

Chapter 2

Peace Negotiations and Dialogue in the Northeast: The Naga Case

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The Northeast of India has suffered from multiple armed ethnic conflicts since India's independence. In 1946, the Naga National Council (NNC) was formed in order to provide a political platform for the Nagas to assert their demand for a separate state outside of India. In 1956, the NNC resorted to violence under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo, a charismatic Angami Naga rebel leader. This led to the deployment of the Indian army in the Naga areas and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 was imposed. Over the years, the Naga ethnic conflict witnessed factionalism within the NNC which resulted in the formation of a breakaway group, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) formed in 1980. Due to leadership differences, the NSCN got further divided in 1988 into two factions: the National Socialist Council of *Nagalim* led by Isak Chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah—NSCN (IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by S.S. Khaplang—NSCN (K). In 2011, a new NSCN (Khole-Kitovi) group was formed as a breakaway faction of the NSCN (K). These three armed groups mostly operate in the Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast. Manipur has also been deeply affected by ethnic violence after the formation of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) on November 24, 1964. Another significant Manipuri separatist armed group is the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) engaged in armed struggle since 1978. The RPF and the PLA are suspected of being trained in Maoist guerrilla warfare by the Chinese in the 1960s and 1970s and both outfits aim at violent revolutionary change to bring about classless society in Manipur. Yet another armed group in Manipur is the *Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup* (KYKL), which has taken up social afflictions such as fighting corruption, drug trafficking and sub-standard education practices as reasons for its armed struggle. Still another armed group, known as the Peoples'

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Revolutionary Party of *Kangleipak* (PREPAK), was established in the 1970s with the objective of fighting for Manipur's independence from India.

Assam has also been plagued by insurgent violence since 1979 with the formation of the United Liberation Front of *Asom* (ULFA). Since the 1990s, the hills districts of Assam; namely, Dima Hasau and Karbi Anglong, also suffer armed groups like the *Dima Haram Daogah* (DHD) and the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). The Bodo areas in Assam are disturbed by the existence of the armed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). It is also important to note that most of these insurgent groups have thrived primarily due to strong external influences. Countries like China in the 1960s and the 1970s as well as Pakistan and later on Bangladesh have supported most of these armed groups by making available arms, training and most importantly, base areas for underground camps. Things have however improved with Bangladesh since 2008 with the coming of Sheikh Hasina to power. The ULFA leadership including Arabinda Rajkhowa, the Chairman of the outfit was arrested in December 2009 near the India–Bangladesh border. In 2010, Bangladesh handed over the leader of the NDFB, Ranjan Daimary, to India¹ (Bhaumik 2007).

In dealing with armed ethnic conflicts in the Northeast, besides the use of force, the signing of ceasefires and peace negotiations has always been a serious policy option for the Indian state. In the case of the Naga conflict, peace negotiations started early with the Akbar Hydari agreement in 1947, the civil society interactions in the 1950s, the Naga Peace Mission in 1964, and the Shillong Accord in 1975. At present, there are ongoing peace negotiations between the Union government and the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K), after the signing of ceasefires in 1997 and 2001, respectively. The Mizo armed conflict that afflicted the Lushai Hills from 1966 to 1986 got resolved through peace negotiations between the Union Government and the Mizo armed group, the Mizo National Front (MNF) (Goswami 2009).

At present, peace talks are underway between the ULFA and the Union government after the ULFA leaders including its Chairman, Arabinda Rajkhowa, its Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Raju Barua and others were arrested by the Assam police from the India–Bangladesh border in 2009. In order to facilitate peace talks between the Union government and the outfit, the Assam government released the leaders a year later. In 2011, the outfit submitted a 'Charter of Demands' to the Union government.² While the Charter listed issues like rehabilitation of the outfit's cadres, greater political autonomy for Assam, illegal migration from Bangladesh into Assam, etc., in return, the outfit agreed to give up its violent struggle and disarm.

¹The Times of India. Bangladesh hands over NDFB Chief Ranjan Daimary to BSF. (May 10, 2010). Retrieved from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-05-01/india/28287637_1_d-r-nabla-ndfb-anti-talks-faction.

²The Times of India. ULFA submits its 'Charter of Demands' to Chidambaram. (August 5, 2011). Retrieved from http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-08-05/india/29854318_1_ulfa-leaders-ulfa-team-top-ulfa.

In the light of this backdrop, this chapter focuses on the peace negotiations and dialogue between the Union government and the Naga armed groups. The significance of undertaking a detailed study on the Naga peace negotiations stems from the fact that the Naga armed conflict is the most critical armed movement in the Northeast. It has inspired the other armed groups in their demands for independence. Also, the Naga peace negotiations have involved not only the armed groups and the Union government, but also Naga society as a whole. The other important factor is that the negotiations are ongoing since 1997 and hence offers contemporary insights into the field of negotiations and dialogue. Most importantly, the Naga dialogue's wide-based representative character and legitimacy in Naga society classifies it as a fit empirical study to arrive at more causal generalizations at the abstract level of dialogue theory (Khatami 2000; Dallmayr 2002; Camilleri 2007; Saunders 2001; Tehranian and Chappell 2002).

This chapter is divided into six sections. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the Naga ethnic conflict. In the second section, I identify the important actors taking part in the Naga dialogue process. In the third section, I dwell on the perceptions of these various actors on the conflict. In the fourth section, I discuss the key components of the Naga dialogue process. In the fifth section, I analyze the peace negotiations between the Union Government and the Nagas. In the last section, I offer certain prescriptions for a more optimal dialogue process.

2.1 Brief Overview of the Naga Conflict

The Naga ethnic conflict traces its roots back to 1918 with the formation of the Naga Club by 20 Naga members of the French *Labour Corp*, who had served in World War I (Nuh and Lasuh 2002). The wartime knowledge motivated the few who had come in contact with the European battlefield to politically organize themselves as a distinct ethnopolitical identity. The Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929, in which it stated that the people of Naga areas, and that of mainland India, had nothing in common between them. Therefore, it would benefit both to stay separate and form their own political entities as and when the British left India. In 1946, the Club was further reinforced with the formation of the NNC under the leadership of Angami Zhapu Phizo. Phizo had trained with the British during World War II on the Burma Front against Japanese forces and he utilized that knowledge to impart training in guerrilla warfare to the NNC members.³ Significantly, a Nine Point Agreement known as the Akbar Hydari Agreement was signed between the moderates in the NNC like T. Sakhrie and the Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, on June 29, 1947. The Agreement gave the Nagas rights over their land as well as executive and legislative powers, but it was

³Chindits Special Force Burma (1942–44). Retrieved from <http://www.chindits.info/> (accessed on April 22, 2008).

rejected by Phizo (Nuh and Lasuh 2002). On August 14, 1947, the NNC, led by Phizo, declared independence, a day before India attained its own independence from British colonial rule.

