested, this provided a 'relational concept' between a rebel group and its constituents, ensuring the group's perception as a viable institution rather than an unlawful newcomer.[347] This research nicely frames the NNC's legitimacy.

Two initiatives undertaken in 1951-2 crystallised this sense of legitimacy and underpinned the NNC's confidence when rejecting post-colonial state-building initiatives. The first was a plebiscite which took place on 16 May 1951.[348] Though the NNC had made significant strides by the late spring of 1951, it lacked a symbolic gesture of its popular support. The plebiscite changed this and provided a key charismatic action for the separatist institution.

The plebiscite asked whether the Naga public desired independence from the Indian Union.[349] The way the plebiscite unfolded enforced the perception of NNC legitimacy. From the outset, the Naga leadership kept the Indian government abreast of its plans. Phizo himself wrote to the President of India months in advance, detailing how the vote would unfold and – crucially – extended an invitation to government officials to observe.[350] Through this correspondence the NNC ensured the plebiscite had a level of authenticity. The fact that government officials never appeared was irrelevant, because the NNC signalled their intent to

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[346] *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

[347] Duyvesteyn, 'Rebels & Legitimacy'.

[348] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 122-39. A. Z. Phizo, 'Naga Voluntary Plebiscite', Delivered 10AM, 16 May 1951. Speech delivered by Phizo for plebiscite.

[349] Misra, *India's North-East,* p. 101.

[350] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 98-100. A. Z. Phizo to the President, Republic of India, 1 January 1951. In Nuh's edited collection, the date is given as January 1952. Considering the content of the letter, and its reference in other works, it is safe to say that the letter was written in 1951, and the date in Nuh and Lasuh's edited collection was merely an error.

the central government clearly and openly. In addition, practical measures such as the use of thumbprints to record votes were implemented on the day.[351]

The results were a key victory for the NNC, as the electorate voted overwhelmingly in favour of independence. Questions remain about the extent to which the vote represented the popular will of all Naga communities. Suggestions that the plebiscite was an overwhelmingly Angami dominated affair have been put forward.[352] Similarly, the extent of the electorate's knowledge about the NNC's political obstinance and the reliability of the 99.9% approval figure remain open to interpretation.[353] A lack of source material surrounding the plebiscite makes definitive conclusions difficult, but the impact of the plebiscite is much clearer. The NNC frequently invoked the result to demonstrate that they were an authentic mouthpiece for Naga nationalism, carrying out the democratically proven will of the people.[354] It provided a sense of legitimacy for the rebel group among its constituents and a pertinent precedent to justify its actions as it accelerated its challenge to the Indian state.

A second notable expression of the NNC's legitimacy was also evident. A legitimate institution has the power and authority to undertake charismatic actions of defiance. The NNC demonstrated this when it organised a district-wide boycott of the first Indian elections.[355]

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[351] Sanjib Baruah, 'Confronting Constructionism: Ending India's Naga War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 40.3 (2003), 321–38 (p. 331).

[352] Charles Chasie and Sanjoy Hazarika, *The State Strikes Back: India and the Naga Insurgency* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2009), p. 4.

[353] M. Amarjeet Singh, *The Naga Conflict* (Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, 2012), p. 13.

[354] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 102-4. Visarü Angami, 'A Statement', 17 December 1960.

[355] Nirmal Nibedon, *Nagaland: The Night of the Guerrillas* (Atlanta: Lancer, 2013). See chapter 6: 'Oking'.

Table 3 gives an overview of the 1952 Assam Legislative Assembly election results in the Assam highlands.

Table 3: ***Assam highlands voting trends, 1951-2 Legislative Assembly of Assam.***[356]

District	Const. No.	Constituency Name	Total No. of Votes	Winning Candidate	Party
Garo Hills	28	Baghmara	0	Harison Momin	Garo National Council
	29	Tura	11313	Emerson Momin	Garo National Council
	30	Phulbari	15079	Emonsing Sangma	Independent
	31	Dainadubi	12998	Aaram Sangma	Garo National Council
Lushai Hills	1	Lungleh	10611	R. Dengthuama	Mizo Union
	2	Aijal East	13708	R. Thanhlira	Mizo Union
	3	Aijal West	13855	Ch. Saprawnga	Mizo Union
Naga Hills	***25***	***Naga Hills North***	***0***	***Uncontested***	***n/a***
	26	***Naga Hills Central***	***0***	***Uncontested***	***n/a***
	27	***Naga Hills South***	***0***	***Uncontested***	***n/a***
United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	17	Shillong	14188	J. J. M. Nicholas-Roy	Indian National Congress
	18	Jowai	13151	U. Kistobinu Rymbai	Independent
	19	Nongstoin	16261	Ajra Singh Khongphai	Independent
	20	Nongpoh	16495	A. Alley	Khasi-Jaintia National Federation State Conference

Two things are immediately apparent from table 3. First was the continued strength of the identity-based institutions in the highlands, a factor scrutinised more rigorously in chapter III. Second was the effectiveness of the Naga boycott.

The election boycott was part of the NNC's attempt to bring attention to its nationalist cause. The people of the region had voted for independence and the leadership were keen to

[356] Figures derived from information provided in *Statistical Report on General Election, 1951 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 1951). Although the election was listed as 1951, delays meant that voting did not take place until 1952.

push through this public aspiration. The fact that not a single vote was cast across all three constituencies spoke volumes about where organisational power lay in the NHD in 1952. The NNC proved it could effectively curtail the basic democratic processes of the Indian state.[357] It subsequently initiated a broader civil disobedience campaign, which included ground-level refusals to pay taxes alongside *gaonburas* returning their coats of office in a symbolic rejection of the state.[358]

By 1952 the NNC had filled the power vacuum left by the British, with the state a distant second. This was a formative time for the Naga Hills. The influence the NNC attained between 1947-52 enabled the intensification of the nationalist struggle that followed. The state, meanwhile, clung to colonial forms of governance out of short-term expediency. Although this was understandable in a practical sense, it enabled the success of the NNC. The NNC was in the ascendency, an unenviable position for a post-colonial state with a weak grip on this remote border region. This environment provided the foundation for the turbulence that followed.

The provincial government and the Naga challenge, 1953-56.

Unrest in the NHD began in 1953. The provincial Assam government's response to the Naga challenge was rooted in a colonial mindset. This security-first approach contradicted nation-building aspirations at the centre. It created an 'us and them' dichotomy, which contrasted with the centre's desire to accommodate regional identity claims in a pluralistic conception of Indian

[357] It should be noted that elsewhere the first Indian elections were an overwhelming success for the nascent nation, which many believed to be a significant gamble so soon after independence. See Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 233-234.

[358] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 71. *Gaonburas* were essentially village leaders or elders.

nationhood.[359] Additionally, ineffective security-force operations against a cohesive, well-organised nationalist movement began to shape perceptions about Indian state capacity. By the outbreak of civil war in 1956, the provincial government's response to the Naga movement embedded challenges relation to nation-building and state perception.

India's federal framework meant the regional Assam government – rather than the centre – dealt with the initial unrest initiated by the NNC. Until 1953, the provincial administration downplayed the Naga nationalist movement. In part, it misperceived the evolving strength of the NNC. But overall, it had enough information to understand a concerted challenge to state authority was brewing in the NHD.[360] The makeshift use of colonial tactics between 1947-52 was not particularly effective, but it was partially understandable in a power vacuum lacking state apparatus. The continued use of colonial-minded governance after 1952, though, ensured longer-term problems for the state.

The spark for unrest occurred during Nehru's tour of Assam in late 1952 and early 1953.[361] Considering the election boycott and the civil disobedience campaign of the NNC, a visit from India's Prime Minister and premier statesman was deemed a timely intervention to ease Naga nationalist concerns, after his visit to the NEFT.[362] Nehru had consistently professed an ideological affinity for indigenous rights and the visit was an opportunity to translate theory

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[359] Khilnani, *Idea of India*, pp. 150-79.

[360] Despite not being privy to the detailed intelligence gathered by the SIB, the Assam government had more than enough basic information to understand the threat posed by the NNC, especially after events such as the plebiscite and the election boycott.

[361] TNA UK FO 371/106853. G. B. Shannon to Alexander Clutterbuck, 6 April 1953.

[362] *Report of the Ministry of External Affairs, 1952-53* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1953), p. 14. Whilst in the NEFT, Nehru had visited the district HQs of Charduar, Ziro and Pasighat.

into practice.[363] Along with U Nu, the head of state in Burma, Nehru visited Kohima at the close of March 1953.[364] This visit would be known afterwards as the 'Kohima Incident'.

The meeting was a farce. The NHD's Deputy Commissioner – S. N. Barkataki – refused the NNC leadership an audience with Nehru. Instead, he insisted they were only there as spectators who would not be allowed to raise concerns.[365] This incensed NNC leaders, who responded by staging a walkout during Nehru's talk, publicly humiliating him in front of U Nu by baring their backsides as they left the meeting.[366] Nehru raged and blamed Medhi for the fiasco. Medhi channelled this fury towards Barkataki. Humiliation descended from Prime Minister down to Chief Minister and finally Deputy Commissioner. The latter bore the brunt and consequently lost his job.[367] The Kohima Incident brought the NNC firmly within the crosshairs of the provincial government, as Medhi's administration sought to stamp out the intransigence of the Naga nationalist movement.

In public the provincial government reiterated its rejection of the Nine Point agreement signed by the NNC and Hydari, whilst its strategies on the ground had adverse ramifications.[368] Increasing state repression has no guarantee of operational success, and the Naga response to the provincial administration's policies aligns with research that suggests military repression

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[363] Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 211-12.

[364] Wouters, 'Difficult Decolonization', p. 19.

[365] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 91.

[366] Sajal Nag, 'Nehru and the Nagas: Minority Nationalism and the Post-Colonial State', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44.49 (2009), 48–55 (p. 50).

[367] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, pp. 91-92.

[368] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to Alexander Clutterbuck, 6 April 1953.

increases rebel group resolve.[369] The state intensified police raids in the NHD, and especially Kohima, as it implemented a security-first approach to the NNC.[370] Colonial governance rested on the spectre of force. After the Kohima Incident the provincial Assam government followed in the footsteps of the British.

Security force raids led to arrests of NNC officials whilst the government ejected perceived troublemakers from the district, in this case American Christian missionaries.[371] A belief that missionaries in the highlands were manoeuvring to create a 'Christian bloc' on India's eastern frontier circulated in political circles.[372] The attempt to isolate the region, evicting people and fostering controlled seclusion was a component part of the frontier governmentality of the British. So was the reliance on force to instigate order. This, however, was a post-colonial problem for a democratic nation-state, not a security concern for an imperial regime.[373]

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[369] Research has suggested varying trajectories in this regard. Rebel group durability may also depend on further factors – such as organisational capacity or its own use of violence – when faced with increasing repression from state security forces. For some insights into these dynamics, see, Charles W. Mahoney, 'Splinters and Schisms: Rebel Group Fragmentation and the Durability of Insurgencies', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32.2 (2020), 345–64; Şule Yaylaci and Onur Bakiner, 'Casualties and Support for Violent Conflict in Civil Wars', *Civil Wars*, 20.4 (2018), 555–86; Joseph K. Young, 'Repression, Dissent, and the Onset of Civil War', *Political Research Quarterly*, 66.3 (2012), 516–32.

[370] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Report, No. 8, 'Assam', 21 April 1953.

[371] *Ibid.*

[372] ASA CMS 287/A/55. B. R. Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'A brief note on the demand for a separate Hills State', 23 May 1955.

[373] This conundrum had, interestingly, been explicitly identified by a British official in the highlands, when interviewed by the Bordoloi Sub-Committee. When asked about future governance in the region by Bordoloi, Mr. Macdonald noted the difficult transition from colonial regime to democratic state. He stated, on the short-term retention of a district officer, that 'your logical position is so weak that the people would discover it very quickly. After all you are not Imperialists. We are'. This quote was particularly noteworthy, considering the state's approach to the Naga nationalist movement in the 1950s. See *North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded & Partially Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Volume II (Evidence). Part I: Lushai, North-Cachar, Garo, Mikir and Naga Hills* (New Delhi: Constituent Assembly of India, 1947), p. 35.

Police raids and the eviction of missionaries continued over the next two years.[374] But the clearest parallels to colonial rule in the NHD unfolded in a legislative sense. The use of emergency regulations was a core aspect of colonialism and the legislation passed in the Naga Hills directly mirrored previous British imperatives.[375] The first step in this direction was the Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act (AMPOA), which came into force at the close of May 1953.[376] The AMPOA gave the state the power to restrict movement, impose fines and generally confront any form of political activity deemed unsuitable. Security forces, meanwhile, were given powers to undertake arrests without a warrant. The Act directly contravened citizens' rights that should be afforded in a democratic system.

The provincial state's response after the Kohima Incident contributed to a growing 'us and them' dichotomy. On the one side were Nagas, at first those involved with the nationalist movement, but eventually the distinctions would be blurred. On the other were Indians, largely in the guise of politicians, security forces and civil staff. This was vividly demonstrated by Jairamdas Doulatram – Assam's Governor – in the Autumn of 1953. He suggested in a meeting with missionaries still operating in the NHD that 'he [who] is not for me stands against me'.[377] This atmosphere was anything but conducive for the centre's aims to foster calls for a pluralistic

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[374] TNA UK DO/35/8891. Extract of enclosure to India Dept. no.129, 'Assam Hills Areas'.

[375] Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, p. 3. The AFSPA was a form of emergency legislation, which enabled the state to bypass its own laws to enact, if necessary, extreme violence in the pursuit of stability. This directly mirrored the process of constitutional reforms made by the British in the subcontinent in the interwar years. As Ghosh wrote, 'when the British finally left India, the British government of India introduced a series of constitutional reforms that were accompanied by a series of repressive and emergency legislation'. The parallels between pre- and post- 1947 emergency legislation have been emphasised by scholars such as Baruah. See Sanjib Baruah, 'AFSPA: Legacy of Colonial Constitutionalism', 2010 <https://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615_sanjib_baruah.htm> [accessed 28 June 2021].

[376] TNAI. 'Assam Act XVI of 1953. The Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act, 1953', *Assam Gazette*, 3 June 1953.

[377] TNA UK FO 371/106853. B. R. Pearn, Meeting Minutes, 25 August 1953.

conception of nationhood; Doulatram's rhetoric reflected the simplistic battle lines that dictated provincial decision-making.

The Assam government's approach to the NNC was an inherent contradiction to the ideological foundations of the Indian Republic, enshrined in the Constitution and rhetorically championed by politicians like Nehru. Nehru repeatedly identified a mid-way between isolationism and assimilation for India's indigenous communities as the key to developing an inclusive conception of Indian nationhood. He, for example, suggested:

> Our objective… is to promote the progress of the tribal folk without interfering with their customs or way of living and without in any way making them feel that we are imposing anything upon them.[378]

Progress was critical but needed to be developed with respect for local conditions. However, developments such as the provincial government's response to the Naga movement provided a blatant barrier to these ideological aspirations evident at the centre.

Whilst the overall strategy of the provincial government contrasted with aims at the centre for nation-building, the operational performance of security forces began to raise questions about state strength. The security-first approach led to greater numbers of staff, improvements to defensive positions and the establishment of extra police posts.[379] A scathing assessment produced by R. C. Dutt – the Assistant Inspector General of Police for Assam – in 1953 had suggested that security personnel in the Assam highlands were not fit to ensure basic law and order. Table 4 provides an overview of the figures produced by Dutt.

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[378] ASA PS 164/1952. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bishnuram Medhi, 4 April 1952.

[379] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

Table 4: ***Armed Police stationed in the Assam highlands, September 1953.*** [380]

District	Permanent Platoons	Temporary Platoons
Garo Hills	1	0
Lushai Hills	0	2
Naga Hills	***2***	***3***
United Khasi & Jaintia Hills	2	0.5
Total	5	5.5

These numbers were – in the words of Dutt – insufficient to cope with even routine police work in any given district.[381] The drive to confront the NNC resulted in a drastic increase in the two hundred and fifty or so Armed Police personnel operating in the NHD in 1953.

The problem for the state was that greater numbers, and focus on security, did not automatically ensure success. The Naga nationalist movement steadfastly confronted this approach. In August 1953 a government run high school was closed and between three and four hundred students boycotted Indian independence celebrations, revealing the support the NNC retained after the Kohima Incident.[382] Backing from the Naga Youth movement was one indicator of the continued strength of the movement's grassroots networks, whilst the NNC's establishment of a parallel Naga institute for education in Kohima signalled that increasing security forces would not deter the NNC's operations.[383]

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[380] ASA TAD PL 54/53. R. C. Dutt to the Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, Tribal Areas & Development Department, 'Armed Police for the District Councils in the Scheduled Districts of the State', 24 September 1953. Each platoon was made up of fifty constables and four havildars alongside a sub-inspector, armourer and bugler.

[381] *Ibid.*

[382] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

[383] *Ibid.*

The establishment of parallel governance structures is a clear and obvious contestation of state sovereignty, if rebel groups have the organisational capacity and strength to do so.[384] The establishment of the school at Kohima was part of broader NNC designs for parallel forms of governance. In 1954, the NNC stamped its authority in the Tuensang region. It established the Free Naga Supreme Court in July.[385] The creation of the Free Naga government, with Hongkhin as its leader, provided an even greater indication of the separatist movement's resolve.[386] Even though the parallel Naga Government was only established in the Tuensang region for the moment, it reflected the NNC's clear rejection of state sovereignty as well as its organisational capacity. These parallel structures would be a recurring fixture as the unrest intensified.[387]

The NNC were able to establish these parallel structures in no small part because of the grassroots networks it had forged since 1947. In addition to strategies identified in the previous section, the role of key NNC leaders such as Imkongmeren – the Vice President – in fashioning ground-level support within interior communities was critical.[388] This support allowed the NNC to attempt multiple approaches to pioneer its claims for independence, such as in the goodwill mission outlined in table 5.

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[384] Arjona et al, *Rebel Governance*; Klem and Maunaguru, 'Insurgent Rule'.

[385] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, p. 154.

[386] ASA CMS 136/56. S. M. Dutt, Memorandum, 6 April 1956.

[387] ASA C Nil/1955. Superintendent of Police, Naga Hills to Inspector General of Police, Assam, 5 May 1955.

[388] ASA CMS 287/A/55. B. R. Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 23 May 1955.

Table 5: ***Naga Goodwill Mission Overview, 1953.***[389]

Delegates:	**Institutional Affiliation:**
Ms Rano M. Iralu	Naga Women's Federation
Ms Ngutuono	Naga Women's Federation
Mr Rongsenwati	Changkikong Range Council
Mr Jasokie	Naga National Council
Mr Chuselie	Kohima Village Panchayat
Mr Tolhopu	Naga National Council
Mr Gwega	Naga National Council
Mr Khriesanisa	Western Group Council
Mr Khrehie	Judge, Kohima Division
Mr Diechülie	Dimapur Tribal Council
Mr Vingunyü	Youth Advisory Board, Kohima

The goodwill mission was organised to spread word of the Naga cause across the Assam state.[390] The objective was ground-level sympathy for Naga nationalist ambitions. Although the mission achieved little, its delegation offers an insight into the use of local networks.[391] The support from women's and youth movements remained strong whilst the regional spread of delegates offered further proof of the broad appeal the NNC held.

The establishment of parallel governance structures and utilisation of grassroots networks by the NNC was a clear contestation of the unfolding militarisation initiated by the Assam government. Despite public claims to the contrary by provincial politicians, regional

[389] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 140-46. Rano M. Iralu et al, *Extract of a Report of the Naga Goodwill Mission to Assam* (Kohima: Naga Goodwill Mission, 22 December 1953).

[390] TNA UK DO 35/8891. Extract from Calcutta Report, 5 April 1954.

[391] This mission toured Assam's major towns, aiming to foster support from the plains and force the government's hand. Despite the optimistic outlook of the Naga delegation after the procession ended, the mission had little tangible effect, as notable Indian officials deriding the tour. Indeed, a political backlash was apparent in certain circles. For example, the Hindu Mahasabha were amongst those who publicly denounced the tour. There were original signs of support from the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) but by 1954 the party had distanced itself entirely from the NNC. The Communist Party of India (CPI), likewise, distanced itself from the Naga movement, deriding it as a stooge of western imperial designs on India's frontiers. See TNA UK DO 35/8891. Extract from Calcutta Report, 5 April 1954; TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

peace deteriorated between 1953-56.[392] By March 1955 between twenty and twenty-four Assam Rifles battalions were operating in the Tuensang region.[393] Divergences appear in the archives about the scale of destruction that accompanied these changes. The alleged massacres at Yengpang and Chingmei are hard to corroborate, but the NNC leadership accused Indian security forces of atrocities in these instances.[394] Easier to substantiate was the obvious outbreak in skirmishes between Naga separatists and Indian security forces by 1955, demonstrated in table 6.[395]

Table 6: ***Ministry of External Affairs Casualty Estimate, December 1955.*** [396]

Region	Deaths	Injuries
Tuensang (NEFA)	258	68

Echoes of British rule resounded as villages were burnt and oaths of loyalty were taken to the Indian government.[397] But the provincial government faced a much more cohesive

[392] Questions about the lack of control in the Naga Hills unfolded in regional and national politics, but politicians such as Medhi were quick to downplay the seriousness of events, preferring to talk up any apparent rifts in the Naga movement, whether real or imagined. Meanwhile, the influence of the missionaries continued to be an excuse for the government when pressed about the NNC. See Lok Sabha Debate. 8 May 1953. Question No. 1972; TNA UK DO 35/8891. Extract from Calcutta Report, 5 April 1954.

[393] ASA C Nil/1955. Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills to Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, 'Operation in Tuensang', 23 March 1955.

[394] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 176-86. Hopongse et al to Prime Minister of India, 'Naga Government's Announcement', 22 March 1956; TNA UK PREM 11/3017. A. Z. Phizo, *The Fate of the Naga People: An Appeal to the World* (London: Naga National Council, 1960).

[395] The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) produced the stats in table 6. This may appear somewhat strange but demonstrated one of the niches of the Naga inhabited regions. Tuensang, home to many Naga communities, was part of NEFA until 1957. As the 1949 MEA annual report revealed, Assam's governor – who administered the region on behalf of the centre – reported directly to the MEA. The NHD, meanwhile, was within the remit of the Assam government as an AHD. See *Report of the Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1949).

[396] Stats presented before the house by the Ministry of External Affairs. See Lok Sabha Debate. 20 December 1955. Question No. 997.

[397] ASA C Nil/1955. Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills to Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, 'Operation in Tuensang', 23 March 1955.

organisation, with greater popular support and weaponry, than the British ever faced. Thus, the Naga movement struck back against security forces with notable successes. NNC volunteers were noted – for instance – to be 'running loose' in certain parts of Ao country.[398] The utilisation of the interior ensured that training camps were established for rebel fighters as the Naga fighting force expanded.[399] Meanwhile, at the village of Yimchunger, virtually the entire population was noted to have mobilised to attack an Assam Rifles outpost.[400] Despite the gulf in resources between the Naga movement and the state, the nationalist group of 'tribal elders' more than held its own against the security-focused strategies of the regional government. Each success bred confidence within the movement, whilst raising questions about the state's capacity to confront regional challenges to its sovereignty.

Without any notable victories against the Naga movement, the state once more took its cue from the British approach to borderlands security. At the close of 1955 the regional government published the Assam Disturbed Areas Act (ADAA) in the *Assam Gazette*.[401] The ADAA followed from the AMPOA and gave the government the power to declare any area as 'disturbed', whilst granting even further powers to security forces. For example, clause 4 stated that any magistrate or officer at Havildar, Sub-Inspector or higher rank, had the power to:

> If in his opinion, it is necessary so to do for the maintenance of public order, after giving such warning, if any, as he may consider necessary, fire upon, or otherwise use force even to the

[398] ASA C Nil/1955. Sashi Merans discussions with Government servants.

[399] ASA C Nil/1955. Superintendent of Police, Naga Hills to Inspector General of Police, Assam, 5 May 1955.

[400] ASA C Nil/1955. Copy of W. T. Message, Dispol Kohima to Police, Shillong, 31 March 1955.

[401] TNAI. 'Assam Act XIX of 1955: The Disturbed Areas Act, 1955', *Assam Gazette*, 21 December 1955.

causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order for the time being in force in a disturbed area.[402]

The qualifications in the statement provided security forces with supreme power if they could provide enough pretext for their actions. The ADAA was the logical continuation of the security-first outlook that the provincial government initiated in 1953.

The result was civil war from 1956. Despite the general resolve of the Naga movement, the first signs of factionalism emerged as the influential Sakhrie criticised the violent turn initiated by Phizo. Because of increasing casualties, Sakhrie signalled his intention to form a new liberal party in 1955, intent on negotiation rather than armed confrontations with the government.[403] Sakhrie's considerable personal standing posed a threat to the cohesiveness of the NNC. The response was swift and brutal.[404] In January 1956, Sakhrie was assassinated by the rebel Naga movement.[405]

With the murder of Sakhrie, the implementation of the ADAA and the growing clashes between rebels and security forces, the central government stepped in and deployed the Indian Army to take over control of security patrols at the beginning of 1956.[406] Meanwhile, a Rs.

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[402] *Ibid*.

[403] TNA UK DO 196/60. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to the Earl of Home, 20 July 1960.

[404] Reports about Sakhrie's death vary. A Ministry of External Affairs publication claimed that Sakhrie had been kidnapped near Chischama. It suggested his murder was followed by having his body hung up outside the village for all to see. The report was published in the mid-1960s as a direct response to the claims made by the Reverend Michael Scott about atrocities committed by Indian forces. As a result, the suggestions are not taken seriously in the thesis, in the same vein as the suggestion that 10,000 Naga deaths occurred by security force hands in 1955. Despite conflicting reports about the nature of Sakhrie's death, the fact that it was carried out in the first place in such swift and ruthless fashion spoke to the resolve of the rebel leadership. See, TNA UK DO 133/185. Y. D. Gundevia, *Hostiles' Atrocities* (Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 1964).

[405] Lok Sabha Debate. Short Notice Question No. 7. 3 April 1956.

[406] ASA CMS 136/56. Note from J.S. on Naga Hills.

5,000 bounty was placed on Phizo's head, and the Naga separatist movement went underground.[407] The civil war had begun.

The period between 1953-56 shaped the evolution of the Naga nationalist challenge. Rather than dialogue, the regional government chose a security-based approach. This may have curbed the nationalist movement if security forces enjoyed operational successes, but clashes between state and rebel forces did not produce any conclusive results by the outbreak of civil war in early 1956. In the process, the Assam government had actively chosen a strategy which worked in opposition to the rhetoric of nation-building at the centre. The battlelines drawn between 'us and them' did not sit easily with the ambitions to foster a sense of national identity. Meanwhile, the lack of concrete state successes indicated that – despite its clear advantages in resources and numbers – the state may not be particularly effective at waging armed conflict with regional nationalist groups.

The central government and the Naga civil war, 1956-58.

From 1956 the central government compounded what the Assam administration began. It too implemented a security-first strategy that embedded the divide between 'Naga' and 'Indian' that the provincial government had exacerbated. Meanwhile, the course of the civil war began to provide lessons for successful insurgency against the Indian state. The NNC had already demonstrated the capabilities of a strong, cohesive movement. But as war unfolded, the underground's use of modern weapons, the northeast's topography and links across international boundaries revealed lessons in how to build a sustained challenge to state authority. As a result, the perception of state strength was further scrutinised, as a

[407] TNA UK DO/35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Report, No. 2/56, 'Nagas', 5 March 1956.

proportionately weak rebel group engaged in protracted conflict with the Indian government.[408] The short-term inability to defeat the Naga underground, therefore, created structural challenges for the state in the long-term.

The deployment of the Indian Army did not deter the Naga separatists. The underground utilised its local connections to ensure survival whilst parallel governance structures expanded noticeably. Taxation continued to be paid to the NNC rather than the state in various regions.[409] Control over interior regions ensured training camps were created deep within mountainous terrain.[410] The underground created the Naga Home Guards (NHG) as a formal fighting unit to replace the more ad hoc volunteer system that came before.[411] Alongside its armed wing, the underground expanded its official governance organs. The Naga Federal Government (FGN)[412] was established on 22 March 1956, to supersede the administration created in Tuensang with Hongkhin as its leader.[413] This organisational capacity underpinned the Naga underground's durability.

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[408] The nature of protracted conflicts – essentially how 'weak actors' can survive and indeed emerge victorious against vastly superior opponents – has a long history of debate. Around the turn of the century, the insights by Ivan Arreguín-Toft provided a useful foundation for exploring the dynamics of asymmetric conflicts. Though the Naga conflict does not rigidly align with Arreguín-Toft's original thesis, his work provides an insightful anchor to explore the Naga civil war. See, Ivan Arreguín-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict', *International Security*, 26.1 (2001), 93–128; Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[409] ASA HPL 129/58. Superintendent of Police, Sibsagar to Assistant Inspector General of Police, Assam, 22 January 1958.

[410] ASA CMS 136/56. Note from J.S. on Naga Hills.

[411] Lok Sabha Debate. Short Question No. 24. 30 May 1956.

[412] Within the secondary literature on the Naga conflict, the Naga Federal Government is intermittently referred to as either the FGN or NFG. Both refer to the same government, with Jelle J. P. Wouters' acronym preferred here.

[413] ASA CMS 136/56. Thungti, 'Announcement of Naga Government', 22 March 1956; Vilhume, 'Naga National Council', 23 March 1956.

There was, though, one notable change in strategy for the NNC. The ability for citizens to 'free-ride' during civil conflicts is difficult. When battle lines develop the chances of avoiding choosing sides – implicitly or explicitly – diminish significantly.[414] The payment of taxes to the Naga underground rather than the state, noted above, offers one of many examples of how implicit support was offered to the underground during the civil war. But to ensure civilians did not explicitly side with security forces and potentially compromise the rebel movement, coercive tactics became widespread from 1956. The Assam government crystallised the us and them dichotomy and central government tactics followed this trajectory. Yet, the Naga underground also contributed as coercive tactics increasingly distinguished a clear line between traitor and loyalist. In short, both government and rebel actions compounded this oversimplified environment of Naga 'nationalists' and 'traitors' by the later 1950s.

Instances such as the kidnap of Telichuba Ao from Chuchujemlong village demonstrated the underground's turn to coercive methods to retain civilian control.[415] Telichuba was a former NNC member who renounced the violent methods of the underground. On the evening of 31 March 1956 separatist volunteers raided Chuchujemlong with the intent of targeting Telichuba. He was kidnapped while his wife was barricaded in an adjacent room. Coercion and terror tactics became increasingly common as the underground stifled dissention.

[414] Kalyvas and Kocher, 'Free Riding'.

[415] ASA HPL 48/56. Superintendent of Police, Naga Hills to Deputy Inspector General of Police, Case No. 202. Report No. 2, 12 February 1957.

Terror is often used in civil wars for strategic purposes, instead of constituting random, mindless acts of violence.[416] It can be a potent tool for rebel groups.[417] It can also take many forms and have a causal impact on the outcome of civil conflicts.[418] For the Naga underground it become an effective strategy to proactively confront potential challenges and formed a core aspect of its tactical repertoire from 1956 onwards.[419] In a trade-off for the inevitable defections terror would – and did – lead to, the overall degree of control through coercion was seen as an acceptable trade.[420] Former NNC members such as Telichuba became targets, as did *gaonburas* who were seen as sympathetic to the state, and *dobashis* who symbolically acted as a bridge between the local and the state.[421] Altogether, this combination of terror and militarisation was particularly jarring for the citizens of the NHD, and partially explains why citizens increasingly

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[416] Richard English, *Does Terrorism Work? A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-2. As English suggested, 'the argument here is not that terrorists act out of rationality alone, but rather that their decision-making processes are likely to be as rational as are those of most other groups of humans, and that even a seemingly incomprehensible act such as suicide bombing can be judged to be, at least in part, rationally motivated'. There are, of course, various forms of terrorism that can be utilised, with differing objectives and levels of success. See, for example, Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The Paradox of Terrorism in Civil War', *The Journal of Ethics*, 8.1 (2004), 97–138; Jeremy Waldron, 'Terrorism and the Uses of Terror', *The Journal of Ethics*, 8.1 (2004), 5–35.

[417] Walter, 'Extremist's Advantage'.

[418] Victor Asal et al, 'Carrots, Sticks, and Insurgent Targeting of Civilians', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 63.7 (2019), 1710–35; Yelena Biberman and Farhan Zahid, 'Why Terrorists Target Children: Outbidding, Desperation, and Extremism in the Peshawar and Beslan School Massacres', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31.2 (2019), 169–84; Daphna Canetti et al, 'Individual Exposure to Terror and Political Attitudes: A Physiologically-Based Model of Militancy', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 33.5 (2021), 1055–70; Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, 'Terrorism, Spoiling, and the Resolution of Civil Wars', *The Journal of Politics*, 77.4 (2015), 1115–28; Virginia Page Fortna, 'Do Terrorists Win? Rebels' Use of Terrorism and Civil War Outcomes', *International Organization*, 69.3 (2015), 519–56; Juan Masullo and Francis O'Connor, 'PKK Violence against Civilians: Beyond the Individual, Understanding Collective Targeting', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32.1 (2020), 77–99; Jakana Thomas, 'Rewarding Bad Behavior: How Governments Respond to Terrorism in Civil War', *American Journal of Political Science*, 58.4 (2014), 804–18.

[419] This included another notable assassination in 1961, as Imkongliba Ao was murdered outside Mokokchung in 1961. See chapter III.

[420] ASA CMS 130/56. Naga Hills (Press information). '457 Country Made Guns Surrendered', GOI Press Information Bureau, 22nd June 1956.

[421] ASA CMS 136/56. Note from J.S. on Naga Hills.

turned to religion as life under Indian rule became especially volatile.[422] In this environment, it is plainly obvious why Naga citizens were reluctant to embrace a sense of self-identification with the Indian nation.

Terror was a strategy that has been repeatedly used in the northeast; the ULFA's wave of secret killings between 1998-2001 was a particularly striking episode.[423] In the Naga civil war, the underground's so-called 'wave of terror' – noted from March 1956 by provincial officials – was made possible by the quantities of small arms the rebels held.[424] Light machine guns and mortars were amongst the modern weapons recovered from rebels by Indian security forces.[425] The arsenal was not infinite, but the operations the Naga underground carried out demonstrated the potency of modern weapons for insurgency in the region.[426] Activities such as the persistent cutting of telegraph wires and general disruptions to communications alongside an upturn in kidnappings of pro-government civilians were enabled by the firepower of the rebels.[427] The longer the Naga underground carried out operations with proportionate success, the clearer the message about rebel group capability, if access to modern weaponry was possible.

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[422] Tezenlo Thong, '"Thy Kingdom Come": The Impact of Colonization and Proselytization on Religion among the Nagas', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 45.6 (2010), 595–609. Thong, for instance, found a direct correlation between periods of military or political tension and conversions to Christianity in the NHD. In particular, a rapid upsurge in conversions was identified from the 1950s.

[423] Dixita Deka, 'Living without Closure: Memories of Counter-Insurgency and Secret Killings in Assam', *Asian Ethnicity*, 22.3 (2021), 428–46.

[424] ASA CMS 136/56. Note from J.S. on Naga Hills.

[425] *Ibid.*

[426] ASA CMS 130/56. B. K. Basu to Chief Minister, Assam, 'Unofficial Handout', 11 July 1956.

[427] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 20 April 1956, 'The Nagas', for period 5-18 April 1956.

The Naga arsenal enabled an attack on Kohima in June 1956.[428] Although the assault was eventually repelled, the situation in the Kohima region was volatile and the day after the underground struck a significant blow. As a civilian convoy made its way along the Kohima-Imphal Road underground forces swooped and looted a reported Rs.700,000 worth of supplies whilst leaving three dead.[429] Significantly, a Lok Sabha MP who was present in the convoy was temporarily kidnapped. Rebel assaults on supply transports were not uncommon, but the capture of a member of the Lok Sabha was a demonstration of the potency of the armed rebel underground.[430] After the MP in question was released, he brought the case before parliament, ensuring a public audience for Naga operations whilst condemning the negligence of state security forces.[431] He claimed that every rebel he had seen was equipped with modern weaponry, which included STEN guns and grenades.[432] Media reports also gave a public platform to narrate the successes that Naga rebels achieved with their armoury of modern weapons.[433] Through these avenues, information – and lessons – from the Naga civil war circulated.

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[428] Sinha, *Lost Opportunities*, pp. 48–79.

[429] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 28 June 1956, 'The Nagas', for period 13-26 June 1956.

[430] ASA HPL 48/56. Superintendent of Police, Naga Hills to Deputy Inspector General of Police, Case No. 216. Report No. 2, 12 February 1957.

[431] Lok Sabha Debate. Motion Re. Situation in Naga Hills. 23 August 1956.

[432] TNA DO 35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 28 June 1956, 'The Nagas', for period 13-26 June 1956.

[433] Though this worked both ways, and some outlets downplayed the extent of the Naga uprising. Added to this was the second-hand nature of information, considering the press blackout in the NHD, in place since 1955. For varied media responses, see B. G. Verghese, 'The Last Frontier: III-Naga Troubles, *The Times of India*, 3 February 1956; 'Other Tribals' Help Sought', *The Times of India*, 22 August 1956; 'Lok Sabha Debate on Naga Situation', *The Statesman*, 24 August 1956; Russell Spurr, 'Forbidden Kingdom', *Daily Express*, 21 September 1956. For a note on the press blackout, see Arjit Sen, *Marginal on the Map: Hidden Wars and Hidden Media in Northeast India* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2011), p. 4.

The use of modern weapons in a region with weak state control formed a key precedent for insurgency in the northeast. It was not the only lesson drawn from the Naga civil war. The use of the region's geography was a similarly potent factor exploited by the underground. The exploitation of the hilly, jungle terrain of the Naga Hills can be gleaned from a Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB) report on a meeting at the village of Sanis in the summer of 1956. The meeting hosted over 2,500 notable Naga elites from across the region and provided insight into how the underground used the interior of the Naga Hills despite the military presence of the state.[434]

The Sanis meeting was 'the largest meeting ever held by Phizo since the inception of the idea of independence and [the] formation of the NNC'.[435] Included on the agenda was the election of a President – or *Kedange* – for the FGN. The election provided a key reflection on the shift towards coercive tactics for the underground. After Imkongmeren declined the position, Phizo declared 'sit down if you cannot shoulder the responsibility, you should be machinegunned'.[436] Khrisanisa was ultimately elected, but his acceptance speech was hardly a stirring call to arms. He declared that 'as no one wanted to be President', he would shoulder the responsibility to the best of his ability.[437] This reflected the shifting reality of the underground, a grim but resolute attachment to the separatist cause enforced by an increasingly coercive leadership group. Yet, the meeting also demonstrated the effectiveness of the Naga interior for the durability of the underground movement.

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[434] The SIB suggested 2,509 attendees.

[435] ASA CMS 136/56. Civil Intelligence Officer, Kohima to S. M. Dutt, 'Sanis Meeting', 3 September 1956.

[436] *Ibid.*

[437] *Ibid.*

Sanis spoke volumes about the enduring organisational ability of the underground, which utilised hilly, jungle terrain to advantageous effect. To spread word of the meeting, 'a notice asking all Tribal Council Presidents, representatives of all the Tribal Councils and villages, Youth leaders and Women's Federation representatives was circulated'.[438] The grassroots networks continued to produce results for the movement and ensured that so many attendees could be present despite security force patrols. Guides were offered and travel was undertaken in small groups to avoid detection. Secrecy was paramount, but the movement felt confident enough in its control within the interior that it could host such a large meeting without being surprised by security forces. The use of the interior, therefore, was a key asset for insurgency in the northeast.

The terrain of the highlands was an advantage for the underground, but also one that would be utilised in time by all insurgent groups operating in the region. The topography of the northeast was important for insurgency. Arguably more important, though, were the international boundaries that ringed the region. Geo-politics, as well as natural features, were therefore critical. The Naga underground operated out of the international borderlands, especially along the Burmese border, to good effect from the outset of clashes with the state.[439] But its contacts established with East Pakistan in 1956 set another notable precedent for the region. Third party intervention and external patronage can be a key indicator of rebel group longevity.[440] The links to Pakistan were important for the Naga underground in 1956, as it

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[438] *Ibid.*

[439] TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

[440] Christopher Linebarger and Andrew Enterline, 'Third Party Intervention and the Duration and Outcomes of Civil Wars', in *What Do We Know about Civil Wars?*, ed. by T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), pp. 93-108; Casper Sakstrup, 'What's Going on next Door? Irregular Leader Change in Neighboring Countries, Uncertainty, and Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 58.3 (2021), 539–53.

provided refuge within the Chittagong Hills Tracts (CHT).[441] It provided a haven for rebel leaders and Phizo utilised this external help to evade capture from 1956 until his exile to London in 1960.[442]

The use of modern weapons, the exploitation of interior and international terrain as well as external patronage were critical factors for insurgency in the northeast. Together, the lessons established during the Naga civil war provided some key indicators for would-be insurgents elsewhere in the region. These were transferred in various guises, explicitly through contact between neighbouring institutions and implicitly through the outcome of the Naga war.[443] During the process of decolonisation, therefore, the precedents of insurgency began with the Naga underground.

Whilst the underground established key precedents, the central government's militarisation of the Naga Hills only raised questions. The longer it took to strike a decisive blow against the Naga movement, the weaker the state appeared. Its security-based outlook, which mirrored that of the provincial government between 1953-6, included an intensification of patrol operations, which accelerated casualties for both sides.[444] Table 7 displays the official casualty figures provided by the Indian Home Ministry by the summer of 1956.

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[441] Bhaumik, *Troubled Periphery*, pp. 95-96.

[442] TNA UK DO 196/60. J. Chadwick to V. Martin, 'Phizo', 12 July 1960.

[443] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'Psychological Background of the Demand for a Hill State', 23 May 1955.

[444] ASA HPL 272/56. A. N. M. Saleh to Deputy Secretary of Finance, 4 July 1956.

