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# Political Risk and Ex-Combatants

## Introduction

On 5 July 2013, 1,352 former Maoist combatants officially joined the Nepal Army.<sup>1</sup> The news occurs as a major milestone given that the issue of integration figured as one of the key sticking points in the peace process. One new entrant said, “There was a time when we fought for a particular party or group but with our new identity and mission we have now given ourselves up for the cause of the whole nation.”<sup>2</sup> With the apparent closure of the chapter on the existence of two separate armies,<sup>3</sup> national attention already focused on the new Constituent Assembly (CA) elections slated to be held on 19 November 2013 is now fully centered on further steps to cementing Nepal’s move away from conflict to peace.

However, this narrative of progress of the peace process leaves out a number of issues such as transitional justice, security sector reform and of central concern of this Martin Chautari (MC) policy brief, the whereabouts and situation of the rest of the thousands of ex-combatants of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) or CPN (Maoist). Both the debates on transitional justice and security sector reform have disappeared from the public sphere. Unsurprisingly, there was no question of vetting the ex-combatants who entered the Nepal Army in the absence of state commitment to investigate serious acts of human rights violations.

Further, there has been no real attempt to analyze the process globally understood as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). In Nepal,

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<sup>1</sup>The Kathmandu Post. 2013. 1352 Ex-Combatants Now Army Personnel. 6 July, p. 1&4.

<sup>2</sup>Lamichhane, Baburam. 2013. New Entrants Say Dawn of a New Era. *The Himalayan Times*, 6 July, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>70 others undertaking training for officer-level positions are scheduled to enter the Nepal Army in August-September of 2013. The Kathmandu Post. 2013. 1352 Ex-Combatants Now Army Personnel. 6 July, p. 1&4.



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the process was contentious in definition as well as practice. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) had stated that “[t]he Interim Council of Ministers shall form a special committee in order to inspect, integrate and rehabilitate the Maoist combatants.” That the parties changed stances and emphases over time reveal the overall weakness of the CPA – composed primarily of promises and reflecting a temporary convergence of interests. Timings and modalities of disarmament, demobilization, integration into the army and rehabilitation became key contentious issues. As a result and in more global language, while disarmament and demobilization were largely successful, there has been almost no planned reintegration process into society and little reflection on this weakness/failure.

This MC policy brief seeks to place Maoist ex-combatants in the larger timing, sequencing and components of post-war security transitions. The dismantling of armed groups is a critical component of the transition process, with key attention to preventing a return to violence by easing combatants’ transition into civilian life. This is more complicated than collecting weapons and sending soldiers back to their communities, even with a large cheque in their pockets. In Nepal, the process was made difficult by the lack of political consensus, extended periods of political stalemate, the consequently long period in which ex-combatants were kept in cantonments and the manner in which they were ultimately released. This has had a serious impact on the manner in which DDR programs were able to be planned and implemented which, as experiences in other countries have shown, has significant implications for the reintegration of ex-combatants and the peace building process.<sup>4</sup>

This policy brief is predominantly based on a total of 129 semi-structured interviews, 114 with ex-combatants and 15 with state and political party officials and members of civil society. Interviews were conducted in 13 districts<sup>5</sup>

from 5 December 2012 to 20 March 2013. These districts were selected on the bases of geographical coverage as well as reports on concentrated settlements of ex-combatants.

### Timeline of Integration

At the start of the peace process, the November 2006 CPA signed by the then main political parties (the Seven Party Alliance – SPA) and the then CPN (Maoist) was followed within days by the Agreement on Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies (AMMAA). Maoist combatants were then located to seven main cantonments with 21 satellite sites around the country. All arms were secured in containers within the cantonments, with keys held by the Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA) but under 24 hours UN supervision.