The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were troubled periods in Naga history, with militancy on the rise and the state's military response based on acts like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, amended in 1972.⁴ The crossfire between the state forces and the NNC resulted in many non-combatant deaths as well as human rights violations. There were numerous efforts at peace by the Union Government, which resulted in the grant of statehood to Nagaland in 1963 and the establishment of a Nagaland Peace Mission (NPM) in 1964. However, it was the loss of bases in East Pakistan after the emergence of a new state, Bangladesh, as well as the constant pressure from Indian security forces, that coerced the NNC under Zaishe Huire to sign the Shillong Accord of 1975. The Shillong Accord, however, repeated the tragic story of the Nine Point Agreement in that it split the Naga rebel movement. The Shillong Accord was the proximate cause for the foundation of the original unified NSCN. Replicating Phizo's resistance to the Hydari Agreement, Thuingaleng Muivah, Isak Chisi Swu and S.S. Khaplang condemned the Shillong Accord as a sell out to the Union government, and they formed the NSCN in Myanmar in 1980. Subsequently, due to intense differences between Khaplang, Muivah and Swu, the NSCN split with Muivah and Swu, forming the NSCN (IM), while Khaplang formed the NSCN (K) in 1988 (Biswas and Sukhalabaidya 2008; Goswami 2007, 2008).⁵

Amidst these social and political complexities involving very stark issues of security in Naga-inhabited areas, the government of India signed ceasefires with the two main Naga militant actors, the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) in 1997 and 2001, respectively. According to the terms of the ceasefire, both the Naga militant factions were to remain in the designated camps and could only move out by giving prior intimation to the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (CFMG). The CFMG was formed in 1997 and consists of members of the security forces, intelligence agencies, government officials, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) (Haskar 2009). Significantly, both NSCN outfits agreed to refrain from collecting 'taxes' forcibly, as well as to refrain from recruiting new cadres into the outfits.⁶ However, in reality, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) do collect 'taxes' (extortions) and have also recruited new cadres. A glance at NSCN (IM) cadres will reveal that between 1997 and 2012, the outfit has increased its armed cadres from 1000 to nearly 5000.⁷ Also, inter-factional violence between both outfits, aimed at establishing territorial

⁴The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958). Retrieved from http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/armed_forces_special_powers_act1958.pdf.

⁵Sashinunga. Nagaland: Insurgency and Factional Intransigence (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume16/Article4.htm>.

⁶Revised Ground Rules for Ceasefire between Government of India and NSCN (IM). Retrieved from http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/documents/papers/revised_rules_cease_fire_goi_nscn_im.htm.

⁷Field observations by the author in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland from 2007 to 2012.

domination over the trade networks, especially in Dimapur (the main town of Nagaland) has resulted in both combatant and non-combatant deaths (Talukdar 2007). The level of violence between the factions was at its highest in the immediate aftermath of a split. In 1988, the split in the NSCN, propelled by differences between Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang, resulted in the killing of 200 of Muivah's men. It was subsequently followed by revenge killings, especially between the Thangkhuls, the tribe to which Muivah belongs, and the Konyaks, showcasing loyalty to Khaplang, who is a Hemi Naga from Myanmar. When the NSCN (IM) split on November 23, 2007, with the formation of a new outfit, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Unification)—NSCN (U), from within its folds, the violence threatened to 'spill over' into the tribal base. Significantly, Naga civil society actors controlled the violence through dialogue and consultations on the ground. This provided the much-needed hope that community-based processes for conflict prevention and management could have the legitimate capacity to handle violent ethnic complexities, especially when the legitimate state structures have failed in their law enforcement duties.⁸

2.2 Participants in the Naga Dialogue

The main participants in the Naga dialogue are: the Naga *Hoho* (Apex Tribal Council); Individual Tribal *Hohos* (councils); the Joint Forum on Gaon Burahs and Doabashis (JFGBDB); individual Village Council representatives; the militant actors like the NSCN (IM), the NSCN (K), the NNC, etc.; civil society actors like the United Naga Council (UNC); the Naga Students' Federation (NSF); the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA); Naga academics; NGOs; bureaucrats; Nagaland police; the business community; public intellectuals; church leaders; and the common people. The dialogue varies in participation from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 10,000 people and the number of days reserved for the process ranges from two days to a month. The dialogue has been mostly facilitated by the Naga *Hoho* and the JFGBDB.

2.3 Actors' Perceptions of the Naga Ethnic Conflict

2.3.1 *The Naga Hoho, the NSF, UNC, NMA and NSF*

These multiple civil society actors view the Naga conflict as a response to the inadequate fulfilment of basic human needs in Naga society. Though Nagas rarely

⁸Namrata Goswami. A Way Out of Naga Factional Violence (2007). *IDSA Strategic Comments*. Retrieved from <http://www.idsa.in/publications/stratcomments/NamrataGoswami230708.htm>.

believe that the NSCN (IM)'s or NSCN (K)'s movements for independent sovereign homeland will succeed, they support the violent struggle as a fight for justice and ethnic lifeworlds (Biswas and Sukhalabaidya 2008). Here, I utilize one of the best known conflict theorist's, Edwar Azar's, 'theory of protracted social conflict [PSC]' as an explanatory framework to understand this support. In *Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*, (Azar 1990), Azar argues that most individual loyalties and motivations to join armed groups and engage in violence arise in order to fulfil one's own societal needs—security, identity, recognition, economic fulfilment and so on. Drawing on a tradition of social anthropology and social psychology, Azar indicates that individuals will join armed groups that promise such benefits. The violent Naga ethnic conflict also enjoys cadre loyalty and support based on the deprivation of basic human needs.

While interacting with the *Naga Hoho* and Tribal Hohos, it is rather obvious that the Naga Hoho and Tribal Hohos realize that Naga sovereignty may be impossible in the context of a rising India that will never compromise its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Naga Hoho and Tribal Hohos are therefore keen to bring about a 'Special Federal Relationship [SFR]' between India and *Nagalim*, resulting in a separate flag and army, and the unification of Naga areas within India.⁹ However, their understanding of the SFR differs from that of the NSCN (IM). In an interview for BBC World, Muivah argued that SFR meant a special relationship with India but not 'within' India. He unequivocally asserted that 'SFR cannot be accepted within the framework of the Indian Constitution'.¹⁰ The only areas that New Delhi will have control over are defence, external affairs, communication and currency. But while India will be obligated to defend *Nagalim* in the case of external threat, *Nagalim* will be under no such obligation concerning India's defence.

Despite being sympathetic to the NSCN (IM)'s stand on these issues, most of these social actors are acutely aware of the militant group's violent engagements, power battles and desire for territorial domination. Territorial domination is understood in the Naga narrative as the ability of the militant groups to run extortion networks and parallel governments in the area. In fact, over the years, the Naga Hoho, Tribal *Hohos*, the NSF and various village councils have openly condemned the violent means followed by the militant actors.

⁹Address of Mr. Isak Chishi Swu, Chairman, National Socialist Council of Nagalim at UNPO General Assembly (October 28, 2006), Taipei, Taiwan. Retrieved from <http://www.nagalim.nl/news/00000487.htm>. Also see The Hindu (April 29, 2005). Muivah talks of 'Special Federal Relationship' with India. Retrieved from <http://www.hindu.com/2005/04/29/stories/2005042904201200.htm>.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

2.3.2 *The NNC*

While being the descendent of the first Naga political organization, the Naga Club, the NNC became weak after Phizo's death in 1990. His daughter, Adino Phizo, who is the present president of the NNC does not enjoy the same stature that Phizo enjoyed in society. Nevertheless, the NNC views the Naga conflict as a struggle for independent homeland and sovereignty.¹¹ It is, however, against the NSCN (IM) being the sole representative of the Naga people in the Indo-Naga peace negotiations. To the NNC, the issue of Naga territorial integration in India is a 'red herring' used by outfits like the NSCN (IM) that deflects from the real issue of Naga independence.