Table 7: ***Home Ministry Casualty Estimate, July 1956.*** [445]

	Killed	**Wounded**
Naga Rebels	370	n/a
Indian Army Forces	68	234

These statistics were accompanied by an estimated one hundred and twenty-one civilian deaths.[446] By the summer of the 1956, the casualty list was accelerating.

In an effort to improve operations, fourteen Armed Police platoons stationed in the Naga Hills were converted into Assam Rifle (AR) units with basic training in guerrilla tactics. This was followed by plans to create another AR battalion out of eight more Armed Police platoons.[447] In addition to improved training, recruits were provided with weapons more suited to confronting the Naga underground, shown in table 8.

Table 8: ***1st and 2nd NHD Battalions, Authorised Arsenal, 1956.*** [448]

Weapon	**Number**	**Ammo Required**	**Reserve Ammo Required**	**Total Ammo**
Rifle (No. 5)	748	37,400	112,200	149,600
LMG (Bren)	56	42,000	112,000	154,000
Grenade Firing Rifle	56	336	1,232	1,568
STEN Gun	126	11,340	22,680	34,020
2” Mortar	14	672	1,176	1,848
Pistol .38”	24	288	432	720
Pistol signal	14	168	504	672
Grenade	770			

[445] Mss Eur F158/239. ‘Nagas’, *Reuters*, 31 July 1956.

[446] Lok Sabha Debate. Short Question No. 24. 30 May 1956; TNA UK DO/35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 23 March 1956, ‘The Nagas’, for period 8-21 March 1956.

[447] ASA HPL 272/56. D. Das to Inspector General of Police, ‘Raising of eight temporary platoons of Armed Police for the Naga Hills District’, 26 April 1956.

[448] ASA HPL 272/56. 1st & 2nd Battalions, The Assam Special Police; ‘Authorised scale of Ammunition’.

STENs reflected the recognition about the advantages of lightweight, fast-firing weapons in the hill terrain of the highlands whilst light machine guns and mortars provided greater firepower than the previous reliance on rifles.[449]

The central government clearly recognised the seriousness of the situation. The militarisation of the Naga Hills indicated this, as did the visit of G. B. Pant – the Indian Home Minister – to Assam to chair emergency talks in July 1956.[450] Yet, practical problems hindered the effectiveness of state-led operations, from intelligence to training and recruitment. Though significant resources were allocated for the Naga civil war, this did not neatly translate into results.

There was a disparity between state and rebel intelligence networks.[451] Whilst the underground was well integrated into the social fabric of Naga society, Indian intelligence gathering was hampered by this lack of penetration. Advances were made, leading for example to the capture of relatives of Phizo and their armed guards, but overall, this remained a problematic issue for the state.[452] The underground was able to utilise its internal leverage to continually strike back, especially against government-friendly citizens in the region.[453] Meanwhile, the underground's use of terror ensured villagers were reluctant to offer

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[449] The use of the jungle carbine ('Rifle No. 5') also demonstrated this point, utilising the shorter barrel than conventional rifles. This was advantageous for warfare in heavily wooded hill terrain.

[450] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 12 July 1956, 'The Nagas', for period 27 June - 10 July 1956.

[451] TNA DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

[452] TNA DO 35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Report, No. 2/56, 'Nagas', 5 March 1956.

[453] TNA DO 35/5349. Extract from the India Fortnightly Summary, 20 April 1956, 'The Nagas', for period 5-18 April 1956.

information to security forces.[454] Between the lack of state presence in the region and the reluctance of Naga citizens, attaining intelligence on the Naga movement was difficult.

Practical challenges were also presented in the training and recruitment of security forces. The Army was meant to offer training for regional security personnel, but this was a relatively ad hoc system that left certain units without suitable preparation.[455] Meanwhile, the second converted AR battalion noted earlier was plagued with issues in efficiency and effectiveness, despite the projected outlay in training and weaponry.[456] It would, ultimately, be disbanded altogether.[457] Efforts to entice local recruits from the highlands into security forces were also met with an overall lack of enthusiasm.[458] The practicalities of conflict in the Naga Hills, therefore, curtailed the effectiveness of state-led operations in the civil war.

The perception of state capabilities was impacted by these developments. The Naga war rumbled on for the next two years without any definitive victories for the government, with small-scale clashes common.[459] Casualty rates were far higher for rebel forces than security forces by 1958, shown in table 9.

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[454] ASA HPL 129/58. Superintendent of Police, Sibsagar to Assistant Inspector General of Police, Assam, 22 January 1958.

[455] ASA HPL 272/56. A. N. M. Saleh to Deputy Secretary of Finance, 4 July 1956.

[456] ASA HPL 272/56. Assistant Inspector General of Police, Assam to Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, 5 August 1957.

[457] ASA HPL 272/56. Inspector General of Police, Assam to the Accountant General, Assam, 'Disbandment of the Naga Hils Battalion', 17 January 1957.

[458] ASA HPL 442/55. K. R. Chaudhuri, Inspector General of Police, Assam to Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam, 23rd February 1956.

[459] TNA UK DO/35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Monthly Summary, No. 12/56 for the period ended 31 December 1956.

Table 9: ***Losses from the Naga conflict, as of September 1958.*** [460]

	Killed	**Wounded**	**Taken Prisoner**
Nagas	1207	1235	1686
Indian Civilians	28	36	2
IA Forces	162	452	0
Totals	**1397**	**1723**	**1688**

However, despite Naga losses outweighing those of Indian forces, the inability to produce any notable breakthroughs posed considerable problems for the state.

The MP kidnapped by the Naga underground – Jogeswar Singh – offered a clear critique of security forces, accusing them of negligence prior to the rebel attack.[461] In the Lok Sabha, the critique was swept somewhat under the rug by MPs, whilst the central government was keen to deflect the seriousness of clashes between state and rebel forces.[462] But this rose-tinted assessment – displayed in public by politicians such as Nehru, Minister for External Affairs J. N. Hazarika and Minister of State B. N. Datar[463] – could not be maintained indefinitely. Across the highlands, as shown in chapters III and IV, the evolving perception of state strength was keenly felt.

[460] TNA DO 35/9004. Extract from Report by the Military Adviser to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India for the Quarter Ended 30 Sep 1958.

[461] Lok Sabha Debate. Motion Re. Situation in Naga Hills. 23 August 1956.

[462] Lok Sabha Debate. Short Question No. 24. 30 May 1956.

[463] Lok Sabha Debate. 20 December 1955. Question No. 997; Lok Sabha Debate. Question No. 1945. 4 May 1956; Lok Sabha Debate. Question No. 945. 7 December 1956. This rhetoric was mirrored by the Assam government. Medhi, for example, suggested that the Naga movement was completely demoralised in early 1956, just as it was solidifying it resolve against the Indian central government. See TNA UK DO 35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Report, No. 2/56, 'Nagas', 5 March 1956.

Whilst the Naga civil war established pertinent questions about state capacity further afield, internally the disdain for security forces was displayed by underground tactics. One example was shown through a case of arms surrenders in Autumn 1956, displayed in table 10.

Table 10: ***Naga Arms Returns, September 1956.*** [464]

Weapon Type	**No. Surrendered**
Shotgun	900
Rifle	28
STEN gun	2

The surrender of so many weapons was initially thought to indicate a growing level of government support from civilians. This belief was quickly dispelled after the revelation that the underground encouraged civilians to surrender largely unserviceable weapons to gain the trust of security forces.[465] Such episodes, which raise questions about other apparent success stories of weapons surrenders, were part of a broader refutation of security force effectiveness.[466]

The precedents of insurgency and state perception were two notable factors in the early stages of the Naga conflict, after the centre took the lead in operations. A third was the entrenching of identity conceptions that the provincial government began. Ardent supporters of the underground had a clear ideological opposition to a pluralistic conception of Indian

[464] TNA UK DO 35/5349. Adrienne Farrell, 'Extracts from Reuters', 1 October 1956.

[465] ASA CMS 136/56. 'Extract from Daily Summary of Information of Assam No. 216', 3 October 1956. Many of the weapons returned were of little military use and were even insufficient in many cases in their primary purpose of offering protection from wildlife. For the problems with locally manufactured shotguns, see ASA TAD PSSI 11/54. 'Issue of gun license for protection of crops from the depredation of wild elephants'.

[466] ASA CMS 130/56. '457 Country Made Guns Surrendered', GOI Press Information Bureau, 22nd June 1956. For example, these muzzle-loading country-made weapons had virtually no strategic advantages in guerrilla warfare.

nationalism, but this was not a unanimous trend amongst the 212,975 citizens of the NHD.[467] Nation-building aspirations were understandably low on the agenda as civil war began, but there was an opportunity for the state to bridge the chasm between 'Indian' and 'Naga', especially considering the underground's coercive tactics.

Between ardent rebel followers and state security forces was a large population of civilians. It has already been identified how the militarised environment of the Naga Hills naturally led to an apprehension towards Indian nationhood amongst Naga citizens. However, greater focus on the strategies implemented towards these civilians could have been pivotal for the Indian government, providing a degree of relief from a volatile atmosphere whilst projecting the nation in a positive light. But a lack of attention to civilian support was critical and the state bypassed a significant opportunity. To compound this, its tactics adversely affected perceptions of identity, creating animosity towards 'Indian' forces. The result was an intensification of the disconnect between Indian and Naga conceptions of identity.

Some state-led tactics had operational uses but appeared on the ground to punish civilians far more than rebel ringleaders. For example, gatherings of five or more people were banned throughout the NHD, but this served to restrict civilian lifestyles more than it combatted rebel operations, creating a source of discontent in the process.[468] But the clearest example of missed opportunities was in the village grouping scheme initiated from 1956. The idea was

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[467] This was a retroactive, revised figure provided in census data after 1951. The 1951 district handbook for the NHD stated the population was 205,950. The variation is attributed in part to the changing boundaries of the Naga Hills. The 1961 census report for Assam noted the impact of changing political boundaries in the region on the fluidity of statistics. See *District Census Handbook: Naga Hills*, ed. by R. B. Vaghaiwalla (Assam, 1951); E. H. Pakyntein, *Census of India, Volume III: Assam. Part II-A: General Population Tables* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1961), p. 64.

[468] ASA CMS 130/56. B. K. Basu to Private Secretary to the Chief Minister of Assam, 4 September 1956.

drawn from British counterinsurgency tactics during the Malayan Emergency.[469] On paper, the tactic aimed to win 'hearts and minds', turning the civilian population into an advantage against the rebels. The hypocrisy within these counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics is drawn out in greater detail in the Mizo civil war in chapter IV, but the Naga case-study aligns with the revisionist historiography of COIN.[470] Village grouping was little more than state sanctioned oppression of civilians. It led to citizens being forcibly moved from their homes, restricted their freedoms and allowed for excesses by security force personnel. In this environment, conceptions of an Indian 'other' spread rapidly.

Village grouping in the NHD was an operational failure, but its ideological effect on the civilian population was a more significant ramification.[471] The most comprehensive ground-level assessment of Naga counterinsurgency operations was provided by a series of interviews conducted by Nandini Sundar. Despite a lack of archival material on grouping in the Naga Hills, Sundar's conclusions closely mirrored the Mizo experience that is drawn out in chapter IV of this thesis. Her research, which encouraged villagers to reflect on their experiences, suggested a clear hardening of attitudes against the government.[472] The conduct of military personnel, the impact on day-to-day life and the treatment of Naga civilians as

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[469] Karl Hack, 'Using and Abusing the Past: The Malayan Emergency as Counterinsurgency Paradigm', in *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. by Paul Dixon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 207-242.

[470] Fausto Scarinzi, 'The Revisionist Historiography of Britain's Decolonisation Conflicts and Political Science Theses of Civilian Victimisation in Counterinsurgency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30.2 (2019), 421–46; Martin Thomas, *Fight or Flight: Britain, France, and Their Roads from Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[471] For studies which identify the operational failure of Naga village grouping, see Sajal Nag, *A Gigantic Panopticon: Counter-Insurgency and Modes of Disciplining and Punishment in Northeast India* (Kolkata: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2011); D.B. Shekatkar, 'India's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Nagaland', in *India and Counterinsurgency: Lessons Learned*, ed. by Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler, paperback edn (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 9–27.

[472] Nandini Sundar, 'Interning Insurgent Populations: The Buried Histories of Indian Democracy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46.6 (2011), 47–57.

outsiders, rather than Indian citizens, all combined to ensure a disenchantment about Indian security forces. As a corollary, this enforced perceptions about the Indian 'other', especially impactful considering the prior isolation from 'mainstream' India and its citizens.[473]

The realities of village grouping, alongside other ground-level initiatives, were something of a debacle. Archival material on village grouping may not be extensive, but it still does suggest that health crises followed the forced movement of citizens.[474] Small-scale disagreements between security personnel and Nagas plainly opposed to the underground provided a further source of unnecessary friction.[475] Such occurrences ensured that where loyalties between state and separatist group were unclear, there was little incentive to support the central government's military drive in the Naga Hills.[476] The appeals to civilians were part-baked and paled in comparison the detrimental effects of ground-level strategies.[477] Village grouping failed to aid the state's military operations against the underground, but embedded the chasm between conceptions of Naga and Indian nationhood.

The village grouping initiative was an early episode in a long history of security force actions against Naga citizens which enforced anti-Indian sentiment in the region. The most fundamental step was taken in 1958. The NHD had already been declared a disturbed area

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[473] Leake, 'Nation-State's Edge', p. 534.

[474] ASA CMS 130/56. B. K. Basu to Private Secretary to the Chief Minister of Assam, 7 September 1956.

[475] ASA HPL 48/56. Superintendent of Police, Naga Hills to Deputy Inspector General of Police, Case No. 270. Report No. 1, 28 August 1956.

[476] ASA CMS 136/56. Satsü-o Angami to Rishang Kaisang, 4 September 1956.

[477] These included plans to conduct publicity tours which amounted to little, relief efforts for communities hit by food shortages and funding for local militias. See ASA CMS 130/56. B. K. Basu to Private Secretary to the Chief Minister of Assam, 4 August 1956; I. P. Chowdhury to Secretary to the Government of Assam, Tribal Areas Department, 6 August 1956; ASA HPL 272/56. S. K. Datta to the Inspector General of Police, Assam, 'Raising of a Naga Militia', 20 September 1956.

under the ADAA.[478] The continuation of colonial methods by the central government was further revealed as it sought greater powers through emergency legislation. The result was the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Ordinance, passed on 22 May 1958.[479] The Ordinance provided the precursor for the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) passed later in the year.[480]

The AFSPA granted powers like the ability to shoot on sight against anyone deemed to be an enemy of the state. Its 'draconian' rules have drawn extensive criticism.[481] If the 1953 AMPOA signalled the invocation of colonial era exceptional legislation, then the AFSPA provided the zenith of this mindset. Rather than transitioning towards a democratic approach to internal challenges, the central government embedded the inclination towards colonial, security-first policies in the Naga Hills, first initiated by the provincial administration.

The implementation of the AFSPA in 1958 was effectively an admission of state weakness: an admission that it lacked the capabilities to confront the Naga separatist challenge. This reality, by the close of the 1950s, became increasingly evident across the highlands, as identity movements elsewhere arose with their own perceptions about Indian state capability. The complete betrayal of democratic freedoms to pursue a military-based approach was more

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[478] TNA DO 35/5349. Extract from the Calcutta Report, No. 1, 'Nagas', January 1957.

[479] Lok Sabha Debate. Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Bill. 18 August 1958. The timing, coming less than two weeks after the budget hearing where the Ordinance would have been open to parliamentary scrutiny, was later noted to be less than democratic.

[480] *Ibid.*

[481] For criticism in the academy see; Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, pp. 155-76; Kikon, 'Predicament of Justice'. For popular activism against the act, the hunger strike of Irom Sharmila from November 2000 until August 2016 remains the most notable protest by an activist. See, for example, Michael Safi, 'How love and a taste of honey brought one Indian woman's 16-year hunger strike to an end', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/11/irom-sharmila-love-story-worlds-longest-hunger-strike> [accessed 10 September 2020].

comparable to British frontier governmentality than effective governance in a democratic nation-state. Where the provincial government began with the AMPOA, the central government continued with the AFSPA.

The evolution of Naga identity in the first decade after independence was critical. It was a key time to demonstrate to the citizens of the Naga Hills the advantages of Indian democracy. Instead, the security-based initiatives of the state crystallised divergent Naga and Indian nationalist conceptions. This reality was a clear contradiction to the nation-building ideals of the early post-colonial Indian state. When added to the notes on state perception and insurgent precedents already identified by this chapter, key trends in the Naga Hills were clearly emerging as potent factors for the long-term stability of the northeast by 1958.

Conclusion

For the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands, the early stages of the Naga conflict were crucial. Questions about the state's capacity to confront identity movements were particularly important because of the national trends affecting the highlands, as shown shortly in chapter III. By 1958 the chances of an inclusive conception of Indian nationhood catching on in the NHD had diminished rapidly, especially after the passing of the AFSPA. The entrenching of anti-Indianness in the Naga Hills would impact how identity movements elsewhere in the highlands developed, also covered shortly. Meanwhile, the early precedents established by the Naga underground would similarly evolve in notable ways in the future. The types of weapons, the different internal and international bases, and the external patron may have all fluctuated in later years. But these fundamentals became key for the insurgencies of the northeast, first established by the Naga underground.

Though these trends became paramount for the northeast's prospects of stability, it is important to point-out that an unsuccessful start to the Naga conflict was not necessarily terminal for the prospects for peace in the northeast. The effects within the NHD were always going to be difficult to reverse after 1958, but further afield the rest of the highlands was not in open conflict with the state. Instead, a more benign start to life in post-colonial India unfolded. The next chapter moves on to interrogate how, despite this more benign environment, the broader highlands became increasingly politicised by the close of the 1950s. In the NHD, the state's security-led approach created problems. In the rest of the highlands, its problematic state- and nation- building practices expanded these problems.

Chapter III: The challenges of state- and nation- building in the highlands, 1947-62.

Introduction.

In the NHD, storm clouds circled shortly after independence. This was not the case in the rest of the highlands. Yet, between 1947-62, a notable transformation occurred. This transformation was slower and more subtle but just as decisive, both for the security of the highlands and the conflict dynamics of the northeast. A relatively benign start to life under Indian rule dissipated as the 1950s wore on.[482] By the early 1960s, in the highlands beyond the NHD, conditions favourable for insurgency were forged.

Regional, national and international processes were critical in this transition. Regional state-building ambitions were curtailed by practical issues. This created questions about the highlands' fit within India's federal structure; a workable governance model, development and positive change was lacking. National calls for linguistic reorganisation in the 1950s had an

[482] The term relative is used because there was small-scale political instability in the Lushai Hills. The ideological split between the MU and the UMFO – established in chapter I – led to public demonstrations. On independence day, Aizawl was affected as MU supporters were threatened and no Indian tricolours were raised. MU supporters intensified their propaganda campaign after August 1947 in the south of the district. The unrest that followed signalled another example of the lack of administrative control in the highlands, as district police were powerless to monitor political action. Rioting broke out by the close of 1948. By the new year – as tensions boiled over – around fifty-four patients were submitted to the hospital in Lungleh. But the deployment of Assam Rifles and the departure of L. L. Peters as Superintendent led to a reduction in political clashes. By the spring of 1949, an air of calm returned to the district. See MSA G-717, CB-58. L. L. Peters to G. E. D. Walker, 4 March 1948; MSA G-717, CB-58. L. L. Peters to G. E. D. Walker, 27 March 1948; MSA G-717, CB-58. Office of the adviser to the Governor of Assam for excluded areas and states to L. L. Peters, 25 September 1948; MSA G-1451, CB-120. Hranglura to Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh, 15 January 1949; MSA G-1451, CB-120. H. Sen to Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh, 16 January 1949; MSA G-1451, CB-120. Lt-Col Commandant, 1st Bn Assam Rifles to Debsing Chetri, 24 January 1949; MSA Gen 717/58. S. Barkataki to the Adviser to the Governor of Assam for Excluded Areas and States, Shillong, 7 June 1949.

acute knock-on effect in the highlands. Identity movements were strengthened and clashed with the central government's nation-building aspirations. This laid the platform for an environment conducive for insurgency, after the Assam Language Act passed in 1960. International relations between India and China had indirect ramifications throughout the highlands. The Sino-Indian war of 1962 revitalised the Naga rebel movement but also impacted regional politics. The hill state movement became less militant as a result, but in the Mizo Hills the war revealed the breadth of instability. Altogether, the challenges of state- and nation- building created the conditions for insurgency, whilst the Sino-Indian War demonstrated the differing reactions of the highlands' identity movements to these conditions.

This transition embedded long-term trends – originally identified in the Naga rebellion – by the early 1960s. Firstly, the state was increasingly perceived as weak across the highlands, not just in the NHD. Secondly, the friction between Indian nationalism and highland identities varied from uneasy accommodation to outright hostility. Finally, the persistence of the Naga movement solidified foundational precedents for future insurgent operations in the northeast. The first decade and a half of the long decolonisation of the highlands, therefore, was critical. Civil war in the Naga Hills was obviously important, but the inability to bridge challenges in the rest of the highlands was similarly significant. The result was widespread political unrest and the genesis of a second civil war.

Regional challenges for state- and nation- building, 1947-54.

In the early years after independence, regional challenges within the highlands were the most pressing concerns for the provincial and central governments. On the one hand, state-building was needed for an area previously defined by a lack of state control. On the other, regional identity aspirations – which were institutionalised on the eve of independence – had to be

integrated into Indian nationalist discourses. These were the immediate challenges the state confronted in this former frontier region of empire.

A recurrent narrative at the time – circulated by provincial and central government officials – stated colonial rule produced artificial boundaries between hill and valley, disrupting historic networks within a supposedly natural, historic Assamese region.[483] State- and nation-building objectives intended to rectify this dislocation. State-building involved the production of tangible state apparatus in a decolonising region, from the construction of governance institutions to improvements in infrastructure and communications. The desire for national unity – especially central in Nehru's rhetoric – required an ideological resonance with Indian nationalism. In both instances, translating theory into practice was difficult between 1947-54.

After independence, the highlands became Autonomous Hill Districts (AHDs) within the Assam state. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee hearings prompted the Constituent Assembly to ensure autonomy provisions for parts of Assam's borderlands. The provisions were codified in the Indian Constitution, published in 1950. The result was the Sixth Schedule, which provided parameters for the AHDs, shown in table 11.[484]

[483] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 23 May 1955.

[484] The Sixth Schedule split the Assam borderlands into part A and B regions. The part A regions were the AHDs in table 11, granted levels of autonomy noted shortly. The part B regions were in the North East Frontier Tracts on Assam's northern and northeast eastern international borders, which became NEFA in 1954. The part B regions were not granted the same provisions for political and administrative autonomy that the part A regions were. See Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, pp. 83-84.

Table 11: ***The Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam.***[485]

No.	Name
1	The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District
2	The Garo Hills District
3	The Lushai Hills District
4	The Naga Hills District
5	The North Cachar Hills*
6	The Mikir Hills*

The Sixth Schedule granted democratically elected district councils to the AHDs, with autonomy in aspects of local legislation alongside taxation, education and justice. This was a notable change from colonial rule, where power rested in the hands of an unelected official.[486] Issues of regional and national interest – in economics, development and security – were beyond the remit of the district councils. But, overall, the model was a practical effort to preserve indigenous culture whilst providing a degree of autonomy, a recurrent theme across the highlands during the Bordoloi Sub-Committee hearings.

The district council model was critical for both state- and nation- building, as shown shortly. For the former it provided a method for transforming administration, governance and local infrastructure. For the latter, the model was decisive for the central government's nation-building ambitions under Nehru. National unity was a key aspect of the central government's ambitions for development and economic prosperity.[487] Unity was also paramount for political

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[485] *The Constitution of India*, ed. by Om Prakash Aggarawala and S. K. Aiyar, 1st edn (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications, 1950).

*The North Cachar and Mikir Hills were merged shortly after, in 1951. See, Sharma, 'District Councils'.

[486] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), pp. 34-38.

[487] Atul Kohli, *The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 61-71. Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress "System" in India', *Asian Survey*, 4.12 (1964), 1161–73; Rajni Kothari, 'The Congress System Revisited: A Decennial Review', *Asian Survey*, 14.12 (1974), 1035–54. For instance, Rajni Kothari identified how 'in giving to the country and its institutions such strength and character, a critical role was played by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India'. He further suggested Nehru played

cohesion within such a diverse nation-state.[488] A defining feature of the early post-colonial state was the desire for an inclusive, pluralistic conception of Indian nationalism which transcended regional identity markers.[489] Nehru's outlook on indigeneity – which weighed heavily on government policy – fell somewhere between isolation and assimilation.[490] Essentially, this meant preserving indigenous rights and culture whilst developing an ideological attachment to the nation.[491] On paper, the district council model provided the solution for the highlands.

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was decisive in forging national unity and proved critical in the legitimacy of state institutions. From this basis, the plans for development unfolded, even if results varied.

[488] Anti-colonialism was obviously a powerful ideological force in the subcontinent. But after independence the government required other constructs to provide harmony amongst its citizens. Christopher Bayly, for example, described how Nehru conceptualised 'democratic socialism' – a combination of historic fragments of different ideologies – as a unifying concept for the nation. See C.A. Bayly, 'The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India', *Modern Intellectual History*, 12.3 (2015), 605–26. For some broader historiographical notes on national unity in the Nehru years, see Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security, and Separatism in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 26-48; Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 43–66; Guyot-Réchard, 'Nation-building'; Yasmin Khan, 'Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State', in Sherman et al, *Subjects to Citizens*, pp. 64–89; Zachariah, *Nehru*, pp. 187-213.

[489] Khilnani, *Idea of India*, pp. 150-79.

[490] For some introductory background reading to Nehru's worldview, see Adam B. Lerner, 'Collective Trauma and the Evolution of Nehru's Worldview: Uncovering the Roots of Nehruvian Non-Alignment', *The International History Review*, 41.6 (2019), 1276–1300. For how his ideas about indigeneity and development evolved, especially with the influence of Verrier Elwin, see, Ramachandra Guha, 'Savaging the Civilised: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Question in Late Colonial India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31.35/37 (1996), 2375–89; Ramachandra Guha, *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).

[491] Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA* (Delhi: Isa Books, 2009). Nehru's philosophy developed significantly after reading Elwin's work. In the foreword to Elwin's book, Nehru noted how his ideas had lacked clarity, though he felt a midway between complete isolation and engulfment was probably the best course. Elwin's work honed this inclination. Elwin essentially suggested a midway between a policy of 'leave them alone' and 'detribalization', which resonated with Nehru. In summarizing Nehru's midway policy, Elwin wrote, 'his [Nehru's] policy may be summarized as one which approaches the historical development of tribal life and culture with respect and the people themselves in a spirit of affection and identification that eliminates any possibility of superiority. It would not ignore the past, but would build upon it. It would bring the best things of the modern world to the tribes, but in such a way that these will not destroy the traditional way of life, but will activate and develop all that is good in it.' This was Nehru's indigenous policy in a nutshell, but – as shown in this thesis – translating theory into practice was difficult both ideologically and practically.

Nehru explicitly identified the importance of the district council model; it was critical to reconcile the tension between highland identity formation and Indian nationalism. In a remarkably prognostic discussion with the head of Assam's Tribal Areas Department, the following was noted:

> The PM [Nehru] was very anxious that the District Council should be given every opportunity to make a good start. He enquired about the financial position of their bodies, and stressed the importance of loans and subventions to them in the beginning… The PM was anxious that everything possible should be done to convince the Tribal people that [the] Government were serious about making the district autonomy scheme a success. The failure of the scheme, whatever the reasons might be, *might result in the most serious repercussions*. The PM particularly referred to the fact that the success of the scheme in the other areas would surely influence the course of wants in the Naga Hills.[492]

The centrality of the district council model to Nehru's macro-level thinking was palpable. The anxieties of the highlands' political elite between 1945-7 – identified in chapter I – were an ailment that required resolution and the district council model was the remedy prescribed by the centre. Further correspondence between Assam officials and Nehru substantiate the claim that he felt autonomy concessions were pivotal for the highlands. To Medhi, he suggested that the protection of local customs was essential to bridge the gap between indigenous communities and national consciousness.[493] But, to realise these ambitions of harmony, the district council model needed to be viable in practice as well as theory.

Yet, before the district council model was implemented, there were early warning signs for state-building aspirations. Roadbuilding offered one example. Partition meant the Lushai Hills District was especially detached from the rest of the country, with international

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[492] ASA PS 164/1952. Secretary to the Government of Assam, Tribal Areas Department to Bishnuram Medhi, 9 June 1952. Emphasis own.

[493] ASA PS 164/1952. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bishnuram Medhi, 4 April 1952.

boundaries to the east, south and west. This meant problems in communication, transport and supply.[494] The bridle track that linked Aizawl to Silchar – and thus towards the Assam Valley – was virtually unusable for motor vehicles during rainy season.[495] Funding was therefore allocated for the Silchar-Aizawl Road, by the central government.[496] The difficulties the project faced revealed the inherent tension in India's federal system that, in turn, prohibited smooth state-building in the highlands.

After the initial allocation of funds, the centre subsequently reduced the money available to the provincial government for the project. This was problematic for the Assam administration, which had focused its energies on publicising the scheme within the Lushai Hills.[497] Failure to deliver on its promises raised questions about the dependability of the government, whilst Mizo citizens in certain areas took it upon themselves to begin construction because of the state's lethargy.[498] Though the centre-regional dispute over funding was never serious, it raised questions at ground-level in the Lushai Hills about the commitment to the development plans the state supposedly had. Though funding issues were understandable considering the severe economic problems the Indian state faced by the late 1940s, the episode proved to be indicative of persistent issues faced in state-building.

Even some of the most small-scale, mundane designs were defined by inefficiency. This was evident when trying to bridge communication problems in the Lushai Hills. Lack of

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[494] ASA PS 175/50. Bishnuram Medhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 1 November 1950; MSA G 1024/CB 84. Memo No C29/52/131, 26 August 1952.

[495] ASA PS 175/50. Meeting Notes, 'Development schemes for the Autonomous District', 22 October 1950.

[496] Originally, Rs. 4.97 Lakhs was granted for the project.

[497] ASA PS 175/50. Bishnuram Medhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 15 October 1950.

[498] ASA PS 175/50. Bishnuram Medhi to Vallabhbhai Patel, 1 November 1950

infrastructure meant that the district's two major settlements – Aizawl and Lungleh – could be completely cut off in the event of an emergency. The Deputy Commissioner devised a cheap and simple contingency plan to forestall this. He required funding for six bicycles, to be used by trained runners in an emergency, to provide points of contact within the district whilst larger infrastructural projects – such as road-building – developed.[499] Such a small-scale plan took around half a year of discussions with provincial government officials and police departments to reach a decision.[500] Despite the advice of both the Lushai Hills Deputy Commissioner and the Deputy Inspector General of Police for Assam on the usefulness of the scheme, the provincial government rejected the plans. They cited a lack of funds whilst directly contradicting the advice offered to them.[501] The inability to create even the most basic solutions for the highlands' communication problems indicated the challenges inherent to early post-colonial state-building ambitions.

These broader issues with state-building provide useful context for the unfolding of the district council model. The district councils were established in the highlands in 1952.[502] Prior state-building ambitions were curtailed by friction within India's federal system, but after 1952

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[499] ASA TAD CON 85/52. Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills to Secretary, Tribal Areas & Development Department, 1 August 1952.

[500] ASA TAD CON 85/52. Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills to Secretary, Tribal Areas & Development Department, 27 October 1952; ASA TAD CON 85/52. D.C. Dutt to Rana K. D. N. Singh, 7 January 1953.

[501] ASA TAD CON 85/52. Rana K. D. N. Singh to Deputy Commissioner, Lushai Hills, 18 February 1953.

[502] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), p. 15. The district council in the NHD was not established, but elsewhere in the highlands the councils were created. This was followed by the establishment of regional councils within the districts. For example, the Pawi-Lakher regional council was unveiled in 1953 as part of the Lushai Hills, whilst the Jowai regional council was inaugurated in 1966 within the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

a more concerted system – at least in theory – for localised state- and nation- building was created.

The district councils were generally toothless entities. The only minor success occurred in the Lushai Hills but involved legislative change rather than state- or nation- building achievements. At the elections to the Mizo District Council (MDC) and the Assam Legislative Assembly, the MU attained notable victories.[503] To realise its democratic message, the MU passed a series of legislative changes between 1952-54. It reduced the taxes on paddy paid to chiefs and changed rules on hunting, honey and salt.[504] The Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights Act of 1954 was the last in a series of changes aimed to break power structures enabled by colonialism.[505] The changes implemented by the MDC ensured the village councils – rather than the older hereditary chiefship system – exercised local administrative power.

The MDC's legislative revolution was the only positive for a model which is widely considered unworkable.[506] Elsewhere, the councils were challenged because of their limited scope of powers. The inauguration of the Khasi and Jaintia council in 1952 was undermined

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[503] *Statistical Report on General Election, 1951 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 1951), pp. 9-11; M. Sajjad Hassan, 'The Mizo Exception: State-Society Cohesion and Institutional Capability', in Baruah, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 207–31 (p. 218). The MU won seventeen of eighteen contested seats in the MDC alongside all three seats allocated for the Lushai Hills District in the Legislative Assembly. The UMFO, on the other hand, won only a single seat at the MDC.

[504] H. G. Joshi, *Mizoram: Past and Present* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), pp. 35-36; Nunthara, *Mizoram*, pp. 134-35.

[505] TNAI. 'Assam Act XXI of 1954: The Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights) Act, 1954', *The Assam Gazette*, 30 June 1954.

[506] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), p. 65; Karlsson, 'Indigenous Governance', pp. 141–53.

by a public protest in Shillong.[507] The time taken to implement the Sixth Schedule and a lack of political representation for the highlands underpinned the unrest in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.[508] This line of thought questioned whether the district council offered any genuine autonomy, if power still effectively lay with the Assam Legislative Assembly.[509] The model, therefore, was not wholeheartedly subscribed to purely because it spoke of autonomy.

The challenge evident at Shillong was not uniform. But a series of meetings from 1952-4 between members of various hill associations reflected the growing scepticism of the model. These discussions resulted in the foundation of the East India Tribal Union (EITU).[510] After a meeting at Tura in the Garo Hills in early October 1954, the demand for a separate hill polity was aired for the first time.[511] The hill state demand was driven by a belief that Assam's highlands did not belong in an Assamese polity. The offer of regional autonomy, through the district councils, was not sufficient. The councils held limited powers, whilst the provincial and central governments held all real control over decisions. It is worthwhile reflecting, at this point, on how regional developments impacted on the growing challenge to the district council model.

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[507] S. R. Bodhi, 'Khasi Political Reality and the Struggle for Statehood: History, Context and Political Processes', in *Handbook of Tribal Politics in India*, ed. by Jagannath Ambagudia and Virginius Xaxa (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2021).

[508] ASA PS 175/50. Jairamdas Doulatram to Bishnuram Medhi, 9 September 1950.

[509] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'A brief note on the demand for a separate Hills State', 23 May 1955.

[510] Bodhi, 'Khasi Political Reality'.

[511] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'Psychological Background of the Demand for a Hill State', 23 May 1955.

In the quote given above, during Nehru's discussions with Assam's Tribal Areas Department, the last line is particularly noticeable: 'the success of the scheme in the other areas would surely influence the course of wants in the Naga Hills'.[512] Nehru saw the scheme acting as a beacon to curb nationalist ambitions elsewhere that were antagonistic to his vision for nation-building. What happened was the reverse, as the Naga challenge enforced criticism of the district council model. Certainly, propaganda campaigns between India and Pakistan did not help. One Assam official was particularly irked by the 'insidious propaganda indulged in by Pakistan' that had created discontent in the Khasi Hills bordering East Pakistan.[513] But within the highlands, the rumblings of discontent in the NHD had their own implications.

The separatist agenda of the NNC resonated throughout the broader highlands. Certain 'extremist' elements elsewhere in the Assam highlands clearly took their cue from the Naga separatist agenda. Those pioneering volatile ideas included S. A. Chyne in the Khasi Hills, who sought a similar path to Phizo's methods.[514] Whilst the NNC acted largely independently from the influential political organisations in the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia and Lushai Hills in an operational sense, its ideology and strategies were a key barometer for indigenous elites seeking greater levels of autonomy. As a central government publication reflected by the mid-1950s, 'there is no denying the fact that the demand for a hill state partly reflects the separatist

[512] ASA PS 164/1952. Secretary to the Government of Assam, Tribal Areas Department to Bishnuram Medhi, 9 June 1952.

[513] ASA PS 175/50. Meeting Notes; 'Development schemes for the Autonomous District', 22 October 1950.

[514] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'Psychological Background of the Demand for a Hill State', 23 May 1955.

pull of the extremist elements'.[515] This statement reflected the importance that extremism – pioneered by the NNC – had in conditioning the political atmosphere of the highlands.

The highlands were not operating in a vacuum. The knock-on effects of political activism in one area created reverberations. Institutions such as the EITU were partially the result of these reverberations. Ground level anxieties, the spectre of the Naga challenge and competing visions about the future of the highlands coalesced to form the first hill state movement. Some of its key leaders – such as Williamson A. Sangma – were particularly influential local figures who advanced the EITU's standing.[516] This fluidity of ideas led to a report by an Assam official, which claimed the 'spirit of separatism had been subtly infused into the minds' of certain figures within the highlands.[517] This intercorrelation across the highlands was evident in the 1940s, identified in chapter I.[518] In the 1950s, it enforced the challenge to the district council model and provided an obstacle to the state- and nation-building objectives of the early post-colonial governments.

By 1954 there were signs that the district council model may not be an effective panacea to the identity movements of the highlands. The MDC had peaked with its legislative revolution whilst elsewhere the councils made little progress.[519] The birth of the EITU spoke of the

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[515] *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1955), p. 185.

[516] Sangma later became the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya, after the region was granted statehood during the federal restructuring of the northeast in the early 1970s.

[517] ASA CMS 287/A/55. Bishnuram Medhi to Jairamdas Doulatram, 'Psychological Background of the Demand for a Hill State', 23 May 1955.

[518] This was the case in a general sense with the production of political anxieties. A more specific example was in the repeated insistence by different groups for the ten-year opt out close during the Bordoloi Sub-Committee hearings.

[519] For example, persistent economic issues were identified throughout the 1950s, with a government report lamenting how 'tangible result are difficult to be achieved' in the highlands. Also, the MDC was soon dogged by claims about corruption and the MU's designs for making village council seats hereditary curtailed its self-

growing rebuttal of the model. Yet, the challenge was not particularly serious by this point. The general mood is best understood as grumblings of discontent rather than widespread militant activism.[520] However, the regional trends that enforced this discontent were about to be impacted by notable developments nationally. The effect of national politics underpinned the transition from grumbling discontent into wholesale political action.

National challenges for state- and nation- building, 1954-60.

In 1954 minor discontent was evident in the highlands. By 1960, widespread political activism abounded. This change was conditioned by national developments. Scrutiny of the district council model within the highlands dovetailed with national calls for a linguistic reorganisation of India's federal structure. The clamour for political change that arose across the country bolstered movements such as the EITU. This, in turn, exacerbated the challenges to state- and nation- building that the post-colonial state already faced in the highlands. By 1960 the benign start to life in independent India was over, and conditions favourable for insurgent action were germinating.

Those within the highlands with qualms about the post-colonial political structure of the northeast were given significant impetus in 1954. The States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was established at a time when challenges to the status quo were manifesting in the highlands. Nation-wide calls for changes to India's federal structure were acutely felt in the highlands because regional state-building initiatives did not result in socio-economic

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proclaimed democratic ideology. See Nunthara, *Mizoram*, p. 157; E. H. Pakyntein, *District Census Handbook: Mizo Hills* (Gauhati: Tribune Press, 1965).

[520] For instance, the SRC's tour in the Garo Hills in May 1955 identified that the hill state idea was more popular amongst Christian leaders in the district. Meanwhile, it noted how leaders such as Sangma would have been 'satisfied with amendment of the sixth schedule' at this time if it provided tangible powers for the district council. See ASA CMS 287/A/55. S. M. L. Bhatnagar to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, 23 May 1955.

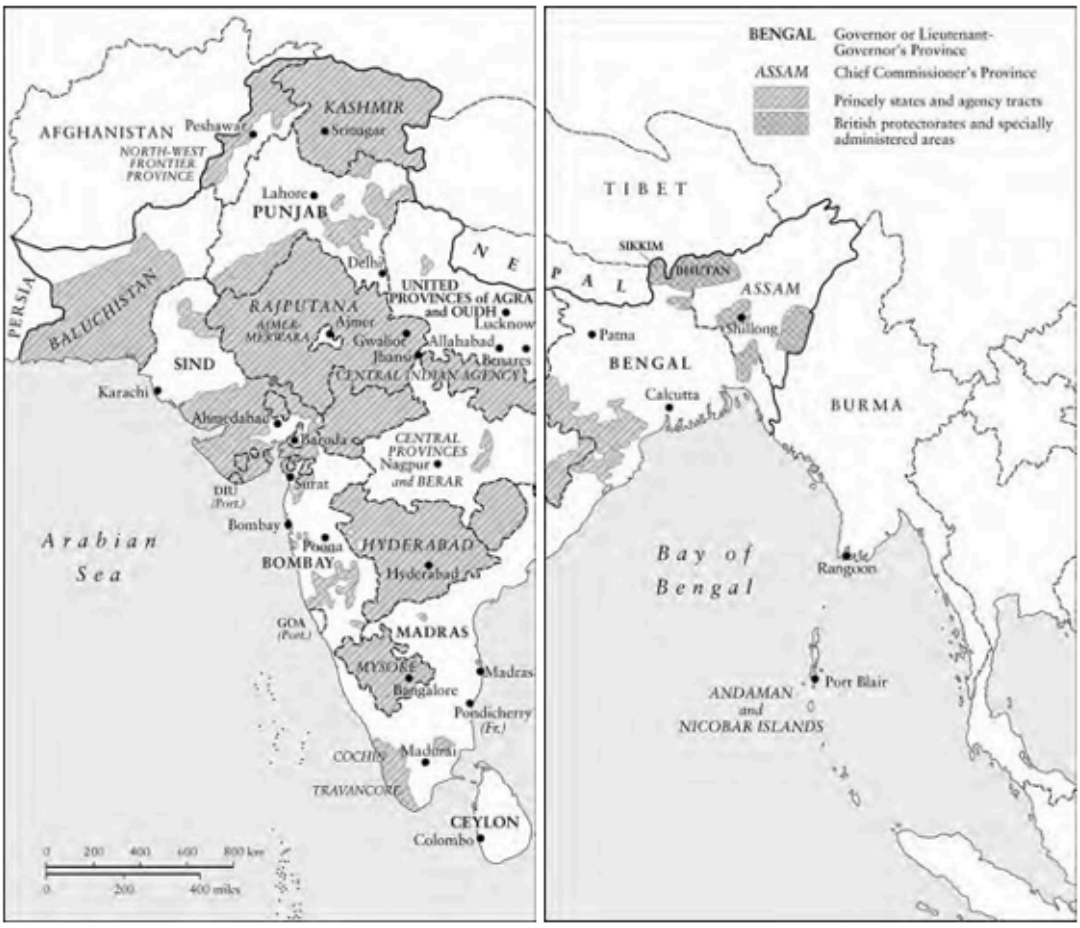
improvement across the 1950s.[521] By the close of the decade, the highlands still faced similar socio-economic challenges to those evident after independence, as covered later in this section. Therefore, as central, regional and local administrations struggled to instigate positive change, nation-wide calls for greater regional autonomy had particular resonance in the highlands.