Settled in cantonments, their registration and verification was undertaken by the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). Verification by UNMIN was completed in December 2007,<sup>6</sup> with 19,602 verified as regular members, and 4,008 individuals disqualified as verified minors and late recruits (VMLRs)<sup>7</sup> and thus ineligible for potential/possible integration into the Nepal Army. While the discharge of the VMLRs was to start immediately, the lack of consensus, inter and intra political party power struggles and the overall climate of political distrust resulted in the discharge process only taking place in January 2010. At that time, only 2,394 (60 percent) of the VMLRs were present. One result of this delay was to confirm accusations from the main political parties that the Maoists did not fulfill their commitments and could not be trusted. This contributed to the climate of political mistrust whereas the prompt dismissal of the disqualified from the cantonments would have potentially helped the momentum of the peace process.

<sup>4</sup> UNIDR. 1999. *The Management of Arms in Conflict Resolution Process*. Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDR).

<sup>5</sup> The districts were as follows: Kailali, Surkhet, Banke, Dang, Chitawan, Nawalparasi, Taplejung, Jhapa, Sunsari, Morang, Bara, Parsa and Kathmandu.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) press statement, 22 December 2007. Available at <http://un.org.np/unmin-archive/downloads/pressreleases/2007-12-22-UNMIN.Press.Statement.End.of.Second.Phase.Verification.ENG.pdf>; accessed 9 July 2013.

<sup>7</sup> The AMMAA had defined “minors” as those born after 25 May 1988, i.e., those under 18 in May 2006 and “late recruits” as those who joined the Maoist army after the 25 May 2006 ceasefire. Of the 4,008, 2,973 were minors and 1,035 late recruits.



UNMIN departed from Nepal in January 2011, and the Special Committee for Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of former Maoist combatants formed in October 2008 was transformed into a Secretariat and given responsibility over the PLA weapons. However, due to disputes on power sharing agreements, it was not until 1 November 2011 that a deal was made on integration. Three options were provided to former PLA combatants – integration into the army, voluntary retirement and rehabilitation. According to the agreement, a maximum of 6,500 personnel would be integrated, with those to meet the standard norms of the Nepal Army with some concessions made on age (three years), education level (one level) and marital status. The highest rank was stated to be Major, with the Special Committee to decide on demands for higher ranks. For those choosing voluntary retirement, payment of Rs. five-eight lakhs<sup>8</sup> based on rank in two installments were to be made. Lastly, there was also agreement to create a new Directorate in the Nepal Army to accommodate the recruits.<sup>9</sup>

This led to a first phase of regrouping (November-December 2011) in which out of the 19,602 verified by UNMIN, only 17,076 showed up. Out of this number, 9,705 combatants opted for integration and 7,365 chose voluntary discharge. Only six combatants registered their name for rehabilitation, an indication of CPN (Maoist) control over the decisions. However, after the handover of the cantonments and arms to the Nepal Army on 10 April 2012, the numbers opting for integration declined drastically.<sup>10</sup> The Maoist party leadership had hastened handover to the Nepal Army as the residing ex-combatants were on the verge of mutiny due to the issue of corruption tied to payments made to cantonments and combatants and factionalism within the Maoist party. The manner of the handover, low morale, unresolved issues of rank and education qualifications as well as loss of faith in the Maoist leadership resulted in mounting

numbers opting for voluntary retirement leaving in the end a total of 1,422 joining the army.<sup>11</sup> The speed with which the Maoist leadership lost moral authority and control after five years is the background of the disorganized dispersal of the ex-combatants.

Initially conceived as a six-month transition period before army integration, the transfer of command to the Nepal Army took some five years in total. The Special Committee for Supervision, Integration and Rehabilitation of former Maoist combatants formed in October 2008 closed on 12 April 2013.<sup>12</sup> The “national unity” government put in place to facilitate power-sharing as a means to end violence during the peace process was successful in that violence between the two signatories of the CPA did not erupt. However, the ambiguities of the CPA, and the failure to hold discussions later to clarify issues and the concentration solely on the demobilization of the Maoists brought fault lines to the fore.