2.3.3 *The NSCN (IM)*

The NSCN (IM)'s stated political objective is Naga territorial unification and sovereignty based on the historical narrative of Naga independence before British rule in the late nineteenth century. In his BBC World interview, Muivah stated that

We can come as close as possible but it's not possible for the Nagas to come within the Indian Union or within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Why? Because it amounts to dismissing the whole history of the Nagas and the Nagas cannot do that... Nagaland was never a part of India either by conquest by India or by consent of the Nagas. This is very clear. This is the unique history and so according to this uniqueness a solution will have to be worked out.¹²

Since 1993, 'Nagaland for Christ' has been another important slogan of the NSCN (IM).

2.3.4 *The NSCN (K)*

The NSCN (K) aims to create an independent sovereign Christian Socialist Republic through the principle of people's supremacy, comprising all Naga-inhabited areas in Nagaland, and especially those in Myanmar. Interestingly,

¹¹Okeet Jeet Sandham (2012), Core issue of Naga people is unequivocally upholding sovereignty of Nagaland: Adino Phizo. Retrieved from <http://www.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=kshow&id=287>.

¹²BBC Hard Talk. (April 29, 2005). Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4k0PgLIKok>.

the NSCN (K) views the Tangkhuls as Meiteis and not Nagas, and hence does not include the Tangkhul-inhabited areas in Manipur in its map of greater Nagaland.¹³ The outfit has been issuing 'Quit Notices' to the NSCN (IM) and the Tangkhul Nagas from Nagaland for some years now. On January 29, 2009, it issued what it termed the 'final quit notice' to Tangkhuls living in Nagaland.¹⁴ In reaction, however, the Naga Hoho asked the NSCN (K) to withdraw the notice and to work through dialogue to arrive at a mutually acceptable framework of living together peacefully in Nagaland. Also, socially influential public intellectuals like Charles Chasie argued strongly against such an irrational and absolutist posture on the part of the NSCN (K).¹⁵

Before we dwell on the Naga dialogue process, it is pertinent to conceptualize the meaning of dialogue and then locate the Naga dialogue within that framework.

2.3.5 *Definition of Dialogue*

The word 'dialogue' is a combination of the Greek words *dia* meaning 'through' or 'across' and *logos* meaning 'word' or 'reason'. Dialogue therefore implies 'a sense of creating meaning through talking or reasoning together' (Broome and Hatay 2006, p. 630). Dialogue deals with the challenge of understanding complexities at the social, political and cultural levels buttressed by differences in perceptions of the contextual situation, vagueness regarding causes of conflict, and ambiguity with regard to the future. Hence, the notion of dialogue, operating within the framework created by such antecedent conditions, is to squarely meet the challenge of coordinating meaning through participatory processes by bringing together diverse groups of actors with differences in personal experiences, perceptions and, at times, a history of violent conflict between them. The aim of most dialogical conflict resolution mechanisms is to create conditions for coordinated action towards a common goal: the end of violence and the emergence of an inclusive and peaceful society.

According to Hal Sanders, of the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue and the Kettering Foundation,

Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concern into her or his own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up her or his identity, but each recognizes enough of the other's valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other (Broome and Hatay 2006, p. 649).

¹³The Telegraph. Peace Rally to Support Naga Unification. (April 9, 2008). Retrieved from http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080409/jsp/northeast/story_9113678.jsp.

¹⁴NSCN (K) issues 'quit notice' to Thangkhus. (January 30, 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.zeenews.com/news351035.html>.

¹⁵Charles Chasie. Quit Notice and the Deeper Issue. (2009). Retrieved from http://kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=kshow&kid=753&Idoc_Session=6580c6ea94011957d83ff68eb17b8d5c.

2.3.6 *Components of Dialogue*

Though the field of dialogue lacks substantial theoretical literature or conceptual mapping of dialogue processes, (Broome and Hatay 2006, pp. 649–652), the effectiveness of ‘empathetic’ and non-violent ‘participatory’ approaches in resolving disputes at the level of states or non-state actors, has given rise to strong supporters for this activity. Dialogue practitioners and academics (Camilleri 2009) have identified certain key components of dialogue (Pruitt and Thomas 2007, pp. 20–21; Camilleri 2009), which I argue is clearly present in the Naga dialogue. These are:

Inclusiveness: The process of dialogue is inherently informed by the element of inclusiveness based on a ‘problem solving’ approach. A number of stakeholders in a conflict with divergent or common interests and perceptions come together to work out a map for prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, both violent and non-violent. This inclusive base ensures that the support structure for a peace agreement is grounded on a solid legitimate social base undercutting the ability of peace-spoilers (Stedman 1997, p. 553), to sabotage the process. The element of ‘inclusiveness’ is also vital in a situation plagued by historical differences, violent conflicts and exclusion of imagined ‘others’.

Joint ownership: The dialogue process must not be hijacked by a powerful actor (for instance, the state) who could utilize it to buy time to forward its own agenda. Instead, there must be joint ownership of the process in order to address problems and issues which have brought about social division.

Listening, learning, and adapting: Listening is of paramount importance to dialogue. Deep listening ensures greater understanding of issues at stake in a conflict, and helps in adapting one’s own behaviour to bring about inclusive and pluralistic living. Judgements and preconceived notions are set aside in the act of listening, learning and adapting.

Empathy and humanity: Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India’s struggle for freedom and a champion of non-violent action, argued in the *Indian Opinion* that the ‘most important requirement for any conflict resolution theory and practice is to find ways to not only understand one’s own position but also empathize with the conflicting actor’s point of view’ (Goswami 2009). To Gandhi, it was mostly differences in positions or world views that created conflicts and hence one has to resolve differences at that level. In order to understand a conflicting other’s worldview, one has to practice empathy for the position of the other without prejudice: recognizing the differences and yet finding common ground is the key to dialogue.

Notions of ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’: Dialogue aims to bridge the gap between the notions of ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ and the constructed realities based on that distinction. Instead of billiard ball-like structures of ‘Self’, whose identity is defined based on a distinctive difference with the ‘Other’, or what is known as ‘Othering’, dialogue insists on the significance of accommodating the ‘Other’ into one’s own identity construction and lifeworlds by focusing on the commonalities, shared

worldviews and ideas. Hence, it is not deemed imperative to construct one's own sense of nationhood and ethnicity based squarely on the linear notion of admission and segregation, but rather on ideas of tolerance and inclusion.

Understanding of context: The participants in the dialogue must have an understanding of the historical context leading to the conflict, and be sensitive to the changing political and social context. Cultural knowledge and understanding of the 'way of the land' is critical.¹⁶ Political understanding should reveal the capacity to correctly gauge the power dynamics at play in conflict-affected societies.¹⁷

Transparency: Trust-deficit affects societies plagued by historical exclusivist narratives, conflict, and multiple violent actors. Hence, a level of transparency about the issues at stake, the problem areas and frank expression of one's position is important for dialogue.

A vision for the future: Any dialogue must have a long-term vision for the future propelled by the recognition that changed relationships hold the key to conflict resolution. Addressing the causes of the conflict takes time and patience.