The northeast was not the only region to express discontent about India's federal arrangement. The protests in Shillong in 1952 were stimulated by an inherent logic that had parallels elsewhere in the country. After 1947, the 'imprint' of traits associated with British rule – especially after the 1935 Act – were retained in the political composition of the nation.[522] As shown in maps 6 and 7, the political map of British India before independence bore notable similarities to the country's post-colonial federal structure.[523]

[521] ASA CMS 287/A/55. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, 'Supplement to My Memorandum of Personal Views'.

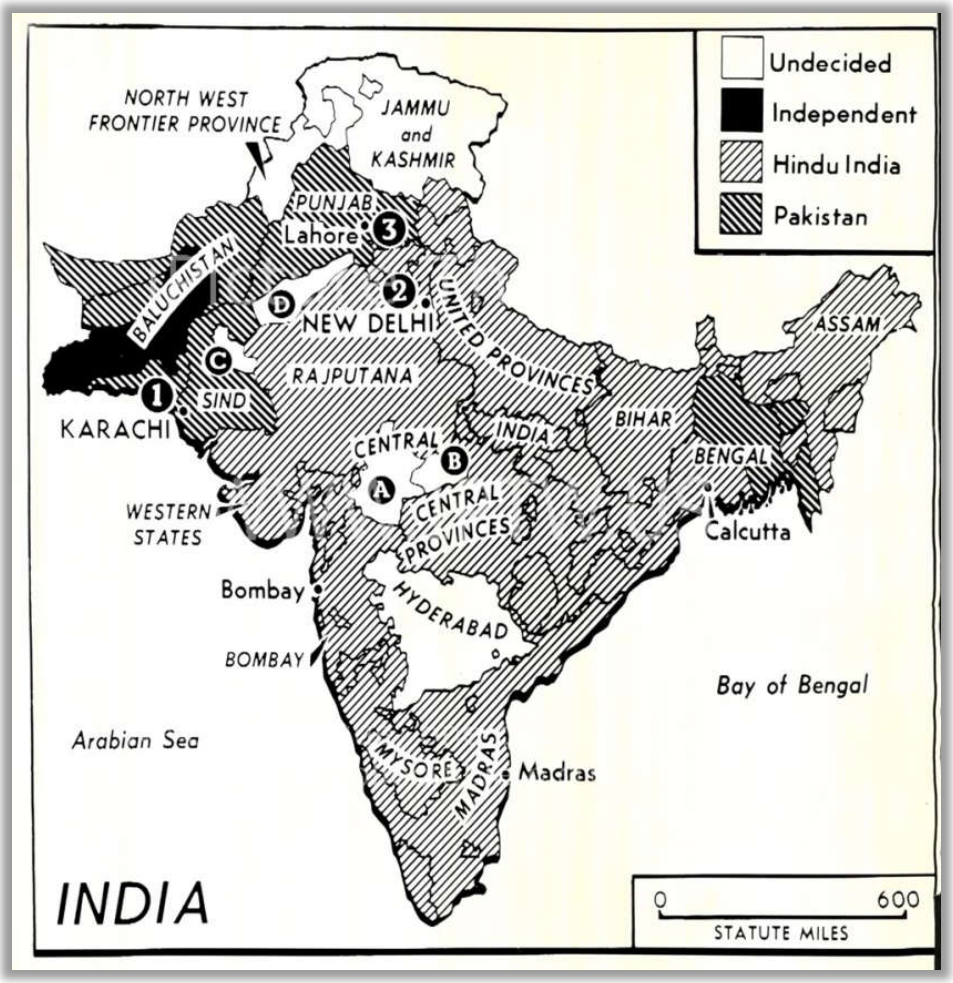
[522] Tillin, *Remapping India*, pp. 29-31.

[523] The partition lines drawn by Radcliffe's Boundary Commission, in Punjab, Bengal and to a lesser extent in places like Assam, provided the obvious major changes. See, Lucy P. Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).



Map 6: British India, c.1900[524]

[524] Map derived from Metcalf and Metcalf, *Concise History*, pp. 128-29.



Map 7: 'The New India', c.1947[525]

Many of the old provinces provided the templates for the new states. The similarities between colonial rule and post-colonial political structures created challenges in the 1950s, as movements demanded a more democratic model attuned to regional demographics.

The vigour of demands intensified after 1952. Potti Sriramulu's campaign for a Telugu speaking polity separate from Madras state led to a hunger strike that ended with his death,

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[525] 'The New India', *Chicago Sun Times*, 1947. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00maplinks/modern/maps1947/maps1947.html> [accessed 8 September 2021]. This map was produced just after Partition, with the troubled incorporation of regions like Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir not yet resolved. Despite this, the general political map after independence had striking similarities, with large polities like Bombay and Madras providing the templates for their post-colonial successors, before the changes noted in this chapter.

revealing the entrenched desire for change in the south of India.[526] After Sriramulu's death, movements for ethno-linguistic changes to India's federal structure became more vociferous.[527] In the central government, apprehensions existed about whether a federal restructuring was contradictory to nation-building imperatives, because it risked entrenching regional identity movements at the expense of the national.[528] But these attitudes thawed as campaigns for change accelerated. Nehru declared before Parliament in late 1953 that a commission would be appointed to conduct extensive research into the breadth of demands.[529] This action was one of many that demonstrated that the early post-colonial state genuinely aimed for democratic evolution.[530] The SRC was established in the following year.

The SRC's announcement had significant impact in the northeast. Memos and wires were communicated to the SRC from various institutions within the highlands. Correspondence was sent from the Khasi National Durbar and from Williamson Sangma in the Garo Hills.[531] In the Mizo Hills District (MHD) – which had been formally renamed in 1954 – the UMFO also sent a note to the SRC.[532] The SRC's travels in the northeast then intensified the clamour

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[526] Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan, 2008), pp. 180-200.

[527] Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1994), pp. 135-68; Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 139.

[528] Zachariah, *Nehru*, pp. 206-12.

[529] *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1955), p. i.

[530] Metcalf and Metcalf, *Concise History*, pp. 233-234.

[531] Communications were sent to the SRC, from across the northeast, including from the Mikir and North Cachar councils. See Bodhi, 'Khasi Political Reality'.

[532] Act No. XVIII of 1954, 'The Lushai Hills District (Change of Name) Act, 1954'.

for potential changes to India's federal model and emboldened institutions such as the EITU.[533] The following reflection made by J. J. M. Nichols-Roy gave a sense of the agitation within the Khasi and Jaintia Hills:

> The hill people do not share the joy of the Independence of India. They feel they are freed from one master to be brought under another master, who, according to the feeling of the people, manifests the tendency to exploit the hills, especially in the Khasi Hills.[534]

Nichols-Roy's reflections detail how the district council model was insufficient to meet the desire for autonomy in the highlands. Rather than instigating state- and nation- building aspirations, the model was actively working against the highlands.

The extensive research of the SRC created the basis for India's linguistic reorganisation of states in 1956.[535] It was an ethnofederal restructuring, a system of federal governance that largely 'equates to ethnically defined territorial autonomy'.[536] Language was the primary tool used to define ethnic demands, even if it would not always be the sole basis for reorganisation.[537] The 1956 reorganisation was part of a broader shift away from the old colonial template and towards an ethnofederal arrangement for the Republic, shown in map 8.[538]

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[533] Satish Kumar Arora, 'The Reorganization of the Indian States', *Far Eastern Survey*, 25.2 (1956), 27–30 (p. 30).

[534] ASA CMS 287/A/55. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, 'Supplement to My Memorandum of Personal Views'.

[535] Tillin, *Remapping India*, pp. 32-47.

[536] Liam Anderson, 'Ethnofederalism and the Management of Ethnic Conflict: Assessing the Alternatives', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 46.1 (2016), 1–24.

[537] Uditi Sen, 'Developing Terra Nullius: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Indigeneity in the Andaman Islands', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59.4 (2017), 944–73.

[538] For example, with the bifurcation of Madras in 1960.

Map 8: Federal map of India, 1956[539]

[539] 'India Map in 1956', *Maps of India Online*. <https://www.mapsofindia.com/history/1956.html> [accessed 8 September 2021].

After 1956 a clearer political structure emerged. Fourteen states and six union territories replaced the older model of part A, B and C states, with language chosen as a predominant marker for polities. Although literature on the early changes to the federal structure of India remains 'scant', India's ethnofederal model has largely been framed as an archetypal success story in global research.[540] Katherine Adeney's work has been particularly insightful for understanding whether India's federal structure has managed – or hindered – competing ethnic demands. She stressed that despite a general decrease in ethnic-based conflict, regional trends were varied.[541] This regional variation is important. The effects of ethnofederal restructuring in the highlands offers a novel angle to nuance the debate.

In 1956, the highlands were not directly affected by India's linguistic reorganisation.[542] Indirectly, there was notable impact.[543] After the linguistic reorganisation of 1956 the hill state

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[540] For the 'scant' nature of research, see, Oliver Godsmark, *Citizenship, Community and Democracy in India: From Bombay to Maharashtra, c.1930-1960* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 6. Meanwhile, a traditional argument was pioneered about ethnofederalism by scholars such as Philip G. Roeder. Roeder and others deployed research heavily focused on post-Cold War case studies of the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia to argue that ethnofederal models were problematic for ethnicity-based movements. In short, they suggested that by creating ethnically organised internal polities these states had effectively triggered their own collapse. Liam Anderson presented a revisionist thesis. He critiqued the small sample sizes and implemented a global approach, which argued that countries such as India and Nigeria had successfully utilised ethnofederal models to manage their ethnic diversity. Hence, India became a central tenet of the revisionist wave about ethnofederal models. See, Liam Anderson, "Ethnofederalism: The worst form of institutional arrangement…?" *International Security*, 39.1 (2014): 165-204; Philip G. Roeder, 'Ethnofederalism and the Mismanagement of Conflicting Nationalisms', *Regional & Federal Studies*, 19.2 (2009), 203–19.

[541] Katharine Adeney, 'Does Ethnofederalism Explain the Success of Indian Federalism?', *India Review*, 16.1 (2017), 125–48; Katherine Adeney, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[542] The research on the northeast that has tackled the effects of ethnofederalism has – perhaps obviously – focused from the 1972 reorganisation (covered in chapter V) onwards. For example, Pahi Saikia, Jugdep S. Chima, and Aniruddha Kumar Baro have suggested that when focused purely on the Bodo identity movement, the logic of ethnofederal solutions has failed. The indirect effects noted here by the impact of the SRC and national calls for change are less obvious, but still significant, factors for debates on federal structures. See, Pahi Saikia, Jugdep S. Chima, and Aniruddha Kumar Baro, 'Limits of Ethnofederalism and Local Political Autonomy Arrangements: Continuing Violence in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts of Assam', *India Review*, 15.1 (2016), 136–62.

[543] This, in turn, suggests that processes involved within ethnofederal restructuring can be as important as the model itself in managing aspirations in a diverse nation-state.

movement gained greater impetus, as the designs of the EITU were overlooked by the SRC. Conversely, the reorganisation accelerated ambitions for the expansion of the Assamese language in the northeast, an antagonistic agenda for identity movements in the highlands. Thus, rather than looking towards a success or failure rubric in India's ethnofederal structure, this chapter argues that the fissures of the federal restructuring process served the critical function of intensifying political activism in the highlands. The publication of the SRC's report demonstrates this point.

The report of the SRC viewed the EITU movement as relatively minor. It did not foresee the EITU offering a concerted challenge to the northeast's political structure. Subsequently, the report dismissed the hill state aspiration along with the separate demands for a 'Purbachal' state pushed by the Cachar States Reorganisation Committee, whilst it similarly overlooked various other suggestions emanating from the hills.[544] Ultimately, the report concluded that 'the creation of a new hill state will... in the long run [work] against the interests of the scheduled tribes'.[545] The paternalistic nature of the conclusions only enhanced the hill state demand, and it became commonplace for hill leaders to invoke accusations of paternalism and hegemony from the plains dating back to independence.[546]

A second notable aspect of the SRC report was the reflection on contrasting aspirations in the northeast. Several institutions – such as Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, the local

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[544] For some background notes on the Purbachal demands see, Mahadev Chakravarti, 'Reorganisation Question of Tripura (1949-62)', in *Reorganization of North-East India Since 1947*, ed. by B. Datta-Ray and S.P. Agrawal (New Delhi: Concept publishing company, 1996), pp. 294-307 (pp. 296-99).

[545] *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1955), p. 186.

[546] In an election manifesto ahead of the 1962 Assam Legislative Assembly elections, for instance, it was noted how – since 1947 – the people of the AHDs had never been 'really free'. See ASA CMS Nil/1962. Martin Narayan, *Election Manifesto of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference of the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam* (Shillong, 1962).

Communist Party and the Tripura State Congress – were 'broadly' in favour of maintaining the status quo.[547] But the report also alluded to the designs of the Assam government in expanding its scope of influence into Manipur, Tripura and NEFA.[548] The report, therefore, revealed the internal paradox that calls for reorganisation to the northeast produced. On the one hand were the designs to expand Assamese cultural influence and on the other were the calls to create new states.[549] The SRC revealed the political contradictions inherent in the long decolonisation of the northeast.

In the highlands, the EITU became increasingly influential after the 1956 linguistic reorganisation of the country. Its successes at the 1957 elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly were evidence of this. Across the highlands, EITU affiliated politicians contested fifteen seats, winning ten.[550] This included victories for key figures within the movement, such as Williamson Sangma in the Phulbari constituency, albeit with an incredibly narrow margin.[551] Although still developing, the hill state demand was given notable public endorsement at the 1957 elections.

Though the majority of the EITU's backing was primarily ideological, certain institutions simultaneously utilised the movement for political goals. This was evident in the UMFO's backing of the EITU movement. The UMFO suffered resounding defeats against the

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[547] *Report of the States Reorganisation Commission* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1955), p. 184.

[548] At this point Manipur and Tripura were still part C states, whilst the NEFA was centrally administered.

[549] Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, p. 138. The former conceived an Assamese cultural space, an idea which certain 'non-political' organisations increasingly and aggressively pioneered in the post-independence period.

[550] Arthur J. Dommen, 'Separatist Tendencies in Eastern India', *Asian Survey*, 7.10 (1967), 726–39 (pp. 729-30).

[551] *Statistical Report on General Election, 1957 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 1957), p. 107.

MU in the early 1950s, but the hill state movement provided an angle for political opportunism. At the 1957 elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly, UMFO candidates stood as part of the EITU movement and won two of the three seats allocated for the MHD.[552] This was a significant reversal for the UMFO, but in a broader sense political support from the UMFO only strengthened the hill state demand.

The developing strength of the EITU movement went hand in hand with the ineffectiveness of state-building initiatives. The 'Pataskar Report' offered the greatest reflection on the struggles in creating state apparatus and forging development in the highlands across the 1950s.[553] The report included observations such as the following:

> There is… a popular impression among the hill people that the pace of development in their areas could have been much faster. The hill areas abound in mineral resources and also resources for setting up power projects, forest based and agricultural processing industries and manufacture of precision instruments and light weight goods. These resources, according to this popular feeling, are not being fully exploited because of the antipathy of the State government.[554]

The lack of implementation of state apparatus, the poorly coordinated drive to develop aspects of the region's economy and the antipathy of the state towards the highlands were all recurring themes of the report.[555]

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[552] *Ibid,* pp. 10-12. The candidates are all confusingly listed as independents in the official report, but essentially the MU only retained Aizawl West.

[553] Dilip Mukerjee, 'Assam Reorganization', *Asian Survey*, 9.4 (1969), 297–311. The Pataskar Commission was established by Shastri, to ascertain the political structure of the northeast and identify whether changes were necessary.

[554] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), pp. 29-30.

[555] Chapters eleven and seventeen were amongst the most particularly revealing, as they delved into the problems encountered with both the district and regional councils.

There is ample evidence to suggest that, as the 1950s wound to a close, the state-building initiatives for the highlands failed to resolve the lasting problems evident since independence.[556] In the broadest sense, the lack of socio-economic development was especially concerning. The highlands were noted to be amongst the poorest in the state, which itself trailed national averages of growth.[557] The regional challenges before 1954 showed little sign of being resolved by the close of the decade, as the highlands stagnated in various ways.

These structuring processes – ineffective state-building initiatives and issues with nation-building – were important. They created an atmosphere where calls for greater political autonomy had significant purchase. Desire for change was grounded in a belief that the post-colonial vision for the highlands was flawed, as the ineffectiveness of state- and nation-building actively enforced the growing strength of regional identity claims. The unfolding events in the Naga Hills particularly encouraged the 'extremist' elements within these identity movements. Together, these provided critical context for a seminal period between 1960-2 which dictated the short-term conflict dynamics of the highlands.

The conditions for insurgency and the trajectories of conflict, 1960-62.

Between 1960-62, the conditions for insurgency were forged across the highlands. The evolution that occurred between 1954-60 laid important groundwork, which was then exacerbated by events from 1960 onwards. The Assam Language Act (ALA), passed in 1960, was fundamental. Widespread agitation followed the ALA throughout the highlands. However,

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[556] In medical provisions, for example, there were never more than twelve doctors stationed in the Mizo Hills before 1960. See John Vânlal Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, *The Mizo Uprising: Assam Assembly Debates on the Mizo Movement, 1966-1971* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. xvi.

[557] Shibani Kinkar Chaube, Sunil Munsi, and Amalendu Guha, 'Regional Development and the National Question in North-East India', *Social Scientist*, 4.1 (1975), 40–66.

differing trajectories unfolded between the Mizo Hills on the one hand and the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills on the other. In the former, a separatist movement was born amid localised famine. In the latter, despite unrest, the Sino-Indian war had the unintended effect of stifling the more extreme elements in the hill state movement. Though the conditions for insurgency emerged across the highlands, it was only in the Mizo Hills that a civil war took place.

In Sanjoy Hazarika's seminal work on conflict in the northeast – *Strangers of the Mist* – his coverage of Meghalaya was understandably scarce.[558] As he wrote, 'Assamese irredentism led to the creation of Meghalaya, the only state of the northeast, barring Arunachal Pradesh, that has not seen a full-fledged insurgency'.[559] The inference from major scholars is that the state of Meghalaya – comprised of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills – provides little insight into trajectories of conflict in the northeast. It is rarely recognised that, from 1960-62, the Assam government was especially concerned about the hill state movement and its potential for violence. This chapter argues that the entire highlands[560] was susceptible to insurgency during this period. Understanding why the Mizo Hills alone witnessed civil war, therefore, is important when reflecting on how intrastate conflict is born.

The ALA – passed by the provincial government – was a critical hit to the nation-building ambitions of the centre in the highlands. It was the culmination of a process fifteen years in the making, where the state failed to bridge the ideological barrier between hill and valley. The passing of the ALA was perceived to be a direct socio-cultural attack from within the highlands. It enforced the strength of the hill state movement and compounded the

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[558] Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, pp. 125-28.

[559] *Ibid.* p. 125.

[560] Beyond the NHD, which was already embroiled in civil war.

disconnect between highland identity formations and broader conceptions of Indian nationalism. The ALA, therefore, signified the ultimate manifestation of the failure of nation-building, as identity formation was embedded as a localised phenomenon opposed to assimilation.

The ALA was an important piece of legislation. It reflected the contradictory forces in play in the northeast that had been revealed during linguistic reorganisation. The Act aimed to make Assamese the mandatory language throughout the state and flowed from the designs of Assam's elites highlighted in the SRC report. Pursued by institutions such as the Asom Sahitya Sabha – an influential literary organization – the ALA was primarily concerned with the preservation of Assamese culture.[561] Although the specifics of the Act were not as draconian as sometimes portrayed, it was perceived in the highlands as a clear show of socio-cultural aggression.[562]

The ALA embodied the anxieties about hegemonic tendencies in the plains evident across the highlands since 1945; the 'Assamisation' of the highlands was widely believed to be underway.[563] The impact of the ALA has been downplayed in scholarship. It was traditionally employed as a convenient 'scapegoat' for Indian officials, who were eager to deflect away from the shortcomings of the district council model as the demands for a hill state

[561] Sanjib Baruah, ''Ethnic' Conflict as State – Society Struggle: The Poetics and Politics of Assamese Micro-Nationalism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 28.3 (1994), 649-671; Misra, *India's North-East*, pp. 337-8.

[562] For example, there was anxiety about how Hindi was being institutionalised in the centrally governed NEFA. The act would have alleviated what was seen in some quarters as a move to marginalise Assamese culture. The fact that the ALA would in turn marginalise other cultures was deemed to be less of a priority for certain pro-Assamese institutions.

[563] S. N. Ali, 'Citizen's Problem, State Response', in Datta-Ray and Agrawal, *Reorganization*, pp. 46-56 (p. 49).

increased.[564] But when framed within the broader processes of decolonisation, it has fundamental importance. Building upon the core theme of nation-building, it enforced the dichotomy between hill and plains whilst sharpening the identity movements within the highlands.

It is critical to note that the ALA was an initiative pursued solely by the provincial government. The centre was aware of the detrimental effects on nation-building it could signal. The correspondence of Bimalaprosad Chaliha – Assam's chief minister from the close of 1957 – revealed this. In a wide-ranging letter, Nehru cautioned Chaliha against the Assamisation of the state, and noted the following:

> I can understand the desire of people in Assam to further the use of the Assamese language. Indeed it is one of our national languages as laid down in the Constitution. But the way agitations are started and often supported by young school boys disturbs me for the future of Assam. There is a certain immaturity about all this and a narrowness in outlook which will come very much in the way of the development of Assam… As you well know, the language issue in Assam has some effect in the hill States. The path of wisdom obviously would have been not to do anything at present which disturbs the atmosphere on these hill States.[565]

Nehru knew what the extension of the Assamese language signalled for highlands.[566] He saw the Act as contradictory – and damaging – for the centre's aspirations for nation-building. But the federal structure of the Republic afforded significant power to the provincial administration and the ALA was passed by the Assam government.[567]

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[564] Shibani Kinkar Chaube, 'Interethnic Politics in Northeast India', *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 5.2 (1975), 193–200 (p. 197).

[565] ASA CMS 20/1960. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 29 June 1960.

[566] *Ibid.*

[567] It is worthwhile noting that Chaliha was not a key instigator of the ALA and had his own reservations. But he was faced with ground-level agitations and pressure from both within and outside his government.

The response was both emphatic and immediate. Bengali speaking communities in Assam rallied and organised a conference in Silchar at the beginning of July 1960 to combat this perceived aggression.[568] In the highlands, a comparable level of political activism unfolded. Within a few days of the Bengali conference at Silchar a meeting of the EITU leadership was held. The result was the formation of a new organisation, named the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC).[569] Although the EITU initiated the hill state movement, the APHLC was the institution that intensified demands in an increasingly volatile environment.

The APHLC immediately called for a hill state, separate from Assam, and ensured talk now turned to action. Publicly, the centre was keen to denounce the idea of a separate state.[570] But the vociferousness of the APHLC demands brought the government to the negotiating table. The situation across the entire state was tense, leading Chaliha to suggest a review of the law and order situation.[571] The result of APHLC demands was the offer of a 'Scottish Pattern' alternative, which proposed greater levels of autonomy from the provincial government without offering full statehood.[572] The concessions included greater power for ministers elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly in a highlands constituency seat.[573] However, in light of

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[568] TNA UK DO 196/48. Malcolm MacDonald to Commonwealth Relations Office, 'India: Disturbances in Assam', 17 October 1960. The colonial imperative of prioritising Bengalis over the Assamese speaking populous for employment was a long-standing source of angst amongst Assam's elite. In the ALA, Bengali communities saw wider designs to marginalize non-Assamese speaking citizens in the post-colonial state coming to fruition. For a brief note on these colonial dynamics, see, Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj*, pp. 204-6.

[569] Dommen, 'Separatist Tendencies', p. 730.

[570] TNA UK DO 196/48. Extract from India Fortnightly Summary No. 324, 24 December 1960.

[571] ASA CMS Nil/1962. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to General Shrinagesh, 28 April 1962.

[572] ASA CMS Nil/1962. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Jawaharlal Nehru, 3 August 1961.

[573] Dommen, 'Separatist Tendencies', pp. 730-31.

the ALA's passing, the APHLC refused any offer short of statehood. This led to a series of negotiations between 1960-62.[574]

The breadth of thought within the APHLC was notable. As with the early Naga movement, there was a broad church of competing ideas. In the Naga uprising, the ascension of Phizo had been critical. The signs of extremist elements in the APHLC were evident. Chaliha, for example, noted how 'there have been indications some of the younger sections are getting extremely restive. Posters have already started appearing threatening people [who supported the] Scottish Formula'.[575] In addition to threats made towards figures such as Chaliha himself, he also predicted that 'a serious threat to law and order' could develop and that 'we need our own forces' to ensure that the threat could be met.[576] The democratic ideals of key members within the APHLC – and the fact that Congress had achieved certain gains previously with J. J. M. Nichols-Roy around independence – were key factors keeping the movement peaceful.[577] But the increasing strength of anti-democratic elements noted by Chaliha signalled that the conditions for a violent turn were not off the table.

The ALA ensured that the APHLC had the required strength to push for its hill state demand. Confident in its position, it consistently rejected the proposals that stopped short of full statehood whilst ramping up efforts to force the state's hand. In a symbolic gesture, a non-cooperation movement was launched on the first anniversary of the passing of the ALA by the

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[574] ASA CMS 79/62. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru, 12 June 1962.

[575] ASA CMS Nil/1962. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to General Shrinagesh, 28 April 1962.

[576] *Ibid.*

[577] Bethany Lacina, *Rival Claims: Ethnic Violence and Territorial Autonomy under Indian Federalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), pp. 157-59.

APHLC in 1961.[578] The strong showing of APHLC candidates at the 1962 Assam elections further emboldened the organisation.[579] With this in mind, the situation across the summer and autumn of 1962 was worrisome for the state.

Stanley D. D. Nichols-Roy – the son of J. J. M. Nichols-Roy[580] – was one of the APHLC's main leadership figures and in the summer of 1962 was noted to have set out proposals to establish a parallel government.[581] Once more, the comparisons to the Naga movement were clear and the open talk about flagrantly disregarding state sovereignty was a notable step for the APHLC. Nichols-Roy, it should be noted, was not the only one pushing the APHLC agenda further, as other local leaders encouraged direct action against the government.[582] Open talk of reputing state sovereignty, alongside the disparate ideas within the APHLC and the consolidation of a highland identity all offered key indicators that a turn towards conflict was possible.

These were conditions favourable for insurgency. Key indicators suggested this: extremist elements in the hill state movement, anxieties within the provincial government and the acceleration of political action. There were clear parallels to the Naga separatist movement. Though the APHLC leadership were more democratically inclined than Phizo, it is worth

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[578] TNA UK DO 196/48. Extract from India Fortnightly Summary No. 206, 'Internal Affairs: Assam', 7 July 1961.

[579] *Statistical Report on General Election, 1962 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam* (New Delhi: Election Commission of India, 1962). This time around, the APHLC won eleven of the fifteen seats it contested.

[580] J. J. M. Nichols-Roy died in 1959, prior to the official inauguration of the ALA. See 'ADC founder bust unveiled', *The Telegraph (India) Online*, 11 September 2009. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/adc-founder-bust-unveiled/cid/595232> [accessed 19 May 2021]; Michael N. Syiem, 'J. J. M. Nichols Roy Adopted Patriliny', *The Shillong Times*, 6 May 2016.

[581] ASA CMS 79/62. Lal Bahadur Shastri to S. M. Shrinagesh, 16 July 1962.

[582] *Ibid.*

remembering that the key figures in the NNC before Phizo's ascent – such as Sakhrie – were similarly peace-minded. The geostrategic location of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills was just as favourable as the Naga Hills for waging civil conflict. Civil war was a possibility in the area around 1960-62.

The impact of the Sino-Indian war was crucial in curtailing the heated nature of the hill state movement. It might appear peculiar that a war that did not even touch the terrain of the APHLC's remit could have such a decisive impact, but the timing of the war – in light of political developments – was startling. Literally hours before the Chinese invasion of India on 20 October 1962, ongoing APHLC meetings were noted in large numbers across the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills.[583] Propaganda was increasingly volatile because members of the Assam government openly questioned the force of the hill state movement.[584] A large scale meeting – known as 'Demand Day' – was planned for 24 October to demonstrate the breadth of the hill state movement. Tens of thousands of people were projected to come out in force to demonstrate the veracity of the APHLC.[585] Considering the strength of the APHLC following, the volatile atmosphere and the historic precedents of similar days of direct action, the future looked volatile.[586]

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[583] Seven meetings, instigated by the APHLC, were held across the region the day before the Chinese invasion. Altogether, over 1,500 attendees were noted. A further three meetings took place in Shillong on the same day. See ASA CMS 79/62. Message conveyed by the D.I.G.C.I.D. Sitrep dated 19 October 1962; ASA CMS 79/62. Phone message conveyed by the DIGCID, 19 October 1962.

[584] ASA CMS 79/62. Message conveyed by the D.I.G.C.I.D. Sitrep dated 19 October 1962.

[585] ASA CMS 258/62. G. G. Swell to Jawaharlal Nehru, 25 October 1962.

[586] The most obvious parallel being Direct Action Day in Calcutta in August 1946, which began as a demonstration of popular support for the Muslim League before descending into widespread violence and lawlessness. See Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 232-33.

Hence, the timing of the Sino-Indian war was pivotal. The war, in theory, opened space for political concessions if the APHLC leadership wanted to exploit the debacle unfolding in India's northeast and northwest borderlands. This did not happen. Chaliha sent an urgent telegram to the APHLC leadership pleading for a suspension to their demands after the Chinese invasion.[587] Despite the potential for dissent created by the border war, the APHLC leadership made a decisive effort to postpone demands and support the government against the 'aggressors'.[588] The role of the leadership was critical in shifting the APHLC's stance towards support for the government, and away from political confrontation.

It must be stressed that the change in stance of the APHLC was not a sudden jingoistic embrace of Indian nationalism. Rather, the prospect of war provided a strenuous test of the APHLC's aims. If India's grasp on the northeast fell, the prospects of a bright, autonomous future for the hill state movement was even bleaker under Chinese influence. Interestingly, there were parallels between the APHLC's changing stance and the argument provided by Bérénice Guyot-Réchard as to why communities in NEFA accepted the return of Indian forces after the war, despite the clear 'disillusion' in the region about the Indian state.[589] In short, the Indian state was weaker and less efficient – for example in military terms or state-building initiatives – than China. This weakness provided potential opportunities for an autonomy movement and greater possibilities to resist the state. For the leadership, who were critical in engineering the turn, the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Indian government was not off the table by 1962. It was the elements within the movement that took their cue from the Naga underground that were pushing for armed confrontation with the state. But the leadership

[587] ASA CMS 79/62. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Captain Williamson Sangma, 23 October 1962.

[588] ASA CMS 258/62. G. G. Swell to Jawaharlal Nehru, 25 October 1962.

[589] Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, pp. 247-51.

– importantly – still held sway as the Sino-Indian war began. In the short-term, Indian – rather than Chinese – influence was preferable, certainly from the perspective of the APHLC leadership. This did not mean that the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills were suddenly replete with ardent Indian nationalists. But it did explain the shift towards the support offered from the APHLC to the Indian government in 1962.

Even with this explanation, the change in tone was startling. It spoke to the organisation of the APHLC that it could alter paths so quickly and decisively. Instead of 'Demand Day' forming a robust show of support for the hill state movement, it became a mass rally against the Chinese incursion.[590] In the following days pledges were sent from local elites in support of the war effort.[591] A week later, a joint resolution was passed in Guwahati on 31 October taking 'a solemn pledge to work, co-operate and give all help in expelling the enemy from the territory of India'.[592] All of Assam's major political parties lent their signature to the resolution, including the APHLC. This was a swift turnaround following the war, as the 'heat' was taken out of the hill state movement.[593] The volatile atmosphere prior to 20 October 1962 had several possibilities. The Sino-Indian War effectively provided an acid-test for the APHLC leadership. The leadership, during a foreign invasion, decisively backed the government.

The impact of the war should not be understated. It demonstrated how issues such as timing and external forces can impact conflict trajectories and the dynamics of identity

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[590] *Ibid.*

[591] ASA CMS 258/62. Siem, Nongstoin to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 2 November 1962. For example, this letter to Chaliha was sent from the western Khasi Hills by the Siem of Nongstoin.

[592] ASA CMS 258/62. Resolution passed in the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference held in the Circuit House, Gauhati on 31 October 1962.

[593] TNA UK DO 196/238. E. G. Norris, 'Highlanders and Lowlanders in Assam', 30 July 1965.

movements. The border war is well known for the indignation felt afterwards in India.[594] 1962 has primarily been understood from international and national perspectives, with Guyot-Réchard's work providing much-needed reflection on its regional importance.[595] For the APHLC, its indirect effect upon the nature of the hill state demand was critical. However, despite the war providing some much-needed good news for the Indian state in the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, it signalled trouble in the Mizo Hills.

The impact of the ALA was as keenly felt in the MHD as elsewhere in the highlands. Yet its consequences were even more damaging because of the famine that hit the district from the late 1950s. The famine – referred to locally as *Mautam* – unfolded as a direct result of ineffective state-building strategies. The stagnation in creating state apparatus and igniting development was particularly important in the MHD, as the famine which gripped the region was both predicted and avoidable. But the lack of efficient governance structures ensured that widespread destruction followed. The famine was the ultimate manifestation of the failure of state-building in the Mizo Hills, and compounded the impact of the ALA.

The famine involved the cyclical flowering of bamboo plants which, in turn, ignited a surge in the rat population. This historically posed a problem to grain stores. Since the cycles of *Mau* and *Thing* could be roughly predicted, contingency planning was possible.[596] Colonial

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[594] Jabin T. Jacob, 'Remembering 1962 in India, 50 years on', in *The Sino-Indian War of 1962: New Perspectives*, ed. by Amit R. Das Gupta and Lorenz M. Lüthi (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016), pp. 236-38.

[595] P. K. Chakravorty, 'Sino-Indian War of 1962', *Indian Historical Review*, 44.2 (2017), 285–312; Das Gupta and Lüthi, *Sino-Indian War*; Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*. As Guyot-Réchard suggested, communities in the borderlands of NEFA generally supported India, whose governance structures allowed greater potential to resist state encroachment.

[596] Sajal Nag, 'Bamboo, Rats and Famines: Famine Relief and Perceptions of British Paternalism in the Mizo Hills (India)', *Environment and History*, 5.2 (1999), 245-252. The flowering in the early 1880s caught the colonial regime off-guard. Widespread devastation followed. By the flowering in the 1910s, provisions were implemented to combat the worst of the famine, largely driven by an embrace of local knowledge.

rule had been autocratic, paternalistic, and laced with the spectre of violence but had adapted to provide relief in the early 1900s. By the famine of 1959 the post-colonial model established for the MHD meant a lack of preparation for *Mautam* despite repeated warnings from the Mizo populace.[597] The result was widespread hardship.

By the time the local government was aware of the gravity of the situation – and funds were sanctioned to combat the crisis – the famine was already raging.[598] Concrete estimates for the number of casualties are difficult. Joy L.K. Pachuau estimates that around five per cent of the population died.[599] That estimate would mean over 13,000 deaths.[600] It can be said with more certainty – as revealed through the archive – that death, poverty and crime all abounded between 1959-61.[601] The inability to effectively communicate between the MDC and the Assam government, alongside a lack of basic state facilities combined to facilitate the disaster.[602] The famine of 1959-61 that gripped the Mizo Hills was the embodiment of failed state-building projects in the district. Not only were development initiatives fundamentally flawed, but the post-colonial model for the MHD actively allowed the famine to wreak havoc.

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[597] Bertil Lintner, *Great Game East: India, China and the Struggle for Asia's Most Volatile Frontier* (Noida: HarperCollins, 2016), p. 105.

[598] MSA G-1224, CB-101. L.S. Ingty, 'Relief Schemes approved by the Deputy Commissioner', 9 March 1960. In this relief scheme note, Rs. 2,00,000 was designated for relief measures.

[599] Pachuau and Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, p. 300.

[600] The population of the MHD in 1961 was 266,063. The obvious caveat is whether famine deaths were accounted for in the 1961 census. If they were, the number of deaths would be higher than the figure stated above.

[601] ASA HPL 275/60. N. N. Narzari, 'Mizo District S.R. Case No. 2/60', 15 March 1960. For example, eighty-four people were arrested in Kawnpui village for theft related matters in early 1960. Starvation created desperation as locals resorted to pilfering state-owned rice stores to feed their families.

[602] ASA HMI 27/60. J. C. Nampui to Joint Secretary, Home Department, Shillong, 7 March 1960; R. B. Vaghaiwalla to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 30 May 1960.

This context is crucial for understanding the Mizo civil war. The legacies of colonial rule presented a post-colonial quandary for the Indian Republic, which state- and nation-building initiatives aimed to resolve. The categorical failure on both counts, personified in the ALA and Mautam, produced the conditions ripe for insurgency. Amid famine, a relief organisation was established because of the inability of local authorities to stem the tide and provide support for beleaguered citizens. Calling itself the Mizo National Famine Front, the institution achieved considerable support because of its efforts. A year after its foundation, the organisational dropped the word 'famine' from its name and restyled itself as a political party, the Mizo National Front (MNF).[603] The MNF was the embodiment of a reaction in the Mizo Hills to the inability to resolve the challenges established during the long decolonisation.

The parallels between the operations of the MNF and those of the Naga underground were striking. Although the two organisations never formally joined, the durability of the NNC presented a clear template for the Mizo rebels.[604] The porous nature of the highlands meant that the two organisations were in contact to trade specific information, whilst the broader messages established by the Naga underground offered clear guidance in how to contest the state.[605] In the same way that Phizo's leadership had acted as beacon for the 'extremist' elements in the Khasi Hills in the 1950s, the Naga separatist challenge underpinned the MNF's rise.

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[603] Discrepancies exist in the literature about when the formal name change took place. Vivek Chadha's suggestion of October 1962 is most likely a minor error rather than a contestation of the widely accepted date of October 1961. See Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, p. 331.

[604] Furthermore, rumours about a potential trans-regional front against the Indian government abounded at times. In 1966 reports about Laldenga travelling to meet Phizo in exile in London caused serious concern for British officials. As one report noted, 'the prospect of having Laldenga here is not an attractive one against the present background of Indo-British relations. The picture which could be painted by back-benchers in the Lok Sabha of Phizo and Laldenga plotting together in London with some sort of connivance from the British Government could be distinctly embarrassing'. See, TNA UK DO 196/541. V. C. Martin to R. J. Stratton, 'Mizo Affairs – Laldenga', 26 May 1966; TNA UK DO 196/541. T. J. O'Brien to V. C. Martin, 'Mizo Affairs – Laldenga', 6 June 1966.

[605] TNA UK DO 196/238. J. Davidson to A. Murray, 28 November 1966.

The MNF's transition from famine relief institution to civil war instigator is analysed in chapter IV. It paralleled the rise of the NNC, from tapping into grassroots networks to seeking help across the international border. But for the present chapter it is important to note the impact the Sino-Indian war had on the Mizo Hills. The MNF was a nascent institution by the time of the Chinese invasion. Whilst the war signalled a rapprochement of sorts between the state and the APHLC, the opposite occurred in the Mizo Hills.

The resolution passed in Guwahati on 31 October 1962 was notable for its lack of Mizo representation. The hill state movement had fluctuating purchase in the Mizo Hills. In the 1950s, the MU remained independent from the EITU, whilst the UMFO backed the movement in the 1957 elections. The ALA and famine motivated a change in stance for the MU. It briefly coordinated with the APHLC because of the developing ground-level unrest in the MHD.[606] But the reconciliation between the APHLC and the state, in response to the Chinese invasion, was not well received in the MHD. The support offered to the Indian government was out of sync with the ground-level agitation against the state brewing in the Mizo Hills. The 1962 war, therefore, ensured the cleavage of all Mizo connections to the hill state movement as the demands for a separate Mizo polity intensified.[607] So, whilst the Sino-Indian war assuaged the political climate in the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, it accelerated the potency of nationalist discourses in the MHD.

With this context, Sanjoy Hazarika's observations on Meghalaya – noted earlier – are worthy of reflection. The inability to resolve challenges for state- and nation- building resulted in a volatile political climate by the summer of 1962 throughout the highlands. Though

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[606] Pachuau and Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, p. 303.

[607] Nunthara, *Mizoram*, pp. 138-44.

Meghalaya never witnessed insurgency the APHLC was mobilising, and political violence was not out of the question. The Sino-Indian war therefore played a significant, if indirect, role in the rapprochement between the APHLC's leadership and the state. It is a timely reminder of the impact unexpected historical processes can have on the trajectories of conflict, adding a significant variable into research which too often reduces its explanations to baseline indicators. Even if conditions are ripe for insurgency, tertiary historical processes – such as international relations – can condition the contours of conflict.

