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THE NSCN-K AND THE PEACE PROCESS

April 2014 saw the coming together of twenty-one armed ethnic groups that have been in conflict with the Burmese Government. The aim of the talks was to discuss a nationwide ceasefire agreement between armed ethnic groups and the Government's negotiating team which also included members of the armed forces. One of these groups, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Khaplang (NSCN-K), appeared at the meeting in somewhat complex circumstances. It remains unclear as to what exactly the goal of the NSCN-K is in relation to the peace process in Burma. Although based in Burma, its primary motivation is conflict with the Indian Government in its attempts to create a



united Nagaland which is to also include parts of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, consequently they have primarily fought the Assam Rifles (AR) and other Naga factions and not the Burma Army. That said however, it also claims parts of Sagaing Division, where the group is based, as being part of a united Nagaland, and it seeks total independence for Nagaland consisting of parts of India and Burma joined together.

The group is now estimated to have between 1000 and 1500 troops after a split in the leadership with its Indian based military commander Khole Konyak. The NSCN-K are based in northern Lahe and Nanyun townships in Sagaing and have primarily relied on creating finances through kidnapping, extortion and other related activities.¹ It is also believed that a number of anti-Indian groups have been trained at NSCN-K bases in Sagaing including the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). It is also alleged that China had been providing finances as well as arms and ammunition to the NSCN-K.

According to one NSCN-K leader, Kughalu Mulatanu:

Yes, they (Chinese people) openly and legally come to India via Delhi and meet Khaplang . . . In fact, the Government of India gets to know of such meetings well before they are held . . . The last of such meetings had taken place in 2009.²

However, the claims of foreknowledge of such meetings have been denied with one unnamed intelligence official stating that:

What we know is small arms such as pistols, revolvers, grenades etc, found with the militants of North-eastern states, come mostly from Chinese market. But we don't have any knowledge of such meetings in Myanmar.³



NSCN (Khaplang) cadres at Khehoi camp in Dimapur. (The Telegraph, India)

A number of offensives have been launched against the NSCN-K bases in Sagaing. Most recently, the Burma Army overran two camps of the NSCN-K and United National Liberation Front (UNLF) in September 2011.⁴ According to a report in the, Indian published, Telegraph newspaper, the attacks were carried out after the Indian Government provided the Burma Army with Sixty trucks of arms and ammunition.

On 9 April 2012, representatives from the NSCN-K met with the Government's peace negotiators, and a five-point agreement was made, the terms were:

1. Cessation of armed conflict with the Myanmar army April 9, 2012
2. Opening of a liaison office by NSCN-K at Khamti to facilitate further talks
3. Coordination among both sides for carrying arms beyond their agreed jurisdiction
4. Freedom of movement of unarmed NSCN-K cadres within Myanmar
5. Holding of sustained negotiations.

The NSCN-K has close ties to the Kachin Independence Army and it is believed that the KIA are involved in ceasefire talks between the NSCN-K and the Government. According to one source quoted in the Telegraph, India:

. . . the KIA has apparently told the NSCN to take its concurrence before going ahead with the negotiations or signing any further pacts with the Myanmar government.⁵

While the agreement with the NSCN-K can be seen as a positive step from the Burmese Governments side, it is unclear as to what the NSCN-K are prepared to accept within a future Burma.

INTERNAL SPLITS

The NSCN-K was created by a split in what was then The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). The NSCN was originally formed on January 31, 1980, by Isak Chisi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah, and S.S. Khaplang. The group soon moved to attack Indian Army outposts and convoys and embarked on a number of robberies. However, disagreements began to emerge when the Indian Government began to make peace overtures to the group. While Muivah rejected the offer, Khaplang did not. This

resulted in splitting the NSCN into two factions, one led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu (NSCN-IM), and the other by Khaplang (NSCN-K). Reportedly, over two hundred rebels died in the fighting as the two groups separated.⁶

Although both are involved in a formal peace process with the government of India, large fighting between the two factions and frequent assassination attempts have continued. The situation was made worse when, in 2011, Khaplang was impeached because, according to then NSC-K, General Secretary Kitovi Zhimomi:

. . . he opposed the Naga reconciliation process initiated by the Forum for Naga Reconciliation. Two months ago, Khaplang asked us to withdraw from the Covenant of Reconciliation signed by him. . . Khaplang is no more associated with the group. He is alone and can't force us to go against the will of the Nagas, who want peace, unity and reconciliation. His true colours were exposed when he opposed to peace and reconciliation. He had also directed all NSCN(K) members not to attend the highest level of meeting convened by the FNR⁷

The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) was created to assist in bringing all different factions together to find a peaceful solution to the Naga issue. Because of the impeachment, the NSCN-K Indian based army commander General Khole was elected president. According to Zhimomi:

Ours is a political problem and we will have a political solution. Peace within the Nagas alone will be insignificant if we do not sit with New Delhi. For now, we are focusing on the Naga reconciliation. We will talk with the Centre after resolving the problems with the Nagas.⁸

The NSCN-K blamed the FNR's Rev.Dr.Wati Aier for the split with Kughalu Mulatonu, the 'Envoy to the Collective Leadership' of the NSCN - K also accusing Rev. Dr. Wati Aier of sending NSCN-IM cadres into Burma to attack the group resulting in 10 dead on the NSCN-K side, and 50 on the NSCN-IM side.

In a further twist, Khaplang then decided to expel not only Khole and Kitovi but also several other ministers from the NSCN-K's Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim (GPRN) for conniving with the unification group and for their anti-party activities. As a result, Khole and Kitovi formed the India based NSCN-KK and have distanced themselves from the NSCN-K in Burma.

THE NSCN-K PEACE PROCESS IN BURMA

As noted earlier, what the NSCN-K hopes to achieve from the peace process is hard to assess. Although they are prepared to enter a ceasefire with the Burmese Government, their overall political objective is largely unobtainable in its current form. The NSCN-K wants an independent Naga State carved out of Sagaing Division. They have made it clear to the National Ceasefire Coordinating Team (NCCT), that although they are prepared to sign a Nationwide Ceasefire Accord, they will most likely not take part in any future political dialogue.⁹

The 2008 Constitution actually designates a self-administered zone consisting of three townships, Leshi, Lahe and Namyun townships. The official designation was announced by decree on 20 August 2010,¹⁰ and the zone is now administered by a retired Naga army officer from the Burma Army.¹¹ However, the NSCN-K does not recognize the creation of the administrative zone due to the fact that there was no consultation with the local Naga Community.¹²

It is highly unlikely that the NSCN-K will be able to achieve the formation of a united Nagaland reaching from Nagaland in India to Sagaing in Burma. Neither India nor Burma are likely to make such a concession to the group in terms of granting them control of any autonomous territory. In addition, rivalries between the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-KK over who best represents the people will continue with or without a ceasefire agreement. It is therefore essential that the NSCN-K rethink its strategy in relation to any future political dialogue. Political dialogue with the Burmese Government and other armed ethnic groups will give the NSCN-K a greater opportunity to represent those Naga living in the country. The Burmese Government has already created a Naga self-administered zone, the NSCN-K should develop strategies that can utilise this into their own plans therefore ensuring that they, and what they seek to achieve, are not neglected in any future union.

Notes

- ¹ http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/terrorist_outfits/NSCN_K.HTM
- ² 'We have strong ties with China, says NSCN(K)', Prasanta Mazumdar, The New Indian Express, 27 July 2010 The New Indian Express
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110916/jsp/northeast/story_14512691.jsp
- ⁵ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1130102/jsp/frontpage/story_16390324.jsp#.U1h3DVWSySo
- ⁶ 'NSCN(K) rules out split after Khaplang ouster', Times of India, 17 June 2011
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Personal Conversation with NCCT Member, 10 April 2013
- ¹⁰ <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/7112811.html>
- ¹¹ Personal Phone Conversation with NCCT member 24 April 2014
- ¹² Ibid.