2.3.7 *Components of the Naga Dialogue*

The Naga dialogue represents an 'insider' prevention and management of violent ethnic conflicts. Indeed, I argue that an in-depth analysis of the Naga dialogue reflects the eight components of dialogue identified above and is therefore a strong empirical case for dialogue literature.

Inclusive: The Naga dialogue is inclusive in character. The decision-making structures of the Naga *Hoho* and the various tribal councils are based on elected representation, with entire villages voting for representatives to their tribal Hohos like the *Ao Hoho*, *Angami Hoho*, *Tangkhul Hoho*, *Konyak Hoho*, and so on. The presidents of the *Hohos* thereafter represent the tribe in the Naga Hoho. Elections to *Hohos* are held every two to three years. The *Gaon Burahs* or village headmen council follows a slightly different procedure. Some of the chiefs are hereditary, for instance, the *Sema*, *Konyak*, *Tangkhul*, *Chang* and *Yimchunger*, whereas with regard to tribes like *Ao*, *Jeme* and *Jeliangrong*, the chiefs are elected by the village from among wise, elderly individuals. Family background matters to a large extent in this election procedure. There is also the *Doiabashis Hoho* (Village Elders Council). This body includes elected representatives from several villages with deep knowledge of Naga customs and traditions. The *Doiabashis* acts as a 'checks and balances' mechanism *vis-à-vis* individual Naga chiefs who may misuse power if left alone to their own volition. The *Doiabashis* also take part in the Naga *Hoho* where decision-making is based on consensus. The elections to the village councils

¹⁶Interview by the author with Temjenkaba, President, *Ao Hoho*, Dimapur, Nagaland, July 27, 2007.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

are held in every village. The day of election resembles a festival, with canvassing, speech-making and unfolding of agendas for the future by the individual candidates. Agendas can include basic issues like water, health, social service or political issues like Naga unification and India–Naga relations.

The Naga public sphere accounts for alternative voices, perhaps reflecting what Marc Lynch identifies as a global public sphere between Islam and the West or an ‘Arab public sphere committed to open and critical public debate’ (Lynch 2005). This social nature of dialogue aimed at conflict prevention and management after years of conflict appears promising. The effect of this was most apparent during the November 2007 split within the NSCN (IM), with the formation of a new militant outfit called the NSCN (U). Despite violent attacks by the former on the latter in the immediate aftermath of the split, the Naga dialogue successfully quelled the violence by enabling the two conflicting actors to come to the table under the aegis of the JFGBDB and the Naga *Hoho*. It must be noted here that the sensitivity of the NSCN (IM) to its reputation as a consulting actor in Naga society ensures the outfit’s susceptibility to social pressures to forsake violent means to settle scores.

Joint ownership: The Naga dialogue is a jointly owned endeavour. The process started in the late 1950s after the Naga ethnic movement took on a violent turn under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo. Phizo established a Naga Army under the overall political structure of the *Khunak Kautang Ngeukhuma* (People’s Sovereign Republic of Free Nagaland) in Tuensang district of Nagaland (Shimray 2005, p. 69). In August 1957, the Naga Peoples’ Convention (NPC) was convened in Kohima under the leadership of Imkonglba Ao, one of the moderate members of the NNC sceptical about the utility of violence to fulfil Naga political aspirations. Significantly, the 1957 NPC involving participation by 1750 Nagas from across Naga-inhabited areas jointly agreed to seek a single Naga Hills and Tuensang district within the Indian Union, a setback to Phizo’s call for sovereign independent homeland (Horam 1988, p. 84). Accordingly, on December 1, 1957, the Naga Hills–Tuensang Area (NHTA) was established as an autonomous district. However, violence between the Indian security forces and the extremist division of the NNC continued, and a second NPC was called in May 1958 by the moderate NNC leaders and the Naga *Hoho* (Horam 1988). Phizo, however, refused to take part in the process. Subsequently, a third NPC was called between October 22–26, 1959, attended by 3000 Naga delegates in Mokokchung, Nagaland. This convention was significant as it came up with the idea of a Nagaland state within the Indian Union. In July 1960, a Sixteen Point Agreement was signed between the NPC representatives and the Union Government (Nuh and Lasuh 2002). The Indian Parliament subsequently passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1962, and on December 1, 1963, Indian president Radhakrishnan inaugurated the State of Nagaland. Though statehood within India was the result of three separate NPCs, the limitation of the process was that Phizo was unwilling to take part in any of them and shifted his base to London in 1960. From London, Phizo continued to assert in his writings that nothing short of independence from India was acceptable to the Nagas, fuelling violence again (Luithai and Haksar 1984, p. 16).

In 1964, the NPM was established by the Union Government with Bimala Prasad Chaliha, then Chief Minister of Assam, Jaya Prakash Narayan, leader of the Sarvodaya movement and the *Shanti Sena* (peace army), and Rev. Michael Scott of the Baptist Mission of Nagaland as members. Jaya Prakash Narayan, while sympathetic to the cause of Naga independence bluntly stated in Kohima on August 12, 1966 that Naga ‘leaders must understand that India cannot agree to anything that might cause disintegration of its territory’ (Narayan 1994, p. 359). Significantly, both Narayan and Michael Scott expressed the view that the geographical location of Nagaland risked a direct threat from China to its future independent status. Scott went on to argue that Nagas should try working out a federal structure with greater autonomy within India (Nuh and Lasuh 2002, pp. 226–230 and pp. 319–323). In a document titled ‘Nagaland Declaration for Peace’ issued on April 13, 1965, the Naga Hoho acknowledged the efforts of the peace mission and expressed its desire to solve the Naga conflict through a process of dialogue (Nuh and Lasuh 2002, pp. 223–225). However, tribal differences within the NNC, buttressed by Phizo’s resistance to the peace moves, resulted in heated arguments in the Hoho with Kughato Sumi, the Nagaland leader for peace negotiations with the Government being accused openly of a lack of commitment to an inclusive dialogue. Worse still, his younger brother, Kaito Sema, the so-called defence minister of the underground Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), revolted against Phizo’s leadership. These divisions along tribal lines led to a further deterioration of the situation, with Phizo removing the president of the FGN, Scato Swu, a fellow tribesman of Kaito, and replacing him with Rev. G. Mhiasi, a Phizo loyalist (Goswami 2007, p. 295; Aram 1974, p. 137; Asoso 1974, p. 294). The assassination of Imkonglba Ao, the pro-dialogue NNC leader, further worsened the situation, with accusations against the NNC for playing along tribal lines and favouring the Angamis, Phizo’s tribe (Shimray 2005, p. 86). However, at this critical juncture when the NPM appeared to be failing, the Naga Church under the leadership of Rev. Longri Ao, then executive secretary of the Nagaland Baptist Church, took the lead in the community-based dialogue while rejecting openly the extremist tactics adopted by Phizo (Shimray 2005, p. 45).