Altogether, the stasis of state- and nation- building aspirations produced some key developments within the long decolonisation of the highlands. In the former, the weakness of state institutions – laid bare during famine – was a key area the MNF exploited as it moved towards civil war. The perception of state capabilities went hand in hand with the state-building and development drive which badly stagnated during the 1950s. The MNF pounced on these shortcomings. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of state-building affected the way the state was perceived in the highlands, in a similar way that the Naga conflict shaped perceptions of the state's military proficiency.

Meanwhile, the nation-building ambitions of the central government were almost destroyed during this period. The impact of national trends and the ALA strengthened regional identity movements. In the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Sino-Indian war proved regional identity was not unilaterally in militant opposition to Indian nationalism, but fervent support was scarce. An uneasy accommodation emerged. But in the Mizo Hills, localised identity discourses increasingly clashed with broader nationalist appeals. The contrast between Mizo identity and Indian nationhood was increasingly confrontational. Both state perception and identity formation – critical factors in the long decolonisation – were moulded because of regional, national, and international trends between 1947-62.

The Sino-Indian war and the Naga conflict.

The ongoing Naga civil war ran parallel to the processes highlighted in this chapter. The persistence of the underground is worthy of brief reflection, as it continued to amplify the military limitations of the state. The state's implementation of the AFSPA was a violation of democratic norms akin to colonial tactics of governance. It reflected state weakness rather than strength, and the underground's longevity only reinforced this perception of weakness. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War the links the underground established in China also set a key precedent for insurgent operations. These went alongside the pre-established lessons drawn about the Naga arsenal and the geography of the region for insurgent outfits. The underground was on the defensive until the Sino-Indian war, but the 1962 conflict gave fresh impetus to the separatist movement. This enabled evolving perceptions about the state, and the development of lessons for insurgency in the northeast.

Despite the illiberal nature of the AFSPA, it had operational effectiveness. The sacrifice of democratic freedoms created longer-term problems for initiatives such as nation-building, but between 1958-62 the state gradually gained the upper hand in the Naga civil war. On the eve of the Chinese invasion of NEFA, the Naga movement was at a low ebb. A triumphant tone defined the rhetoric of both central and regional government officials by 1962. On 22 August, Senayangba Chubatoshi Jamir – Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of External Affairs[608] – declared before the Lok Sabha:

[608] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 79.

> The moral[e] of the hostiles [is] low and central direction of their activities [has] been non-existent for some time. The small bands into which the hostile ha[ve] been split up [are] short of men, money and equipment.[609]

For once, the public statements issued by Indian politicians were a relatively accurate reflection of events.[610]

By this point Phizo was exiled in London, having travelled there from East Pakistan via Switzerland on a fake Salvadorean passport in 1960.[611] Despite the Naga leadership's ability to seek refuge in East Pakistan – and the utilisation of the international borderlands by NHG cadres for movement – direct assistance from Pakistan declined because of the delicate nature of Indo-Pakistan relations.[612] Internally, heavy state security force presence meant the Naga movement had to operate outside the NHD, which created problems for its grassroots support networks.[613] This military presence also ensured embryonic signs of separatist support was firmly stamped out at source.[614] The Naga underground was not defeated, but it was facing increasingly difficult odds.

The underground, it should be highlighted, was still potent despite the shifting tide. The continued use of terror tactics was clearest in the assassination of Imkongliba Ao in August

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[609] Lok Sabha Debate. 22 August 1962. Question No. 518.

[610] Amongst the others to speak publicly about the failing strength of the Naga rebel movement in the summer of 1962 was Akum Imlong, a member of the NPC. He suggested that the 'rebel rank and file has been demoralized', no longer posing a 'major problem'. See, TNA UK DO 196/63. 'Nagaland', Extract from India Fortnightly Summary, 26 October 1962.

[611] TNA UK DO 196/60. J. Chadwick to V. Martin, 'Phizo', 12 July 1960.

[612] Lintner, *Great Game East*, p. 86.

[613] TNA UK DO 196/58. O. R. Blair, *Report on a Visit to Manipur* (Calcutta: Office of the British Deputy High Commissioner, 1961).

[614] TNA UK DO 196/65. Geoffrey Whitfield to Harold Macmillan, 2 October 1961.

1961.[615] Imkongliba was the first leader of the Naga People's Convention (NPC) and a key figure for the central government's designs, since the NPC was at the centre of talks for creating a Nagaland state within the Union.[616] His murder by Naga underground forces demonstrated the rebel movement was still in the fight. It also provided a message for Naga citizens who wanted to follow the conciliatory path of the small, but government-backed, NPC. These tactics persisted – for example with the kidnap and execution of an Assistant Commissioner – but the implementation of terror was increasingly undertaken from a position of desperation.[617] And the state was aware of the shifting balance of power in the hills.[618]

By 1962 the Naga rebels were running low on weapons, money, and supplies.[619] Since the outbreak of civil war, the NNC had declined in local popularity and – although it retained a strong core – the increase in surrenders by Naga separatist personnel suggested the movement was, to an extent, ailing.[620] The impact of the Sino-Indian war was pivotal for the rejuvenation of Naga forces. This happened in two ways. First, the security force presence in the Naga Hills briefly diminished because of the Chinese invasion. Second, in the aftermath of the war the Naga underground established ties with China to secure support for the separatist cause. Together, these dynamics prolonged the Naga civil war and – as a result – embedded

[615] TNA UK DO 196/61. 'Nagaland', Extract from New Delhi Fortnightly Summary, 1 September 1961.

[616] Misra, *India's North-East*, pp. 144-45. This is outlined in greater detail in chapter V.

[617] TNA UK DO 196/61. 'Nagaland', Extract from Eastern Region Monthly Summary, December 1961.

[618] BL Mss Eur F158/239. 'Steady improvement in Nagas areas', *Indiagram*, 1 May 1959.

[619] TNA UK DO 196/61. 'Nagas', *Reuters*, 1 May 1962.

[620] TNA UK DO 196/61. G. L. Simmons to Robert Walker, 1 February 1962.

perceptions about Indian state capacity and the benefits for insurgency that links to China created.

The Chinese invasion created panic and dismay; its swiftness took the Indian state by surprise and left its premier disconsolate about the deterioration of relations between two of Asia's major powers.[621] A direct military consequence of the invasion was to move Indian forces away from the Naga Hills and towards NEFA.[622] This provided the respite the beleaguered separatist movement needed. The armed rebel forces on the ground wasted no time in capitalising. Although Phizo spoke openly about declaring a ceasefire considering the invasion – and certain Naga voices lent rhetorical support to the Indian government[623] – rebel actions on the ground revealed a different picture.[624] By the close of the year attacks on convoys increased and larger bands of rebels were operating once more.[625] This led to an escalation in clashes between the Indian Army and Naga forces. The previously optimistic appraisals of Indian officials in 1962 were dashed by the start of 1963.[626]

In London four Naga leaders – Kaito Sukhai, Yong Kong, Mowu Gwizautsu and Khodao Yanthan – had travelled to meet Phizo in September 1962 for crisis talks about the

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[621] Zachariah, *Nehru*, pp. 249-51.

[622] TNA UK DO 196/64. *India: Nagaland and its Importance to North-East India* (London: Commonwealth Relations Office Print, 1963), p. 5.

[623] TNA UK DO 196/63. Delhi to CRO, 14 November 1962.

[624] TNA UK DO 196/63. Extract from the Calcutta Monthly Summary, 'Nagaland', for the period November 1962.

[625] TNA UK DO 196/63. Extract from Eastern Regional Monthly Summary, 'Nagaland', December 1962.

[626] TNA UK DO 196/63. Extract from Calcutta Monthly Summary, 'Nagaland', for period January 1963.

civil war.[627] Two of these – most likely Kaito Sukhai and Yong Kong – were swiftly sent back after the Chinese invasion to take advantage of India's brief military woes.[628] By December, Kaito was noted to have led a band of rebels in the border regions between the Naga Hills and the Sibsagar district.[629] Kaito's movements reflected a general reassertion of rebel strength. The death toll of Indian security forces rose.[630] Two hundred and seventy-seven civilians were kidnapped by rebel forces between October 1962 and February 1963.[631] The few media outlets that had access to the Naga conflict also noted the re-emergence of the underground.[632] The change in rebel fortunes – a direct result of the Chinese invasion of NEFA – was swift.

This changing tide was further embedded by the underground's subsequent collusion with China. Reports suggested that a standing offer of assistance to the Naga cause from China had existed since 1956.[633] Apprehension previously abounded within rebel ranks about receiving aid from the communist regime because of the centrality of Christianity to Naga nationalism.[634] Therefore, the question of external patronage was laced with trepidation. Phizo

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[627] TNA UK DO 196/63. G. Price-Jones to W. J. E. Norton, 30 November 1962.

[628] TNA UK DO 196/63. J. A. Scott to Far Eastern Dept. (FO), 18 December 1962. The report stated that two of the Naga leaders were sent back to India, with two intending to travel to the US to garner support for the movement with the UN, without specifying who was heading where. However, considering the movements of Kaito and Yong Kong in late 1962 and early 1963 – narrated here – it seems most likely that these were the two sent back to India by Phizo.

[629] TNA UK DO 196/63. 'Nagaland', Extract from Eastern Regional Monthly Summary, December 1962.

[630] TNA UK. DO 196/63. 'Nagaland', Extract from Calcutta Monthly Summary, January 1963.

[631] Lok Sabha Debate. 16 March 1963. Question No. 835.

[632] ''Big Naga offensive' soon by India', *The Guardian*, 27 January 1963. The report noted how 'in recent weeks, there have been reports of various Naga successes against the Indians'.

[633] TNA UK DO 196/63. W.J.E. Norton to Mr. Dutton, 24 October 1962.

[634] Longkumer, 'Bible, Guns and Land'; Thong, 'Thy Kingdom Come'.

was especially wary.[635] But by 1962 these ideological concerns eased slightly, due to the practical realities faced by the underground.

Back in London, Phizo's apprehensions about Chinese support were counteracted by his exile and the potential for an internal revolt against his authority.[636] Yong Kong, who had travelled with Kaito to London, journeyed to China to establish a relationship between the rebel movement and Chinese officials. In all, he spent six months in China, whilst modern weapons and supplies provided further impetus to the resurgent Naga underground.[637] Indian officials were soon made aware of this external patronage, which added a further sense of despondency to the hopes of ending the civil war.[638]

The collusion with China opened a new avenue for the Naga underground. It continued to prove conducive, with contact maintained well into the ceasefire that took effect from 1964 – covered in chapter V.[639] Varying levels of support from East Pakistan also continued.[640] With India's relations with its neighbours strained – for instance since the revelations about the Dalai Lama's retreat into Indian territory in 1959 – the Naga underground took full advantage.[641] The exploitation of India's foreign relations was a theme that would consistently haunt the Indian

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[635] TNA UK DO 196/64. E. J. Emery to M. E. Allen, 25 September 1963.

[636] TNA UK DO 196/63. Commonwealth Relations Office to Delhi, 27 October 1962.

[637] TNA UK DO 196/64. *India: Nagaland and its Importance to North-East India* (London: Commonwealth Relations Office Print, 1963).

[638] TNA UK DO 196/63. Extract from Note of High Commission's Staff meeting in Delhi, 24 January 1963.

[639] Lintner, *Great Game East*, pp. 38-92. Within the literature there are discrepancies about when support from China began. Lintner suggests 1963 was merely the start of an increase in Pakistan's support, with Chinese aid following in 1967. As the archival holdings show, this support commenced after the Sino-Indian War in 1962.

[640] Bhaumik, *Troubled Periphery*, pp. 91-102.

[641] Chen Jian, 'The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8.3 (2006), 54–101.

state as insurgencies sprouted across its northeast. First with East Pakistan, then with China, the Naga underground displayed the advantages of external patronage in civil war. This was a key step in the evolution of the northeast's long-term prospects for peace. The exploitation of India's international rivalries repeatedly reoccurred, in the MNF's links with East Pakistan – as shown in chapter IV – and further down the line.

The concrete advantages of external patronage compounded some of the lessons already established by the Naga underground in the 1950s. The geography of the region and access to modern SALW provided the basic tools for insurgency. But external patronage signalled longevity. This interlinkage of ideas, established by the Naga rebel movement, had lasting traction across the northeast. Between these precedents for insurgency, and the growing perception of state weakness, the persistence of the Naga movement was a notable thorn in the side of the Indian state.

Conclusion.

The first decade and a half after independence in the Assam highlands – beyond the NHD – provided more subtle challenges for the state than those witnessed elsewhere in the Republic. But they were just as decisive. The Naga nationalist movement could be explained away as an esoteric uprising: a rare challenge to Indian sovereignty that had few parallels within a vast, diverse nation-state. But the parallel trajectories in the highlands by the early 1960s revealed the deep-seated nature of the challenges presented by the northeast's borderlands. The transition from frontier governmentality to democracy required more resolute state- and nation-building practices. The Indian government – at provincial and national level – was unable to deliver. This inability moulded ideas of state capability. Ideological attachment to Indian nationhood ranged from uneasy accommodation to outright hostility. Both were critical, forging the conditions for unrest.

The result of skewed state- and nation- building was an environment susceptible to political action, with the potential for civil conflict. This was the case in the highlands almost two decades before the volatility emerged within the broader northeast. From the early 1960s the challenge established by the APHLC demanded changes to India's federal structure. From the early 1960s the MNF capitalised in the Mizo Hills and instigated the turn towards the second civil war in the highlands. By the early 1960s, the Naga underground had persistently demonstrated how to effectively wage a sustained irregular conflict against the Indian state. Crises abounded across the Assam highlands. This supposedly peripheral region of modest importance – by the start of the 1960s – was proving to be a significant problem for the post-colonial Indian state.

Chapter IV: 'An elephant chasing a rat': The Indian state and the Mizo conflict, 1961-70.

Introduction.

In 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF) initiated a civil war against the Indian state, half a decade after its formation. The Naga conflict hinted at the Indian state's inability to confront separatist insurgency. The Mizo civil war confirmed it. Contrary to popular belief in academic and policy circles, Indian security operations against Mizo rebel forces were defined by ineffectiveness. As one resident in the Mizo Hills reflected in a regional council meeting, 'Mr. Chairman Sir, we have all seen the [Indian] Army as against the [Mizo National Front]. They look like an elephant trying to chase a rat'.[642]

Rather than a 'quintessential example of successful counterinsurgency', the Indian campaign in the Mizo Hills was a failure at humanitarian, operational and ideological levels.[643] This failure had consequences. First, suspicions about the state's military capabilities that arose in the Naga conflict were compounded in the Mizo Hills. The Indian state was perceived to be unable to confront insurgency. The movements that formed in the northeast from the late 1970s onwards knew the state had limitations. Second, the excesses of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations embedded anti-Indian resentment in the Mizo Hills. As in the Naga wars, this

[642] ASA CMS 11/67. Minutes of the Pawi-Laker Regional Council Budget Session, May 1967.

[643] Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. 156. It is worth noting that Baruah does not to subscribe to this view. Furthermore, he has questioned why the AFSPA is still active in Mizoram – even in the guise of a 'sleeping act' – if counterinsurgency was so successful there.

actively worked against nation-building aspirations at the centre, creating another case of 'us and them' syndrome. Third, the inability to defeat the MNF ensured the rebel group continued building precedents for insurgency that the Naga underground began.

The two-decade long civil war in the Mizo Hills was defined by state ineffectiveness. Once more, India's security-focused doctrine only produced greater long-term challenges. This chapter identifies how a famine relief organisation turned into civil war instigators (1961-66), before outlining the formulation of India's COIN strategy (1966-67) and its resounding failure (1967-70). The chapter concludes with reflections upon this failure and what the Mizo civil war's impact signalled for stability both in the highlands and the wider northeast. As the long decolonisation of the highlands was ending, the effects of the Mizo civil war created lasting challenges for the prospects of peace in India's northeast.

From famine relief to insurgency, 1961-66.

As outlined in chapter III, the conditions for insurgency had arisen in the Mizo Hills District (MHD) by 1961, the result of problematic state- and nation- building initiatives. This did not mean civil war was inevitable. In this environment the MNF was critical. It capitalised on the zeitgeist in the hills, which was defined by widespread disillusion about the MHD's place in post-colonial India. It fashioned a move away from civilian support for the democracy-inclined leadership of the APHLC to pursue an independent path. Taking its cue from the Naga underground, the MNF forged a relatively cohesive separatist movement that began a civil war in 1966.

After its conversion from famine relief organisation in October 1961, the MNF was critical of the APHLC leadership's 'soft' approach towards attaining autonomy.[644] The MNF's combative rhetoric concerned the Assam government. In the summer of 1962, Chaliha provided the following assessment:

> We deputed our senior officers in March last to examine whether time has come for taking action against the leaders of the Mizo National Front but we were advised that the support for the organisation at that time was so little that by taking action against them we will be giving them undue importance. Therefore, we did not take any action against them. Since then, however, their activities have increased and what is more serious is that they are establishing contact with the Pakistan Assistant High Commissioner at Shillong for assistance.[645]

The MNF were on the radar of both the regional and central government, but no proactive agenda to forestall the organisation was forthcoming.

The durability and relative successes of the Naga underground weighed significantly on the thinking of the MNF leadership. Laldenga – the leader of the MNF – openly stated in public his knowledge of the Naga movement whilst talking about the commitment to attaining Mizo independence.[646] Meanwhile, buoyed by the struggles of the state in the Naga civil war, the MNF grew in strength with a widespread feeling amongst volunteers that they could contest Indian sovereignty with sufficient popular backing.[647] It is critical to note that as the MNF expanded, the Naga underground and Chin insurgents in Burma were frequently involved with

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[644] ASA CMS 79/62. Phone message conveyed by the DIGCID, 19.10.62. The MNF was sceptical about Demand Day even prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War. It favoured a solely Mizo nationalist agenda, rather than the conglomerate indigenous conception of the hill state idea.

[645] ASA CMS 79/62. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Jawaharlal Nehru, 24 July 1962.

[646] ASA CMS 79/62. 'Propaganda for Separation: United Mizo National Front', *The Hindustan Standard*, 19 July 1962.

[647] ASA CMS Nil/1962. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to General Shrinagesh, 28 April 1962.

the Mizo Hills. This contact between armed groups – and their ties to East Pakistan – was critical.

Reports from Assam Rifles (AR) patrols are amongst those which reveal this collusion. Across the Burmese border Chin volunteers utilised their close connections in the MHD to operate against Burma's security forces. After conducting raids in Burma, Chin groups sheltered in the MHD in Champhai[648] and Thingsai.[649] Even the nascent Paite National Council based in Manipur used the Mizo Hills for refuge.[650] Meanwhile, joint small scale operations were noted between Chins, the Naga underground, Mizos and Kukis.[651] These links did not constitute outright alliances, despite the close links to East Pakistan all enjoyed, but they formed the basis for the transference of ideas and knowledge of insurgency.[652]

The budding networks that emerged through cross-border anti-state activity were key as a point of contact. It was no surprise, for example, when MNF supporters during the civil war were found to have close ties to the Naga underground.[653] A statement made by the MNF member Lalminthanga is revealing in how this transference occurred:

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[648] MSA Gen 1382/114. Deputy Commissioner Mizo District to Commandant 1st Assam Rifles, 3 March 1965.

[649] MSA Gen 1382/114. Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh to Deputy Commissioner, Aijal, 18 May 1965.

[650] MSA Gen 1382/114. J. S. Pathak to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Assam, 'Arrest of six Chin volunteers on their return journey from East Pakistan with arms and ammunition', 22 March 1965.

[651] MSA Gen 1382/114. Additional Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District to Assam, 15 January 1965; MSA Gen 1382/114. Deputy Commissioner Mizo District, draft telegram, 16 March 1965.

[652] Gade et al, 'Networks of Cooperation'. The links to East Pakistan were important because, as Gade, Gabbay and Hafez suggest, state sponsorship can be a decisive factor behind rebel group networks. Ultimately, though, they suggested this factor was secondary to ideology.

[653] MSA Gen 1401/116. N. H. Narayan to Deputy Commissioner Mizo District, 'Apprehension: MNF Volunteers/Sympathisers', 1 July 1966. In this instance, R. Lalhuzuava was suspected of links to the Naga underground in 1963, before being outed for supplying information to the MNF in 1966. His close connection to the rebel movement was outlined by the fact his brother was Zamawia, the Secretary of Defence for the MNF.

> I decided to go to Nagaland instead of going to China. Accordingly during the last part of Dec '66 I along with staff proceeded to Kohima by bus and after halting for a day at Kohima, I managed to go to Chedema village, the so-called H. Q. of Naga Federal Govt. and then I… managed to get a chance to have some talks with Mr. A. K. Sukhai, self-styled Prime Minister of Naga Hostiles in one of their Battalion H. Q... I simply put him some questions whether he was in a position to provide us some escort if we go to Burma. In reply he told me that if we go in a big batch then he would try to help us... Mr. Sukhai was asking me whether we were trying to go to China and I did not tell him anything at that moment.[654]

This statement by Lalminthanga was a specific example of how inter-regional ties strengthened the MNF. It was not operating in a local vacuum. Instead, it was part of a geopolitically unstable region where the lessons of one insurgency had weighting on another.

In this vein, the MNF established links in East Pakistan in 1963, as the Naga underground had done previously.[655] External bases in East Pakistan – in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) – were decisive for the durability of the Naga rebel movement. The MNF followed the NNC's lead. The MHD's direct western border with East Pakistan made this connection even more advantageous than it was for the Naga movement.[656] The Naga underground's arsenal was primarily comprised of the SALW left behind after WWII. Though some of these weapons were used by the MNF, and smuggling routes provided another source

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[654] MSA Gen 1505/125. R. Natarajan to Superintendent of Police, 1 June 1967.

[655] Namrata Panwar, 'Explaining Cohesion in an Insurgent Organization: The Case of the Mizo National Front', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28.6 (2017), 973–95 (p. 980). Laldenga travelled to East Pakistan along with Lalnunmawia and Sainghaka to establish the East Pakistan relationship.

[656] ASA CMS 220/1963. Mizo National Front telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru, 19 December 1963. It should be noted that these borderlands still had risks. For instance, Laldenga and Lalnunmawia were arrested in late 1963 by Indian security forces. This telegram sent from the MNF to Nehru demanded their release. Both were released after pledges of good behaviour. The decision to release the MNF leadership formed a core aspect of Suhas Chatterjee's criticism of Bimalaprosad Chaliha's handling of the Mizo separatist threat. Chatterjee framed Laldenga as a cunning Machiavellian figure that outfoxed the naïve Chaliha, suggesting that 'a politically wise Chief Minister would have nipped the MNF insurgency in the bud'. Chattejee's account of Chaliha is problematic, especially when considering the actions of the previous Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi, who followed a tougher line against the Naga movement. Medhi's inability to understand minority anxieties embedded the animosity between the Assam government and the Naga separatist movement. The lasting resentment felt towards Medhi in the highlands was more impactful than Chaliha's conciliatory strategy. See Suhas Chatterjee, *Making of Mizoram: Role of Laldenga* (New Delhi: Mittal, 1994), p. 184.

of firearms, the links to East Pakistan provided the core of the MNF's arsenal.[657] A series of trips were undertaken by Mizo rebel cadres to bring back weapons and supplies, starting in 1964. The arms haul from this trip is displayed in table 12 and was followed by further journeys in 1965 and 1966, just as civil war broke out.

Table 12: ***Arms haul from MNF visit to East Pakistan, 1964.***[658]

Type:	**Quantity:**	**Ammunition:**
Rifle	21	35,960
LMG	2	73,500
STEN gun	15	n/a
Tommy gun	3	27,300
Pistol	3	27,300
Grenade	336	n/a

Alongside its growing arsenal, the MNF also organised its fighting forces with the birth of the Mizo National Volunteers (MNV).[659] By the eve of civil war, MNV battalions were organised throughout the district at key zones and villages. The units were relatively small – with the largest numbering no more than two hundred – but extensive. In sum, eighteen battalions existed according to Indian Army reports, including sizeable forces at Rieik – close

[657] For example, during a police raid in the MHD, Czech and Italian manufactured ammunition was found. The ammo was thought to be smuggled in from East Pakistan but was not directly linked to the MNF. See ASA HMI 51/63. I. Ali to Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam, 'Smuggling of 12 bore cartridges into Mizo district from East Pakistan', 23 September 1963.

[658] Stats collected from Lalthangliana, 'Mizo National Front Movement: A Sociological Study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Gauhati University, 1993), p. 48. Taken from an interview with Zamawia.

[659] The volunteer fighting force of the MNF was subsequently reorganised during the civil war, in 1967, with the creation of the Mizo National Army (MNA). The MNA was organised into two brigades, Lion Bridge in the North and Dagger Brigade in the South. Research differs on whether the MNA was made up of seven or eight battalions, but these were definitely split into two brigades. For discrepancies on the battalion composition of the MNA, see Panwar, 'Explaining Cohesion', pp. 981-82; Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion', pp. 102-3.

to Aizawl – and Lungleh.[660] Altogether, the MNV had around 2,000 recruits in its ranks by late 1965 and were supplied by a sizeable number of small arms, shown in table 13.

Table 13: ***Estimated arsenal of the MNF, February 1966.***[661]

Type:	**Quantity:**
Rifle	270
LMG	31
STEN Gun	150
Pistol	12

The arsenal was not the most extensive, but nonetheless provided the tools to challenge state authority.[662] The lessons provided by the Naga underground suggested that a small arsenal of modern weapons could be incredibly advantageous in the hill terrain of the highlands. This knowledge was utilised to good effect by the MNV both at the onset of civil war and during Indian COIN operations.

Exploiting the geopolitics of the Mizo Hills was critical for the MNF's success. But the support and internal cohesion it forged closer to home was similarly decisive. At the Assam Legislative Assembly by-elections in 1963, its popularity was evident. Two of the seats reserved for the Mizo Hills were previously vacated by MU-APHLC candidates in 1962, part of the broader attempt to push the hill state demand prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Indian

[660] ASA CMS 171/1965. Lt General Manekshaw to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 23 September 1965. See Appendix A for the full rundown of MNV battalions.

[661] Stats derived from ASA CMS 71/70. Y. B. Chavan to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 6 March 1970.

[662] This paralleled insurgencies elsewhere in Asia in the 1960s. For instance, before the North Kalimantan National Army in Brunei received weapons and training from Sukarno's Indonesian government, its arsenal was limited. But it still instigated the Brunei revolt of 1962, even if the uprising was swiftly defeated. See Michael Eilenberg, 'Straddling the Border: A Marginal History of Guerrilla Warfare and "Counter-Insurgency" in the Indonesian Borderlands, 1960s–1970s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45.6 (2011), 1423–63; Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'British Counterinsurgency in Brunei and Sarawak, 1962–1963: Developing Best Practices in the Shadow of Malaya', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27.4 (2016), 702–25.

war.[663] At the elections, the MNF swooped as its candidates won both seats. Lesser, but still evident, gains were also made in local elections to the village councils.[664] The electorate's shifting support for the MNF, especially at the expense of the MU, was a testament to the lasting popularity of the institution because of its relief work during the famine as well as its strong nationalistic message.

Additionally, the MNF's ability to tap into grassroots networks was particularly important. It was able to permeate into what Anoop Sarbahi called the 'enhanced structural connectivity' of the Mizo Hills.[665] Sarbahi has persuasively argued that Mizo society was exceptionally well integrated because of the efforts of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. This meant layers of communication between smaller settlements and the larger villages in the district. The MNF tapped into these pre-existing networks to ensure a level of cohesion akin to the NNC in the early 1950s.[666] Further to Sarbahi's findings, additional grassroots campaigns increased the functionality of – and support for – the MNF. Propaganda crusades, for example, were particularly useful.[667] This was a clear contrast to government presence in the district and the broader dislocation from Indian nationalist rhetoric.

Overall, the potency of the MNF contrasted with an estimation provided by a British official who produced a wide-ranging report on the nationalist movement in 1964. The official

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[663] Nunthara, *Mizoram*, pp. 138-40.

[664] Hluna and Tochhawng, *The Mizo Uprising*, pp. 4-5.

[665] Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion'.

[666] This enforces research within the micro-analytical turn in the intrastate conflict subfield, which suggested that the social composition and connectedness of the society the rebel group operates in can be critical for rebel group functionality.

[667] Chawngsailova, 'Mizo National Front and Its Role in Mizoram Politics' (unpublished doctoral thesis, North-Eastern Hill University, 1997), pp. 58-9.

– E. H. M. Counsell – noted how the MNF was unlikely to 'indulge in terrorism'.[668] He further suggested that the organisation was destined – even at its most potent – to be no more than a 'pinprick in the vast tough hide of Congress India'.[669] Counsell's projections could not have been less prescient.

The MNF unleashed a surprise attack across the Mizo Hills District on the evening of 28 February 1966. Codenamed Operation Jericho, the attack resulted in MNF forces overrunning most of the district. Only in Aizawl did Indian security forces manage to hold out in the Assam Rifles barracks.[670] In the rest of the Mizo Hills, the MNF held sway. This rebel group – which Counsell waved away as an irrelevance – had instigated the second civil war in the Assam highlands since independence.

Civil war and the formulation of COIN strategy, 1966-67.

The MHD was the largest of Assam's AHDs – at over 20,000km² – and the MNF relied heavily on its organisational capacity to conduct its audacious assault.[671] The surprise of both Indian security forces and the wider nation spoke volumes of the efficient planning by the separatist group. For example, press reports revealed how government officials were caught off guard by Operation Jericho.[672] Such a flagrant renunciation of state sovereignty required a swift response from the Indian state.

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[668] TNA UK DO 196/238. E. H. M. Counsell, 'Notes on a visit to the Mizo Hills District of Assam', 15-19 March 1964.

[669] *Ibid*, p. 10.

[670] ASA CMS Nil/66. Assam Legislative Assembly Debate. Speech by Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 5 March 1966.

[671] To put this into perspective, the district is similar in size per square kilometre to Israel or Wales.

[672] 'Timing of Rebellion took Govt. by Surprise', *Assam Tribune*, 3 March 1966.

India's Home Minister Gulzarilal Nanda declared publicly that the MNF would be crushed 'with all the forces at our command'.[673] The uprising was unprecedented. It was a complete rejection of state legitimacy and overturn of political authority within a district. The Naga movement had engaged in protracted low intensity conflict but never came close to ousting the state. Such a complete and categorical rejection of Indian legitimacy had not occurred since the aftermath of Partition in Hyderabad.[674] And, because international media outlets reported on Operation Jericho, India's global prestige was questioned.[675] The state's initial response was swift.

Indian security forces spread across the district were reinforced and large-scale operations were undertaken by the Indian Army to reclaim control of the major population centres. The initial firefights largely took the shape of conventional warfare.[676] In these regular conflicts the army's resources ensured there would only be one winner. Aizawl was retaken after some brief – but intense – fighting.[677] Lungleh and Champhai were also reclaimed in swift fashion. Within weeks the district had seen a region-wide rebellion and a complete subsequent reversal in its major towns. By 20 March 1966 a degree of order had been re-established by Indian forces.[678]

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[673] 'Mizo Rebels will be Crushed: Nanda', *Assam Tribune*, 3 March 1966.

[674] Purushotham, 'Internal Violence'; Sherman, 'Integration'.

[675] B. J. Anthony, 'New Delhi Moves to Quell "Revolt"', *New York Times*, 4 March 1966, p. 5.

[676] TNA UK DO 196/541. G. G. Swell and Stanley D. D. Nichols-Roy, *Report on the Mizo Hills Situation* (1966).

[677] Assam Legislative Assembly Debate. Speech by B. P. Chaliha, 5 March 1966.

[678] Vivek Chadha, 'India's Counterinsurgency Campaign in Mizoram', in Ganguly and Fidler, *India and Counterinsurgency*, pp. 28–44 (p. 37).

The central government achieved swift successes in the weeks after the MNF's assault. But the Mizo civil war did not end in March 1966; it rumbled on for the next two decades.[679] The lasting impact of the Mizo civil war was defined in the aftermath of Operation Jericho. The Indian state was far less effective after the MNF's shift towards irregular conflict. This ineffectiveness contributed to the evolving perception of Indian state capabilities, embedded a clear sense of anti-Indian resentment in the Mizo Hills and ensured the MNF developed lessons for insurgency that the Naga underground began.

After March 1966 Indian security forces struggled to stamp out the rebel movement. As in the Naga hills, state presence in the interior was scarce. Additionally, even though MNV fighters were defeated in the field, rebel forces claimed substantial weapons caches during Operation Jericho. This provided further impetus for the movement as it shifted towards guerrilla tactics. Table 14 gives an overview of the weapons captured by Mizo forces during Operation Jericho.

Table 14: ***Arms seized by the MNF during Operation Jericho.***[680]

Type:	**Quantity:**
Rifle (.303)	285
Rifle (Grenade Firing)	10
Rifle (Musket)	6
LMG	15
STEN Gun	38
Revolver	6
Mortar	2
Grenade	500

[679] This contrasts with how some researchers have coded the conflict in certain databases. For example, as Anoop Sarbahi has shown, the UCDP/PRIO database suggests the Mizo conflict ended in 1968, a clear mistake which is demonstrated in this chapter. See, Sarbahi, 'The Structure of Religion', p. 91-93.

[680] Stats derived from an interview with Zamawia in, Hluna and Tochhawng, *The Mizo Uprising*, pp. 69-71.

Between its internal cohesion, control over the interior, arsenal and fighting forces, the MNF was well equipped to fight a guerrilla campaign.

This contrasted with state-led operations. A report produced at the close of June 1966 revealed this lethargy, as posts established across the district were hampered by difficult terrain and the effects of monsoon.[681] Successes were evident in the confiscation of weapons and arrests of rebel personnel – as displayed in table 15 – but these did not definitively impact rebel forces.

Table 15: ***Indian Army efforts vs MNF rebels, March-June 1966.***[682]

	Number:	**Type:**	**Number:**
MNF suspects apprehended	530		
MNF weapons confiscated	884		
MNF weapons confiscation by type:			
		Rifle	74
		Rifle (Semi-Automatic)	1
		LMG	3
		STEN Gun	6
		Other	800

Although the number of weapons confiscated appeared to be high, the vast majority of these were listed as 'other'. In correlation with similar source material elsewhere, these 'other' firearms were likely to be country-made, ineffective weapons with limited practical uses in protracted conflict.[683] The weapons that mattered were the modern firearms, of which the rebels had gained more than they lost between March and June 1966.

[681] MSA Gen 1399/115. A note on the present situation in the Mizo Hills, 30 June 1966.

[682] Stats taken from MSA 1399/115. A note on the present situation in the Mizo Hills, 30 June 1966.

[683] ASA CMS 130/56. '457 Country Made Guns Surrendered', GOI Press Information Bureau, 22nd June 1956.

The report noted above, published at the close of June, outlined a combination of inefficient operations and the lack of a coordinated strategy. Security forces were poorly trained and unsuited for guerrilla conflict whilst intelligence on the rebel movement was lacking.[684] The inability to win local support hindered intelligence gathering.[685] Despite the clear advantages the state held in resources and personnel, it once more struggled to contend with rebel forces operating out of the difficult terrain of the highlands.

These ineffective measures were compounded by the blatant disregard for the use of 'minimum force' against its citizens, a principle enshrined in the Indian Army Act.[686] Despite public denials by government officials, proof emerged that the Indian Air Force engaged in arial bombing of Aizawl.[687] As the only town in the district, Aizawl had the highest concentration of civilians in the Mizo Hills.[688] The bombing of Aizawl was the first in a string of military operations that blatantly disregarded the policy of minimum force.

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[684] MSA Gen 1399/115. A note on the present situation in the Mizo Hills, 30 June 1966.

[685] TNA UK DO 196/541. G. G. Swell and Stanley D. D. Nichols-Roy, *Report on the Mizo Hills Situation* (1966).

[686] Act No. XLVI of 1950, 'The Indian Army Act'.

[687] Chaliha, for example, refuted allegations about the bombing of Aizawl before the Assam Legislative Assembly in early June. He insisted that the Indian Air Force had not used excessive methods, targeting only MNF forces with machine-gunning and strafing. See Assam Legislative Assembly Debate. 5 June 1966. But a report gathered by MLAs G. G. Swell and Stanley D. D. Nichols-Roy – conducted from late March to early April 1966 – uncovered proof that bombing operations were undertaken. Archival material in the Mizoram State Archives supports the report of Swell and Nichols-Roy, whilst the secondary literature has similarly identified that the IAF bombed Aizawl. For the original report by Swell and Nichols-Roy, see TNA UK DO 196/541. G. G. Swell and S. D. D. Nichols-Roy, *Report on the Mizo Hills Situation* (1966). For primary material in the Mizoram State Archives confirming IAF bombing, see MSA Gen 1385/114. Lal Bahadur Lama, 'Detailed assessment of list of properties damaged due to air attack of 6 March 1966', 14 April 1966; MSA Gen 1505/125. Interrogation Statement of Saizama s/o Lalluaia, 14 August 1967. For secondary research, see Nag, *Gigantic Panopticon*.

[688] E. H. Pakyntein, *District Census Handbook: Mizo Hills* (Gauhati: Tribune Press (Government of Assam), 1965), pp. 12, 65-67, 270. Its population in the 1961 census was 14,257 but as the handbook noted, migratory trends from rural areas into towns was already escalating by this point. Hence, the population of Aizawl by 1966 would likely be somewhat higher than the 1961 statistic.

Appeals to Indira Gandhi – who had taken the Indian premiership following the deaths of Nehru and Shastri – from the MNF leadership, citing Geneva Convention protocols, initially went unheard.[689] Where security forces took control on the ground, reports about harassment of civilians were commonplace.[690] The inability to identify MNF sympathisers resulted in contentious arrests based on precarious foundations.[691] These actions hardened civilians' attitudes against Indian security forces and heightened levels of suspicion when genuine errors of judgement did occur.[692] Meanwhile, the spectre of colonial violence continued to penetrate the Indian security psyche. Table 16 – for example – identifies the extent of burned villages in the MHD by the summer of 1966.

[689] TNA UK DO 196/541. Lal Hmingthanga to Indira Gandhi, 4 April 1966.

[690] MSA Gen 1370/113. Parkimi to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Verification of antecedent of my husband and to arrange his early release', 9 July 1966.

[691] See for example MSA Gen 1370/113. C. Pahlira to Chief Secretary to Govt of Assam, 'Release of LP School teachers arrested in connection with the Present Mizo Hills Disturbance', 24 August 1966; MSA Gen 1370/113. Chawngbuangi to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Release of Security Prisoner Shri Liankunga', 7 November 1966.

[692] MSA Gen 1494/124. Assistant Commissioner Champhai to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Petition of Smt Engliani for Financial Assistance', 23 November 1966. In this incident a villager from Zucchip named Rengchhuana was mistakenly shot and killed by security forces. Rengchuanna was later revealed to be a Mizo Union member and highly unlikely to be a MNF collaborator. His death occurred after a mix-up during a security force raid. The previous actions of security forces, however, heightened suspicions about Rengchhuana's death.

Table 16: ***Villages burnt by Indian Security forces, 1966.***[693]

Incident No	Village	Houses Burnt
1	Champhai	180
2	Khawzant	80
3	Enahlan	100
4	Kelkang	60
5	Sangau	4
6	Khawabok	60
7	Pangzawl	50
8	Hnahthial	50
9	Pukpui	70
10	Puksing	34
11	Kaoapui	n/a
12	Baikal	n/a
Total		**688**

Indian security forces did not have a concerted strategy to deal with the MNF's shift towards unconventional warfare. A range of issues plagued security personnel. There was no suitable jail in Lungleh to hold rebels by late June 1966.[694] This provided a practical headache, as prisoners were transferred out of the district into a jail at Cachar, which soon experienced severe overcrowding.[695] When curfews were attempted, poor planning ensured disruptions in cultivation, embedding resentment against the state.[696] Meanwhile, the effort to control civilian

[693] Statistics compiled from the information provided in TNA UK DO 196/541. G. G. Swell and S. D. D. Nichols-Roy, *Report on the Mizo Hills Situation* (1966).

[694] MSA Gen 1401/116. Superintendent of Police, DSB Mizo District to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Persons arrested at Lungleh and other interior places', 23 June 1966.

[695] MSA Gen 1401/116. S. Khosla to Assam Shillong, 'IG Prisons Shillong', 21 July 1966. By July 1966, the prison in Cachar had six hundred and nine inmates, against a total allocated capacity of two hundred and twenty-nine.

[696] MSA Gen 1401/116. HQ 61 Mountain Brigade Signal No 0 2451. 1 May 66.

movement was hampered by ground-level administrative practices, as passes were offered frequently and indiscriminately in some locations to citizens.[697]

Ineffective security measures hardened civilian attitudes against the state while efforts to improve civilian relations were underwhelming. Relief funds were established for those affected by security force operations. But administrative sluggishness hindered the remuneration process and meant non-governmental institutions were established to provide aid.[698] In Aizawl – for example – the Aizawl Citizens Committee was created to provide relief measures.[699] Archival material revealed the state was keen to ensure financial remuneration for victims, but this desire was curtailed when theory translated into practice.[700] Efficiency was necessary, but the state remuneration efforts were defined by incoherence.

A final problem curtailing the state-led operations against Mizo rebel forces in 1966 was the exposed nature of government-friendly regions in the far south of the district.[701] In these areas, the MNF failed to secure popular support. They held potential for security forces

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[697] MSA Gen 1399/115. R Natarajan to Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 'Copy of Secret Letter No.DSB/V/2-66/8872-73 from Supdt. of Police, DSB, Cachar, Silchar to DC Silchar', 7 May 1966.

[698] For example, the family of Rengchhuana – killed during the confusion during the raid at Zucchip village – was recommended a bereavement fund of Rs, 1,000 by Champhai's Assistant Commissioner. Whether the fund was officially allocated, and more importantly whether the family ever received the remuneration, is not revealed in the archive.

[699] MSA Gen 1399/115. Paul Zakhuma & Lal Ngurauva Ralte to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 13 May 1966.