The climate of political distrust led to struggles over leading government, political stalemates and various unhelpful posturing. Non-Maoist parties such as the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified-Marxist-Leninist) demanded that the PLA be disbanded before the Maoists be allowed back into power. The Maoists had always opposed the use of the DDR terminology – a term seen as positioning the Maoists as ‘the defeated’ who were to be dismantled.<sup>13</sup> They had argued that the integration process should be part of a wider security sector reform. Given the lack of clarity on the modalities for how combatants were to be integrated into the security sector, dismantling their forces appeared premature to the Maoists. For the latter, demobilization was also linked to the constitution-writing

<sup>8</sup> Approximately US\$5,300 to 8,500 at the exchange rate as of July 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Simkhada, Shambhu Ram. 2013. Home Making. *República*, 21 April, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Dahal, Phanindra. 2012. Number of NA Aspirants See a Free Fall. *The Kathmandu Post*, 18 April, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> According to an agreement made on 13 March 2013, the highest rank to be attained will be Colonel – one – 2 Lieutenant Colonels, 13 Majors, 30 Captains and 24 Lieutenants. The newly formed General Directorate for National Development headed by a Major General will house the new entrants in various positions. *The Kathmandu Post*. 2013. 1352 Ex-Combatants Now Army Personnel. 6 July, p. 1&4.

<sup>12</sup> Dahal, Phanindra. 2013. PLA Integration Process Concludes. *The Kathmandu Post*, 13 April, p. 1&4.

<sup>13</sup> Gautam, Kulchandra. 2009. The Rehabilitation and Integration of Maoist Combatants as Part of Nepal’s Security Sector Reform. In *Changing Security Dynamics in Nepal*. Rajan Bhattarai and Rosy Cave, eds., pp. 95-111. London: Saferworld.



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process, with the cantonments and the ex-combatants used to influence the structuring of the ‘New Nepal.’

It is in these larger political calculations, negotiations, bargains and agreements in which the ex-combatants in the cantonments were ensnared either as tools of leverage or key obstacles to the peace process. All were following partisan approaches and none seeing the demobilization of a large number of militarily trained youth to be a national issue affecting long-term peace and stability. Calculations of best interests for the ex-combatants appeared of low, if any, priority for both CPA signatories during this process. Unsurprisingly, after release, ex-combatants have been removed from the national political and development vision.

### Disarmament and Demobilization

The DDR program in Nepal was in practice disarmament and demobilization (DD). Reintegration as globally understood has been practiced to a very limited degree – for the VMLRs and the six who opted for rehabilitation packages offered by the state and funded by Western donors.<sup>14</sup> These reintegration initiatives have further been fraught with challenges. Mistrust of external parties resulted in the Maoists refusing to allow the government and UN staff access to the VMLRs in the cantonment. This meant that the profiling stage<sup>15</sup> of the rehabilitation program to ascertain their aspirations, etc. could not take place. Adding to this, an adequate baseline survey on the labor environment into which the VMLRs were to be released was not undertaken. In the words of a United Nations Interagency Rehabilitation Programme (UNIRP) review,

<sup>14</sup> Main partners to the Discharge and Reintegration program run by the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) were UNDP, UNMIN, UNFPA, UNICEF and DFID. See Discharge and Reintegration Assistance to Maoist Army - DRAMA. Final Programme Narrative Report. 1 January 2009–31 May 2010. Available at <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00071690>; accessed 13 July 2013.