Due to intense social pressure, the moderate elements in the NNC led by Zaishe Huire signed the Shillong Accord on November 11, 1975 with the Union Government. Though Phizo was not present, his younger brother Kevi Yalley took part in the signing of the Accord. The Accord meant the NNC recognized the Indian Constitution and it agreed to surrender arms, while India lifted the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act from Nagaland (Nuh and Lasuh, pp. 344–356). However, an inability to jointly own the process of negotiation led many NNC cadres to condemn the Accord and to the formation of a new outfit in 1980 called the NSCN.¹⁸ In 1988, the NSCN further split due to differences in the leadership, with Muivah and Swu forming the NSCN (IM) and Khaplang forming the NSCN

¹⁸NSCN Manifesto, GPRN, Oking. (January 31, 1980).

(K) (Verghese 2004, pp. 95–96; Nayar 2005, p. 38).¹⁹ The subsequent years in Nagaland have been vitiated by inter-factional killings between these two outfits aimed at territorial and political domination. However, Naga society's enthusiastic participation in an informal yet structured dialogue based on their deep-seated desire for peace and progress in the Naga areas have strengthened the community-based peace movements. From the late 1980s, the joint ownership of the process facilitated by the Naga Hoho has taken on a mass participatory base, with participation increasing to an astounding 10,000 people since 2007.²⁰ In March, 2009, a 'Naga Convention for Reconciliation and Peace' was held in Kohima in order to send across 'a message of peace and an end to bloodshed and violence'.²¹ The convention was attended by thousands of people from various Naga tribes, the militant actors, the church and the civil society. According to Vivi, General Secretary of the NMA, 'the convention is a positive attitude, everyone expressing the desire for reconciliation ... and this is where we can build our hope'.²² What is most refreshing to observe is that no single actor claims ownership of this process. Rather, it is viewed as a collective effort by all stakeholders to the conflict.

However, I would like to add a caveat so that we keep the 'politics of representation' in stark focus. Militant groups like the NSCN (IM) would ideally like to control the dialogue process. For instance, in 2001 the Naga Peace Reconciliation move under the joint ownership of the Naga Hoho, the Nagaland Peace Centre and the UNC proved so successful in addressing issues of violence, basic needs and political aspirations of the Nagas that the NSCN (IM) feared losing its dominant position as the sole peace negotiator with the Union Government. In reaction, it issued 'threat notices' to the leaders of the Reconciliation Committee forcing them to leave Nagaland.²³

Learning a lesson or two about NSCN (IM) behaviour from these experiences, the later dialogues, especially from 2005 onwards, have involved both the NSCN (IM) and the NSCN (K) in the process of consultations. On July 24, 2007, when the JFGBDB issued an overall underground ceasefire, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K) representatives were present.²⁴ Moreover, the visible involvement of the JFGBDB in the dialogue since 2007 makes it difficult for the NSCN (IM) to issue similar notices to the Naga peace facilitators as it did in 2001 due to the social

¹⁹Joint Statement of Muivah and Swu, (July 7, 1989). GPRN.

²⁰Field Observations by the author in Nagaland, 2007.

²¹Vibhou Ganguly. 'Peace and Reconciliation Convention Held in Nagaland'. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/peace-and-reconciliation-convention-held-in-nagaland_100163818.html.

²²Ibid.

²³Author's interview with Naga Peace Reconciliation Leaders, July 2007. Names not revealed due to protection of source.

²⁴Nagaland Post, GBs and DBs Declare CFs Among Factions (July 25, 2007). The author was also present in Dimapur on that day to observe the process.

stature of the JFGBDB. The power of the present Naga dialogue was recognized by the NSCN (IM) General Secretary, Muivah in his speech at Camp Hebron, the NSCN (IM) headquarters, in July 2007.²⁵

The issue of religion is another bone of contention between the NSCN (IM) and Naga civil society actors. Since 1993, the NSCN (IM) has declared 'Nagaland for Christ'.²⁶ This makes political sense since 90% of Nagas are Christians.²⁷ (Eaton 1997). However, according to Secretary of the Naga Hoho, Keviloto, the NSCN (IM) should refrain from using religion as a legitimizing tool for their militant activities as it is uncomfortably similar to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and shrouded with dangerous consequences for Naga society.²⁸ This viewpoint is also supported by Rumpui Jeme, president of North Cachar Hills Heraka Association which has 56 Naga villages as members. He points out that most of these villages follow the old Heraka cult of the Nagas and are not Christians.²⁹ On many occasions Naga village headmen in North Cachar Hills have been threatened by the NSCN (IM) to convert to Christianity. The Naga Hoho's stand on religion is a sincere attempt to accommodate other faiths in a highly politicized context.

Listening, learning and adapting: Listening to the other side's viewpoint is an inherent feature of the Naga tribal councils. Discussion on the need for reconciliation takes centre-stage, with the Naga *Hoho* playing the role of the facilitator. Participation by Naga youths in these forums trains younger community leaders in the art of 'listening', even if the views expressed could be controversial or conflicting. The representation from the militant actors ensures that they are included in the process of learning, listening and adapting to the changing context. The detailing of the conflict, listing the root causes, enables informed dialogue on conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. At the end of the consultations, the various tribal councils usually adopt a unanimous resolution based on consensus. Dissenting voices are also reflected to give due recognition to non-consensual views.³⁰ The opinion of the council is then made available to the society at large. The crucial aspect in this community-based dialogue is the notion of 'self-preservation and survival'. As violence is such an intrinsic aspect of their

²⁵Speech by Thuingaleng Muivah, 6th Naga Peoples' Consultation Meeting (July 27, 2007), Camp Hebron, NSCN (IM) headquarters, Nagaland where the author was present as an observer.

²⁶Annual Report of 1992–1993, *Nagaland for Christ*, Council of Nagaland Churches, Oking (30 June 1993).

²⁷Richard Eaton indicated that Nagas represented the second massive conversion to Christianity, the first being Filipinos. Eaton estimated that 90% of Nagas were Christians, while the NSCN (IM) puts the figure at 95%. Hence, it is not surprising that the NSCN (IM) declared in the Free Nagaland Manifesto 'Nagaland for Christ' in 1993. The NSCN (IM) has a separate Ministry for Religious Affairs, and a council called the 'Council of Nagaland Churches'.

²⁸Speech by Keviloto, Secretary, Naga Hoho, Camp Hebron, Near Dimapur, Nagaland (July 27, 2007).

²⁹Interview by the author with Rumpui Jeme, President, North Cachar Hills Heraka Association, Lodhi Village, North Cachar Hills (July 18, 2007). Heraka is an animist religion of the Nagas, who primarily pray to the sun. It has been in existence for centuries.

³⁰Based on field observation of the author from 2007 to 2012.

lives, the people inhabiting these violent spaces have worked out mechanisms to handle violence through dialogue (verbal communication for them) which are not always interest-based. While interviewing the actors in conflict, I realized that they viewed their evolution not always in competitive but in cooperative terms, unlike the *realpolitik* reasoning that the evolution of human beings has always been based on selfish competition (Brookes 2009).