[700] MSA Gen 1393/115. Private Secretary to the Prime Minister to Principal Private Secretary to the Chief Minister of Assam, 20 September 1966; MSA Gen 1370/113. Lallianduii to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 25 October 1966.

[701] The Mizo nationalist imaginary was something which had increasingly united the majority of the MHD since the mid-1940s. However, not all subscribed to this idea. The establishment of the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council in 1953 – separate from the Mizo District Council – was a clear indicator in this regard. Pawi-Lakher communities had little affiliation with the Mizo conception of identity central to the Mizo Union, the United Mizo Freedom Organisation and eventually the Mizo National Front. Wary of being exploited within a Mizo dominated district, many of these outlier regions sought political safeguards, and continue to do so today. See, Pachuau and Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, pp. 359-75; Roluahpuia, 'Unsettled Autonomy'.

if looking to squeeze the rebel movement. Yet, Chakma communities, for example, were noted to be at the mercy of raids by rebel Mizo forces. The result was burnt villages and socio-economic hardship.[702] As time wore on, as identified later in this chapter, these anti-MNF communities began to consider collusion with the rebel movement out of sheer necessity. Altogether, the transition towards irregular conflict was a cumbersome one.

This reality led to discussions for a concerted strategy. A cohesive plan was required to counteract the guerrilla operations of the Mizo separatist movement.[703] The result was not quite a fully coordinated doctrine of COIN operations. However, the plans put in place constituted a discernible strategy to defeat rebel forces. This COIN strategy was implemented from the beginning of 1967.

To understand India's COIN strategy in the Mizo Hills, it must be placed within the broader, global historiography on counterinsurgency. As Scott Gates and Kaushik Roy have noted, research on COIN in India and Pakistan is strikingly underdeveloped.[704] This underdevelopment has prevented a rigorous examination of some of India's previous campaigns. This is noticeably so in the MHD.

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[702] MSA Gen 1399/115. D. S. Khongdup to Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, 'Protection to Chakmas', 20 June 1966.

[703] MSA Gen 1393/115. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 August 1966 in the Chief Secretary's Room of the Assam Civil Secretariat.

[704] Gates and Roy, *Unconventional Warfare*, pp. 1-4. Whilst some research exists, India's experiences have remained remarkably under-analysed in global approaches to COIN. This is despite a wealth of material to interpret how the Indian state conceptualises COIN and extensive historical case-studies to interrogate how operations have unfolded. The lack of interest in India's campaigns is particularly surprising when the breadth of global research into COIN is taken into account, especially since the start of the twenty-first century. See Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler, 'Introduction', in Ganguly and Fidler, *India and Counterinsurgency*, pp. 1-5; Celeste Ward Gventer, David Martin Jones and M. L. R. Smith, 'Introduction', in *The New Counter-Insurgency Era in Critical Perspective*, ed. by Celeste Ward Gventer, David Martin Jones and M.L.R. Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-5; Alexander Paul Waterman, 'Managing Insurgency: Counterinsurgency and Order Negotiation in Northeast India' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2018), p. 70.

Internally, the Indian Army has provided a clearer articulation of its COIN strategy since 2006.[705] In academic circles, since the turn of the century, broad conclusions about India's COIN experiences have been made.[706] Fallacies exist in this research. This is especially clear in the Mizo civil war. Despite being under-analysed, it has become commonplace to characterise operations against the Mizo separatist movement as a success story: 'the quintessential example of successful counterinsurgency'.[707] In Bibhu Prasad Routray's analysis, the Mizo campaign anchors his work as a victory par excellence for the Indian state. It provides a significant building block for Routray's central conclusion, that India's failures have resulted from an inability to enact good practice. Good practice – to Routray – included the village grouping scheme implemented in the Mizo Hills, which supposedly curtailed the MNF's ability to survive by controlling sparsely populated areas.[708] This narrative is difficult to sustain when the contents of the archive are revealed.

India's COIN approach in the MHD has been critiqued before. As identified in chapter II, Nandini Sundar provided a crucial insight into the quotidian effects of village grouping. Whilst there is a consensus that operations in the Naga Hills were a failure, Sundar argues

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[705] Dipankar Banerjee, 'The Indian Army's counterinsurgency doctrine', in Ganguly and Fidler, *India and Counterinsurgency*, pp. 189-206. Evident in the publication of the Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations (DSCO).

[706] See, for example Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*; Namrata Goswami, *Indian National Security and Counter-Insurgency: The Use of Force vs Non-Violent Response* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Rajesh Rajagopalan, '"Restoring Normalcy": The Evolution of the Indian Army's Counterinsurgency Doctrine', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 11.1 (2000), 44–68; Rajesh Rajagopalan, *Fighting like a Guerrilla: The Indian Army and Counterinsurgency* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2008); Bibhu Prasad Routray, 'India's Internal Wars: Counterinsurgency Role of Central Police Forces', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24.4 (2013), 648–68.

[707] Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. 156.

[708] Bibhu Prasad Routray, 'India: Fleeting Attachment to the Counterinsurgency Grand Strategy', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 28.1 (2017), 57–80.

against the grain by suggesting similar problems were evident in the Mizo Hills.[709] Baruah's internal logic – about the limitations of a COIN-focused approach – imply a similar conclusion.[710] Both are right to critique to assumptive premise of COIN success in the Mizo Hills. But this chapter suggests the critique needs expanding. Sundar, for example, essentially suggested a moral failure; the Indian state failed its citizens on humanitarian grounds. Rather than a purely humanitarian failure, Indian COIN operations in the MHD were further characterised by ideological and operational failures.

To reach this conclusion, developments in global research into COIN provide a key starting point. India's COIN approach in the MHD closely mirrored Europe's colonial powers' wars of decolonisation. The implementation of village grouping schemes, the ideology of 'hearts and minds' and the use of 'minimum force' were all taken directly from the colonial textbook in managing insurgency.[711] A long lineage of research has delved into how counterinsurgency doctrines were developed and weighed heavily on warfare in the twenty-first century in Afghanistan and Iraq.[712] The revisionist wave of this research is acutely relevant for this chapter.

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[709] Sundar, 'Interning Insurgent Populations'.

[710] Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, pp. 19-24.

[711] Paul Dixon, 'The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: 'Hearts and Minds' from Malaya to Afghanistan?', in Dixon. *British Approach*, pp. 1-48; Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'The study of insurgency and counterinsurgency', in Rich and Duyvesteyn *Routledge Handbook of Insurgency*, pp. 1-20 (pp. 8-11). For an example of research that historicises British counterinsurgency, and the roots of hearts and minds, see Kim A. Wagner, 'Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency', *History Workshop Journal*, 85.1 (2018), 217–37.

[712] For some introductory notes on how the perceived wisdom of – especially – British COIN strategies impacted on US military thinking in Afghanistan and Iraq, see Dixon, *The British Approach*; David J. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Rich and Duyvesteyn *Routledge Handbook of Insurgency*.

Traditionally seen as the go-to model for counterinsurgency operations – especially so in the British case – the revisionist wave questioned the entire premise of the successfulness of European COIN.[713] In the seminally cited British approach in Malaya, Hew Strachan has suggested 'divide and rule' was a more apt appraisal of British approach than the doctrine of hearts and minds.[714] The revisionist approach has paved the way for significant broader reflections. If – as David French argued – British COIN was more concerned with reinforcing state legitimacy than winning hearts and minds or humanitarian norms, the entire premise of India's COIN strategies is brought into question.[715] Did India's strategy in the Mizo Hills actually rest upon a desire to win the support of civilians in the MHD? Similarly, Martin Thomas questioned whether France's wars of decolonisation were as exceptional as first thought. Rather, the violence and repression that characterised French rule in Algeria was notably consistent with global comparisons.[716] As will be shown, the Mizo Hills witnessed a

[713] For some general notes on the development of the field, see Ian Beckett, 'The Historiography of Insurgency' in Rich and Duyvesteyn *Routledge Handbook of Insurgency*, pp. 23-31; Austin Long, *On "Other War": Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006); Scarinzi, 'Revisionist Historiography'.

[714] Hew Strachan, 'British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq', *The RUSI Journal*, 152.6 (2007), 8–11. Such thinking opened the field to more intellectually expansive debates than those that previously existed. Whilst research by – for example – Simon Smith was useful for interrogating the role of Templer in Malaya, the debates were relatively smaller in scale. They essentially looked towards the role of an individual in the broader context of a specific war: an attempt to reach a 'balanced judgement' about Templer as a military figure. In contrast, the revisionist wave delved into far more profound questions, as highlighted above. For some notable revisionist research on British counterinsurgency, see Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies: British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst, 2013); David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Bruno C. Reis, 'The Myth of British Minimum Force in Counterinsurgency Campaigns during Decolonisation (1945–1970)', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34.2 (2011), 245–79. For revisionist work that also includes France's history of counterinsurgency, see Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Thomas, *Fight or Flight*.

[715] French, *The British Way*, pp. 105-37.

[716] Thomas, *Fight or Flight*, pp. 74-75.

comparable security-first strategy which was defined by violence and excesses against civilians.[717]

Historiographical developments on COIN therefore provide the foundation for the reinterpretation of India's COIN experience in the Mizo Hills. Rather than accepting security force narratives about hearts and minds, India's COIN approach is judged by the ground-level outcomes of security force actions. Instead of accepting an operational success occurred simply because peace was brokered in 1986, the efficiency and effectiveness of COIN is scrutinised with greater rigour. To interrogate these questions, a largely untapped source-base is utilised. The Mizoram State Archives holds a sizeable degree of material to pursue this research. Through the regional archive, a clear critique of the traditional assumptions about India's COIN campaign in the Mizo Hills emerges. This was not a success story. It was not even close.

The failure of Mizo COIN operations, 1967-70.

Indian COIN operations were a failure on three levels: humanitarian, operational and ideological. This section demonstrates the sheer breadth of inefficiency that defined India's COIN operations before the next section reflects on the implications of this chaotic episode. This section is focused on how these failures occurred, including the extensiveness of security

[717] It should be noted that the revisionist wave has been so fundamental that the turn towards post-revisionism has been suggested in the past few years. Jacqueline Hazelton, for example, sought to move beyond the entire debate about hearts and minds. She suggested that counterinsurgency success is purely constructed through violent state-building techniques, with civilian support and interests amounting to little. This is juxtaposed to research that has attemtped to develop conclusions about hearts and minds doctrine with a recognition of recent findings. Meanwhile, Karl Hack suggested an alternate angle for post-revisionism. He suggested COIN case-studies can expand research into the processes behind deep violence. See Heather S. Gregg, 'Identity Wars: Collective Identity Building in Insurgency and Counterinsurgency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 31.2 (2020), 381–401; Karl Hack, '"Devils That Suck the Blood of the Malayan People": The Case for Post-Revisionist Analysis of Counter-Insurgency Violence', *War in History*, 25.2 (2018), 202–26; Jacqueline L. Hazelton, 'The "Hearts and Minds" Fallacy: Violence, Coercion, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare', *International Security*, 42.1 (2017), 80–113; Christoph Mikulaschek, Saurabh Pant, and Beza Tesfaye, 'Winning Hearts and Minds in Civil Wars: Governance, Leadership Change, and Support for Violent Groups in Iraq', *American Journal of Political Science*, 64.4 (2020), 773-90.

force transgressions against Mizo citizens and the structural problems hampering the efficiency of Indian COIN. When the realities of Indian operations are presented, it becomes abundantly clear that this was no success story for the state.

From 1967, a clearer Indian strategy emerged in the Mizo Hills. The obvious ultimate objective for the state was victory over the Mizo separatist movement. To achieve victory, a relatively coherent plan was established to win over the Mizo populace, whilst cutting links between civilians and the separatist movement. The tactic of village grouping formed a core practical tenet. Within this village grouping initiative, a rhetorical commitment to minimum force was supposed to be a guiding light for security forces, to win hearts and minds and pave the way for the destruction of the separatist agenda.[718]

In practice, this strategy was derived from British methods of COIN.[719] The Indian Army lacked any standardised approach to irregular warfare at the time and was yet to establish training centres for guerrilla campaigns.[720] Hence, the approach fell short of a fully coordinated doctrine.[721] This was, however, the clear macro-level plan from 1967. But the Indian strategy

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[718] The mantra of minimum force was established in the Indian Army Act, even if – as this chapter shows – this did not translate neatly in COIN operations. Meanwhile, the identification of population control – which developed into the village grouping scheme – along with the precedent of hearts and minds, was developed from the late summer of 1966 onwards. See Act No. XLVI of 1950, 'The Indian Army Act', 20 May 1950; MSA Gen 1393/115. Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 August 1966 in the Chief Secretary's Room of the Assam Civil Secretariat.

[719] Nirmal Nibedon, *Mizoram: The Dagger Brigade* (Atlanta: Lancer, 2013). See chapter six, 'Operation Security', for a direct link between the Mizo Hills and global templates for COIN.

[720] In 1970 the Counterinsurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) was established at Wairengte in Mizoram for military personnel new to the region. This was in recognition of the need for greater training for troops engaged in irregular conflict. Dipankar Banerjee has suggested the school was a success, at least in comparison to the institutions established in Jammu & Kashmir and Tamil Nadu. The latter two, according to Banerjee, suffered from a lack of permanency that the CIJWS had. See Banerjee, 'Indian Army's counterinsurgency doctrine', pp. 194-95.

[721] This taps into a wider debate about whether there has ever been an Indian 'way' of doing COIN, and the importance of the DSCO in the evolution of unconventional operations. See Banerjee, 'Indian Army's counterinsurgency doctrine', pp. 189-206; David P. Fidler, 'The Indian Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations: reflections from a U.S. counterinsurgency perspective', in Ganguly and Fidler, *India and*

rested on ideas which – unbeknownst to Indian military planners – were built upon shaky foundations. As with the British experience, no definitive answers were produced when theory met practice. When pushed, did hearts and minds take precedence over military authority and state sovereignty? Meanwhile, did security forces have the internal cohesion to be able to push through this relatively clear strategy? The unfolding of Indian COIN operations revealed the practical realities undermining the broad strategy in place.

The starting point for India's COIN strategy was the first wave of village grouping, codenamed Operation Security.[722] Under Operation Security, the 'Protected Progressive Village' (PPV) scheme was born. This first phase of the village grouping initiative led to a resettlement of villages within reasonable proximity to the Aizawl-Silchar Road.[723] This was the major road in the MHD, and Indian forces were reliant on it for movement and supplies. It ran southwards from Silchar, into the north of the MHD towards Aizawl and continued onwards to Lungleh in the south of the district. Table 6 shows the numbers of citizens moved to the PPV centres in 1967.

Counterinsurgency, pp. 207-224; Gautam Navlakha, 'Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations: A Critique', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42.14 (2007), 1242-46; Alexander Paul Waterman, 'Compressing Politics in Counterinsurgency (COIN): Implications for COIN Theory from India's Northeast', *Strategic Analysis*, 41.5 (2017), 447–63.

[722] MSA Pol 221/22. New Grouping Scheme in Mizo Hills.

[723] This was the same road referred to in chapter III, that suffered repeated setbacks in financing and construction. It was eventually built.

Table 17: ***Population of PPV Grouping Scheme, 1967.***[724]

Phase	Sl. No.	Name of PPV Centre	Original	Shifted	Total
I	1	Zemabawk	456	860	1316
	2	Thingsulthliah	876	2431	3307
	3	Tlungvel	662	1804	2456
	4	Baktawng	963	1628	2591
	5	Chhingchhip	370	1840	2210
	6	Chhiahtlang	370	1539	1909
	7	Serchhip	1265	1220	2485
II	8	Durtlang	1213	1727	2940
	9	Sihphir	1036	990	2026
	10	Lungdai	1050	2264	3314
	11	Kawnpui	1393	1403	2796
	12	Thingdawl	1050	999	2049
	13	Bilkhawthlir	700	360	1060
	14	Vairengte	531	477	1008
III	15	Bungtlang	368	1534	1902
	16	Pangzawl	369	1943	2312
	17	Hnahthial	323	3106	3429
	18	Zobawk	-	707	-
Totals			**12995**	**26832**	**39110**

The table displays the original populations of the eighteen villages, alongside the new figures after the implementation of Operation Security, as civilians from outlier regions were moved towards these centres.

The basic premise of village grouping was to merge a small number of settlements in a region into one central settlement. This central settlement was usually the most strategically advantageous current village. Hence the Kawnpui centre – Sl. No. eleven – drew together citizens from three settlements in that general region: Kawnpui, Mualvum and Bualpui.[725] The

[724] MSA Gen 1496/124. Population of PPV Grouping (as indicated by Indian Army records).

[725] MSA Gen 1505/125. Interrogation Report of MNF from Police. Interrogation statement of kidnapped Purna Bahadur Lohar, U.D. Assistant, Kawnpui PPV Centre, 27 September 1967.

result was the expansion of the population of Kawnpui from 1,393 to 2,796, as the other villages were deserted. The PPV scheme was hindered by significant operational problems from the outset.

A clear breakdown in communication between military and civil authorities hampered the efficiency of the scheme. Despite a public announcement that Operation Security was to be initiated, not all the relevant civil authorities were notified. This led to the Extra Assistant Commissioner at Kolasib writing in a state of confusion to his superior, citing zero knowledge about this newly unfolding plan.[726] This disjuncture between civil and military authorities was a recurring trend that hampered efficiency. At the end of January, for example, the Mizo District Council (MDC) was notably out of the loop with how the village grouping scheme was developing.[727] As the ruling institution in the MHD, the confusion that followed by not keeping the MDC abreast of developments was both detrimental and avoidable.

A further practical issue curtailing the effectiveness of Operation Security was the lack of state apparatus in the district. The inability to establish efficient postal services and the failure to implement a new ID card scheme intended for greater control within PPVs were notable examples in this regard.[728] Once more, the ramifications of poorly implemented state-building practices created problems down the line for the state. Additionally, the severe lack of accommodation provided a problem for staffing levels, noted in at least six of the grouped

[726] MSA Gen 1509/125. Extra Assistant Commissioner, Kolasib to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Village Regrouping', 3 January 1967.

[727] MSA Gen 1509/125. J. C. Sengluaia to Brigade Commander 61 Mountain Brigade, 25 January 1967.

[728] MSA Gen 1494/124. HQ Eastern Command, Fort William, Calcutta to N. K. Rustomji, 19 January 1967.

centres.[729] Compounding these issues were the more immediate problems of water supply and the lack of medical personnel.[730] Operation Security, therefore, began in a disjointed manner.

Early signs of resistance to the scheme were evident as the MU sent a delegation to New Delhi to protest to the central government. The delegation declared that village grouping should have never taken place. The protestations of the MU provided a further issue for the state to confront, one of public perception.[731] In an attempt to garner positive press a small batch of journalists were taken to the MHD on a state conducted tour. The reports were positive, noting the efficiency with which the scheme was carried out.[732] This escapade on the one hand offers another example of the unreliability of press reporting in the northeast and the attempts of the state to present a rose-tinted assessment of unfolding events in the highlands.[733] On the other, it partially explains how COIN operations in the Mizo Hills became routinely seen as a success story, as the wider public read press reports about effective operations against Mizo rebels. On the ground a different reality was unfolding.

Objections to a state-imposed relocation scheme would be expected in any society. The government were forcing citizens to move from their homes and resettle in new locations. Sam Manekshaw – the Indian Army's GOC in the east – believed that in time this contestation would

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[729] MSA Gen 1509/125. Divisional Officer, MHD to R. Natarajan, 3 March 1967.

[730] MSA Gen 1509/125. Civil Surgeon, Mizo District to Under Secretary to the Govt of Assam, Health Dept., 22 May 1967.

[731] TNA UK FCO 37/267. R. W. Renwick to R. M. Purcell, 'Mizo Affairs', 23 February 1967.

[732] *Ibid*.

[733] As identified in chapter II, there were intermittent bans on press reporting during episodes of intrastate conflict. This meant a range of media responses, from state-friendly publications which downplayed the northeast's troubles to hyperbolic international conspiracy theories about the Mizo rebellion. One report, for example, suggested that NATO was actively supplying the MNF's arsenal, such was the divergence in media analysis. See 'Where They Get the Arms?', *The Frontier Times*, 13 June 1966.

ease.[734] But this required a concerted turnaround to start winnings hearts and minds amongst the Mizo populace. The problem was that the teething issues in the opening months of 1967 continued as the year progressed. By April, problems that had plagued Operation Security from the outset were simply not addressed. A lack of coordination between civil and military authorities continued to be a recurrent theme.[735] This inefficiency resulted in greater failures as the year wore on.

The story of Pu Khawpuia's murder in July 1967 was reflective of the lack of restrictions in place to curtail rogue security forces. Inefficient military practice and planning enabled ground-level excesses against civilians, which in turn actively hindered the central objective: winning hearts and minds. It was Lalbuaia – the head of the MDC – who brought the case before the Assam government. He suggested the incident was symptomatic of structural issues that plagued Operation Security. On 15 July 1967 Khawpuia's house was raided by security forces. He was a prominent figure in the community, but the raid was not related to the war. Rather, security force personnel were interested in the contents of his safe. Upon refusing to hand over the keys to the safe to Indian forces, Khawpuia was shot and killed.[736] Such mindless, sporadic acts had a deep-seated impact on the Mizo populace and

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[734] TNA UK FCO 37/267. E. H. M. Counsell to R. W. Renwick, 7 March 1967.

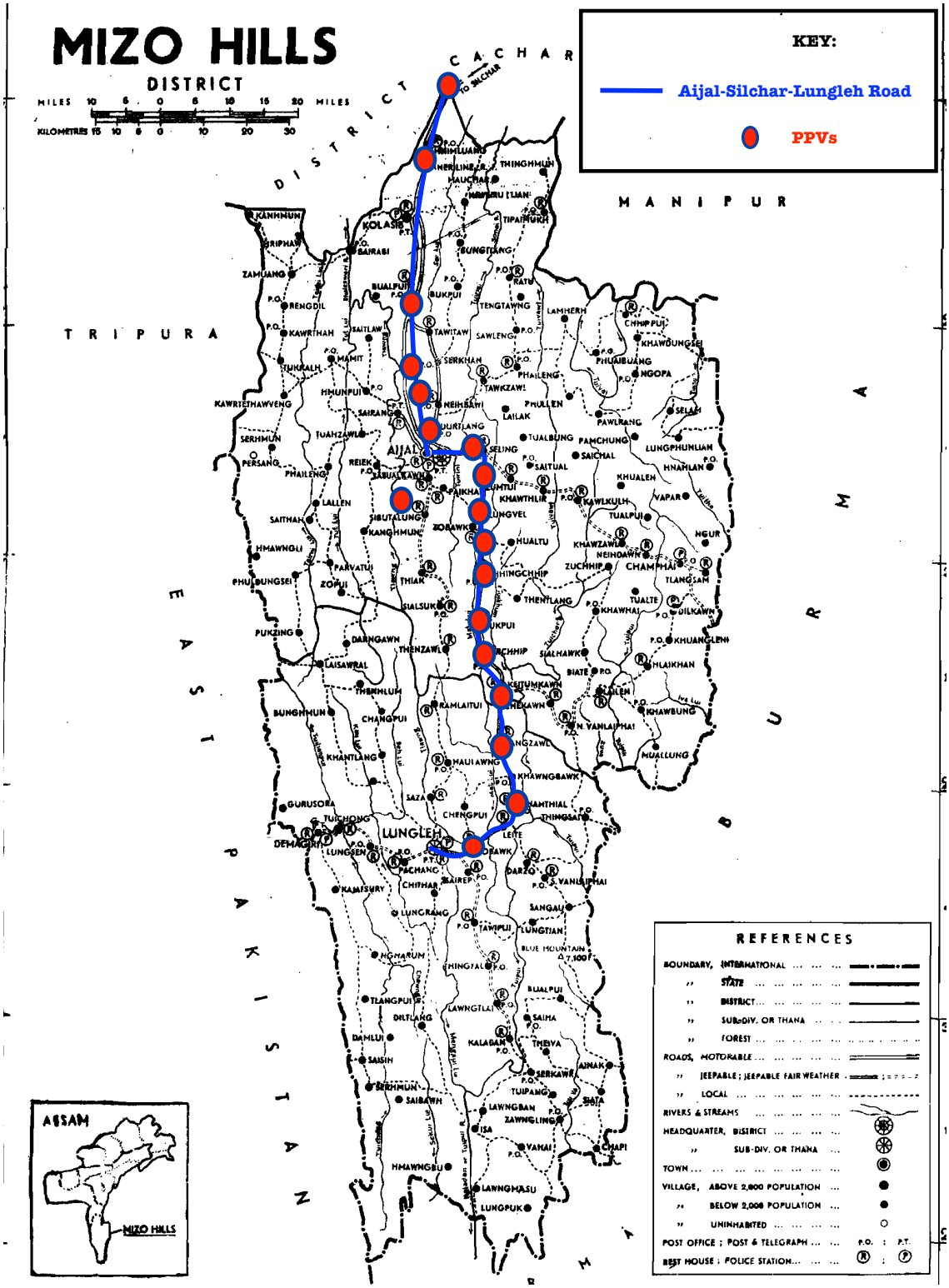
[735] ASA CMS 11/67. Joint Secretary, TA and WBC department, 'Meeting Minutes', 17 April 1967.

[736] ASA CMS 11/67. Lalbuaia to Chief Minister of Assam, 'Disturbances in Mizo District', 20 July 1967. A series of further allegations were put forward by Lalbuaia. Considering that Lalbuaia was staunchly anti-MNF, his narration of security force conduct was especially telling. He, for example, highlighted how Indian Army conduct in the Baktawng PPV centre earlier in the year warranted a complaint by the Mizo District Council, displayed in a letter dated 1 March 1967. However, the letter's calls for the establishment of a committee to investigate the excesses at Baktawng were met with blanket silence. In addition, he accused security forces of dealing out indiscriminate punishment to civilians, whether there was a case for rebel collusion against them or not. He also suggested that Indian personnel were also open to bribes, looking the other way when certain information about rebel movements was presented to them. Finally, he even noted how citizens in Aizawl, supposedly the most secure location in the district, were still liable to being kidnapped by MNF forces, under the 'very nose of security force personnel'.

excesses such as this were part of a broadening dislike of Indian security forces. As one official working in the PPVs noted, disillusionment against the initiative was clear amongst the populace.[737] Rather than winning hearts and minds, Operation Security was actively turning citizens against the state.

The echoes of the Naga war rang across the hills, as the actions of Indian security forces embedded the chasm between highlands identity and Indian nationalism. Village grouping, in its early stages, enabled ground-level excesses that adversely impacted civilian perceptions. These excesses were common in the PPVs. In the eighteen regrouped villages – shown in red in map 9 – recurring quotidian issues hampered the entire premise of Indian COIN.

[737] MSA Gen 1501/124. S. K. Agnihotri to M. Gopalakrishna, 20 April 1967.



Map 9: PPVs in Operation Security[738]

Without winning local support, bringing the civil war to a swift end was incredibly difficult. But within the grouped centres shown in map 9, civilians increasingly found themselves at the mercy of military personnel. Without effective mechanisms in place to keep security forces disciplined – and no clear method of submitting complaints about civilian victimisation – the actions of military forces had a significant impact upon the ultimate failure of the village grouping plan.

Not all security forces acted with impunity. But persistent and routine transgressions unfolded with striking regularity. The victimisation noted at Baktawng (Sl. No. four) – which included the alleged rape of women, routine beatings of citizens and thefts – was echoed in similar complaints raised in the Chhingcchip (Sl. No. five) centre.[739] In both cases, the silence from above was deafening when complaints were made by the MDC.[740] If the premier source of administrative power in the district could not bring attention to excesses that were being committed, then the civilians living within the PPVs had even less chance of exposing military misconduct.

Within the archive, the clearest example of complaints against a specific individual is reflected in the protests levelled against Major Sharma. It is worthwhile noting that the official archive is likely to understate – rather than accentuate – such misconduct. Sharma oversaw the Sercchip (Sl. No. seven) PPV centre. His conduct was brought into question on several occasions. This included attempts to 'outrage the modesty' of a civilian, followed by efforts to

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[738] Template map sourced from E. H. Pakyntein, *District Census Handbook: Mizo Hills* (Gauhati: Tribune Press, 1965).

[739] ASA CMS 11/67. Lalbuaia to Chief Minister of Assam, 'Disturbances in Mizo District', 20 July 1967.

[740] ASA CMS 11/67. Lalbuaia, 'Baktawng Incident – 17 & 18 February 1967'.

bribe citizens, provided by battalion funds, to ensure silence.[741] Numerous cases about Sharma's misconduct towards civilian women were highlighted. These offenses created a 'deep' impact on the civilian population about the way Mizo citizens were treated by an increasingly stereotyped Indian other.[742]

As security force behaviour deepened civilian animosity towards the state, other aspects of India's COIN strategy compounded the failure to win hearts and minds. Aspirations for state-led publicity tours within the MHD were hampered by a lack of basic utilities. This ensured plans, such as film screenings, could not take place.[743] Lack of labour enforced the decision to coerce civilians into work. This was followed by delays in payment to these workers, which only furthered the discontent.[744] Added to this was a broader sense of operational ineffectiveness. In certain cases where MNF volunteers were captured, bribery of corrupt officials ensured that rebels slipped through the net of security forces.[745] Reports of government staff still being targeted by the separatist movement continued despite the existence of the PPVs.[746] This was a story of widespread COIN inefficiency.

To compound the issues noted so far, the MNF's control over the interior regions meant that some PPVs took significant time to establish, whilst the Kawnpui centre was noted to be under government control on paper only. Indeed, it was described as a 'hotbed' of separatist

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[741] MSA Gen 1413/117. Extract from a Secret Report dated 13 August 1967.

[742] *Ibid.*

[743] MSA Gen 1494/124. U. S. Gupta to Deputy Commissioner Mizo Hills, 26 June 1967.

[744] MSA Gen 1413/117. R. Natarajan to Jaswant Singh, 28 October 1967.

[745] MSA Gen 1413/117. Jaswant Singh to R. Natarajan, 'Handing over of arrested persons', 27 October 1967; MSA Gen 1505/125. K. C. Lalsangzuali to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 21 November 1967.

[746] *Ibid.*

activity.[747] In a similar vein, the expansion of control over the Zobawk (Sl. No. eighteen) centre was a drawn-out and contested process.[748] The quotidian resentment against government security forces in other PPVs ensured that citizens in the Zobawk region were in no rush to submit to Indian military rule. Although the PPVs should have been areas where a modicum of normality was restored – considering the heavy military presence – skirmishes between government and separatist forces continued with regularity.[749]

Despite a relatively clear COIN strategy, significant problems hampered state-led efforts across 1967. Confronting the MNF's influence in the interior was always going to be a difficult challenge for Indian security forces, but the way COIN operations unfolded made the task far more arduous. But it is important to stress that this was a relatively new form of operations, and the swiftness of the Mizo uprising was especially startling. Teething issues were to be expected. They could be explained if early mistakes prompted improvements. The setbacks of 1967 did not necessarily dictate a complete failure. But as India's COIN strategy in the Mizo Hills expanded, inefficiency and ineffectiveness were persistent staples. This persistence across 1967-70 ensured the overall failure of India's counterinsurgency operations against the Mizo separatist movement.

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[747] MSA Gen 1505/125. Interrogation statement of kidnapped Purna Bahadur Lohar, U.D. Assistant, Kawnpui PPV Centre, 27 September 1967.

[748] MSA Gen 1509/125. Lianngura Sailo to the Commissioner, Cachar & Mizo District, 'Zobawk PPV Centre', 1 July 1967.

[749] For the skirmishes around Aizawl see MSA Gen 1494/124. Brigadier Major, Assam Rifles, '61 Mountain Brigade, Aijal Alarm Scheme', 20 February 1967; MSA Gen 1406/116. R. Natarajan to head of offices in Aijal for circulation amongst staff, 'Notice', 28 February 1967.

By July 1967 Rs. 37,357,613 had been spent by the Indian state on the Mizo civil war.[750] By mid-1968 there were thought to be around 70,000 Indian troops tied down in India's northeast, with around 20,000 operating in the MHD.[751] This was a concerted effort to eradicate insurgency in the highlands, but the unimpressive expansion of COIN operations undercut this commitment in resources. By 1970 the Mizo rebel movement was still at large. The state failed to win the hearts and minds of the Mizo populace as an array of offences were committed against citizens of the district.

After Operation Security, three further waves of village regrouping unfolded between 1967-70. Forty more centres were established under the Approved Centres scheme, followed by another twenty-six regrouped villages in the 'Voluntary' Centres initiative. Finally, seventeen further centres were established under the Extended Loop Areas plan. Overall, the scale of these initiatives had an unprecedented impact on the day-to-day lives of the citizens of the MHD. Table 18 gives an overview of civilians affected by the four waves of village grouping.

[750] ASA PLB 236/1967. Deputy Secretary to Government of Assam, 9 August 1967.

[751] *Central Intelligence Bulletin* (Central Intelligence Agency, 8 June 1968); *India's Troubled Eastern Region* (Central Intelligence Agency, 26 July 1968).

Table 18: ***Total Village Grouping statistics in the MHD.***[752]

Sl. No.	Heading	Original (Population)	Shifted	Total
1	PPVs (18 Centres)	13,315	30,241	43,556
	Kolasib	3,219	0	32,19
	19 Centres (including Kolasib)	16,534	30,241	46,775
2	Approved Centres (40 Centres)	34,450	54,465	88,915
3	Voluntary (26 Centres)	23,721	23,435	47,156
4	Extended Loop Areas (17 Centres)	15,919	18,276	34,195
	102 Centres	**90,624**	**126,417**	**217,041**

Before the first wave in 1967, there were seven hundred and sixty-four villages in the district. Fast-forward to 1970, and the number of villages had drastically reduced to two hundred and forty-eight. One hundred and two settlements were manipulated and forged by village grouping operations.[753] The gravity of these changes cannot be overstated. In sum, as shown in table 19, over two-thirds of the population of the MHD were directly impacted by village grouping.

Table 19: ***Citizens affected by Indian village regrouping schemes.***[754]

	Number	Percentage
District Population, 1969	316,950	n/a
Total Grouped Population	217,041	68%
Total Ungrouped Population	99,909	32%

[752] Stats derived from MSA Gen 1496/124. Group Populations.

[753] C. Nunthara, 'Grouping of Villages in Mizoram: Its Social and Economic Impact', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16.30 (1981), 1237–40.

[754] Stats derived from MSA Gen 1496/124. Group Populations.

Despite this massive effort to restructure the fabric of Mizo society, the MNF was still active, and the civilian population's anti-Indian resentment became stronger than ever.[755]

In certain centres with notable anti-MNF feeling, Indian security forces did little to ingratiate themselves to citizens. An episode in Tlungvel – Sl. No. three in the PPV scheme – is revealing.[756] Pro-government civilians in Tlungvel submitted repeated requests to Indian forces for a security post, but the appeals were rejected. In the event of an attack, an alternate plan was concocted. A volunteer force was established, that undertook patrol duties to watch for rebel attacks. Indian security forces were supposed to respond if the volunteers signalled an imminent assault. When an MNF raid party did attack on 5 January 1968, the volunteer force on patrol signalled to security forces that an offensive was looming. Security forces ignored the warning and rebels entered the village, burned eighteen houses and left around Rs. 15,000 in damages. More important than the economic destruction was the disillusionment of the villagers of Tlungvel. They had aided security forces against the MNF but faced only adversity for their efforts. In these circumstances, it is plain to see why villagers preferred acquiescence to MNF demands rather than outright opposition.

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[755] It should be noted that in addition to the village grouping waves other tactics were used by Indian forces. Notions of arming the small pockets of government-friendly citizens, for self-defence against rebel forces, were considered but ultimately rejected. Curfews were established in the wider district and were maintained and altered in adaptation to local requirements, without any major success. Despite the MNF's persistent use of international borders, security forces were unable to create any coherent strategy to hinder the porousness. A ban was placed on certain equipment – such as mountain clothing and survival gear – which civilians were suspected of supplying to rebel forces. But illicit trade routes, which especially utilised rivers running out of the district, were similarly difficult to control. Altogether, there was little success in these more minor tactics. It was the village grouping initiative that ultimately dictated the outcome of Indian COIN operations. See ASA CMS 11/67. Joint Secretary, TA and WBC department, 'Meeting Minutes', 17 April 1967; MSA Gen 1406/116. A. Rahman to Commissioner of Cachar-Mizo Division, Silchar, 'Cachar-Mizo Border', 17 May 1967; MSA Gen 1509/125. R. Natarajan, Public Notice, 19 June 1967; MSA Gen 1509/125. R. Natarajan, Memo No. AGJ 29/67/98, 6 October 1967; MSA Gen 1406/116. N. H. Narayan to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'Security Check', 22 October 1967.

[756] MSA Gen 1504/125. AAO Thingsulthliah to Deputy Commissioner, PPV Branch, Mizo District, 'Depredation by MNF at Tlungvel on the night of 5 January 1968', 8 January 1968.

Added to the inability to keep pro-government volunteers safe were instances where informants were exposed to rebel intimidation. An incident at the Thingsulthliah centre – Sl. No. two from Operation Security – was notable. An informant working for the Administrative Officer supplied information on a suspected MNF collaborator.[757] The suspected collaborator was interviewed by police but quickly released. The problem came in the aftermath of the suspect's release. The informant's identity was made known to the suspect, leading to open public threats made by the accused. Even in rarer cases where COIN operations produced information networks, the inability to keep informants safe – and their identity protected – further hampered ground-level government aid.

The inability to safeguard informants expanded beyond the Thingsulthliah centre. In Kolasib, a rare example of the nature of gendered violence – beyond the multiple examples of sexual violence conducted by security forces – was evident in the case of Lalsangzuali.[758] The problems in recovering indigenous voices from the archive have already been identified, but the majority of those that are uncovered are male.[759] The insight of Lalsangzuali, a female

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[757] MSA Gen 1504/125. AAO Thingsulthliah to the Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 12 January 1968.

[758] The more obvious cases included the offences noted above and below, committed by those such as Sharma. But as numerous gendered approaches to history have revealed in the past few decades, gendered violence can take many forms and embed in a variety of ways. For some examples of work that interrogates the relationship between gender on the one hand and violence and warfare on the other, see Srobana Bhattacharya, 'Gender, Insurgency, and Terrorism: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30.6–7 (2019), 1077–88; Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*; Arpita Chakraborty, 'Can Postcolonial Feminism Revive International Relations?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52.20 (2017), 51–57; Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Vanessa Farr, 'Scared Half to Death: The Gendered Impacts of Prolific Small Arms', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 27.1 (2006), 45–59; *Gender and the Great War*, ed. by Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Margaret Randolph Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 31–49.; Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, 'Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations', *American Political Science Review*, 109.3 (2015), 488–506.

[759] This is despite the fact female volunteers existed within the MNF, alongside the widespread female support that existed for the Mizo separatist cause. Mary Vanlalthanpuii has suggested that women's voices have at times been repressed in the story of the Mizo civil war. As she noted, 'while the male freedom fighters were often depicted as having sacrificed themselves for the freedom of the country and have since become famous politicians, women were not recognized as volunteers in the MNF's history, politics, or even by their own relatives or in their own localities. A striking example of this was the granddaughter of Zahmingliani who lived in the same locality

government informant operating in Kolasib, offers a rare angle for reflection. As with the incident at Thingsulthliah, the lack of protocols in place to keep the identity of informants discrete exposed Lalsangzuali. She noted how, after her cover was blown, rebel forces 'got hold of me and most unceremoniously cropped my long and lustrous hair leaving me half-dead in shame and humiliation'.[760] The nature of punishment is notable, an explicitly gendered form of violence which did not have parallel for male 'traitors'. Lalsangzuali subsequently refused to operate in Kolasib, offering another example of the inability to protect informants.[761]

As with most of the instances cited in this section, the issues with informants witnessed at Kolasib and Thingsulthliah were symptomatic of wider structural problems within Indian COIN designs. Plans were made for an annual fund to remunerate civilians that provided information on MNF movements.[762] The result was an ad hoc fund cobbled together, rather than an annual pot, that was left with the civilian administration.[763] The civil-military conundrum appeared once more in this instance. Any information gathered by Indian intelligence was sent straight back to New Delhi, so the civil administration was left out of the loop and required their own networks.[764] Without centralised coordination, sporadic, disjointed information networks were established. Even when these were successful, they were often plagued by inefficiency. For example, an informant aided the confiscation of several firearms

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as her grandmother. When asked about her grandmother, she said she had never heard that her grandmother had participated in the MNF movement'. See Mary Vanlalthanpuii, *Women's Action in the Mizo National Front Movement, 1966-1987* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2019), p. 10.

[760] MSA Gen 1501/124. K. C. Lalsangzuali to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 21 November 1967.

[761] *Ibid.*

[762] ASA PLB 353/1967. B. C. Cariapa to Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 24 November 1967.

[763] ASA PLB 353/1967. A. C. Ray to Special Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 13 July 1970.

[764] *Ibid.*

at a house in the Sihphir centre – Sl. No. nine – in January 1969.[765] But it took until July for a response about remuneration to even be acknowledged, never mind paid.[766] The mechanisms in place to support information networks within the grouped regions were another example of inefficiency.

By mid-1969, Indian COIN operations were best reflected by a tour undertaken by the Mizo District Congress Committee (MDCC) to the regrouped villages.[767] That the tour could take place indicated that security forces held sway over the grouped centres by this point. But this was the extent of positivity for the state. The findings of the MDCC plainly demonstrated the lack of progress made since the initiation of Operation Security. The structural issues that hampered the scheme in 1967 were still evident, such as the conditions of buildings that officials were working in.[768] Meanwhile, it was noted how the atmosphere in the grouped villages revealed 'no sign or hope for the people' living under the initiative.[769] The damning report is corroborated by the archival evidence presented from within the grouped villages in 1969.

Back at Tlungvel, for example, the violations of security forces provided an example of how the teething issues witnessed in 1967 were no longer start-up problems. Rather, they were part of the normality of life in a grouped centre. Complaints made against Major

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[765] ASA PLB 353/1967. A. K. Palit to Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 28 January 1969.

[766] ASA PLB 353/1967. G. K. Medhi to A. K. Palit, 7 July 1969.