<sup>15</sup> The rehabilitation program was to be a six-step process consisting of: information and consultation; profiling survey of combatants; discharge from cantonments; orientation and counseling in transit center; rehabilitation with technical education and vocational training support; and post-training support and monitoring. See Subedi, D.B. 2011. Rehabilitation and Reintegration of the Maoist Ex-Combatants in Nepal: Issues, Challenges and Potential Lessons. *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 38(2): 158.

the restricted access to VMLRs and lack of baseline data “constrained the capacity of the UNIRP to design the optimum training options and support systems that would accurately target both the needs of the labour market and the capacities and aspirations of the beneficiaries.”<sup>16</sup>

Compounding all of the above was the early terming of the VMLR as “ayogya” – unfit in the Nepali language. This was in direct contrast to practices which emphasize using terminologies which reflect both local preferences and highlight the dignity and self-assertion of the individuals undergoing reintegration.<sup>17</sup> Despite attempts to change the terminology, the term “ayogya” remains dominant and there has been considerable outcry by VMLRs and other ex-combatants over the labelling. Interviews have revealed that while reintegration into society remains a challenge for all ex-combatants, this is especially so for those now labeled by the larger public as being “unfit/ayogya” as will be detailed later.

Of central concern here is that for the majority of ex-combatants who opted for voluntary retirement and cash payment,<sup>18</sup> there has been no additional support or follow-up. Thus while international literature on best practices note the importance on focused and sustainable support for ex-combatants to enable them to succeed in the transition from military to civilian life, this has not happened in Nepal. As the following shows, it is important to keep a focus on their lived realities and the choices that they make now and in the future.

<sup>16</sup> General Lessons Learned in the Planning and Implementation of Rehabilitation of Ex-Combatants in Nepal. Available at [http://peacebuilderscenter.jp/parts/20130124-0306/Desmond\\_Molloy/0213\\_text1\\_Desmond\\_Molloy\\_Session3A\\_General\\_Lessons\\_Learned\\_UNIRP.pdf](http://peacebuilderscenter.jp/parts/20130124-0306/Desmond_Molloy/0213_text1_Desmond_Molloy_Session3A_General_Lessons_Learned_UNIRP.pdf); accessed 11 July 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Dudouet, Veronique, Hans J. Giessmann and Katrin Planta. 2012. From Combatants to Peacebuilders: A Case for Inclusive, Participatory and Holistic Security Transitions. Policy Report. Berlin: Berghof Foundation; p. 23. Available at [http://www.berghof-conflict-research.org/documents/publications/Policy\\_Paper\\_dudouetetal.pdf](http://www.berghof-conflict-research.org/documents/publications/Policy_Paper_dudouetetal.pdf); accessed 11 July 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Donors were unable to contribute to the cash payments made to ex-combatants “because these tended to go against international best practice and represented a fiduciary risk.” See Annual Review: Nepal Peace Support Programme. February 2013; p. 3. Available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/213901/Annual-Review-Peace-Support-Prog-nepal.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/213901/Annual-Review-Peace-Support-Prog-nepal.pdf); accessed 12 July 2013.



## Reintegration Realities

Early reports on the ex-combatants focused on their resolve and initiatives to start their lives afresh and break with their past armed with their cash payments.<sup>19</sup> As then, buying of property, building homes and a family life, and securing livelihoods continue to be the priority for those who took voluntary retirement. Having spent their youth in the war, sacrificing all, it is marriage, family and livelihood that are central.

And as in early reports on those choosing voluntary retirement, interviews reveal widespread anger at the party and party leadership.<sup>20</sup> In the words of one ex-combatant, “There are those who don’t want to hear the names of Prachanda and Baburam.” This stems from a number of reasons. Prominent is the manner in which integration into the Nepal Army took place. Although clearly encouraged by the party to choose integration in order to boost leverage, many interviewees stated that joining the Nepal Army had been their first choice. Among other things, they had been told by leadership that integration would be “respectful,” that there would be unit-wise integration at their PLA ranks, that the education level they attained in the cantonments would be taken into consideration and that the merging would take place only after the formulation of the national security policy, which would fix the numerical strength of the national army.