Empathy and humanity: Empathy and humanity are paramount in any dialogue, especially in conditions where violence between communities and tribes is a recurring phenomenon, and where the structures of the state bureaucratic system are insensitive to the affected societies. The Naga dialogue is unique in its ability to offer a platform for developing empathy and respect for the other's point of view. The tone of the dialogue is respectful and accommodating. For example, the Ao Hoho in its meeting on July 27, 2007 at Camp Hebron, Dhansiripar assumed responsibility for the problems afflicting the tribe while offering concrete solutions after consultations with all the different village representatives to the Hoho.³¹ In the larger setting of the 6th Naga Peoples' Consultative Meeting the same day, the views of all the Hohos like Ao, Angami, Thangkul, Jeme, Konyak, Sema (and so on), and the NSCN (IM), were listened to with empathy by around 5000 participants from all the Naga-inhabited areas of the Northeast. By the end of the day, a common consensus was arrived at: indefinite extension of ceasefire between the NSCN (IM) and the Union Government; transparency in the functioning of the NSCN (IM); support for the peace negotiations between the Union Government and the NSCN (IM); more representations from the Nagas in the formal peace talks; infrastructure development; and improvement in the security situation in conflict prone areas (Van Ham and Saul 2008).

Notions of 'Self' and the 'Other': The Naga ethnic conflict has been afflicted by the distinction drawn between 'self' and 'other' based on tribal lines. Historically, tribes fought each other over land, village boundaries and natural resources, and practised 'head-hunting'.³² The tribal identity was solidified by drawing a clear distinction, for example, between an Ao and a Konyak. These differences still exist and affect the violent militant actors. What the Naga intra-community dialogue has been successful in achieving over the years is to compel a large number of Nagas to give up rigid notions of 'self' and 'other' and converse together under a common banner on issues of critical concern. This has enabled many to think beyond a narrow tribal base and genuinely to engage so-called 'others'. In order to break down violent differences between militant actors aligned along tribal lines, the Naga dialogue participants utilize various means, including music and sports. In October 2008, a special football match was played between the NSCN (IM) and the NSCM (K) which brought together not only their cadres but, most importantly, their leaders, on a common platform. This was a unique move. As spelled out by Zhapu Terhuja of the Nagaland Christian

³¹Ao Hoho Meeting, Camp Hebron, July 27, 2007.

³²Ibid.

Forum, 'It's an event which conveys a message to the people that something is taking place, which has never taken before'³³ aimed at peace and reconciliation.

Transparency: The level of transparency in the Naga dialogue has increased over the years, thereby increasing its credibility and level of sustainability in Naga society. Earlier, in the 1960s and the 1970s, the dialogue was limited to a few from the Naga Church, Naga politicians like S.C. Jamir and Hokishe Sema of the Naga Nationalist Organization, and militant leaders like Phizo, Muivah and Swu. The Union Government for its part was secretive about what transpired in the process of consultations. This lack of transparency left socially powerful groups like the Tribal and Village Councils with no space to offer their positions on the issues at stake in the overall situation. Over the years, as the conflict has become more protracted and bloody, more and more Nagas have got involved in the process of consultation and dialogue through both traditional and institutional structures, with the goal of bringing about peaceful reconciliation. The Nagaland Peace Centre, the Naga Hoho, the JFGBDB, the UNC, the NMA, the NSF (and so on) have taken up prominent responsibilities to bring about transparency in the dialogue with regard to issues intrinsic to Naga society like land, religion, infrastructure development, governance, militant extortion networks and agriculture. This transparency has been also possible due to the flexible nature of social bodies like the Naga Hoho and the tribal Hohos. Women, who were traditionally kept out of any serious consultation processes, are now strong agents for social change. An example is the involvement of the *Tangkhul Shanao Long* (Tangkhul Women's Organization) in averting a violent exchange between the Assam Rifles and the NSCN (IM) in Shirui Village of Ukhrul district, Manipur in January 2009 (Haskar 2009).

In direct contrast to the Naga civil society, my field experiences in Manipur and Nagaland have revealed that the NSCN (IM) functions through a highly centralized and hierarchical political structure known as Government of the Peoples' Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) (Shimray 2005, pp. 150–151; Horam 1988, p. 23).³⁴ The headquarters of the group is at Camp Hebron by the Dhansiri River in Nagaland, India. The GPRN has a president, vice president, prime minister, kilonsers (Ministers) and ministries.³⁵ The military wing consists of the People's Army of Nagaland with the chairman as the supreme commander, followed by the defence minister and the chief of army staff.³⁶ Among the leaders, Muivah is politically charismatic, articulate, and obviously wields the highest influence within the militant structure. The support of the NSCN (IM) for dialogue will therefore depend mostly on Muivah.

³³Historical football match played by warring factions of Naga underground groups. (2009). Retrieved from http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/historical-football-match-played-by-warring-factions-of-naga-underground-groups_100111268.html.

³⁴Insights based on the author's visit to the headquarters of the NSCN (IM) in July 2007.

³⁵Based on speech by Thuingaleng. Muivah, General Secretary of the NSCN (IM), Camp Hebron, Dimapur, Nagaland (July 27, 2007) where author was present.

³⁶NSCN (IM). Retrieved from www.nscnim.online.

Understanding of context: The main participants in the Naga dialogue are local actors with a vital stake in the Naga conflict. Their deep understanding of the historical narratives and local politics increases their capability to resolve issues which appear incomprehensible to an outsider. The involvement of various actors in the dialogue, including Nagas from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Myanmar gives a rich contextual basis to understand issues and is perhaps the best way forward for long-term conflict resolution.

A vision for the future: The Naga intra-community dialogue has an articulated vision for the future: a progressive, multi-linguistic, multicultural, unified *Nagalim* in which smaller Naga tribes as well as others will be given due recognition. Connection with a bigger tribe is also viewed as a 'security guarantee'. For instance, the Anal Naga tribe which inhabits the Chandel district of Manipur are only 13,853 compared to the larger Naga tribe Tangkhul in Manipur, numbering 112,944.³⁷ Since they fear the Meiteis, the Chandel Naga Peoples' Organization fully supports the NSCN (IM)'s agenda of a unified *Nagalim* and has sold land surrounding their villages to the Tangkhuls represented by NSCN (IM) for ensuring protection.³⁸

2.4 Brief Overview of the Peace Process Between the Indian State and the Nagas

Before getting onto the section on prescriptions for a more inclusive dialogue between different actors affected by the violent Naga ethnic conflict, I offer a brief overview of the peace process between the Union Government and the NSCN (IM) as well as indicate the limitations in that process of consultation. While peaceful dialogue between the Indian state and the Nagas started way back in the 1950s when the three NPCs were convened in 1957, 1958 and 1959, respectively, followed by the establishment of the Nagaland state in 1963 and the NPM in 1964, these developments did not quell the violent Naga independent movement. Instead, it sharpened the divide between the pro-statehood (within India) and pro-independence groups with the pro-state (within India) Naga moderate leader, Imkonglba Ao assassinated in the 1960s. Subsequently, due to intense intertribal rivalry, the Naga independence movement suffered from splits with new armed outfits emerging from within the original NNC and trying to wrest control of the Naga ethnic movement. In this unfolding drama, the NSCN (IM), established in 1988, emerged as the most powerful Naga armed group and the Government of India, perhaps in recognition of that fact, has engaged the group in peaceful dialogue from 1997 till date.

³⁷W. Nabakumar. The Inter Ethnic Relationship of the Different Communities of Manipur: A Critical Appraisal. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.manipuronline.com/Features/November2005/interethnicrelationship17_2.htm.

³⁸Interview by the author with Chandel Naga Peoples' Organization (August 18, 2009) at Chandel Headquarters, Chandel District, Manipur.