[767] The MDCC was originally established in 1961 as a minor institution under the direction of the APCC. It eventually became an official organ of the INC in March 1972. See Jerry Lalmuansanga, 'Indian National Congress in Mizoram: A Study on the Electoral Performance and Policies (2008-2013)' (unpublished masters dissertation, Mizoram University, 2017), p. 5.

[768] MSA Gen 1419/117. Hrangchuana to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 2 July 1969.

[769] *Ibid.*

Shekhawat provided a rare – but ironic – case of efficient civil-military unison as both worked to cover up the transgressions of the Major. After complaints were made against Shekhawat interviews were held. But Shekhawat, a clearly intimidatory figure, sat in on hearings, which predictably led to a reluctance amongst civilians to follow up their allegations.[770] The flagrant disregard for impartial procedure was obvious.

Tlungvel appears so predominantly in the archive because it offers a rare example where complaints did reach an official level. The Mizo Deputy Commissioner – K. K. Sinha – was actively made aware of transgressions undertaken by Tlungvel's Administrative Officer, A. Ahmed. In addition to complaints about Indian staff drunkenly harassing civilians at Tlungvel, Ahmed's conduct came under the microscope.[771] Ahmed was accused of drunkenly beating a porter so badly he could no longer work.[772] Sinha attained proof and sought to act upon the transgressions that plagued the village since its original allocation as a PPV in 1967.[773] Once more, the question of archival silence arises. At Tlungvel, repeated and persistent offenses of various kinds were required before the Mizo Deputy Commissioner was made aware of the scale of mismanagement. It is likely, considering the haphazard nature of Indian COIN operations in the MHD, that many more examples like Tlungvel happened, but went under the radar of official documentation.

Though there were likely to be many undocumented incidents, the archive is still replete with data reflecting the haphazard nature of Indian COIN. By 1970 the first delegation of public

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[770] MSA Gen 1504/125. R. Dengthuama to Pu Ray, 11 November 1970.

[771] MSA Gen 1504/125. A. Ahmed to K. K. Sinha, 16 July 1969.

[772] MSA Gen 1504/125. Gopin Baske to Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 7 July 1969.

[773] MSA Gen 1504/125. K. K. Sinha to A. Ahmed, 10 July 1969. Though there is little indication that Ahmed or Shekhawat received any meaningful punishment for their actions.

officials was allowed to tour the grouped villages. Their findings mirrored those of the conducted tour of the MDCC delegation the previous year. Overall, a picture was presented of overwhelming discontent in a chaotically managed village grouping initiative.[774] The animosity and disenchantment levelled at the government by vast sections of the Mizo populace by 1970 was fundamentally a result of Indian COIN operations.[775] Indian COIN aimed to defeat to the MNF. To do so, it attempted to win the hearts and minds of Mizo civilians. It clearly failed. By 1970, four years after the beginning of the Mizo civil war, the bleak situation in the district reflected the overwhelmingly poor response of the state to the second insurgency in the Assam highlands.

Reflecting on COIN failures in the Mizo Hills

The extensive archival research in the previous section paints a clear picture. The success story narrative of Indian COIN operations is wrong. Rather, a wide-ranging series of problems and ineffectiveness curtailed India's COIN strategy. This was consistent throughout the village grouping initiatives, enacted between 1967-70. This reinterpretation has important ramifications.

The inefficiency that defined Indian COIN operations produced a failure in three guises: humanitarian, ideological and operational. These failures were important because they directly correlated with the facets of the long decolonisation central to this thesis. Humanitarian failure contributed to an 'us and them' mentality in the MHD, a strikingly similar fallout to the Naga

[774] TNA UK FCO 37/735. P. J. Fowler to South Asian Department, FCO. London, 'Mizos', 24 June 1970.

[775] For more discontent in 1970 across the MHD, see MSA Gen 1504/125. Lalthangpula to the member i/c Law and Education, Mizo District Council, 'Village Council', 16 August 1970; MSA Gen 1504/125. Lalthangpuia to Commander 61 Mountain Brigade, 17 September 1970.

conflict. As in the Naga conflict, this entrenched identity formations against Indian nation-building aspirations. The ideological failure of Indian COIN compounded this effect on identity formation since the mantra of hearts and minds failed to resonate. The operational failure was notable for two reasons. First, the time taken to defeat the Mizo rebel movement shaped perceptions about state capacity that were already evident because of the Naga war. Second, this timeframe allowed the MNF to follow the Naga underground's lead, as they exploited the geography of the northeast and India's international relations to aid its separatist agenda. The MNF – for instance – forged links with other nascent nationalist movements in the northeast. This created long-term issues for the northeast's stability, a completely overlooked facet of the Mizo civil war. Altogether, therefore, Indian COIN operations had ramifications that spread far beyond the Mizo Hills.

Beginning with the humanitarian aspect, the previous section should make it abundantly clear that Sundar's conclusions were accurate: Indian COIN operations in the Mizo Hills were a humanitarian failure. The Indian state did not uphold its duty – as a democracy – to its citizens. It would be naïve to suggest that anomalous rogue officials should constitute a failure of COIN. A perfect COIN campaign has never unfolded.[776] Instead, any comprehensive analysis should consider whether these transgressions were an outlier to an otherwise well-run and fluid operation. The wide-ranging nature of offenses, as well as the breadth and persistence of them, indicate that excesses were not anomalous occurrences. Rather, they were a routine part of Indian COIN in the MHD.

[776] Celeste Ward Gventer, David Martin Jones and M. L. R. Smith, 'Minting New COIN: Critiquing Counter-Insurgency Theory', in Gventer et al, *New Counter-Insurgency Era*, pp. 9-31.

The findings within the archive enforce Sundar's conclusions. She suggested that 'grouping hugely increased the support for the insurgents, not necessarily ideologically, but as a matter of justice'.[777] Repeatedly, the state publicly proclaimed it was conducting an internal operation against its own civilians rather than fighting a war against an external foe.[778] War against an external foe would still be conditioned by international humanitarian norms, but greater accountability was required in an internal war against Indian citizens. The state consistently botched the duty of care owed to its residents. This humanitarian conclusion is the clearest, least contestable conclusion about Indian COIN operations. It does not require too much more research, only greater recognition in academic and public life.

The humanitarian impact on identity formation was accompanied by the ideological failure of COIN; the stated desire to win hearts and minds never happened. A central objective for the state was an ideological victory, to win hearts and minds and turn the populace against separatist forces. The actions of security forces and the structural issues with COIN ensured this did not happen. The result was a final nail in the coffin for any lingering hopes for nation building in the MHD. Because humanitarian failure hardened attitudes against the state, creating an 'us and them' dichotomy, it enforced the broader ideological failure of operations.

This ideological aspect was clear immediately after the Indian Army was deployed, following Operation Jericho, and persisted thereafter. A letter from the Aizawl Citizens Committee to Bimalaprosad Chaliha revealed the pre-existent disconnect between Mizo citizens and the government, in May 1966:

> From the action taken by the Civil and Military Authorit[ies], it appears that all Mizos are under the influence of lawless elements [the MNF]. This concept may be removed from the minds of the authorit[ies]… Otherwise, indiscriminate arrests made by the authorit[ies] brought about hatred towards the Government.[779]

Then, as the year wound to a close and the shift towards counterinsurgency began, the MHD's Deputy Commissioner noted the persistent disconnect:

> A large number of competent officers are required especially under the disturbed conditions prevailing in the district. The Govt. officers are performing their tasks in the interest of the Mizos… and impartially carrying out their duties under the most difficult circumstances to gain the confidence of the Mizos, but if the Mizos wish to continue to have their prejudices it cannot be helped.[780]

The last line is notable, underlying the maintenance of the divide between state and citizen.[781] Then, naturally, transgressions by security forces embedded this gulf.

Incidents where young women were targeted by security forces produced the greatest backlash. For instance, after twelve Mizos were arrested in mid-1967 in the Chhingchhip PPV, only the women were detained whilst the men were sent away to Aizawl. The following report outlined the repercussions:

> Consecutive 3/4 nights [of] cries of the girls [were] heard by the neighbouring houses. It is believed that… Biaktluangi was raped by Major Sharma and Dy. S. P. Sehgal. It was common talk in the centre for a few days after the incident and was deeply resented by all sections of the local people.[782]

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[779] MSA Gen 1399/115. Paul Zakhuma & Lal Ngurauva Ralte to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 13 May 1966.

[780] MSA Gen 1393/115. M. Gopalakrishna to Chief Secretary, Political Dept., Govt. of Assam, 18 October 1966.

[781] The positive appraisal of Indian security forces was consistent with the general trend of official reports in the archive, that exaggerated the performance of state officials to present a rose-tinted assessment that contrasted with the realities that they reported.

[782] MSA Gen 1413/117. Extract from a Secret Report dated 13 August 1967.

The breadth of security force misconduct meant the incident at Chhingchhip was not an outlier in hardening attitudes against the state, as demonstrated in Kolasib later in the year:

> Sangsuali, sister of self styled Depcom. Lalsuiliana was apprehended at Sialsuk and brought to Serchhip on the 16 September '67 and kept in Major Rawley's Basha. The Major was stated to have outraged the modesty of the girl. Two brothers of the girl are JCOs in the Indian Army. Sensation prevails among [the] public in general.[783]

Anti-state attitudes hardened because of Indian COIN operations. This was a complete contradiction to the ideological objective of counterinsurgency, to win hearts and minds.

By the early 1960s – as shown in chapter III – it was clear that ideological aspirations at the centre regarding identity did not translate into tangible results. A dichotomy emerged between highland identity and Indian nationalism. But COIN operations – and the abuses that took place within – solidified this sense of Mizo identity. As a result of COIN operations, Mizo identity was directly opposed to Indian nationalism. In the state's attempts to be militarily strong, it ensured the ideological divide between region and nation crystallised.

As already shown, COIN operations created hostility against security forces and the state. The clearance of Thangte village in the Lungleh region, as part of the village grouping scheme, offers further insight into how the ideological failure of COIN unfolded. According to the records of D. S. Khongdup – the Additional Deputy Commissioner at Lungleh – Thangte was not meant to be part of the regrouping scheme.[784] Despite this, security forces appeared at the village, ordered its residents to leave and 'immediately' burned down the settlement.[785]

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[783] MSA Gen 1413/117. Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, 'note', 26 September 1967.

[784] MSA Gen 1509/125. D. S. Khongdup to Commanding Officer, 3rd Bihar, 23 March 1967.

[785] MSA Gen 1509/125. Translated copy of petition of 22 March 1967 from the V/C President, Thangta to the Addl. Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District, Lungleh.

Villagers petitioned Khongdup, and noted how the existence of young children made travel difficult, whilst the predicament left them fearful for food supplies. The petition ultimately asked for 'sufficient time' if regrouping was critical and noted the angst spread across the village about potential military reprisals.[786] Security forces were keen to press on with their plans, regardless of the pleas of the villagers at Thangte.

At Thangte, as elsewhere in Indian COIN operations, security forces embodied the state. The reality of security force actions was burned villages, violence and flagrant disregard for citizens' rights. The resentment created through these undertakings solidified local ties in opposition to 'Indian' forces responsible for hardship in the district. Not every citizen wanted to join the rebel movement. Far from it.[787] But the way Indian COIN operations unfolded ensured that very few were actively supporting the government, and even less were doing so out of an ideological commitment to the nation.

On the ground, state-led drives for ideological development – such as plans for 'National Integration Week' – had little effect.[788] Ceremonial attempts to obtain oaths were of little value when quotidian actions – evident at Thangte – produced such profound effects on the day-to-day lives of citizens.[789] There was a gaping chasm between the rebel movement and

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[786] *Ibid.*

[787] A letter by Paul Zakhuma in the summer of 1966 displayed the convoluted issue of local loyalties. For example, he was not pro-MNF, but was particularly critical of the MDC and the MU for the way local politics enabled both insurgency and state-led operations. He even suggested that the primary motivation for some separatist volunteers was to destroy the MU, rather than an ideological desire for independence. The final claim is debatable, but the letter nonetheless reflected the various trajectories of support and contestation in the MHD. See MSA Gen 1393/115. Paul Zakhuma to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, Assam, 6 August 1966.

[788] MSA Gen 1509/125. A. N. Kidwai to R. Natarajan, 18 September 1967.

[789] In the rare instances where nationalistic sentiment was displayed – by this point largely confined to civil servants or other government employees – the lack of operational control led to rebel reprisals. For example, after a school employee was instructed to sing the Indian national anthem in the autumn of 1967, word quickly reached

the government, with numerous citizens falling somewhere in the middle after protracted warfare emerged. The nature of Indian COIN ensured little ideological support from Mizo civilians and actively created an obstacle to the mantra of hearts and minds.

Together, the humanitarian and ideological aspects of COIN were critical in the development of identity formation in the post-colonial highlands. The final aspect of operational failure is less obviously apparent but just as important. The Indian state threw a sizeable amount of money, resources, and personnel into the Mizo conflict. This was enforced by a deep resolve to defeat the Mizo separatist movement. By 1970, there was no doubt that security forces had a greater degree of control over the MHD than it did in 1966.[790] Despite this, an operational failure was also evident.

There is a flawed assumption that conditions the traditional understanding of Indian COIN in the Mizo Hills. This logic supposes that, because the war concluded with a lasting peace settlement, COIN operations must have been a success. This is a fallacy. A shifting tide by the early 1970s was hardly a success. The MNF remained undefeated. It continued to operate both within and beyond the region, despite disproportionate odds. In the time taken to resolve the Mizo conflict, key trends emerged from this operational aspect of COIN failure. Insurgencies can be fundamentally difficult to curtail, but the sheer breadth of ineffectiveness of Indian COIN operations actively hindered the state. Ultimately, the remarks of L. Chinzah – identified at the start of this chapter – were the most perceptive. His suggestion that the Indian

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rebel forces, who ensured the school was burned down as a result. See MSA Gen 1501/124. S. K. Agnihotri to Assistant Inspector of Schools, Mizo District, 21 September 1967.

[790] TNA UK FCO 37/735. P. J. Fowler to W. K. Slatcher, 'Mizos', 20 May 1970. For instance, the first elections since 1962 were held in the MHD in 1970. Without greater control over a decent majority of the MHD's settlements, the elections could not have taken place.

Army was 'like an elephant trying to chase a rat' was more insightful that the success story narrative.

Operational failure produced two notable conclusions. The first was the continued evolution of the perception of the Indian state. Chinzah displayed a broader belief within the MHD about the limited capacities of the state. His remarks came in a Pawi-Lakher Regional Council meeting.[791] But this general attitude rang around the MHD. The attack at Tlungvel in early January 1968 revealed the ease at which MNF forces could still operate in the district.[792] And the general threats and sanctions that the MNF were able to impose across the MHD were clear signs of the limits of state control.[793] The internal perception of state capacity was important in reducing civilian support – whether explicit or tacit – for the MNF. The inability to present a more coherent challenge to rebel forces underpinned continued civilian support for the MNF. But more important was the wider perception of state capacity in the northeast and further afield.

The realities of this perception are identified in the conclusion of this thesis, but in short COIN operations conducted by Indian security forces provided another telling lesson for the wider northeast. The state was not able to defeat the Naga movement militarily. As chapter V reveals, the attempt at political compromise with the NNC was also unsuccessful. In the Mizo Hills the state demonstrated that the Naga civil war was not an oddity. Through these

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[791] ASA CMS 11/67. Minutes of the Pawi-Laker Regional Council Budget Session, May 1967.

[792] MSA Gen 1504/125. AAO Thingsulthliah to Deputy Commissioner, PPV Branch, Mizo District, 'Depredation by MNF at Tlungvel on the night of 5 January 1968', 8 January 1968.

[793] This continued well into the 1970s. It was evident, for example, in the MNF's drive against the consumption of alcohol. This led not only to ordinary civilians being affected, but also administrative officials. This included an Rs. 100 fine for an Administrative Officer that hosted a 'zu' party. See MSA Gen 1434/119. Superintendent of Police SB & CID, Mizoram, 27 June 1974.

occurrences, the state proved it had a severe, profound inability to confront insurgency. This knowledge was central in the emergence of insurgent groups and armed units from the late 1970s onwards across the northeast. With the lessons drawn from the Naga and Mizo civil wars, the 'new rebellions' from the 1970s identified the state as a vulnerable enemy.[794]

The second notable conclusion stems from the time taken to defeat the rebel movement, a direct result of ineffective COIN operations. The MNF's durability ensured it acted as a key conduit for the spread of insurgency in the region. This was especially notable as links were established between the Mizo separatist movement and the development of indigenous nationalism in Tripura.[795] In the late 1960s, the Sengkrak movement was born.[796] Its existence was directly enabled by the MNF. Joint raids were conducted and the MNF put the budding movement in touch with contacts in East Pakistan.[797] Although the Sengkrak movement was short-lived, instability in Tripura was just emerging. Hrangkawl, a key indigenous leader at the forefront of this instability was directly influenced by the MNF.[798]

Beyond Tripura, the broader collusion between the disparate separatist movements of the Indo-Burmese borderlands developed alongside the MNF's survival. MNF raids were noted

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[794] Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, p. 135.

[795] For some introductory notes on the historical background to Tripura's identity movements, see, Harihar Bhattacharyya, 'The Emergence of Tripuri Nationalism, 1948–50', *South Asia Research*, 9.1 (1989), 54–71; Harihar Bhattacharyya, 'The Reang Rebellion in Tripura, 1943-45 and the Birth of an Ethnic Identity', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 32.3 (1995), 375–90.

[796] For notes on the Sengrak movement, the birth of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti in the late 1960s and the links to the MNF, see Harihar Bhattacharyya, *Radical Politics and Governance in India's North East: The Case of Tripura* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 182-96; Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire*, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Lancer, 2008); Mahadev Chakravarti, 'Insurgency in Tripura: Some Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36.25 (2001), 2229–31.

[797] TNA UK FCO 37/267. M. G. Macdonald to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 27 June 1968; P. J. Fowler to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 16 May 1968.

[798] Bhaumik, *Insurgence Crossfire*, p. 196.

in Manipur, with identity movements there likewise on the rise.[799] Links across the international border with Burma, especially with Chin nationalists, were also a staple.[800] The utilisation of the geopolitics of the northeast, a precedent already established by the Naga rebel movement, was accelerated by the MNF. The effectiveness of SALW was repeatedly shown by Mizo rebels who facilitated other emergent nationalist movements' access to weapons.[801] In sum, the precedents for insurgency established by the Nagas were embedded during the Mizo civil war. The inability of the state to defeat the MNF ensured these precedents had significant traction in a region that was showing signs of increasing volatility.

Therefore, the ramifications of India's COIN failure in the MHD were vast, permeating into both ideological and practical realms. Before moving on to the final chapter of the thesis, one final conclusion is worthy of brief rumination. There were clear structural issues evident in the village grouping scheme, ensuring that ground-level transgressions could persist. Yet, taking a step back, it should be noted that the entire premise of COIN operations was built on flawed logic. The entire utility of European COIN has been brought under the microscope, especially in the past two decades. Unbeknown to Indian military planners at the time, their go-to templates for success were hardly a reliable guide for successful counterinsurgency. In this sense, the entire premise of Indian COIN rested on a foundation that was unstable from the outset. This does not excuse the excesses that took place, but it does signpost how knowledge production can undermine military operations from their very inception.

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[799] TNA UK FCO 37/267. M. G. Macdonald to Office of the BHC, 'Mizos', 25 July 1968.

[800] TNA UK FCO 37/267. M. G. Macdonald to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 27 June 1968; P. J. Fowler to R. A. Burns, 'The Mizo Hills and Manipur', 4 April 1968.

[801] TNA UK FCO 37/267. P. J. Fowler to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos', 2 May 1968.

The utilisation of village grouping schemes was drawn from half-baked operations elsewhere, where circulating the illusion of hearts and minds served a greater purpose as a mythology than a practical tenet of operations. As David French has suggested, 'coercion, not conciliation, was the mainstay of British policy' when it came to counterinsurgency.[802] This was a problematic precedent for the Indian military. Whether India's COIN strategy ever had a genuine commitment to hearts and minds is debatable. But, regardless of intent, its failure was clear to see, as demonstrated in this chapter.

Conclusion.

By the end of the flawed COIN operations in the Mizo Hills the Indian state solidified its reputation as a relatively weak institution that could not confront armed identity movements in its northeastern borderlands. This reality was apparent in the broader northeast by the late 1970s, as discussed in the thesis' conclusion. COIN similarly compounded the inability to bridge the divide between highlands identity and Indian nationalism, ensuring that even today a distinct regional identity persists in Mizoram without an emotional attachment to the state.[803] Meanwhile, the durability of the MNF essentially confirmed what the NNC hinted at, in conducting anti-state operations. All this is a far cry from the apparent success story of Indian COIN operations, which continues to persist as a popular mythology. The transference from the early stages of the Naga civil war mainly resonated in the highlands, at least in the shorter-term. But together, the lessons from the Mizo and Naga civil wars – and their longevity – ultimately acted as a beacon for the wider northeast.

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[802] French, *The British Way*, p. 175.

[803] P. Thirumal, Laldinpuii, and C. Lalrozami, *Modern Mizoram: History, Culture, Poetics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). See chapter three, 'the postcolonial inheritance of *Puma Zai*'.

By the time the fourth wave of village grouping unfolded in the MHD in 1970, the end of the long decolonisation was close. Chapter V delves into the end of the long decolonisation. It identifies how the inability to negotiate a political settlement with the NNC between 1964-72 simultaneously contributed to state perception in a comparable way to COIN operations in the Mizo Hills. It also investigates the logic behind the political and economic reorganisation of the northeast in 1972, where significant opportunities existed to cast off the shackles colonial precedents had established. A different politico-economic outlook was created for the northeast, which eschewed the colonial template evident until 1972. But this new framework's own inherent problems ensured the transition towards a unique northeastern region – complete with its peculiar amalgamation of conflict dynamics and instability – was underway.

Chapter V: Peace talks, federal restructuring, and the end of the long decolonisation, 1964-72.

Introduction.

By the 1960s the highlands were defined by crises. Civil wars abounded in the Naga and Mizo Hills, whilst the APHLC's demands for statehood for the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills continued.[804] This thesis concludes by analysing two opportunities for the state. These opportunities had the potential to assuage both short-term crises in the highlands and long-term structural challenges for the northeast. The first was the Naga ceasefire, from 1964-72. The second was the political and economic reorganisation of the northeast, implemented in 1972.

The Naga ceasefire provided opportunities for state perception. The Naga and Mizo campaigns displayed state military limitations, but conflict resolution offered an opportunity to demonstrate its diplomatic efficacy. Meanwhile, the reorganisation of the northeast created the potential to resolve the many challenges that plagued the state since independence. The skewed governance model, the inability to initiate state-building and the antagonism towards Indian rule could all have been eased with an effective political and economic restructuring of the region. In both instances, opportunities were squandered. These discarded prospects enabled the emergence of the 'exceptional' northeastern region from the late 1970s onwards.

[804] Despite the Sino-Indian War cooling the more extreme tendencies of the APHLC, it did not lessen the statehood demand. As this chapter shows, this demand was never dropped, and finally came to fruition as part of the political reorganisation of the northeast.

By 1972 the northeast was fashioned as a post-colonial construct, a vision of state design which departed politically and economically from the colonial model that preceded it.[805] This long decolonisation was not a successful transformation. The postcolonial migraine established in the 1940s in the Assam highlands was never resolved. Further, the problems created along the way – related to state perception, identity formation and insurgent operations – were problematic, transferable factors that survived the 1972 reorganisation. The political and economic model for the northeast was transformed, but the lingering issues established during decolonisation persisted. The proliferation of militant activity from the 1970s onwards in the northeast – the beginning for the region's unique amalgamation of conflict dynamics and instability – was a direct consequence of this inability to resolve the challenges of decolonisation.

Ceasefires and peace talks in the Naga Hills, 1964-72.

The Indian government could not reverse time. The Naga and Mizo wars revealed the state's limitations when confronting insurgency. But the peace talks that commenced after the 1964 ceasefire – between the Indian state and the Naga rebel movement – presented a chance for an alternative route to conflict resolution. Rather than forcing the Naga underground into submission, the chance for political compromise appeared. But peace talks floundered. The ceasefire persisted until 1972 in name only. The lost chance for peace did little for state perception, whilst leaving the long-running civil war at a crossroads as the close of the long decolonisation loomed.

[805] Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, pp. 1, 25-46.

Though chapter II focused primarily on the state's military approach to the Naga civil war, there was a political strategy too. This approach hindered the prospects for peace in the NHD. In 1957, the central government forged a dialogue with the – admittedly few – state-friendly Naga figures.[806] The hastily assembled Naga People's Convention (NPC) was identified by the Indian central government as the legitimate negotiating institution in the district.[807] Though not quite a government stooge, the NPC lacked any regional clout to act as a mouthpiece for Naga consciousness in the way the NNC had.[808] The decision to bypass the NNC altogether in negotiations was problematic. Successful conflict resolution requires genuine commitment from both sides.[809] By excluding the entirety of the Naga underground, the state torpedoed its chances of successful negotiations before they even began.

The underground labelled the NPC traitors, which undermined settlements such as the 'Sixteen-Point Agreement'.[810] Negotiations unfolded between the NPC and the Indian government from 1957 onwards but stood little chance of success whilst the underground

[806] It was logical that negotiations would take place, considering that military stalemates increase the likelihood of talks. See Pechenkina and Thomas, 'Battle Stalemates'.

[807] For instance, in August 1960 Nehru revealed to the Lok Sabha that Phizo had reached out to him for possible talks. As written in *The Times*, 'the Prime Minister pointed out that he could not discuss constitutional matters with him but would soon be doing so with the properly elected representatives of the Naga people.' The centre consistently framed the NPC as the legitimate mouthpiece of Naga consciousness, effectively trying to ignore away the strength of the underground. See 'Naga Charges Denied by Mr. Nehru', *The Times*, 5 August 1960.

[808] TNA UK DO 35/9004. Extract from Calcutta Monthly Summary, No. 5/58, 'Nagas', for period ending 31 May 1958.

[809] Cecilia Albin and Daniel Druckman, 'Equality Matters: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56.2 (2012), 155–82.

[810] Nuh and Lasuh, *The Naga Chronicle*, pp. 201-4. 'The Sixteen Point Agreement'.

remained active and influential.[811] In late 1957 the Naga-Tuensang merger was announced.[812] This was a useful bargaining chip for the state, since the NNC had outlined its desire for the amalgamation of the Tuensang region – formerly part of NEFA – with the NHD after independence.[813] But this chip was effectively wasted. The grant of full statehood, arguably the best hand the state could play, was also squandered because the agreement was not endorsed by the underground. Statehood was announced in 1960 after negotiations with the NPC.[814] But this political compromise – the creation of Nagaland as the sixteenth state of the Indian Union in 1963 – had no effect on the Naga civil war.[815] It was a concession effectively given away by the state.

By the time the ceasefire began in 1964, the central government realised the need for a settlement endorsed by the Naga rebel movement. The rejuvenation of the underground – after the Sino-Indian War – as well as ongoing political strife in the highlands motivated the Indo-Naga ceasefire.[816] In 1964, after notable efforts from the Naga Baptist Church, the ceasefire

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[811] The first meeting between Nehru and an NPC delegation took place in Delhi in September and set the parameters for political concessions. See BL Mss Eur F158/239. 'Amnesty for Naga prisoners', *Indiagram*, 28 October 1957.

[812] *Ibid*; Lok Sabha Debate. Naga Hills-Tuensang Area Bill. 25 November 1957.

[813] This relationship worked both ways, with a groundswell of support within Tuensang for the NNC and a merger of all Naga inhabited regions. By April 1955, for instance, the NEFA administration publicly stated that villagers in the Tuensang region had demanded independence for the Naga region. See TNA UK DO 35/5349. G. B. Shannon to G. H. Middleton, 17 June 1955.

[814] Lok Sabha Debate. 1 August 1960. Statement by the Prime Minister Re: The Naga Hills and Tuensang Area. 13.42 hours.

[815] TNA UK DO 196/64. *India: Nagaland and its Importance to North-East India* (London: Commonwealth Relations Office Print, 1963).

[816] In addition to the demands of the APHLC – which continued after the Sino-Indian War despite the relative rapprochement with the government – were anxieties about the rising strength of the MNF. For example, the smuggling of ammunition and cartridges in the Mizo District in 1963 was noted to be 'most disquieting', considering the political climate. In this environment, a ceasefire provided some respite for the state. See ASA HMI 51/63. I. Ali to Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam, 23 September 1963.

was announced.[817] On 24 May, the ceasefire was signed, followed by its ratification in August. It officially began on 6 September 1964.[818] Indian government delegations then met with rebel Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) representatives five times during the remainder of the year.[819] Peace talks unfolded intermittently until 1972 with numerous extensions to the ceasefire.[820] Despite the length of the truce, peace talks did not resolve the conflict, which reignited in 1972 after the ceasefire formally lapsed.

Academic analysis in India tended to blame the breakdown of the ceasefire on the Naga underground.[821] This oversimplistic view overlooked several nuances. More importantly, it suggested an air of inevitability about the failure of peace talks. This was not the case; peace was possible. Insights from the literature on conflict resolution are helpful to understand this.

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[817] Gordon P. Means and Ingunn N. Means, 'Nagaland-The Agony of Ending a Guerrilla War', *Pacific Affairs*, 39.3/4 (1966), 290–313; Gordon P. Means, 'Cease-Fire Politics in Nagaland', *Asian Survey*, 11.10 (1971), 1005–28 (pp. 1021-22).

[818] ASA CMS 269/64. U. N. Sharma to various, 26 August 1964; U. N. Sharma to various, 29 August 1964; Shihoto Swnetho et al, 'The day of thanksgiving for cease-fire in Nagaland', 18 August 1964. Alongside the announcement that the ceasefire would officially be enacted from midnight of the 5-6 September 1964 was the repeal of the AFSPA in the district. During the ceasefire, therefore, the sub-divisions of Kohima and Mokokchung were no longer listed as 'disturbed areas'.

[819] Additionally, there were several informal meetings in the district to discuss the peace talks. For example, a delegation of Sema Nagas invited the Nagaland Peace Mission to a series of public talks it held between 27-30 October 1964. See ASA CMS 269/64. Ilhosho Khala to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 15 October 1964.

[820] ASA CMS 269/64. Mithun, Kohima to Govsec, Shillong, 22 October 1964. In October 1964 the underground indicated its acceptance of an extension of the ceasefire until the close of the year, and this dynamic of extensions continued until 1972.

[821] It is easy to find this narrative trend in the 1970-80s in journals such as the *Indian Journal of Political Science*, which largely framed the Naga uprising as a minor irritant to a quasi-Whiggish belief in Indian nation-building. More recently, Vivek Chadha has followed a similar argument. For examples of the former literature, see Johari, 'Creation of Nagaland'; Chandrika Singh, 'Nagaland: From a District to a State: Culmination of Democratic Political Process', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 41.4 (1980), 815–32. For Chadha's assessment, see Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, pp. 293-6. Beyond this narrative, the ceasefire is often glossed over in secondary literature. This is evident even in work by scholars such as Namrata Goswami, who have otherwise provided insightful analysis of the Naga conflict. See Das, 'Naga Peace Parleys', pp. 74-75; Goswami, 'Naga Narrative', pp. 295-96.

This literature uses the 'bargaining model' ideal.[822] This ideal suggests that parties within peace talks would inherently prefer a favourable settlement to unending conflict.[823] But to reach a successful conclusion, key obstacles must be overcome, especially 'commitment' problems and 'information' shortages.[824] The former essentially revolves around issues of trust, and the latter on how each side perceives the strength of their opponent. If such obstacles are overcome, a settlement is conceivable.

The declaration of the Naga ceasefire reflected certain logic within conflict resolution research. When insurgent groups survive their initial vulnerability,[825] conduct irregular

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[822] Research in the field varies in quality. A RAND publication, released in 2017, aimed to provide an in-depth appraisal of social science literature on conflict trends. The section on peacebuilding and conflict resolution displayed some of the general shortcomings that exist. Within the report, the authors emphasise questionable narratives, such as how 'changes in global norms explain much of the *post-Cold War decline in intrastate conflict*'. Such assessments completely overlook some of the most fundamental aspects of civil war research. In Fearon and Laitin's seminal 2003 article, they argue against 'conventional wisdom [which] holds that *civil wars proliferated rapidly with the end of the Cold War* and that the root cause of many or most of these has been ethnic and religious antagonisms'. The contention was not that civil wars neatly declined after the Cold War, which is a mere fantasy disproved by empirical analysis (see Therése Pettersson and Kristine Eck, 'Organized Violence, 1989–2017', *Journal of Peace Research*, 55.4 (2018), 535–47.). Instead, Fearon and Laitin critiqued how focus on post-Cold War dynamics clouded an understanding of intrastate conflict. They suggested it led to a championing of the liberal order rather than serious critical analysis of conflict trends. The appraisals in the RAND report more closely mirror Fukuyama's Hegelian commentary about the end of history, and the liberal mythologies that Fearon and Laitin criticise, rather than the incisive research of intrastate conflict. See Fearon and Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency'; Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), 3-18; Stephen Watts et al, *Understanding Conflict Trends: A Review of the Social Science Literature on the Causes of Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), pp. 245-252.

[823] Daniel Druckman and James A. Wall, 'A Treasure Trove of Insights: Sixty Years of JCR Research on Negotiation and Mediation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61.9 (2017), 1898–1924; Fearon, 'Why Do Some'. The bargaining model has been widely applied in broader literature on negotiation and mediation. This was then adapted by scholars interested in intrastate conflict.

[824] For examples of how information and commitment issues are negotiated during conflict resolution, see Daniels, 'How and When'; Gaku Ito and Kaisa Hinkkainen Elliott, 'Battle Diffusion Matters: Examining the Impact of Microdynamics of Fighting on Conflict Termination', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.5 (2020), 871–902. The former suggested amnesties can reduce commitment problems by offering a tool for trust building. The latter notes how battle diffusion can affect information challenges, as warring factions become more accustomed to each other's strengths, capabilities, and resources.

[825] Navin Bapat, 'Insurgency and the Opening of Peace Processes', *Journal of Peace Research*, 42.6 (2005), 699–717.

warfare,[826] control territory in peripheral regions,[827] face successive stalemates with state forces[828] and use terror, peace talks are more likely.[829] All these factors applied to the Naga civil war, as established in chapter II. In addition to the logical nature of the ceasefire, it is critical to understand that talks were not predestined to fail. Several Naga rebel leaders indicated that complete independence from the Indian Union was not necessarily a deal breaker, whilst British and US officials also noted this sentiment.[830] Jayaprakash Narayan – who formed part of the Nagaland Peace Mission – was most sensitive to the question of sovereignty when he suggested that:

> The case put forward by the [Naga] Federal [Government] is historically right; so too is India's case… they are two sides of the same coin… We are not asking that the voluntary participation in the Indian Union should be unconditional… [We] first plan out the form of the [Indo-Naga] relationship, and then ask people to endorse it. To be within the Indian Union might mean many different things.[831]

Terms like independence, sovereignty and autonomy were not always straightforward. Narayan realised that the sticking point was the way rhetoric had been framed, as he noted 'the very

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[826] Balcells and Kalyvas, 'Does Warfare Matter'.

[827] David E. Cunningham, Kristian S. Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, 'It Takes Two: A Dyadic Analysis of Civil War Duration and Outcome', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53.4 (2009), 570–97.

[828] Pechenkina and Thomas, 'Battle Stalemates'; Jeffrey Pugh, 'The Structure of Negotiation: Lessons from El Salvador for Contemporary Conflict Resolution', *Negotiation Journal*, 25.1 (2009), 83–105. Jeffrey Pugh framed this through the concept of 'ripeness', whereby parties within a conflict recognise that mutually detrimental indicators – such as protracted stalemates – exist, leading to a preference for resolution.

[829] Thomas, 'Rewarding Bad Behavior'.

[830] TNA UK DO 133/185. A. M. Simons, 'Rev. Michael Scott', 31 December 1964; Franke, *War and Nationalism*, pp. 106-7.

[831] Lydia Walker, 'Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation for the Postcolonial State and Its Imperial Fragments', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 56.2 (2019), 147–69 (p. 160).

phrase "within the Indian Union" is a red rag to a bull!'.[832] Forging a dialogue about these combustible notions was difficult, but not impossible.

There are a range of indicators which can affect conflict negotiations.[833] During the Naga ceasefire, obstacles were fourfold. First, was lasting resentment in the Naga Hills about the war. Medhi's return to Assam as an MP in 1964 revealed the ingrained animosity that citizens had towards certain politicians. A letter from the Naga Baptist Church, for example, blamed him for 'must of the troubles and sufferings' that occurred during his time as Chief Minister.[834] Another letter suggested he 'should be deported from India as a national criminal because he is the creator of hell in Nagaland'.[835] This vitriol was not reserved solely for Medhi. Hem Baruah – MP for Guwahati – was mocked for his claim to have Naga interests at heart,

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[832] *Ibid.*

[833] Beyond the issues of commitment and information, several additional factors have been identified which can hinder conflict resolution. These can range from macro-level factors such as the emergence of global, liberal norms and the need for an internationally recognised third party mediator. In overcoming issues related to commitment problems, the need for institutional guarantees can be a critical factor. The levels of violence in conflict can dictate the desirability of peace, whilst fragmentation with the rebel group, the way that battles diffuse and the embeddedness of ideological concerns can provide further problems for reaching peace settlements. Finally, one concern increasingly noted within both the academy and in policy is the need to include grassroots organisations in negotiations. See Allard Duursma and Feike Fliervoet, 'Fueling Factionalism? The Impact of Peace Processes on Rebel Group Fragmentation in Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65.4 (2021), 788–812; Carolyn A. Hartzell, 'Explaining the Stability of Negotiated Settlements to Intrastate Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43.1 (1999), 3–22; Chad Hazlett, 'Angry or Weary? How Violence Impacts Attitudes toward Peace among Darfurian Refugees', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.5 (2020), 844–70; Howard and Stark, 'How Civil Wars End'; Ito and Elliott, 'Battle Diffusion'; Eric Keels and Krista Wiegand, 'Mutually Assured Distrust: Ideology and Commitment Problems in Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64.10 (2020), 2022–48; Marina Malamud and José Francisco Alvarado Cóbar, 'Overcoming Barriers to Grassroots Inclusion in Peace Processes', *WritePeace*, 2021 <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2021/overcoming-barriers-grassroots-inclusion-peace-processes?utm_source=phpList&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=SIPRI+Update+February+2021%3A+Nuclear+challenges+in+South+Asia%2C+peace+operations+impacted+by+climate+change%2C+grassroots+inclusion+in+peace+processes%2C+and+more&utm_content=HTML> [accessed 24 February 2021]; Walter, 'Critical Barrier'.

[834] ASA CMS 269/64. Reverend Longri and Kenneth Kerhuo to Bishnuram Medhi, 28 July 1964. Medhi's reign as Governor of Madras came to an end in May 1964, after which he returned to Assam. Medhi had been – to borrow the terminology of a British CRO official – 'kicked upstairs' to his posting in Madras as a result of his unpopularity in Assam's highlands. See TNA DO 196/238. E. G. Norris, 'Highlanders and Lowlanders in Assam', 30 July 1965.

[835] ASA CMS 269/64. Lima Ao to Lal Bahadur Shastri, 31 July 1964.

despite 'never [having] cared to visit Nagaland [during] all these years of our travail'.[836] The Naga Baptist Church noted the following about him:

> Pardon us for being so blunt but the fact remains that your negative approach and patronising attitude with a superior air has not only led to the immediate separation of Naga Hills from Assam but created numerous problems for her for ages to come.[837]

Resentment about the war, and the role of certain politicians, ran deep in the Naga Hills, providing the first obstacle for negotiations.

A second obstacle was public sentiment, in India and the Assam Valley. An article in the *Observer* noted the 'widespread belief in India that if the Army had been left to deal with the problem, then the Nagas' resistance would have been broken long ago'.[838] A letter written by the general secretary of the All India Nationalist Christian Association also revealed this strand of public thought. As the general secretary noted to Bimalaprosad Chaliha,

> Patriotic Indians resent your part in dealing with Naga rebels… [you should] throw out Reve[rend] Michael Scott. No surrender to Phizo and his likes [and] no negotiations under Naga duress… Talk of peace with rebels when they act war [is] unthinkable. [The] rest of India demands no further talks until [an] unconditional surrender… What do you stand for… You have to answer. India expects you to preserve her intergration [sic] and sovereignty.[839]

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[836] ASA CMS 269/64. Reverend Longri and Kenneth Kerhuo to Bishnuram Medhi, 28 July 1964.

[837] *Ibid*.

[838] Cyril Dunne, 'Call to End Naga Peace Mission', *The Observer*, 27 December 1964 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/475690797/97503F740DF94DEFPQ/1> [accessed 24 February 2021]. Also quoted in Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 107.

[839] ASA CMS 269/64. F. P. Fatehmasih to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 7 September 1964.

At national level, discourses of this nature were common.[840] This was mirrored in parts of the Assam Valley, which elicited angry rebukes from Naga citizens.[841] Altogether, there was notable national and regional public opposition to the ceasefire.

A third element to add into the mix was the ideological nature of the Naga movement. Greater focus on ideology in recent literature led Eric Keels and Krista Wiegand to identify how 'indivisible' factors – such as ideas – can be overlooked within the bargaining model construct.[842] The diametrically opposed ideological outlook of the Naga underground and the Indian government presented a relatively obvious obstacle, but one that could nonetheless be overlooked in traditional conflict literature.[843] The Naga rebel movement could not be bought. A lasting political settlement that reconciled Indian claims over the Naga Hills with the rebel desire for independence was required.

The fourth and final obstacle was factionalism in the Naga ranks. As identified in chapter II, the use of terror affected the popularity of the NNC after 1956. By the time of the ceasefire, the movement enjoyed less popular support and Phizo's position as leader was more

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[840] ASA CMS 269/64. H. K. Pathak to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, 7 August 1965. This letter included an excerpt from an English weekly in Bombay – titled *Blitz* – which included widespread derision of the peace talks. It talked of the 'phony peace' that the underground had exploited and the need to break up the Nagaland Peace Mission.