Given such promises, many of the ex-combatants saw the integration modality agreed upon in November 2011 as a “humiliating surrender.” In their perception, not only was the PLA made to surrender in the name of peace, the ex-combatants were to be subject to recruitment rather than integration according to the 2006 vision of the merging of forces. Chest measurement – one of the recruitment procedures to be undergone and symbolic of recruitment – was a central point of derision. The fact that they were to be given a year’s army training, after having fought a war for eight to nine years and seen 14-15 battles, was seen as unacceptable. Unsurprisingly Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ and

Baburam Bhattarai were seen as treacherous, destroying the PLA, ruining their future and forgetting the blood of martyrs and friends. The party leadership was seen as using them as a ladder to get to the top and then discarding them. The weighing of their worth with monetary compensation has only added to their anger and disappointment with the party. The sense of wasted years was pervasive; many interviewees noted the economic achievements made by friends in the outside world. For them, the ten years of war resulted in little reward, much damage.

Consequently, as in past coverage,<sup>21</sup> ex-combatants spoke of little if any connection to the UCPN (Maoist) and little interest in politics. The chances of going to war, leaving families behind and again enduring such hardships, was said to be minimal. Of the minority still working with the UCPN (Maoist), most of them were part-time. Wary of new party programs, plans and activities, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees stated that they were focused on family and livelihood.

Importantly, in terms of livelihood and economics, in contrast to earlier reports of optimism,<sup>22</sup> MC interviews revealed a widespread sense of pessimism and increasing desperation. To be noted is the fact that the majority of them had had to start from point zero. Central to their concerns was providing food, education for the children and addressing medical expenses. The amounts received in return for voluntary retirement was widely seen as very little relative to their sacrifices, and insufficient in these expensive days. As mentioned above, most had invested in land and had or were making plans to build homes. With large amounts thus invested, relatively little remained. Thus they claimed they had homes, but no food.

Many had invested in businesses, especially shops and hotels. A minimum number has invested in small industries and a few had undertaken collective ventures such as vegetable, fish and mushroom farming, as well as cow rearing. However, as repeatedly stated, they had

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, The Himalayan Times. 2012. Ex-Combatants Start New Life. 20 October, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Pun, Kiran. 2012. Ultimate Deception. *Republika*, 14 October, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> For example see K.C., Durgalal. 2012. Nata Toddai Purva-ladaku. *Nepal*, 15 September, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> For example see Pandey, Lekhanath. 2012. Ex-PLAs Turning Over a New Leaf. *The Himalayan Times*, 26 December, p. 6. and Nepal, Balkumar. 2012. Banduk Birsandai. *Annapurna Post*, 29 July, p. 4-5.



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no background in business and were finding it hard to make ends meet. There were a number of stories of failed investments. Others reported using retirement payments to pay off loans incurred by families during the conflict while they were fighting. A few remained in the process of planning their future – including going abroad to India and the Middle East as other ex-combatants had done. A minority reported going back to agriculture.

With rising economic burdens and responsibilities there was a sense of hopelessness; one ex-combatant stated, “We are now squeezed from all sides.” Much was made of the fact that the Dahal-led Maoist party had left them to fend for themselves (“the party has made no programs for us”) and that the state had also ignored them. Many stated that instead of lump sums, guarantees of employment and useful employment linked trainings would have been better.<sup>23</sup> They also bemoaned the fact that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the support these organizations had formerly offered had also disappeared.

In a wait-and-see mode on their economic enterprises, but with little hope of their own success, the lack of alternatives was made clear. One ex-combatant said, “When the money runs out there can be problems.” As many ex-combatants stated, given their lack of other skills and options for livelihood, necessity and not ideology would next drive them to violence. Indeed, attraction to the more radical Baidya faction of the Maoists (or CPN-Maoist)<sup>24</sup> was expressed by some not in terms of “the revolution” but for the means of livelihood that it secured.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ex-combatants pointed to GIZ sponsored trainings on car driving and furniture as of limited use given the need to have resources to invest to fully utilize such trainings. They were furthermore said to be short-term and small scale interventions.