2.5 Peace Negotiations Between the Union Government of India and the NSCN (IM)

On February 23, 1996, an offer for unconditional talks was put forward by the then Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao to the NSCN (IM). In its response on July 31, 1996, the NSCN (IM) set three preconditions for talks:

1. Negotiations should focus on sovereignty,
2. Talks would be held in a third country,
3. A third party mediator should be included.

Rao's successor, Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda met the NSCN (IM) leaders on February 3, 1997 in Zurich. After a series of high-level meetings, a ceasefire agreement was signed on July 25, 1997 during I.K. Gujral's tenure as Prime Minister, which came into effect from August 1, 1997.³⁹ Then onwards, the ceasefire had been renewed either on a six-monthly or a yearly basis. Significantly, on July 30–31, 2007, the peace negotiations between both the sides was held for the first time in Dimapur, Nagaland, India, indicating that the NSCN (IM) had come down from its rigid stand of 'talks would be held in a third country'. Significantly, the ceasefire was extended indefinitely in that meeting, mostly due to the pressure from Naga civil society, who had expressed great dissatisfaction with the uncertainty of a six-monthly or yearly ceasefire extension in the Naga Peoples' Consultative Meetings.⁴⁰

In the meantime, the NSCN (IM) has steadily extended its influence in the Northeast by setting up an umbrella organization known as the United Liberation Front of Seven Sisters. This overarching organization consists of the now surrendered Dima Halam Daogah-Jewel faction (DHD-J) of North Cachar Hills, Assam, the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) of Karbi Anglong, Assam, Arunachal Dragon Federation (ADF) of Arunachal Pradesh, People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF). Earlier, on November 30, 1994, it formed the Self-Defence United Front of South East Himalayan Region in order to coordinate the activities of Hynniewtrep-Achik Liberation Council (HALC), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), Karbi National Volunteers (KNV), Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL).⁴¹

³⁹Nagaland. (2006). Retrieved from <http://nagaland.nic.in/profile/history/peace.htm>.

⁴⁰Observations by the author based on her participation in Naga Peoples' Consultative Meetings (July 27, 2007) at Camp Hebron, Dhansiripar, Nagaland.

⁴¹National Socialist Council of Nagaland. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/terrorist_outfits/nscn_im.htm.

2.6 India's Dilemma in the Peace Dialogue

Despite such disturbing developments, New Delhi has so far, failed to arrive at any substantial solution to the Naga movement for a unified homeland beyond the extension of the ceasefire. Perhaps, given the complexity of the Naga problem, which has been festering for the last sixty years, it might not be an easy task for either party to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution. The demand for sovereignty by the NSCN (IM) cannot be encouraged by New Delhi as it will stimulate further secessionist tendencies in other states, threatening the integrity of India. The NSCN (IM) is also perhaps right in its demands for a unified Naga homeland encompassing all Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast. However, territorial demarcation is not an easy task and is forbidden by the Constitution of India unless the states are willing partners in the project. Neighbouring Assam and especially Manipur strongly resists Naga political and territorial unification within its borders. The path to peace appears more complicated than ever as a result of the ongoing contest between the NSCN (IM) and other groups with regard to territorial demarcation.

2.7 Contested Spheres of Territory

The NSCN (IM)'s demands in the peace process for a common unified Naga homeland are contested in the real world of interstate territorial discourse. The idea of *Nagaland*—seeking unification of all Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh into a common politico-administrative unit—has exacerbated the situation. The NSCN (IM) has been demanding that the existing ceasefire agreement with New Delhi be extended to all Naga-inhabited areas in the region. This is a highly emotive issue with Manipur and Assam. In theory, a ceasefire automatically means the giving up of violence in favour of peaceful negotiations to a conflict. In this case, the extension of the ceasefire to Manipur and Assam would theoretically mean the end of a violent resistance by the NSCN (IM). However, a larger more 'diabolic' fear pervades the minds of the population of the other neighbouring states, especially Manipur. Any extension of the ceasefire to Manipur, with its large Naga population, is perceived to become a springboard of the Naga territorial unification process. The Meiteis fear that lurking behind the extension of the ceasefire is a legitimization of the NSCN (IM) demands on Manipur's territory. Such a move would also acknowledge the NSCN (IM)'s growing presence in the hills of Manipur. The NSCN (IM) too is caught up in a dilemma. A number of the NSCN (IM) cadres along with their leader Muivah belong to Ukhrul in Manipur. Therefore, in his inability to clinch an extension of the ceasefire to the Manipur hills, Muivah faces the possibility of being sidetracked. But an important part of the hills of Manipur seems to form the core of the Naga movement conducted by the NSCN (IM). Therefore, although the militant group has appeared silent on the sovereignty issue in recent years, it would be rather difficult for them to give up

their demand for a unified Naga homeland. If the demand for unification is given up, the NSCN (IM) faces the fatal prospect of losing the reason for their existence. The militant group knows well that without the unification card New Delhi might not talk to them, their larger struggle based on a historical ‘uniqueness’ notwithstanding. Even more obvious is the fact that without including the Tangkhul Naga base in the larger *Nagalim* project, the present NSCN (IM) leadership possesses limited influence in Nagaland per se—particularly given the fact that these areas are dominated by the Ao, Angami, Chakesang and Konyak Naga tribes whose loyalty to the NSCN (IM) is rather suspect.

2.8 Manipur Raises the Ante

Under pressure from the NSCN (IM), in a joint statement issued on June 14, 2001 in Bangkok, the Indian government and the NSCN (IM) extended the Naga ceasefire ‘without territorial limits’.⁴² This led to violent protests in Manipur, with the state assembly building being burnt down and 13 protestors being killed on June 18, 2001. Meitei, Kuki and Muslim civil society organizations in Manipur were united in a mass movement against the decision to extend the Naga ceasefire to the Naga-dominated hill districts of Manipur—Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong. These protest groups included the All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO), comprising 83 social and voluntary organizations across Manipur. Later, a new body comprising the AMUCO as well as All Manipur Students’ Union (AMSU) was formed to carry forward the protests. Finally, New Delhi was forced to reconsider its decision, and on July 27, 2001, it revoked the new ceasefire arrangements, and restored the status quo of a territorially restricted ceasefire with the NSCN (IM) in Nagaland.⁴³

The Meiteis are deeply apprehensive that the current peace process could end up in the balkanization of Manipur. Geographically, the hills constitute 70% of Manipur’s territory and any further slicing of territory would leave Manipur at a disadvantage (Baruah 2005, p. 114). Meiteis also claim that their culture is a synthesis of Naga and Meitei cultures and are embittered by the identity and historical exclusivity discourse of the Nagas. Their narratives concentrate on the state’s culture of pluralism. Meiteis point out that the term ‘Naga’ in a historical sense had never been applied to the hill tribes of Manipur by the Ahoms and the British, but

⁴²For full text of the agreement see South Asia Terrorism Portal. Countries; India; States; Nagaland; Papers; Extension of the ceasefire with the NSCN-IM (2006). Retrieved from www.satp.org.