[841] ASA CMS 269/64. Lima Ao to the editor of the Frontier Times, 21 August 1964. As Lima Ao wrote, 'it is high time that the group of people in Assam, who are trying every effort to frustrate the Peace Mission… should realise that their long-cherished unholy designs have failed.'

[842] Keels and Wiegand, 'Mutually Assured Distrust'; Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond', *Journal of Peace Research*, 51.2 (2014), 213–26; Efe Tokdemir et al, 'Rebel Rivalry and the Strategic Nature of Rebel Group Ideology and Demands', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65.4 (2021), 729–58.

[843] Unlike the contemporary outlook in the northeast, where several armed movements geared more towards crime and extortion exist, the movements that emerged in the first three decades after independence had a clear ideological motivation. For the shifting nature of insurgency in the contemporary northeast, and why traditional COIN imperatives are doomed to fail in this environment, see Lacina, 'Does Counterinsurgency Theory Apply'; Lacina, 'Rethinking Delhi's Northeast India Policy', pp. 329–42.

precarious than it had been.[844] As an Indian government official wrote, 'a successor to [Phizo] has not emerged and the underground is reported to be going through a phase somewhat akin to that of a collective leadership arrangement'.[845] Possible cracks in the leadership, and fluctuating levels of public support within the Naga Hills, heightened the possibility of factionalism.[846] Factionalism had the potential to affect lasting peace, as a cohesive unit could enforce peace terms in a manner that a divided movement could not.[847]

Therefore, four identifiable obstacles hindered the prospects of peace in the Naga Hills. They did not mean peace was impossible, but they needed to be navigated with a degree of sagacity. Against these obstacles were two factors favourable for a peace settlement. The first was existence and role of the Nagaland Peace Mission. The second was the commitment from the centre and the FGN delegates. Together, these dictated the contours of the peace talks in the Naga Hills.

The Nagaland Peace Mission (NPM) was a quite unique formation. After Shankerrao Deo was forced to decline an invitation to the NPM on the grounds of ill-health, a tripartite

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[844] TNA UK DO 196/64. E. J. Emery to M. E. Allen, 25 September 1963.

[845] ASA CMS 269/64. U. N. Phadnis, 'Political Mind of the Nagas', p. 2.

[846] One villager summed up the disillusion with the longevity of the war in an interview in 1964. When questioned about the Naga underground and his beliefs in Naga sovereignty, he suggested he wanted 'to be left alone, to enjoy in peace his *madhu* or *zu* (rice wine and beer)'. See ASA CMS 269/64. U. N. Phadnis, 'Political Mind of the Nagas', pp. 6-7.

[847] It should be noted that the issue of factionalism was not purely an obstacle, and in other contexts can provide a potential route towards a peace settlement. If a movement loses levels of popular support, it may be more inclined to pursue peace. In the Naga context, this meant that ground-level expressions of goodwill had the potential to motivate FGN delegates to move towards resolution. But the lack of centralised control in the movement – which resulted in elements within the underground testing the parameters of the ceasefire – trumped the potential offered by factionalism. For instances of ground-level support for peace, see ASA CMS 269/64. Lima Ao to the editor of the Frontier Times, 21 August 1964; ASA CMS 269/64. Ilhosho Khala to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 15 October 1964.

delegation was formed in early April 1964.[848] It was crucial for the signature and inauguration of the ceasefire as the year progressed. The NPM was composed of the Indian political activist Jayaprakash Narayan, British priest and advocate Michael Scott and Assam's Chief Minister Bimalaprosad Chaliha.[849] Its purpose was to act as a mediatory body, to bridge the divide between the Indian government and the Naga separatists. The NPM's support from – and active correspondence with – the Nagaland Baptist Church was one of several indicators of its credentials.[850]

Third parties, especially those that are impartial and respected, can play a critical role in peace talks.[851] The NPM served that function in the Indo-Naga ceasefire. At its inception, the NPM enjoyed widespread popularity within Nagaland.[852] As the first rounds of talks unfolded between Indian and FGN officials at the close of 1964, the NPM was routinely praised for its work in bringing both parties to the negotiating table.[853] Additionally, smaller bodies

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[848] Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, p. 295.

[849] Chaliha's role may appear somewhat contradictory, but he was an example of an official that was held in high regard in Nagaland, as opposed to Medhi or Hem Baruah. For some examples of Chaliha's popularity in Nagaland, see ASA CMS 269/64. C. Warbah to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 'Congratulation – Peace Mission in Nagaland', 8 September 1964; ASA CMS 11/67. Reverend Longri to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 20 March 1967.

[850] ASA CMS 269/64. Jayaprakash Narayan to Kenneth Kerhuo, 7 July 1964.

[851] The nature of the third party can be crucial, especially in an international context. In a compelling recent contribution to the literature, Allard Duursma's case study of mediation in Africa, for example, suggested that a third party with greater ground-level legitimacy was preferable to an international body. Altogether, though, Duursma agreed with the generally accepted rule that a legitimate, effective third party increases the prospects of conflict resolution. See Allard Duursma, 'African Solutions to African Challenges: The Role of Legitimacy in Mediating Civil Wars in Africa', *International Organization*, 74.2 (2020), 295–330.

[852] ASA CMS 269/64. Gopi Kakoti to P. Shilo Ao, 6 September 1964; Letter to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 6 December 1964; J. C. Borgohain to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 23 October 1964; Kenneth Kerhuo to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 31 December 1964; H. C. Chakravarty to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 21 November 1964; Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Jayaprakash Narayan, 12 August 1965; Paolen Haokip to Chief Minister, Government of Nagaland, 'Nagaland Peace Talk', 13 September 1964.

[853] ASA CMS 269/64. Toniho Sema et al, 'An Appeal from the Nagaland Baptist Church Leaders', 13 January 1965; R. S. Kapangkhui to the Honourable Peace Mission Members, 22 December 1965.

existed which aided the work of the NPM. An 'Observer Team', for instance, was established and Majorie Aram and Dr. Sykes spread news of talks throughout the state whilst encouraging support for a peace settlement.[854] Within Nagaland, the work of third-party bodies ensured that the ceasefire began in a positive manner, with a groundswell of local support for a resolution.

Added to this outlook from within Nagaland were genuine levels of commitment from the central government, provincial government and FGN delegates. At the centre, Nehru's death three days after the ceasefire was signed in May 1964 brought in a new ministry as negotiations began.[855] Lal Bahadur Shastri – Nehru's replacement – was 'set for peace' and determined to bring the Naga war to a conclusion.[856] This was repeatedly demonstrated by his ministry. At one point, under criticism in the house for its reconciliatory approach to the Naga conflict, a supporter of Shastri suggested 'simply, voices are raised here as if the Government or we, sitting in this House, are quietly bartering away Nagaland on this side and Kashmir on the other'.[857] This was a sign that peace talks would not be derailed by a desire for state bravado and short-term popularity, whilst Shastri was also keen to ensure that minor criticisms at national level did not affect the ceasefire.[858] The ability of the centre within this period to take

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[854] ASA CMS 269/64. Y. D. Gundevia to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 4 May 1965; T. S. Krishnamurti to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 30 March 1966; Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Marjorie Sykes, 6 April 1966; Marjorie Sykes to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 3 August 1966.

[855] Zachariah, *Nehru*, pp. 253-66.

[856] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, p. 106. It should be noted that a change in leadership at the centre was generally favourable considering the baggage that existed between Nehru and the Naga rebel movement. This was the first time that the underground had dealt with a leader apart from Nehru, a not insignificant factor.

[857] Lok Sabha Debate. 20 November 1964. Constitution Amendment Bill (Omission of Article 370).

[858] For example, in the face of criticism about why the Ministry of External Affairs rather than the Home Ministry was overseeing peace talks, he took a reasoned viewpoint. Shastri refuted claims that he was implicitly suggesting that Nagaland existed outside the Indian Union – as members of the House claimed the role of the MEA indicated – but rather that a drastic change in negotiating personnel was only likely to cause undue disruption to peace talks. See Lok Sabha Debate. 22 February 1965. Statement on Nagaland.

criticism on the chin in pursuance of its primary aim was a departure from the ministries that came before and after.

The central government's commitment was mirrored at provincial level. Chaliha was critical in these endeavours. His role as Chief Minister, as well as member of the NPM, was a unique position. Despite sections of Assam society actively rooting against the peace process, Chaliha consistently worked to create a positive atmosphere. He, for instance, suggested gestures such as an APCC grant to the NPM as a show of goodwill.[859] A local newspaper editorial best reflected Chaliha's commitment to peace. It stated, 'B. P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam, [has] fearlessly, even at the cost of his future as a politician, [taken] part in this peace-talk'.[860] This was mirrored within the Naga movement. Phizo's brother – Kevi Yallay – offered an example. In 1965, when rumours of discontent emerged within the more extremist elements of the underground, Kevi Yallay was quick to meet with Chaliha to smooth over claims of misconduct aimed at underground forces in the borderlands.[861] Altogether, from the outset of talks and through early discussions, a lasting peace settlement was not out of the question.

However, changes at the centre, the collapse of the NPM and the outbreak of clashes between the Naga underground and state forces curtailed this chance for peace. By 1966, the potential for a settlement was all but gone. As a result, the state had to deal with the fact it could not militarily defeat the Naga underground, nor reach a political resolution. The inability

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[859] ASA CMS 269/64. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Sarat Chandra Sinha, 16 August 1964. Such gestures also involved the Naga underground donating money to a relief fund for flood victims in Assam. See ASA CMS 269/64. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to the President, FGN, 2 August 1965.

[860] ASA CMS 269/64. Letter to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 6 December 1964.

[861] ASA CMS 269/64. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Chief Secretary, 25 September 1965.

to reach an agreement in the Indo-Naga ceasefire was not a story of state failure, but the ultimate result contributed to an already unfavourable perception about Indian state capacity.

The peace talks that began in late 1964 continued into 1965 without any notable breakthroughs. This was a slow process where the smallest slights had the potential to snowball, considering the scars left by the civil war.[862] Time was a critical factor. Talks needed time to develop but reports about breaches of ceasefire rules – on both sides – threatened to break the delicate peace as 1965 wore on. Though peace talks were generally well received in Nagaland, the underground still held rallies, much to the chagrin of state officials. A large gathering to celebrate 'independence day' in the Naga dominated northern parts of Manipur hosted – according to SIB reports – around 4,000 attendees.[863] The underground President's incendiary comments, that they would not 'deviate from the principle of self-determination' and that 'their country stood exposed to the worst type of colonialism', was not conducive to an atmosphere of peace.[864]

The underground was not alone in threatening the ceasefire. Claims were made about the conduct of Central Reserve Police personnel stationed in and around the Naga Hills. Forces operating from a camp at Chizami in eastern Nagaland – in the Phek region – were reported to have left five Nagas dead just as the ceasefire was about to officially begin.[865] These allegations

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[862] For an example of small slights that held up proceedings, an invitation extended to Phizo in late 1965 is revealing. Despite the idea of Phizo's invitation being widely accepted as a positive gesture, he ultimately declined because the invitation was not formally submitted to him by the FGN. Seemingly trivial gestures were premised on notions of respect and authority, and even the slightest misstep had the potential to delay talks. See ASA CMS 269/64. B. D. Baruah to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 9 December 1965.

[863] ASA CMS 269/64. S. R. Mirchandani to T. S. Krishnamurtie, 17 August 1965. The independence celebrations harked back to the NNC declaration in 1947, the day before India became an independent nation-state, as noted previously in the thesis.

[864] *Ibid.*

[865] ASA CMS 269/64. Kedulhi et al to Deputy Commissioner, Kohima District, 20 August 1964.

continued. The archive is littered with accusations on both sides about the misconduct of opposing forces. Indian Army reports were routinely accompanied with statements such as:

> Whereas the Security Forces have scrupulously adhered to the terms of suspension of operations, it will be clear from these lists that the hostiles have repeatedly violated the terms to an extent amounting virtually to a complete repudiation of the agreement.[866]

In a similar vein, the FGN reported to the NPM the 'provocative action' of security forces. This included the burning of twenty-six houses at Chekiye village and the murder of five citizens.[867] As the FGN delegate Zashei Huire wrote, the 'Indian Government is resorting to the use of force in this nature everywhere, which we view [as] extremely detrimental to the peace effort…'[868] Ultimately, a slew of reports filtered through between 1964-6 about smaller scale incidents which threatened to undermine the peace process.[869]

These incidents threatened the ceasefire. But they were not terminal to the chances of peace. It was in the early months of 1966 that the chances of conflict resolution diminished. Shastri's death – the day after signing the Tashkent peace agreement in early 1966 – was an

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[866] ASA CMS 269/64. GOC 8th Mountain Division to Chief Secretary, Government of Nagaland, 'Suspension of operations', 5 November 1964.

[867] ASA CMS 269/64. Zashie Huire to Nagaland Peace Mission, 'Burning of Naga village by Indian Government', 12 May 1965.

[868] *Ibid.*

[869] For examples of the numerous accusations levelled by both sides, see ASA CMS 269/64. Dijin Niumai to Nagaland Peace Mission, 17 December 1964; U. N. Sharma to Nagaland Peace Mission, 'Violation of terms of stoppage of operations – complaints thereof', 29 April 1965; U. N. Sharma to Nagaland Peace Mission, 'Violation of terms of stoppage of operations by the underground', 1 May 1965; Superintendent of Police, Memo No. SB.V/93/66/18434, 22 May 1965; Dharma Vira to Nagaland Peace Mission, 16 February 1966; Untitled to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 'Army forces searching the jungle and houses secretly', 18 February 1966; T. S. Krishnamurti to Nagaland Peace Mission, 9 March 1966; Viruzhu et al to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 27 April 1966; S. Angam, Memo No CV/I/XIII/604-27/FG.

unfortunate occurrence.[870] Until the end, Shastri's ministry was resolute in its desire for peace. Fantastical rumours that surfaced about the nature of talks were outright refused at the centre. Its stance was clear, the government would 'accept the conclusions reached by the Peace Mission'.[871] This outlook received significant praise from the supporters of the ceasefire and provided a constructive pillar for negotiations.[872] His death was a sizeable blow.

Early 1966 also witnessed growing unrest after Indian forces posted a unit of Manipur Rifles in the Ukhrul subdivision, whilst the underground was accused of raids within the ceasefire area.[873] Both the Indian government and FGN defended their actions. The former felt rumours of underground raids necessitated extra security; the latter saw raids as acceptable because Indian security forces encroached into their zone of control. The FGN previously suggested that attempts to change the nature of ceasefire rules added an extra layer of 'tension' to peace talks.[874] The proximity between Indian and Naga forces by early 1966 only heightened this tension.

In this atmosphere, the NPM was decisive. In 1964-5, it acted as a buffer to gloss over the minor infractions by both state and rebel forces.[875] When commitment issues arose – such as whether taxation rules applied under the terms of the ceasefire – it was the NPM that doused

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[870] Rakesh Ankit, 'Lal Bahadur Shastri, 1964–1966: Leader at a Glance', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 8.1 (2020), 39–57.

[871] Rajya Sabha Debate. 11 May 1965. Question No. 233.

[872] ASA CMS 269/64. Suresh Ram to Lal Bahadur Shastri, 6 August 1964.

[873] ASA CMS 269/64. Dharma Vira to Nagaland Peace Mission, 23 February 1966.

[874] ASA CMS 269/64. Zashie Huire, 'Statement by the Delegation of the Federal Government of Nagaland', 6 May 1965.

[875] For some examples of how the NPM handled correspondence and functioned as an intermediary force between the FGN and GOI, see ASA CMS 269/64. Biseto Medom to the Nagaland Peace Mission, 26 August 1964; Isak C. Swu to Michael Scott, 29 August 1964.

the potential spark for contestation.[876] But as time wore on, and a peace agreement remained elusive, the NPM faltered. Practical issues, from timetabling to transport, affected the cohesion of the NPM, as did Michael Scott's unpopularity amongst India's elite.[877] More important, though, were the differing viewpoints of the NPM's members, which only crystallised by early 1966.

To Chaliha, the role of the NPM was clear. Its primary purpose was to ensure a dialogue between state and rebel officials could take place. It was not responsible for the success or failure of talks. It merely had to ensure that talks occurred with a reasonable chance of success.[878] This, as became clear by 1966, contrasted with Scott's vision, which involved actively contributing to how peace should emerge.[879] Narayan, too, was more interested in securing an agreement. When talks stalled and unrest rose in early 1966, therefore, Narayan presented a dejected tone.[880] By the spring of 1966, he felt the good groundwork laid by the

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[876] In essence, the FGN wanted the taxation of certain villages to be lifted as a measure of good faith during the ceasefire. An apparent misunderstanding led to certain sections of the underground believing this to be the case, but by the close of April 1966 the rules were clearly stated that taxation should be taking place as normal. With the NPM acting as an intermediary during correspondence sent in by both sides, the issue did not unduly escalate. See Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Kenneth Kerhuo, 15 October 1965; Vishnu Sahay to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 9 March 1966; Lungshim Shaiza, 'Non-cooperation or negotiation?', 20 April 1966; S. Angam to Nagaland Peace Mission, 'Illegal collection of house-tax', 27 April 1966.

[877] Challenges included the logistical issues of travelling throughout the northeast – with its difficult terrain and lack of infrastructure – to attend meetings. Problems with flights, for example, meant that Narayan was unable to attend meetings in Shillong, Kohima and Imphal throughout September and October 1965. Added to this were timetabling issues. Chaliha was Assam's Chief Minister and both Narayan and Scott were also involved in other pursuits. This meant periods where delegates were unavailable, such as January and February 1966 because of Chaliha's busy schedule. Further compounding these practical issues were Chaliha's recurring health battles, which continued to plague the Chief Minister. See ASA CMS 269/64. Gian Chand to Chief of the Air Staff, 8 January 1965; Keneth Ayutemjen to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 15 July 1965; Jayaprakash Narayan to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 11 September 1965; Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Michael Scott, 28 January 1966.

[878] ASA CMS 269/64. Bimalaprosad Chaliha to Executive Secretary, Nagaland Baptist Church Council, 19 April 1966.

[879] ASA CMS 269/64. Michael Scott, 'Note', 10 November 1964.

[880] ASA CMS 269/64. Jayaprakash Narayan to Ayutemjen Ao and Kenneth Kerhuo, 20 March 1966.

NPM required a swift resolution.[881] With an agreement still not close, and the differing views of its members clear, the NPM disbanded between February and April 1966.

The breakdown of the NPM was sparked by the resignation of Narayan in February 1966, ostensibly because of misinterpreted remarks he made about the Naga movement.[882] This was the culmination of a broader process, where Narayan's reputation amongst the underground deteriorated.[883] The erosion of trust undermined the legitimacy of the NPM as an intermediary third party, and Narayan left as a result. His departure instigated the collapse of the NPM. Without the NPM as a mediatory body, the chances of conflict resolution evaporated.

The growing distrust of Narayan preceded a shift away from the persistent – but relatively minor – offences conducted by rebel Nagas into 'serious breaches' of the ceasefire.[884] This included an attack by a group of around two hundred armed rebels on a Manipur Rifles post.[885] This followed with two major attacks at train stations by Naga separatist towards the end of April. The attacks at Diphu and Lumding resulted in numerous fatalities, that in turn signalled the end of the NPM and the prospects for peace.[886] Scott was deported from India and

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[881] *Ibid.*

[882] Walker, 'Jayaprakash Narayan', p. 161.

[883] Narayan was already aware of the increasingly hostile outlook of key Naga leaders such as Isak Swu and Kughato Sukhai towards him at the time of his resignation. But this relationship worked both ways, and Narayan's growing frustration with the inability to reach an agreement led to his own failing belief in the sincerity of the FGN. See ASA CMS 269/64. Jayaprakash Narayan to Reverend Ayu and Reverend Kenneth Kerhuo, 2 March 1966; ASA CMS 269/64. *Questions of Jayaprakash Narayan's Resignation* (Oking: Federal Government of Nagaland, 1966).

[884] ASA CMS 269/64. Dharma Vira to Nagaland Peace Mission, 16 February 1966.

[885] ASA CMS 269/64. Dharma Vira to Nagaland Peace Mission, 23 February 1966.

[886] ASA CMS 269/64. J. K. Sukhai to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 13 May 1966.

Chaliha's resignation from the NPM swiftly followed.[887] Chaliha's resignation was the symbolic final nail in the coffin for the hopes of a peaceful resolution to the Indo-Naga conflict.

Despite the designs for a new intermediary body and the widespread sorrow expressed at the disbandment of the NPM, the ceasefire became something of a sham.[888] Those that criticised the peace talks from the outset wasted no time in sniping at the NPM's former members.[889] Clashes between state and rebel forces increased, whilst the poor conditions of the ceasefire became common knowledge across the nation.[890] As Marcus Franke has noted, the peace process was dead long before the formal lapse of the Indo-Naga ceasefire in 1972.[891]

Indira Gandhi – Shastri's successor – continued negotiations, but the resolute commitment to peace that defined Shastri's ministry was lacking. Added to this was the evolving outlook of sections of India's elite. The Mizo rebellion in 1966 added weight to the belief that the supposed 'soft handling' of the Naga underground was misguided.[892] Eventually, Indira Gandhi looked towards exploiting the ceasefire to split the underground. As Subir Bhaumik has suggested, her ministry was initially open to concessions, but when opportunities arose to exploit divisions within the Naga leadership the government preferred exploitation to

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[887] 'Nagaland Peace Mission has come to an end', *Assam Tribune*, 9 May 1966.

[888] ASA CMS 269/64. Kenneth Kerhuo, 'Resolution adopted by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council', 9 May 1966; Kenneth Kerhuo, 'Actions passed by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council', 10 May 1966; J. K. Sukhai to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 13 May 1966.

[889] 'Chaliha hits out at critics of his peace mission role', *Assam Tribune*, 10 May 1966.

[890] In Bangalore – for example – a conference held representing the 'entire Christian Community in India' passed a resolution noting that 'recent developments in Nagaland and Mizo area must cause concern… Violence and subversion unfortunately prevalent at present can lead to no health[y or] beneficial results…' See ASA CMS 11/66. J. C. Ryan and J. R. Chandran to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, 24 May 1966.

[891] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, pp. 113-14, 129-30.

[892] *Ibid*, p. 108.

reconciliation.[893] This approach actively hindered commitment issues, a common feature of failed peace processes.[894]

Meanwhile, the increasingly fractured nature of the underground meant sporadic attacks took place without any clear central direction.[895] In 1968 this factionalism birthed the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland, which split from the FGN.[896] By this time, government officials openly accused China and Pakistan of supplying arms to the Naga underground.[897] Kartik Oraon – MP for Lohardaga in present day Jharkhand – captured the prevailing mood by the late 1960s. He suggested that 'the Naga problem and the solution of it by negotiation… are like the two banks of a river which go on widening as they go on further away from the origin'.[898]

Calls for peace after early 1966 were forlorn.[899] The ceasefire remained because it was strategically advantageous to both parties in the short-term. The state had a war to fight in the Mizo Hills, whilst the underground used the ceasefire to expand its arsenal and fighting force after 1966.[900] Clashes continued until the close of the decade, without enough pretext to

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[893] Subir Bhaumik, 'The Accord That Never Was: Shillong Accord, 1975', in *Peace Processes and Peace Accords*, ed. by Samir Kumar Das (New Delhi: SAGE, 2005), pp. 200-221 (p. 206).

[894] Michael G. Findley, 'Bargaining and the Interdependent Stages of Civil War Resolution', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 57.5 (2013), 905–32.

[895] Goswami, 'Naga Narrative', pp. 295-96.

[896] Means, 'Cease-Fire Politics', pp. 1012-13.

[897] Rajya Sabha Statement. 8 May 1969. Swaran Singh – India's Defence Minister – told the house that government sources estimated that around 900 rebels had recently returned from China, trained, and armed.

[898] Lok Sabha Debate. 14 August 1968. Question No. 484

[899] ASA CMS 299/1969. Haolay Tongul et al, 'Note on meetings May-July 1969', 14 July 1969.

[900] ASA CMS 299/1969. A. K. Das to Shri Kidwai, 'Proposed establishment of N. A. P. posts in Dessoi Valley', 5 December 1969.

officially end the ceasefire.[901] It took until 31 August 1972 for its formal lapse, when Indira Gandhi's ministry felt confident enough to launch its 'final drive' against the rebel movement.[902] B. K. Nehru – Nagaland's Governor – announced via radio that members of the NNC, FGN and Naga Army were now 'liable to prosecution' and noted that operations against rebel forces would resume.[903]

The inability to reach a peace agreement was a missed opportunity. The route to reconciliation was not straightforward, but neither was it predestined to fail. But the sham peace that emerged by 1966 presented a problem for the state. It could not deal with insurgency through military might, nor could it negotiate its way out of conflict. Its perception in the northeast was increasingly deteriorating, a reality which the newer movements that emerged in the 1970s were keenly aware of. Without military or political victories, the challenges in the highlands persisted. It meant that a radical overhaul was needed. The political and economic reorganisation of the northeast provided the potential for this overhaul. But, like the Indo-Naga ceasefire, it was another story of a missed opportunity.

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[901] ASA CMS 299/1969. Dr Aram to Bimalaprosad Chaliha, undated; A. K. Das to Shri Kidwai, 'Eviction operation in Dessoi Valley Reserve Forest etc', 5 December 1969; R. C. Langthasa to Minister in charge, Relief and Rehabilitation, 'Rehabilitation of Bomkhai village', 9 December 1969; D. P. Sinha, 'Report of visit to Akongyim village in Nagaland-Assam border area', 13 December 1969. In – for instance – the Dessoi Valley Reserve Forest six hundred and thirteen houses were demolished by Naga rebels as part of their agenda to assert control over territory they declared within their remit.

[902] Franke, *War and Nationalism*, pp. 116-17.

[903] 'India Decrees Outlawing of Nagaland Rebel Groups', *New York Times*, 1 September 1972, p. 24. Among the immediate reasons cited by B. K. Nehru for the resumption of military operations was the attempted assassination of a state minister by Naga rebel forces.

The political and economic reorganisation of India's northeast, 1972.

The political and economic reorganisation of India's northeast in 1972 was a paradox. On the one hand, it created an entirely new model for the northeastern region, a genuinely post-colonial vision whose politico-economic structure differed markedly from the colonial template which preceded it. On the other, the internal logic behind the reorganisation and the contradictions within the restructuring curtailed its effectiveness with regard to diversity and conflict. Though the political and economic structure of the northeast changed, the tools for managing the northeast's diversity did not. This lack of potency for managing the challenges presented by the northeast enabled the emergence of widespread volatility in the region – beyond the highlands – from the 1970s onwards. The reorganisation signalled the end of the long decolonisation, but the instability of the northeast only accelerated.

As with the Naga peace talks, this was a story of missed opportunity. Political reorganisation provided a platform for managing the recurrent theme of autonomy. New political units meant a move away from the provincial Assam government, a source of contention that had hindered nation-building during the long decolonisation. Economic restructuring provided an opportunity to kick-start the laboured development drive that unfolded since independence, reversing the problems that emerged from state-building. On both counts, the restructuring did not deliver. Autonomy claims were not resolved, and economic development still faltered after 1972. The result was an expansion of crises beyond the highlands, as extremism spread throughout the northeast.

By the mid-1960s the central government had considered alterations to the federal framework of the northeast.[904] The APHLC's statehood demand, though less explicitly combative than the Naga or Mizo cases, was both persistent and robust after the Sino-Indian war. The leadership of the hill state movement was unwavering in the desire for full statehood within the Indian Union.[905] Anything short of statehood was not entertained.[906] The political concessions granted to Nagaland in 1957 and 1963 were the first notable changes to the northeast's federal structure. But, as previously identified, it did little to resolve the armed challenge in the Naga Hills, and only added impetus to other identity movements in the northeast that felt they deserved similar compromises.[907] The rumblings of discontent within the Mizo Hills provided added motivation for the central government's developing ideas about the northeast's federal structure.

The twelfth session of the APHLC, held at Tura in April 1964, ended with a provisional agreement with the central government.[908] It should be stressed that this agreement was not a decision by the APHLC to renege on its hill state demand. Rather, the agreement was reached

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[904] This created significant discussion within the Assamese press, as major publications such as the *Assam Tribune* and *Frontier Times* opposed the disintegration of the state. See the 'Press' section of ASA CMS 132/67. Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 'Fortnightly Report for Assam for the Second Half of May 1967', 28 June 1967.

[905] After 1962, contact was retained with figures in the Mizo Hills, to demonstrate the breadth of the hill state demand. But, as shown in chapters III and IV, the idea of a separate Mizo polity gained ascendency in the MHD. See MSA Gen 1451/120. Deputy Superintendent of Police, Aijal to DIG CID SHG, 15 April 1964.

[906] By 1957, for example, the APHLC was noted to have expanded its influence in the interior of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills to expand its support for non-violent direction-action, if needed. See the 'Tribal Affairs' section of ASA CMS 132/67. Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, 'Fortnightly Report for Assam for the Second Half of May 1967', 28 June 1967.

[907] The birth of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964, for example, was premised on Meitei nationalism and initiated the emergence of armed nationalist politics in Manipur. This is outlined in greater detail in the conclusion. For a brief secondary overview, see Komol Singha, 'Understanding Ethnicity-Based Autonomy Movements: A Study of Manipur', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 5.1 (2017), 55–66.

[908] TNA UK DO 196/238. 'Hill Leaders Accepts PMs Offer', *India News*, 25 April 1964.

to establish a commission to work out the details for implementing an offer related to the 'Scottish Pattern'. The Scottish Pattern was the government's attempt at political compromise, and its composition evolved over time. As a result of the provisional agreement, the Pataskar Commission was authorised by Shastri.[909]

The report published by the Pataskar Commission ultimately still envisaged autonomy for the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills squarely within the Assam state. The publication noted how the 'preservation of the unity of Assam' was still an overriding principle.[910] The APHLC, in response, rejected the proposals laid out by the Pataskar report because it failed to deliver on its core demand.[911] The timing of the rejection, by 1966, was important. Reports in the press circulated about Khasi volunteers following the lead of the MNF and the NNC in reaching across the international border for aid. A *Times of India* article noted, for example, that 'over 100 armed Khasi youths have crossed the border from East Pakistan into the Jowai subdivision of Khasi Hills, it was reliably learned here today'.[912] As previously identified, the strong democratic tendencies of the APHLC leadership kept this militant faction at bay, but the rumours were worrisome for a central government that already had two civil conflicts to contend with in the highlands.

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[909] Mukerjee, 'Assam Reorganization', pp. 303-4.

[910] *Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1966), p. 1.

[911] Mukerjee, 'Assam Reorganization'.

[912] 'Khasis Being Trained in Pakistan', *The Times of India*, 17 December 1966.

The Mizo uprising earlier in the year weighed heavily as Indira Gandhi travelled to Shillong to establish talks with the hill state movement. In a report on the visit, produced at the British High Commission in New Delhi, the following was noted:

> On arriving at Shillong she [Gandhi] evidently found that [the] All Party Hills Leaders' Conference (A.P.H.L.C.) had organised a hartal and demonstrators to greet her. They are reported in the press to have presented her with a memorandum demanding the formation of a separate hill State and threatening "disastrous consequences" if this demand was not met.[913]

Rumours that circulated about possible collusion between the APHLC and East Pakistan also hung over decision-making and prompted the central government to take the demands seriously.[914] A Cabinet Committee was established in the summer of 1966 after the APHLC rejection of the Pataskar report, to reach a settlement.[915]

The precarity of Indira Gandhi's own position added greater impetus for negotiations and helped ensure that the APHLC would eventually be granted its wish of statehood. Bethany Lacina has suggested that the changing fortunes of Congress were a key factor. At the 1967 Indian election Congress' majority was noticeably reduced.[916] In addition, the leadership contest between Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai produced a rift within Congress.[917] Lacina, therefore, identified how the resultant rift alienated Indira Gandhi from the Assam Congress

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[913] TNA UK DO 196/238. R. W. Renwick to R. M. Purcell, 'Hill Areas of Assam', 29 December 1966.

[914] TNA UK DO 196/238. J. Davidson to A. Murray, 28 November 1966.

[915] Mukerjee, 'Assam Reorganization'.

[916] Samuel J. Eldersveld, 'The 1967 Indian Election: Patterns of Party Regularity and Defection', *Asian Survey*, 10.11 (1970), 1015–30.

[917] Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, pp. 67-73.

and strengthened the hand of those who supported her, which included the APHLC.[918] Congress was, by the close of the decade, 'shattered' due to internal power struggles and electoral struggles.[919] Indira Gandhi took several steps to confront this milieu.[920] For the northeast, the weakening of Congress emboldened the hill state demand and underpinned the political reorganisation of 1972.

As national politics provided leverage for the APHLC over the central government, the move towards full statehood gained serious traction. Contestation from the Assam government – and especially the media – ensured that the hill state aspiration did not unfold unchallenged, and included further compromise offers such as the 'sub-state' alternative by 1968.[921] However, by the close of 1969 the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act was passed.[922] This established the provisions for the creation of Meghalaya – out of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills – as an 'Autonomous State'. This was the beginning of the broader reorganisation of the northeast.

The Meghalaya Act of 1969 was effectively an admission that the regional political structure of the northeast was unsustainable. The template provided by colonial rule simply did

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[918] Lacina, *Rival Claims*, pp. 165-66. In a broad sense, the Assamese elite generally favoured Desai's Syndicate, whilst the non-Assamese population of the state tended to shift towards Indira Gandhi. In providing this conclusion, Lacina utilised Mukerjee's commentary referenced above.

[919] Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, pp. 67-93.

[920] For some reflections on Indira Gandhi's premiership and ruminations about the changing nature of Indian politics in the period, see Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 66-121; Emma Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (London: C. Hurst, 2003).

[921] *Central Intelligence Bulletin* (Central Intelligence Agency, 13 September 1968), CIA Online Library <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp79t00975a012100040001-2> [accessed 12 December 2018].

[922] Act No. LV of 1969, 'The Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act'.

not function effectively after 1947. The widespread dissatisfaction in the highlands was increasingly mirrored elsewhere by the late 1960s, especially in Manipur and Tripura.[923] The Naga and Mizo civil wars signalled the possibilities of unsolved identity movements. Worries about Meghalaya were a not insignificant factor in the reorganisation. However, the desire to resolve competing identity-based claims was not the sole, nor primary, motivation for reorganisation. This undercut the potency of the 1972 political restructuring.

The plans to reorganise the northeast were passed through Parliament at the close of 1971, in the North- Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act.[924] The Act came into effect the following year. Prior to the reorganisation of 1972, the map of the northeast still mirrored the colonial model with the Assam state as the key polity. The only major changes after independence were in Nagaland, prompted by the separatist challenge rather than a proactive design for managing the northeast's diversity. Elsewhere, minor adjustments were made as Manipur and Tripura were shifted from 'part C' states to Union Territories, with little in the way of tangible administrative transformation. But the 1972 reorganisation – displayed in map 10 – changed the entire federal structure of the northeast.

[923] In addition to the rise of the UNLF in Manipur was the emergence of disparate identity movements in Tripura, as outlined briefly in chapter IV and in more detail in the conclusion.

[924] Act No. LXXXI of 1971, 'The North- Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971'.

MAP 1. *Map of Northeast India*

Map 10: India's northeast after 1972[925]

Political Reorganisation of India, 1972.

Polity	Old Status	New Status
Assam	State	State
Manipur	Union Territory	State
Meghalaya	Autonomous Zone	State
Mizoram	District	Union Territory
Nagaland	State	State
NEFA (Arunachal)	Centrally Administered Zone	Union Territory
Tripura	Union Territory	State

The area of the Assam state reduced by over 16,000 square miles.[926] Its population shrank by more than one million people.[927] Manipur and Tripura were granted full statehood alongside Meghalaya. These three new polities joined Assam and Nagaland on equal political footing. Further asymmetric concessions were granted in the Mizo Hills and the NEFA. The MHD was granted Union Territory status, as was NEFA.[928] The Assam government lost control over much of the borderlands, whilst ambitions for the assimilation of NEFA – evident within certain sections of the Assam elite – were also dashed.[929] In sum, what had been one 'part A' state and two 'part C' states in 1949 became five states and two union territories by 1972.

Although the political structure of the northeast changed noticeably in 1972, the concessions in political autonomy did little to manage the divergent outlooks of identity movements in the region. The new ethnofederal structure of the northeast, therefore, did not provide a template for managing diversity within this complex region.[930] To understand why

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[925] Map template taken from Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, p. xiii.

[926] Its area declined from around 47,000 square miles to under 31,000. To put this into context, that is a reduction about the size of Denmark.

[927] V. Venkata Rao, 'Reorganization of North East India', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 33.2 (1972), 123–44 (p. 127). In an interesting report produced by the CIA at the time, it was suggested that such reductions caused less angst amongst the Assamese elite than the ongoing issue of exploitation of resources – especially tea – by the centre. See *Prospects Brighten in Northeast India* (Central Intelligence Agency, 22 February 1972), CIA Online Library <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00875r001100130035-4> [accessed 12 October 2018].

[928] NEFA was granted full statehood – and became Arunachal Pradesh – in 1987, the twenty-fourth state of the Union. Mizoram was granted statehood the same year, after the signature of the Mizo Accord in 1986. See Deepak K. Mishra, 'Developing the Border: The State and the Political Economy of Development in Arunachal Pradesh', in Gellner, *Borderland Lives*, pp. 141–62; Namrata Goswami, 'The Indian Experience of Conflict Resolution in Mizoram', *Strategic Analysis*, 33.4 (2009), 579–89.

[929] Especially within the Asom Sahitya Sabha. See Baruah, 'Ethnic Conflict', pp. 665-66.

[930] Though the federal restructuring of the northeast was not directly motivated by language, as the earlier changes were, the 1972 reorganisation was a form of ethnofederal restructuring. As Katherine Adeney has suggested, it must 'be understood as ethnofederal' in nature, part of a broader series of changes to northeast driven by 'a complex mixture of identity, caste, tribal and developmental politics'. See Adeney, 'Does Ethnofederalism', p. 131.

this is so, the other factors motivating the centre's decision to restructure the northeast must be understood. When this internal logic is identified, the reason that reorganisation failed to resolve competing identity claims becomes clear.

It would be tempting to view the 1972 reorganisation purely as a tool for conflict management. Political activism emerged in the highlands and the centre needed a better model to assuage competing identity-based interests. But an ambition to manage the political challenges presented during decolonisation was only one aspect of the centre's decision for reorganisation.[931] Two core aspects – beyond managing diversity - motivated the political reorganisation of 1972. Firstly, strategic concerns about the northeastern frontier underpinned the desire for change. Secondly, economic concerns trumped socio-cultural interests. Together, these formed the tripartite motivation for 1972. The priority given to strategy and economics ensured the ineffectiveness of the northeastern federal model after 1972, when considering identity movements and instability.

Strategic concerns were a stark reality after the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The ease at which Chinese forces passed through the NEFA sent shockwaves throughout military and political circles in Delhi.[932] Nationalising the frontier space and the creation of a genuine state infrastructure in the region therefore was a key concern. State-building received far greater urgency when the possibility of military weakness arose. But the prioritisation of strategic

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[931] This conception, that the reorganisation was purely a reaction to the aggressive cultural policies of the Assamese elite, has been criticised by Baruah. He specifically referenced Gurudas Das in this critique. In Das' more recent work, he has introduced the strategic element expanded upon here, to a degree. However, the wider tripartite motivation behind the reorganisation explained in this chapter often goes unacknowledged. For the above, see Sanjib Baruah, 'Nationalizing Space: Cosmetic Federalism and the Politics of Development in Northeast India', *Development and Change*, 34.5 (2003), 915–39; Gurudas Das, *Security and Development in India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 38-62.

[932] Though the militarisation of the region preceded the Sino-Indian War. It was evident from the late 1950s onwards. See Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, pp. 165-200.

concerns signalled internal problems. As Sanjib Baruah has suggested, the result was a form of 'cosmetic federalism'.[933] 1972 served the purpose of realigning the border spaces within the northeast, taking them away from the remit of the Assam government and bringing them closer to the central government. The new polities of the northeast were dependent on central subsidisation, ensuring the centre had greater control in affairs. This change was critical.

The new polities' subservience to the centre, due to strategic concerns, undermined the potency of political concessions. The borderlands were relinquished from their attachment to the Assam government and the subsequent possibility of hegemony from Guwahati. But the new centres of administrative power were not necessarily in places such as Shillong in Meghalaya or Aizawl in Mizoram. Rather, the new polities swapped Guwahati for New Delhi for its dependence. This dependence was crucial. Despite the clear political and cartographic changes of 1972, there was little tangible change in autonomy. New Delhi required greater state-building designs for strategic concerns, not to manage the diversity of the region. Initiatives were dictated by international affairs, and this distinction was massive. 1972, therefore, did not resolve the lingering issues of autonomy that were evident in the highlands since independence, and were increasingly central to the wider politics of the northeast.

The strategic impetus behind the 1972 reorganisation was also complicated by the second aspect of economics. Development in the northeast was problematic after independence. This has already been demonstrated in the highlands. It was also a reality for the broader region, when compared with national trends.[934] Therefore, an economic reconstitution of the northeast unfolded alongside federal restructuring. 1972 ushered in both

[933] Baruah, 'Nationalizing Space'.

[934] Chaube et al, 'Regional Development', pp. 40–66.

significant political and economic changes in the northeast, a notable departure from the old colonial template which persisted until the early 1970s. The result was the birth of the North Eastern Council (NEC), established as an advisory board to foster regional development.[935] The economic imperatives of the NEC provided a problem. As Shibani Kinkar Chaube, Sunil Munsi, and Amalendu Guha suggested at the time:

> These conditions weigh heavily in favour of Assam… In fact Assam stands to gain out of the anticipated relation of equality, for there is every likelihood that the political status of the new states and union territories of north-east India will unleash strong trends towards economic growth.[936]

Economic ambitions – in this guise – were a direct contradiction to the management of diversity and the designs for autonomy within the borderlands. The new economic drive actively re-established power within the Assam Valley. As with strategic concerns, the economic impetus behind 1972 directly contradicted the designs for autonomy within Assam's identity movements.