<sup>24</sup> Senior vice-chairman Mohan Baidya along with several other senior leaders broke away to form another party, the Communist Party of Nepal–Maoist in June 2012. Advocating revolution, they had cited the two key decisions of the Dahal-led Maoist party – accepting the “democratic republic” line in 2005 (which enabled collaboration with democratic parties); and signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 – as major mistakes.

<sup>25</sup> There is a large literature that argues that the lack of income of demobilized combatants who are not placed into employment or provided skills training opportunities results in an increased propensity to commit crimes. See for example Collier, Paul. 1994. Demobilization

Socially, the challenges for ex-combatants seemed as severe. Numerous ex-combatants had bought land and set up homes near old cantonment sites most of which are in the Tarai; many had set up homes in the nearby areas when wives became pregnant and left the cantonments for the proper care, raising and education of children. Apart from convenience calculations, there were higher economic opportunities to be gained in the Tarai, as well as better access to education and health facilities. However, with a bleak economic future in sight, the potential of these interviewed ex-combatants of joining the urban poor appears very high.

Apart from the reasons given above, the move to the Tarai and relocations to new sites was also informed by the fact of leaving home communities at a small age and inter-caste marriages. Some were reluctant to return to their old communities given that they were unable to fulfill the promises of change that they had made earlier. There were also concerns of those that they had persecuted during the conflict seeking revenge.

However, in their new lives, challenges were many. Apart from the difficulties of transitioning from military to civilian life, there was a pervasive sense that they were negatively viewed and treated by the larger communities. They stated that they were seen as those who had “lost” the war, those unable to fulfill their promises of change and were spoken to, and treated, differently.

Despite their attempts to merge into communities with new civilian identities, they were still seen as Maoists or PLA and treated differently. One ex-combatant running a hotel said that police had warned him that this was the city, not the “jungle,” a belittling term referencing their guerilla war days spent in hinterlands. Another sought a non-Maoist partner to avoid his hotel being labeled a “Maoist” hotel. Others noted a host of community level problems including people putting trash in cooking pots and utensils left to fill water at taps. Overall interviewees reported receiving little support, acceptance and respect from communities and society at large.

Important to note is that many of those who joined the ‘Peoples’ War’ of the CPN (Maoist) did so to change

and Insecurity: A Study in the Economics of the Transition from War to Peace. *Journal of International Development* 6(3): 343-351.



society and the structured inequalities that marginalized and oppressed them. Leaving the war and cantonments, they found little had changed despite their struggles and sacrifices. Now armed with a new sense of rights and worth, they find themselves in a society that continues to marginalize and demean them. According to one ex-combatant, “We who joined to change the country, build a beautiful society, should get respect.” Unsurprisingly, reintegration into society is expressed as a frustrating, angering and tiring endeavor.

As mentioned above, it is difficult for most ex-combatants, reintegration appears to be particularly challenging for the “unfit/ayogya.” According to a journalist in Kailali, the labeling has affected their stay in society, making them feel disrespected. Belittled by society and family, feeling discriminated by party and state and now unemployed, other ex-combatants point to this group as particularly willing to take to violence and vulnerable to recruitment given their military knowledge and skills. According to one ex-combatant, “If a power comes that handles the ayogya group, that power will rise.”

A former CA member had the following to say about ex-combatants, “Not looking at the reintegration part and only giving some money in their hands, will not work in the long-term.”

### Assessing Political Risk

One ex-combatant stated the following:

If friends who were made to go outside [of the cantonment] or chose retirement are not properly managed by state, party or society, there is a strong possibility that they will involve themselves in crime....At the moment we have money. But after the money finishes we can go to crime. Everyone has knowledge of arms. We know the art of war.

Assessing the political risk of ex-combatants is difficult.<sup>26</sup> At the basic level, the number of ex-combatants who remain in Nepal is unclear given that many are reported to have gone abroad in search of employment.

<sup>26</sup> While a recent media report indicated no motivation for violence, the latter appears to be in the context of political goals of a Communist republic. See Adhikari, Gyana. 2013. The Desperation of Foot Soldiers. *The Kathmandu Post*, 3 August, p. 7.

Furthermore, how a lack of economic opportunities, faulty DDRs, availability of arms and experiences of insecurity combine into collective violence is unknown. However, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into account, not the least being the need to disaggregate the members of the cantonments who clearly varied from militias to new inductees.

One is that there are a large number of militarily trained and skilled ex-combatants that have been released into the country. It is widely viewed that the more senior and experienced PLA – an estimated 5,000 – were inserted into the Young Communist League (YCL) and not the cantonments. However, it is important to note that others, including late recruits, were given military and political training during their long stay in the cantonments. Interviews revealed that these persons, termed “new” were targeted for military and arms training. Late recruit interviewees admitted that they had only learnt how to handle a gun, make bombs, etc. after they had entered the cantonments.

Secondly, there are political networks to consider. While condemning political leadership, some still stated that they believed in the Dahal-led Maoist party, expressing a willingness to again follow its lead should programs and policies treat them in a “respectful” manner. It is important not to underestimate the ideological training given in the cantonments as well as during the war. The utility of those unwilling to go to war, but still work for the party is clear. For example, one ex-combatant stated he was with the Baidya faction, working for the party in a particular electoral constituency. Plans for the mobilization of these ex-combatants for the upcoming elections appear to be in place.<sup>27</sup> Nothing is known of how they will “campaign.”

These political networks become all the more important given that many ex-combatants are living in settlements together. An interviewee noted 210 ex-combatants living in one village development committee (VDC), all of whom were unemployed. A second interviewee stated that 700 ex-combatants were living in another area. The levels of institutionalization that

<sup>27</sup> See Sejuwal, Kalendra. 2013. Chunav Bitholna Purva-ladakuko ‘Action Group.’ *Nagarik*, 26 July, p. 2.



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happened during the cantonment process and the trepidation of those reentering society as isolated individuals, has clearly aided the tendency to stay in groups. Geographically in clusters, these settlements can be easily targeted for recruitment. This process appears to have started; one interviewee now with the Baidya faction stated that they were trying hard to recruit ex-combatants.

Finally, these political networks are important in the triggering of organized violence. The lack of economic opportunities, presence of small arms and experiences of insecurity appear insufficient in explaining the resort to violence. The ex-combatants appear risk averse; interviews revealed a “wait-and-see” strategy to business ventures, what political parties had to offer and what fellow combatants would do. However, recent research has argued that “entrepreneurs of violence” (read here military or political elite with access to resources) can utilize mid-level commanders as intermediaries who building upon military affinities and offering enticements (funded by the elite) can mobilize disgruntled ex-combatants who often lack the capacity to do so themselves.<sup>28</sup> In Nepal,

there are political elites with access to large resources. There are also mid-level commanders/PLA colleagues with varying levels of engagement with the political elites and lower-level ex-combatant colleagues. What is needed is more research to identify forms and mediums of military affinities, funding potentials and potential hotspots.

For all the progress made in the peace process, Nepal continues to have weak rule of law, a struggling economy and poor governance. Thousands of young fighters have been released into this mixture of lawlessness and an economy which cannot absorb them. At the most fundamental level, little is known about the success or failure of reintegration into society and the levels of alienation, poverty, etc. that exists in this particular community. What is known is that around 20,000 young people with military training who for years were dislocated from their normal environment and whose skill sets are making, obtaining and utilizing guns, bombs and other tools/modes of violence are now a part of the larger society. Ignoring this population is a luxury that Nepal can ill afford.

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<sup>28</sup>Themner, Anders. 2013. A Leap of Faith: When and How Ex-Combatants Resort to Violence. *Security Studies* 22(2): 295-329.