Added to the logical fallacy of development was the composition of the NEC. It was initially made up of the Governors of the northeast's states – instead of the chief ministers – meaning that the council was run by those answerable to the central government.[937] Democratically elected politicians of the new states, therefore, did not have a seat on the NEC. The overarching model reinforced economic power in Guwahati, whilst the practical

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[935] Thongkholal Haokip, 'Political Integration of Northeast India: A Historical Analysis', *Strategic Analysis*, 36.2 (2012), 304-314 (p. 304).

[936] Chaube et al, 'Regional Development', p. 45.

[937] Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, p. 43.

mechanisms of the NEC actively excluded the new polities from decision making. This was not conducive for solving problems related to local identity.

The reorganisation of 1972 needed a revolutionary approach to managing competing interests in the northeast. It successfully moved away from the old colonial model, but the politico-economic changes were anything but revolutionary. They were a poor solution to managing regional diversity. There have been divergent views on whether India's broader federal changes have successfully managed competing demands related to ethnicity, language and culture.[938] In the northeast, the 1972 model categorically failed to manage ethnic conflict in the northeast. This much is obvious, considering the plethora of insurgencies in the region after the late 1970s. But it is crucial to understand that the logic behind reorganisation – and the contradictions inherent within this logic – prevented any form of viable arrangement from emerging.

Ultimately, the tripartite logic behind the political and economic reorganisation of India's northeast in 1972 provided a great contradiction.[939] Strategic concerns ensured greater control over the northeast at the centre. Development initiatives reinforced power within the

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[938] There is a clear juxtaposition in conclusions between Maya Chadda on one hand, and Harihar Bhattacharyya, Kham Khan Suan Hausing, and Jhumpa Mukherjee on the other. The former suggested that the 'creation of new state units is easily the most successful' method of containing ethnic conflict in India. In contrast, Bhattacharyya, Hausing and Mukherjee argued that reorganisation alone is not sufficient in accommodating the demands of minority groups. These positions are both more analytically useful than accounts which implicitly accept that territorial concessions equate to 'success stories'. This assumption is especially problematic in the work of Bhupen Sarmah, considering that one of these 'success stories' he describes is the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The BTC is one of the key examples used by Bhattacharyya and others to demonstrate the shortcomings of India's record in linguistic reorganisation. See Harihar Bhattacharyya, Kham Khan Suan Hausing, and Jhumpa Mukherjee, 'Indian Federalism at the Crossroads: Limits of the Territorial Management of Ethnic Conflict', *India Review*, 16.1 (2017), 149–78; Maya Chadda, 'Integration through Internal Reorganization: Containing Ethnic Conflict in India', *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 2.1 (2002), 44–61 (p. 44); Bhupen Sarmah, 'India's Northeast and the Enigma of the Nation-State', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 42.3 (2017), 166–78.

[939] And it continues to impact the northeast to the present day. For contemporary analysis of the relationship between development and security see, for example, Duncan McDuie-Ra, 'Between National Security and Ethno-nationalism: The Regional Politics of Development in Northeast India', *Journal of South Asian Development*, 3.2 (2008), 185-210.

Assam Valley. Both undercut designs for political autonomy provided by statehood and union territory status.[940] The prioritisation of strategic and economic concerns therefore worked against regional autonomy. After 1972, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram had greater political autonomy solely on paper. In the borderlands, the post-colonial vision for the northeast – established by 1972 – was rife with contradictions that undermined political concessions. This form of 'cosmetic federalism', unsurprisingly, did nothing to reconcile the identity movement in the highlands. Additionally, it enabled the emergence of greater challenges elsewhere in the northeast.

Conclusion.

The Naga ceasefire and the reorganisation of the northeast were two processes with significant potential. They both offered opportunities to manage short-term challenges in the highlands, and longer-term structural issues in the northeast. Confronting these challenges was not straightforward, but a durable peace in the Naga Hills, or an effective federal reorganisation, could have been pivotal. Both proved to be cases of squandered opportunities. Instead, they only contributed to the trends – related to state perception and identity formation – which defined the long decolonisation of the highlands.

By 1972 the long decolonisation of the northeast wound to a close. A concertedly post-colonial political and economic vision emerged for the region, markedly different from the

[940] It would be wrong to overstate the strategic and economic elements without noting that the management of diversity was still a contributory aspect of the reorganisation. By the time decisions were being made, they were being done so in the knowledge that the district council model had largely provided 'toothless tigers' for political autonomy. As Kham Khan Suan Hausing suggests, this 'civilization burden' approach to governance only fuelled the political demands focused upon in this thesis. The problem, as shown in this chapter, is that strategic and economic concerns took precedence over the desire to manage the northeast's diversity in a more constructive manner. See Kham Khan Suan Hausing, 'Salvaging Autonomy in India's Northeast: Beyond the Sixth Schedule Way', in Oinam and Sadokpam, *Northeast India*, pp. 187–98; Karlsson, 'Indigenous Governance', pp. 141–53.

colonial model that preceded it. Indian state officials began to formulate new plans for the political, strategic, and economic future of a region which had been reorganised significantly from its colonial past. As identified in the introduction of the thesis, this was not a clean break from the past. At ground-level – and in the eyes of the followers of rebel movements – the notion of 'decolonisation' remained somewhat abstract. However, the emergence of this new politico-economic model for the region was a critical step in the history of the northeast. It bookmarked the end of the long decolonisation framed in this thesis.

The ineffectiveness of this model would soon become apparent. Though this 'artefact of deliberate policy' was created, its ability to confront the challenges that emerged in the preceding years was lacking. Perceptions about state capacity, issues with identity formation and precedents for insurgency all weighed heavily as instability spread from the highlands to the entire northeast from the 1970s onwards. The conclusion identifies these emerging dynamics, as a unique region of instability emerged in India's far northeastern corner. This unique assemblance was made possible because of the way that the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands unfolded.

Conclusion

The long decolonisation of the Assam highlands established three core trends that impacted the long-term conflict dynamics of the northeast. Throughout decolonisation, the state revealed its limitations in confronting insurgency, whether through military or diplomatic means. Reconciling regional identity claims within broader conceptions of Indian nationalism likewise proved problematic. Finally, the Naga and Mizo wars established some key precedents for how to conduct irregular conflict against the Indian state. All three trends resonated throughout the highlands. The unique amalgamation of conflict dynamics and instability that defined the northeast from the late 1970s onwards would not have unfolded as it did without the transference of these processes, established in the highlands between 1942-72. The exceptionality of India's northeast, therefore, cannot be understood without an appreciation of the decolonisation of the highlands.

This conclusion is split into two parts. The first narrates how these trends loomed large – especially by the late 1970s – across the northeast. The budding insurgent movements in Tripura and Manipur, alongside the growing insecurity in the Assam Valley and the evolving nature of conflict in the highlands, are easier to explain when framed against the backdrop of the long decolonisation. The second reflects on the significance of the thesis' findings. Traditionally, the northeast is disregarded as a peripheral region without much global impact.[941]

[941] Although the evolving influence of 'global' approaches to history suggest this oversight may become less prevalent, since the field is primarily concerned with interactive processes and exchange. Within this logic, previously peripheral zones appear less remote than once assumed. Yet, discussions about how global history should unfold, and its usefulness, has elicited debate. For some introductory notes on global history, see *Writing the History of the Global*, ed. by Maxine Berg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014). For some critiques, reflections and responses to the framing of the 'global', see Jeremy

The reflections on this thesis identify the importance of studying the region. The northeast offers critical insight for understanding national trends within India, how borderlands operate and the less obvious, but multifarious aspects, of decolonisation. Together, this spatial and temporal sensitivity reveals gaps within conflict literature and provides suggestions for future interdisciplinary research.

Emerging trends in India's northeast.

In the former princely states of Manipur and Tripura, the transference of trends from the long decolonisation was clearest. Both had their own, complex internal dynamics which shaped the nature of insurgency, but the deteriorating stability of both by the late 1970s was conditioned by preceding processes in the Assam highlands.

In Manipur, militant nationalism first appeared with the birth of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in 1964. The UNLF was a Meitei nationalist movement, representing the majority Meitei population of the Manipur Valley.[942] The UNLF was the forerunner to the nationalist movements that followed and the 'mother' of all insurgencies in Manipur.[943] From

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Adelman, 'What Is Global History Now?', *Aeon*, 2 March 2017 <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment> [accessed 24 March 2020]; Antoinette M. Burton, 'Not Even Remotely Global? Method and Scale in World History', *History Workshop Journal*, 64.1 (2007), 323–28; Richard Drayton and David Motadel, 'Discussion: The Futures of Global History', *Journal of Global History*, 13.1 (2018), 1–21; Katja Naumann, 'Long-Term and Decentred Trajectories of Doing History from a Global Perspective: Institutionalization, Postcolonial Critique, and Empiricist Approaches, before and after the 1970s', *Journal of Global History*, 14.3 (2019), 335–54.

[942] For some notes on the demographics of Manipur, the focus on Meitei rather than 'pan-Manipuri' histories and the evolution of Meitei nationalism, see Ngamjahao Kipgen and Arnab Roy Chowdhury, '"Contested State-Craft" on the Frontiers of the Indian Nation: "Hills-Valley Divide" and the Genealogy of Kuki Ethnic Nationalism in Manipur', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 16.2 (2016), 283–303; Bhagat Oinam, 'Patterns of Ethnic Conflict in the North-East: A Study on Manipur', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38.21 (2003), 2031–37; Parratt, *Wounded Land*, pp. 1-8; T. Hemo Singh, *Manipur Imbroglio: Insurgency, Ethnic Politics, Socio-Cultural Dimensions* (New Delhi: Akansha, 2009), pp. 3-11; H. Kham Khan Suan, 'Hills-Valley Divide as a Site of Conflict: Emerging Dialogic Space in Manipur', in Baruah, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 263–89.

[943] N. Joykumar Singh, *Revolutionary Movements in Manipur* (New Delhi: Akansha, 2005), p. viii.

the late 1960s, it was clear that the lessons from the Naga and Mizo wars weighed heavily in Manipur. A splinter movement of the UNLF, led by Arambam Samarendra Singh, sought contacts with China in 1968 through its embassy in Dhaka.[944] The splinter group – known as the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) – then re-established contact with Chinese officials in 1972, after the 1971 Bangladesh War.[945] The parallels to both the Naga and Mizo rebel movements and their experiences with external patronage were clear.

Correspondence at the time, within British official circles, noted the logic of transference between the Meitei nationalist splinter groups and the Naga and Mizo insurgencies. Political concessions made in the Naga Hills, the strength of the hill state movement and the challenge to state legitimacy by the MNF all affected Manipuri identity movements. One report suggested the 'Hindu Meitei people of Manipur's central plain are strongly pressing for Manipur to become a separate State like Nagaland'.[946] The autonomous identity claims within Nagaland filtered into the psyche of Meitei nationalism. As well as impacting on regional identity claims, the international networks of insurgency often overlapped. Though no formal alliances emerged, reports were common of interaction between Mizo, Naga and Meitei rebels as they sought foreign aid for their agendas.[947] The blossoming

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[944] Lintner, *Great Game East*, pp. 146-48.

[945] *Ibid.* It is worthwhile noting that the 1971 war has various names and 'code words' within its splintered historiography. As van Schendel has noted, this has been shaped by competing nationalist narratives during 'first-generation' research. This resulted in the war's framing as either a great Bengali liberation, a betrayal of Pakistan by a small self-interested group aided by India and as a saviour narrative, with a benevolent Indian Army helping Bengali rebels overthrow an alien government. To avoid these pitfalls, the war is simply referred to as the 'Bangladesh War' in this thesis. See Willem van Schendel, 'A War Within a War: Mizo rebels and the Bangladesh liberation struggle', *Modern Asian Studies*, 50.1 (2016), 75-117.

[946] TNA UK FCO 37/647. Morrice James to I. J. M. Sutherland, 4 September 1970.

[947] TNA UK FCO 37/735. P. J. Fowler to South Asian Department, FCO. London, 'Mizos', 17 September 1970. This message from Fowler, for instance, noted how 'some 120 Naga, Kuki, Mizo and Meitei rebels [had been] given training in air operations in the Chittagong Hill Tract 15 miles southeast of Rangamati since late last year'.

challenge to state legitimacy prompted Indian authorities to hand a protest note to Pakistan's High Commissioner about aid granted to Naga, Mizo and Meitei nationalist groups.[948] Trends from the highlands had potency in Manipur by the 1970s.

The rise of Meitei secessionist thought was premised on the knowledge that the Indian state had a chronic problem with insurgency. Though the Bangladesh War was a setback for the various factions within the UNLF, Meitei nationalist ambitions evolved throughout the 1970s.[949] Nameirakpam Bisheswar Singh led a small band of RGM volunteers to China for training in the mid 1970s, which resulted in the formation of the Manipur-based People's Liberation Army (PLA).[950] The PLA would later be referred to as the 'perfect example of Maoist Guerrilla fighters', and established its political wing – the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) – in 1979.[951] A force of PLA recruits utilised help from Naga guerrillas to reach Burma in 1979 and established links with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).[952] Meanwhile, the PLA unleashed a series of terror attacks in Manipur as the 1970s wound to a close.[953] It was

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[948] TNA UK FCO 37/735. P. J. Fowler to W. K. Slatcher, 'Mizos', 8 April 1970.

[949] Bases of operation in the CHT were closed to the northeast's insurgencies whilst around one hundred and fifty Manipuri rebels were arrested by the Indian Army for aiding Pakistan during the war. See Lintner, *Great Game East*, p. 147.

[950] Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, p. 315. Obviously not to be confused with China's PLA.

[951] Gou Son Lian, 'Drugs, Small Arms Proliferation and Its Casualties: The Tragedy of Commons in Manipur', *Journal of North East India Studies*, 3.1 (2013), 86–92 (p. 87).

[952] Binalakshmi Nepram, 'The Origin and Impact of Small Wars and Insurgencies in the North East', *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, 5.3–4 (2001), 54–95 (p. 79). For an overview of the Kachin independence movement and the KIA, see Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[953] The breadth of terror attacks gained international media recognition. The *Economist* noted how 'blood is flowing in the once idyllic Manipur valley, where several civil servants and policemen have been killed this year by tribal militants'. The state's government was dissolved whilst Indian security forces struck back with a similar logic to that applied in the Naga and Mizo Hills. On 8 September 1980, the AFSPA was declared across the entirety of Manipur, after previous legislation had already established curfews. See 'India Imposes Direct Rule on State', *The Globe and Mail*, 15 November 1979; 'The Tribals Are Restless', *The Economist*, 8 December 1979, p. 55; 'Curfew Imposed on Part of India', *New York Times*, 19 May 1980, p. 9.

the first organisation in Manipur to instigate enough casualties to be coded in conflict databases such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).[954] This upsurge in armed violence was part of a wider evolving transference of conflict dynamics from the highlands.

The link between the Manipur attacks and the instability in the wider region was explicitly highlighted in international media reports. As the *Economist* noted, 'the army was rushed into the eastern state of Manipur to control rampaging students infected by the virus from neighbouring Assam'.[955] This was a story of transference. In this environment, the highlands acted as a beacon for the challenges to state authority that emerged elsewhere in the northeast. The terror conducted in Manipur had striking parallels to the Naga underground's operations after 1956, and the MNF's actions after 1966.[956] The northeast did not operate in a vacuum, and this became abundantly clear across the region by the late 1970s.

The formation of the PLA formed part of a consolidation of militant groups in Manipur,[957] concerned with the revival of pre-Vaishnav Meitei culture and the rejection of both

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[954] 'India: Manipur', *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* <https://ucdp.uu.se/encyclopedia> [accessed 6 September 2021]. This was with the recognition that 'information about this time-period is extremely scarce', meaning UCDP records are likely to underestimate total battle casualties. Overall, the UCDP requires twenty-five battle deaths per year to constitute a conflict, where the state is involved in operations against a militant group over territory or government type.

[955] 'Bad Start', *The Economist*, 3 May 1980, p. 43.

[956] Though this was not drawn out in too much detail in chapter IV, the MNF mirrored the Naga underground in its use of terror tactics to ensure civilians did not cooperate with state forces. For example, one report suggested that 'alleged kidnappings, forced labour, torture and killing has been the main weapon of the MNF'. Though the report was made by an Indian official, there is plenty of evidence in the archive about such MNF operations. See MSA Gen 1393/115. M. Gopalakrishna to Chief Secretary, Political Dept., Govt. of Assam, 18 October 1966; MSA Gen 1504/125. AAO Thingsulthliah to Deputy Commissioner, PPV Branch, Mizo District, 'Depredation by MNF at Tlungvel on the night of 5 January 1968', 8 January 1968.

[957] Hassan, *Building Legitimacy*, pp. 1-65, 110-137; Komol Singha, 'Study of Manipur'; K. S. Subramanian, *State, Policy and Conflicts in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2016), pp. 29-88.

modern Hinduism and the Indian state.[958] The outright rejection of the state was a clear and obvious sign that regional identity movements in the northeast were not reconciled with nation-building aims espoused by the centre after independence. A similar story also unfolded in Tripura.[959] From 1967, discontent emerged under the banner of the Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Union (TTSU).[960] The Sengkrak movement was actively established with help from the MNF, and the two conducted joint operations, while the latter helped the former establish ties in East Pakistan.[961] Though the Sengkrak movement was short-lived, instability in Tripura was only beginning.

The creation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) in 1967 was effectively a third-way political movement between the left and the INC in Tripura.[962] It appealed – at least in theory – to Tripura's increasingly isolated indigenous communities.[963] As in Manipur, the Bangladesh War affected both movements, but after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman – Bangladesh's President – in 1975 the CHT once more became a viable avenue for

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[958] Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, pp. 315-16; J. R. Mukherjee, *An Insider's Experience of Insurgency in India's North-East* (London: Anthem, 2005), pp. 42-43. Within this environment, the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) was created in 1977 and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) was established in 1980.

[959] The violent turn in the late 1970s again had its forerunners, though in Tripura around independence this was clearest in the Reang rebellion in the north of the region. See Bhattacharyya, 'Reang Rebellion'.

[960] TNA FCO 37/267. P. J. Fowler to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 16 May 1968; M. G. Macdonald to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 27 June 1968.

[961] TNA UK FCO 37/267. M. G. Macdonald to B. H. G. Kay, 'Mizos, Manipur and Tripura', 27 June 1968.

[962] Bhattacharyya, *Radical Politics*, pp. 182-96.

[963] The demographics of Tripura shifted rapidly after independence, with high levels of immigration from East Pakistan. As Tripura's official state portal has noted, 'in 1901 Tripura's population was 1.73 lakh, with tribals making up nearly 52.89 percent of the whole. By 1941, the total population rose to 5.13 lakh with a barely 50.09 percent tribal majority. But by 1981, the tribal population dipped to 28.44 percent of a total population of 2.05 million because of several socio-political developments'. See 'Demographic Features', *Tripura State Portal* <https://tripura.gov.in/demographics> [accessed 6 September 2021].

insurgent operations.[964] Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl played a key role in the shift towards armed insurrection in the late 1970s. He was a high-ranking member within the TUJS, but after meeting Nameirakpam Biseshwar Singh – who had been key in the establishment of the PLA in Manipur – in jail, his vision for armed struggle crystallised.[965] The state had a chronic issue in confronting insurgency in its northeastern borderlands, and figures like Hrangkhawl and Singh built from this premise first established in the highlands. Once more, the spiralling effects of the long decolonisation were critical in the spread of insurgency throughout the region.

Hrangkhawl's disillusion with the TUJS's preference for non-violent political agitation underpinned his part in the creation of the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) in November 1978.[966] As the with Sengkrak movement, the TNV operated with aid from the MNF.[967] Paralleling Manipur, it was in the late 1970s that Tripura witnessed its first notable insurgent clashes, with the UCDP clarifying as much: 'armed action… [began] with the formation of the TNV'.[968] International media coverage gave indications of the extent of violence that gripped Tripura in 1980, as communal clashes intersected with insurgency to create an environment of

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[964] Bhaumik, *Insurgence Crossfire*, pp. 200-1. The Bangladesh War dealt a terminal blow to the Sengkrak movement, but not the TUJS.

[965] *Ibid.,* pp. 197-98.

[966] There is some discrepancy in some of the older literature on the TNV. Mahadev Chakravarti, for instance, suggests the TNV formed in 1983, but the 1978 has since been widely acknowledged. Chakravarti's work is nonetheless a useful introduction to politics in Tripura and the emergence of the TUJS. See Mahadev Chakravarti, 'The TUJS: From Petition to Power', in *Regional Political Parties in North East India*, ed. by L. S. Gassah (New Delhi: Omsons, 1992), pp. 226–40 (p. 237).

[967] Gates and Roy, *Unconventional Warfare*, p. 48.

[968] 'India: Tripura', *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* <https://ucdp.uu.se/conflict/335> [accessed 6 September 2021].

instability.[969] The formation of the All Tripura People's Liberation Organization (ATPLO) followed the emergence of the TNV, and after a lull in violence more insurgent groups were formed from the close of the 1980s.[970]

Tripura had been notable for its largely peaceful transition into the independent Indian nation-state.[971] This changed rapidly after the outbreak of violence from the late 1970s and the proliferation of insurgent organisations. As in Manipur, the decolonisation of the highlands enabled this insurgent uprising, both directly and indirectly. The identity groups in Manipur and Tripura would not have arisen in the northeast if they thought the state was strong and could translate its vastly superior resources into swift victory.[972] But the long decolonisation of the northeast revealed the limited capacities of the state. This logic became commonplace in the northeast from the late 1970s onwards.[973]

It was not only the former princely states where the transference of trends from the highlands was notable. The Assam Valley, too, was affected. In 1979, widespread anti-

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[969] For coverage in *The Times* of the violence in Tripura during the summer of 1980, see '300 Die as Indian State Is Swept by Violence', *The Times*, 11 June 1980, p. 7; 'Carnage in Riot-Torn State "Unparalleled in Independent India"', *The Times*, 12 June 1980, p. 8; 'Tripura Villages Stormed by Tribesmen', *The Times*, 18 June 1980, p. 9; Trevor Fishlock, 'Tripura Riot Toll Rises to More than 1,000', *The Times*, 23 June 1980, p. 1; 'Death Toll in Tripura Now over 2,000', *The Times*, 26 June 1980, p. 10. The riots were sparked by the deteriorating atmosphere between TUJS supporters and migrant Bengalis, whose numbers had risen dramatically in the region since 1947. A clash at Lembucherra led to large-scale violence, such as the massacre at Mandai. The Mandai massacre was noted by Manas Paul to be the largest single-day slaughter in the northeast until the Nellie massacre in Assam three years later. See Manas Paul, *The Eyewitness: Tales from Tripura's Ethnic Conflict* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2009), pp. 83-94.

[970] Chakravarti, 'Insurgency in Tripura'. The All Tripura Tribal Front (ATTF) has been particularly influential.

[971] Subramanian, *State, Policy and Conflicts*, p. 89. At least in comparison to Manipur, though it would be an oversimplification to suggest this was an episode of tranquillity.

[972] For an introduction to the mindset of 'weak' groups, and how they identity state fragilities and exploit these for favourable gains, see Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*.

[973] Baruah, 'Gulliver's Troubles', p. 4180.

immigration discourses ushered in the beginning of the Assam Agitation.[974] The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was born in the same year as the radical fringe of Assamese sub-nationalism.[975] As agitation unfolded, President's rule was declared in Assam in December 1979, whilst Indira Gandhi began talks with Assam's leaders to try resolve the migration issue in 1980.[976] The heated political atmosphere resulted in tragedies such as the Nellie massacre in 1983 and the election debacle of the same year.[977] Though a deal was struck in 1985, the unsatisfactory nature of the Assam Accord ushered in the ULFA's rise as a mainstream insurgent group.[978]

Archana Upadhyay has suggested that ULFA's 'culture of violence' produced a 'mushrooming of 'copycat rebel groups'' in the northeast.[979] It must be stressed that this genealogy of violence did not begin with ULFA. The ULFA was, like the nascent groups in Manipur and Tripura, impacted by the transferable processes from the highlands. The ULFA conducted some of the most expansive anti-state operations and ensured some of the most extensive COIN efforts from the Indian Army.[980] But both its operations and internal logic

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[974] For a useful overview of the historiography on Assamese identity, which was central to the Assam Agitation, the politics of immigration and the emergence of separatist movements, see Madhumita Sengupta, 'Historiography of the Formation of Assamese Identity: A Review', *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 2.1-2 (2006), 121–34.

[975] Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, p. 151.

[976] Chadha, *Low Intensity Conflicts*, pp. 239-40.

[977] Makiko Kimura, *The Nellie Massacre of 1983: Agency of Rioters* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2013).

[978] Anindita Dasgupta, 'Resisting the Resistance: Civilian Protests against ULFA Insurgency in Assam, India', *Millennial Asia*, 3.2 (2012), 115–37 (pp. 120-21). The ULFA sought to resolve 'unfinished business' that the Assam Accord – allegedly – failed to address.

[979] Upadhyay, *India's Fragile Borderlands*, p. 44.

[980] Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, pp. 167-236. Especially notable were Operations Bajrang and Rhino. The former largely ended in stalemate, but the latter was much more successful from an Indian perspective.

were conditioned by the insurgencies that preceded it. The use of terror,[981] its operations within international borderlands and links to foreign powers,[982] the utilisation of civil society and grassroots organisations for its operations,[983] the widespread acquisition of small arms,[984] a rejection of Indian nationalism[985] and a belief in the limitations of state capacity were all central to the ULFA's operations.[986] These were well worn paths that have been established throughout this thesis.

The transregional nature of insurgency in the northeast meant that the ULFA was not the only armed group operating in the Assam state. The Bodo separatist movement, for instance, emerged in the Assam state in the late 1980s, operated across the northeast and became an important aspect of the region's 'security conundrum'.[987] In Nagaland, the Shillong Accord – signed in 1975 – was a weak, provisional arrangement that only created more

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[981] For some press coverage on the expansiveness of the ULFA's use of terror, see R. Menon, 'Assam: Terror Cult', *India Today*, 12.19 (1987); Sanjoy Hazarika, 'New Ethnic Violence Is Shaking India's Northeast', *The New York Times*, 11 June 1989; 'Bus Bomb in Assam Kills 12 Despite Truce', *The New York Times*, 30 August 1989; Sanjoy Hazarika, 'Assam Separatists Terrorizing Tea Planters', *The New York Times*, 14 February 1991.

[982] Mukherjee, Kunal, 'Comparing India's Disputed Borderlands: Kashmir and the Northeast', *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 18.1 (2014), 31-61 (p. 38); Upadhyay, *India's Fragile Borderlands*, pp. 50-54.

[983] Monica Banerjee, 'Civil Society and Violence in India's Northeast', *Journal of Civil Society*, 5.2 (2009), 151–67; Akhil Ranjan Dutta, 'Civil Society's Engagement with ULFA in Assam: A Historical Exploration', *Studies in Indian Politics*, 2.1 (2014), 43–54.

[984] Dasgupta, 'Small Arms Proliferation'.

[985] Sanjib Baruah, 'The State and Separatist Militancy in Assam: Winning a Battle and Losing the War?', *Asian Survey*, 34.10 (1994), 863-877. As Baruah suggested, the term 'united' in the ULFA reflected the theme of unity of Assamese nationalism in its early stages, opposed to Indian nationalist conceptions. The ULFA's memorandum of understanding with groups such as the NSCN and UNLF in 1990 reflected this centrality of Indian nationalism.

[986] This led, for example, to the targeting of rural areas where 'government machinery had broken down', exploiting the tangible aspects of state weakness. See Jayanta Krishna Sarmah, Nirmala Devi, and Amar Deep Pegu, 'ULFA Versus State - Unresolved Issue of Sovereignty: A Human Rights Perspective', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 69.4 (2008), 825–31.

[987] Nel Vandekerckhove and Bert Suykens, '"The Liberation of Bodoland": Tea, Forestry and Tribal Entrapment in Western Assam', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31.3 (2008), 450–71.

problems than it resolved.[988] Though the NNC signed the declaration, the fragmented nature of the Naga nationalist cause by 1975 meant that another insurgent movement rose by the end of the decade.[989] The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) then fractured further, as splinter factions were created in 1988.[990] In Mizoram, the civil war rumbled on until 1986, though a particularly remarkable peace agreement – which included making the head of the MNF, Laldenga, the first Chief Minister of Mizoram – ensured lasting peace in the state.[991] Though peace eventually came to Mizoram, the broader northeast has been wracked by instability since the late 1970s, as it became an exceptional space of conflict dynamics.

The narrative provided here, in terms of basic facts and events, is relatively well known. No scholar of the northeast will learn anything new about the various armed movements that have been identified, but what is critical is the framing. The fundamental impact of the long decolonisation in conditioning the conflict dynamics of the northeast has never been understood. The sheer breadth of insurgency and violence is something that baffles various commentators.[992] But the insights provided in this thesis, about the impact of the long

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[988] Subir Bhaumik, 'The Accord That Never Was: Shillong Accord, 1975', in Das, *Peace Processes*, pp. 200-221; Das, 'Naga Peace Parleys', p. 75; Goswami, 'Naga Narrative', pp. 296-97; Swarna Rajagopalan, *Peace Accords in Northeast India: Journey over Milestones* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2008).

[989] For some useful introductory reading to Naga conflict dynamics since the establishment of the NSCN in 1980, see, Staniland, 'Armed Politics'; Bert Surykens, 'Comparing Rebel Rule Through Revolution and Naturalization: Ideologies of Governance in Naxalite and Naga India', in Arjona et al, *Rebel Governance*, pp. 138–57; Thakur and Venugopal, 'Parallel Governance'; Alex Waterman, 'Ceasefires and State Order-Making in Naga Northeast India', *International Peacekeeping*, 28.3 (2021), 496–525.

[990] M. Amarjeet Singh, 'Revisiting the Naga conflict: what can India do to resolve this conflict?', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 24.5 (2013), 795-812. These were the NSCN-IM under the leadership of Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah and NSCN-K headed by S. S. Khaplang.

[991] Goswami, 'Conflict Resolution in Mizoram'.

[992] To translate the northeast's dynamics as simply as possible to a global audience, Subir Bhaumik has written numerous introductory overviews for the BBC to try and partially demystify the region. See Subir Bhaumik, 'Where Do "Chinese" Guns Arming Rebels Really Come From?', *BBC News*, 3 August 2010 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10626034> [accessed 20 April 2020]; Subir Bhaumik, 'What

decolonisation of the Assam highlands, makes the conflict dynamics of the northeast much easier to understand. The northeast, therefore, cannot be understood without a recognition of the events that preceded the exceptional turn in the late 1970s.

Reflecting on the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands.

To understand the broader significance of this thesis, it is worth returning to Sankaran Krishna's review of Baruah's *In the Name of the Nation*, highlighted at the very beginning. Prior to Krishna's identification of a 'mainstream' view of India's northeast, he wrote the following:

> This review begins with a shameful confession: despite being a student of Indian politics and history for many decades now, I spent a fair amount of time poring over the map of north-eastern India reproduced at the outset of Baruah's *In the Name of the Nation*. While I could possibly locate every other state in the Union, once you moved east of West Bengal, my geographical knowledge foundered. In this matter of uncaring, I am possibly the rule and not the exception when it comes to most Indians from what north-easterners call the 'mainland'.[993]

Krishna's assessment was refreshingly honest. Despite an upsurge in literature on the northeast in the past decade or two, the region remains decisively on the margins of 'mainstream' Indian studies and the nationalist imaginary.[994]

Lies behind Assam Violence?', *BBC News*, 26 July 2012 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-18993905> [accessed 14 September 2021].

[993] Krishna, 'Book Review', p. 1232.

[994] The evolution of literature focused on the northeast is perhaps best displayed by two historiographical appraisals, the first published in the mid-1990s, the second in the mid 2010s. See Sajal Nag, 'Aspects of Historiography of North East India', in *Proceedings of the North East India History Association*, ed. by J. P. Singh (Aizawl: NEIHA, 1996), pp. 66–74; David Zou, 'Environment, Social Identity and Individual Freedom in the Current Historiography of Northeast India', *Studies in History*, 32.1 (2016), 117-129.

This poses a significant quandary. By his own admission, Krishna specializes in 'how the project of nation-building in postcolonial South Asia has evinced ethnic, regional and other resistances even as it has failed to deliver on development and dignity to the majority of its people'.[995] Without interrogating the northeast – arguably the most extreme Indian case-study within this conundrum – it is impossible to attain a truly national or international appraisal. Ethnic, regional resistance is a fundamental aspect of the northeast's history, and the state's inability to confront these challenges offers potent insight for subcontinent-wide comparisons.

How can a state's efforts at formulating an effective nation-building project be understood if a clear example of its failure is ignored? How can a state make grandiose claims about being the largest democracy on the planet when it has sanctioned airstrikes on its own towns and – in the case of the Mizo hills – forcibly moved almost seventy per cent of its region's inhabitants?[996] How can Indian nationalists seriously make a case for a Nehruvian golden period, when that same period saw legislation such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act passed for the first time?[997] These are uncomfortable questions, but questions that must be asked of any democracy with a legal and moral obligation to its own citizens. Reflecting upon

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[995] Sankaran Krishna, 'Faculty Profile' <https://politicalscience.manoa.hawaii.edu/sankaran-krishna/> [accessed 19 March 2021].

[996] MSA Gen 1496/124. Population of Voluntary Grouping.

[997] This conception continues to epitomise works such as the vastly popular account of India since 1947 by Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee. 2008 saw the publication of its twelfth edition, wherein it still clung to the notion that 'the years from 1951 to 1964 were those of maturity and achievement.' See Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, and Aditya Mukherjee, *India since Independence*, 12th edn (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), pp. 167-88. Elsewhere, the conception of the 'golden era' has been challenged for some time, but this lingering mythology still affects the ability to critically analyse the first decades after independence. For some revisionist examples of the 'golden era' thesis, which ranges from general overviews to analyses of economic growth, poverty, inequality – especially related to caste – and the incorporation of the princely states, see Vivek Chibber, *Locked in Place: State-Building and Late Industrialization in India*, 2nd edn (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. ix-xi; Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, pp. 43-66; William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s-1960s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 12-14; Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London: Hurst & Co., 2003), pp. 11-12; Kohli, *State and Poverty*, pp. 61-71; Sherman, 'Integration'; Zachariah, *Nehru*, p. 262.

the chequered history of the northeast absolutely requires a broader reflection upon the entire foundations of the Indian nation-state.

In addition to provoking uncomfortable questions about India's post-colonial history, the northeast provides further insight in a several guises. This thesis directly engages with various subfields of research, such as nationalism, SALW, federalism, counterinsurgency, and conflict resolution. The reflections on this literature should be apparent from the preceding chapters. However, a brief few final notes on three of the core aspects of this thesis, as identified in the introduction, are useful to summarise.

The first is the wider insights for borderlands research presented by the northeast. The subfield of border studies has struggled somewhat for theoretical coherence. Beyond the acceptance that the border is a dynamic region of exchange – as opposed to a static line on a map – there has been little convergence on a unified research agenda.[998] This is somewhat strange, considering the quality of some of the individual work that employs a borderlands approach, though the wide disciplinary net of border studies is arguably a key factor in this relative incoherence. The highlands are a classic example of a border region. Furthering knowledge of the processes involved in borderlands regions – especially those that are under-

[998] For some reflections on the field, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, 'From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History', *The American Historical Review*, 104.3 (1999), 814–41; Kristine Beurskens and Judith Miggelbrink, 'Sovereignty Contested: Theory and Practice in Borderlands', *Geopolitics*, 22.4 (2017), 749–56; Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, 'The State of Borders and Borderlands Studies 2009: A Historical View and a View from the Journal of Borderlands Studies', *Eurasia Border Review*, 1.1 (2010), 1–16; Brunet-Jailly, 'Borders, Borderlands and Theory'; John R. Chávez, 'When Borders Cross Peoples: The Internal Colonial Challenge to Borderlands Theory', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28.1 (2013), 33–46; Andreas Fahrmeir, 'Conclusion: Historical Perspectives on Borderlands, Boundaries and Migration Control', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 34.4 (2019), 623–31; Henk van Houtum, 'The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries', *Geopolitics*, 10.4 (2005), 672–79; Vladimir Kolossov, 'Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches', *Geopolitics*, 10.4 (2005), 606–32; David Newman, 'Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9.2 (2006), 171–86; Willem van Schendel and Erik de Maaker, 'Asian Borderlands: Introducing Their Permeability, Strategic Uses and Meanings', *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 29.1 (2014), 3–9.

analysed – is critical for the expansion of the subfield. With this base to work out from, comparative studies conducted by scholars such as Benjamin D. Hopkins can provide a platform for greater coherence in research. Border studies – in its present guise[999] – may be relatively new, but it has significant potential for expansion.

The northeast also provides similar insights for understanding decolonisation. Though the literature on decolonisation is far broader than that on borderlands, there is still scope for expansion.[1000] This thesis suggests that studying the decolonisation of borderlands can be pivotal for broader spatial conceptions, as the notion of transference between the Assam highlands and the rest of the northeast was critical. The transferable processes of decolonisation provide just one example of how research can be expanded, whilst the temporal framing of decolonisation is similarly insightful. As framed here, the politico-economic decolonisation of a region can unfold whilst colonialism still looms large in other areas. This sensitivity to how to perceive decolonisation, what constitutes decolonisation and how the trajectories of

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[999] David J. Weber, 'Turner, the Boltonians, and the Borderlands', *The American Historical Review*, 91.1 (1986), 66–81. Though, as David J. Weber noted, there has been a long history of border and frontier studies, dating back to at least the late 1800s, even if the evolution of research has been somewhat disjointed. Additionally, the weighting of previous research in forging border studies was clear. Two examples derived from key works used in this thesis demonstrate this point. James Scott's conception of non-state spaces was impacted by Annales School methodology, and especially the work of Braudel. As he wrote, 'a friction of distance map allows societies, cultural zones, and even states that would otherwise be obscured by abstract distance to spring suddenly into view. Such was the essential insight behind Fernand Braudel's analysis of *The Mediterranean World*. Here was a society that maintained itself by the active exchange of goods, people, and ideas without a unified "territory" or political administration in the usual sense of the term'. Braudel's geo-cultural zone – the Mediterranean – directly fed into Scott's conception of space. Scott just flipped the logic that Braudel applied. Similarly, Benjamin D. Hopkins' application of 'governmentality' was clearly derived from Foucault's use of the term, the 'rationality' of governance rather than *the* government. See Andrew Berry, 'Michel Foucault', in *Palgrave Advances in Continental Political Thought*, ed. by Terrell Carver and James Martin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 244-259 (p. 252); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Harper Collins, 1972); Scott, *Anarchist History*, p. 48.

[1000] Andrew Thompson and Martin Thomas recently displayed this desire for expansion. In their edited collection, they suggested that their ambition was to build on revisionist scholarship towards decolonisation to 'provide a new analytical framework, the purpose of which is not simply to explain when and why decolonization happened, but how it happened and, as importantly, with what results'. See Thompson and Thomas, *Rethinking Decolonization*, p. 3.

decolonisation have wider resonance, all help move further away from the reductionism of 'flag independence' research.

The reflections on both borderlands and decolonisation are though, perhaps, most demonstrably useful when wedded to the other major research field used in this thesis: intrastate conflict. The subfield of intrastate conflict and civil wars has undoubtedly produced a wealth of valuable literature since the turn of the century. Some conflict research is acutely sensitive to historical or spatial dynamics.[1001] But rarely, if ever, does either take precedence. They are mostly framed as a backdrop to more important trends. This can be a fallacy.

The framing of space can be crucial for conflict dynamics. The transference of the highlands had limits. Beyond the northeast, the three critical trends had far less – if any – purchase on conflict dynamics in the rest of India.[1002] Therefore, researchers must be sensitive to where these boundaries exist. These boundaries – it is critical to understand – rarely align with administrative, regional or national borders. The highlands demonstrate this.[1003] The same applies for temporal frames. The framing of historical trajectories is a well-trodden path, especially since the advent of postmodernism, but beyond the historical discipline this sensitivity often goes unnoticed.[1004] The critical role of decolonisation – specifically as a

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[1001] Lina Grip, for example, exposed the ahistorical nature of research into arms control in Africa. Grip's concerted historical analysis displayed some of the weaknesses that follow because of this fallacy, and the article is a useful indicator for broader conflict studies about the importance of temporal sensitivity. See Grip, 'History Never Repeats'.

[1002] The thesis, for instance, does not suggest much causal weighting between the insurgencies of the northeast and the rise of the Naxalite insurgency in the 'Red Corridor'. The two do, however, make for interesting comparative study, as Bert Surykens has shown. See Bert Surykens, 'Comparing Rebel Rule Through Revolution and Naturalization: Ideologies of Governance in Naxalite and Naga India', in Arjona et al, *Rebel Governance*, pp. 138–57.

[1003] Though the highlands concept is framed within the parameters of India's national borders, the interaction beyond these boundaries should – by now – be obvious.

[1004] Michel Foucault's impact was sizeable on the move away from 'total' histories, which aimed to uncover a 'system of homogenous relations'. Rather, he sought to understand the fragmented trajectories that at times

process, not just as backdrop timeframe – demonstrates the potency of historical sensitivity. Both spatial and temporal considerations, therefore, can have a significant impact on understanding conflict dynamics.

In 1980 the geographer John House pioneered a concept he coined as the double peripherality.[1005] Double peripherality envisaged a geographically marginal region located close to the border that also existed on the 'economic, social and political' fringes of society.[1006] The term, logically applicable to India's northeast, suggested an area amongst the most marginal imaginable. This is sometimes how India's northeast is understood. But the reflections here suggest quite the opposite. Considering the vast array of insights the northeast has for wider research, the many lessons drawn from the long decolonisation of the Assam highlands suggest the region is anything but peripheral.

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intersected, 'to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical system they are capable of forming'. He referred to this as the history of the 'general'. In summary, he suggested 'a *total* description draws all phenomena around a single centre – a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a *general* history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion'. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), pp. 10-11.

[1005] John W. House, 'The Frontier Zone: A Conceptual Problem for Policy Makers', *International Political Science Review*, 1.4 (1980), 456–77 (p. 463).

[1006] Newman, 'Borders and Bordering', pp. 179-80.

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