⁴³The ULFA has said that the NSCN (IM)’s claim of eight Assam districts as part of Nagalim has ‘neither credibility nor any historical basis’. Arabinda Rajkhowa, the ULFA chairman, has called upon the NSCN (IM) to remove the eight Assam districts from its Nagalim map. See Ajai Sahni. Survey of Conflicts and Resolution in India’s Northeast. (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume12/Article3.htm>.

was limited to present Nagaland. Indicating the state's historical cultural plurality and ethos, Manipuri narratives point out that Panheiba, a Naga, ascended the throne of Manipur in 1714. He later adopted Hinduism and also assumed the title Gharib Nawaz being conferred on him by the Meitei Pangals (Muslims) for his kindness towards them. Two Tangkhul Naga politicians, Yangmasho Shaiza and Rishang Keishing have been chief ministers of Manipur. Keishing, despite his Tangkhul lineage, passed a resolution in 1994 in the Manipur assembly upholding the territorial integrity of Manipur on the face of the Nagaland assembly adopting a resolution calling for unification of all Naga areas (Baruah 2005, p. 115).

2.9 External Linkages

Internal conflicts fought for local issues also involve a complex transnational network (Kaldor 2006, p. 2). External support is contingent on the geographical proximity and political relations maintained by the armed groups with external actors. These groups procure the hardware of violence and update their strategies through external support. Support from neighbouring areas could be political, moral, military, economic, territorial or cultural based on ethnic ties (Bajpai 2002, pp. 33–37). The NSCN (IM) is heavily dependent on external support for its violent movement. The northeastern states share a 4500 km highly porous border with China in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest and Bhutan in the northwest. The NSCN (IM) has training camps in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Significantly, the unified National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed in Myanmar on January 31, 1980.⁴⁴ The NSCN (IM) is also suspected to have a strong links with the Kachin Independence Organization and the Karen National Union (KNU) in Myanmar. The GPRN sends emissaries abroad to acquire funds for an annual NSCN (IM) budget of Indian Rs. 200–Rs. 250 million. Drug trafficking, arms procurement and intelligence from groups in South and Southeast Asia is vital for the group. Arms are purchased from Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries and transported through Myanmar and Bangladesh.⁴⁵ Unless these external linkages are thwarted by India, the militarization of the Naga ethnic movement will continue unabated.

A significant development that took place in the 1990s was the admission of the NSCN (IM) into The Hague based Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO) on January 23, 1993. The admission elevated the Naga movement to the international arena (Nuh and Lasuh 2002, pp. 449–462). It is, however, surprising that apart from articulating a weak condemnation, New Delhi did not question the basis of the membership. Consequently, the internationalization

⁴⁴See Nagalim. (2007). Retrieved from http://www.unpo.org/member_profile.php?id=41n.

⁴⁵For more details on NSCN (IM) and (K) factions, see Nagaland Timeline. (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/timeline/index.html>.

of the Naga issue perhaps drove home the inevitable truth for New Delhi—that in order to mitigate a growing crisis, a proposal for peaceful resolution must be negotiated with the armed group. The NSCN (IM) has also strong linkages with Kreddha—the International Peace Council for States, Peoples and Minorities based in Amsterdam which is involved in the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts between population groups and the government of states within which they live.⁴⁶ The role of Michael C van Walt van Praag, a lawyer and member, Kreddha in the peace negotiations in a rather covert fashion on the side of the NSCN (IM) is a well established fact. The legal language of the NSCN (IM)'s text in its negotiating position with the Indian government is suspected to be the handiwork of Praag. While it is interesting to observe this kind of third party mediation, it remains to be seen how effective it is going to be towards finding a final resolution to the Naga conflict unless support exist for such outside involvement from the Naga community.

The Naga Reconciliation process headed by Baptist clergyman Wati Aier has also received the support of the Baptist World Alliance and a UK-based Quaker group, which organized a reconciliation meeting of the Naga factions, community Naga organizations and tribal Hohos at Chiang Mai in Thailand in June, 2008. This kind of peaceful support is significant as it further vindicates the fact that community organizations possess the credibility to bring together warring factions for peaceful reconciliation.

2.10 Prescriptions for Better Dialogue Mechanisms

The Naga dialogue is a useful, solid base for informing the formal, official negotiations between the Union Government and the NSCN (IM). Negotiations are important to bring about a peace agreement but they have never by themselves succeeded in establishing peace. It has been observed that negotiations between two conflicting actors usually involve each side taking up strong positions on issues, thereby rendering the process incapable of reaching a consensus. Hence, instead of shared 'meaning-making' based on respect, listening to the other side and the articulation of divergent voices, negotiations tend to streamline various issues and voices into a structured decision-making process based on asymmetries of power.

The difference between negotiation and dialogue is that while negotiation aims at finding a concrete agreement, dialogue aims at a changed relationship. The Naga peace negotiations reflect a similar situation and hence have been stalled for decades due to their intense focus on dealing with rigid postures (the Union Government's position that India's territorial integrity and sovereignty are non-negotiable and that the Naga political resolution has to be squarely placed within the framework of the Indian Constitution; the NSCN (IM)'s insistence that

⁴⁶Kreddha. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.kreddha.org/text/index.asp?text.asp?cat1=1&cat2=5&cat3=0&langId=1~main>.

resolution has to be outside the framework of the Indian Constitution). Therefore, a Naga community dialogue could perhaps be more successful in finding new ground for mutual respect and understanding. The government of India must while holding future peace talks go beyond its conceptual framework of conflict management to conflict prevention and resolution, giving due recognition to the informal yet very critical groundswell of Naga dialogue process. Since the entire Naga society is affected by violent conflict, representation must be accorded to various actors like the Naga Hoho, tribal Hohos, Village Councils, NMA, etc. The few prescriptions offered here are:

1. Reframe the negotiation framework between the Union Government and the NSCN (IM) to make it more inclusive, broad-based and socially viable.
2. The positive change that the Naga community dialogue has brought about in Naga society and its ability to control violent escalations between the militant outfits is truly remarkable. Therefore, the government of India and the Nagaland State government must take valuable inputs from these civil society actors to increase effectiveness of democratic governance and in bringing down the levels of bureaucratic corruption in Naga areas.
3. The *Naga Hoho* and the JFGBDB must be institutionalized and their informal dialogues recorded and widely disseminated to bring about greater awareness of these 'bottom up' approaches to conflict management and resolution.
4. The NSCN (IM)'s *Nagalim* map threatens the territorial integrity of states like Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The Naga militant actors are also instrumental in setting up other violent ethnic groups like the *Dima Haram Daogah* (DHD) in Assam. It is perhaps necessary that the Union Government involves people affected by the conflict in other states in the process of dialogue and negotiation in order to make the entire process of resolving the conflict a joint effort.

In conclusion, one can hope that the involvement of Naga society in the dialogue process and its support for the peace negotiations between the Naga armed groups and the Government of India provides the requisite legitimacy to these processes. The recent developments in the peace process are encouraging. In October 2012, the NSCN (IM) organized a people's consultative meeting at its headquarters, Camp Hebron, which was attended by top-ranking leaders as well as by members of Naga civil society. After this meeting, the group issued a statement to the effect that almost all present at the meeting backed the leadership's efforts to find an honourable solution through the ongoing peace negotiations with the Indian government.

On the Indian government's side, Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde was even more categorical; he has hinted that a solution is most likely by March 2013. The other significant development in this regard is the commitment reiterated by the representatives of the Joint Legislators' Forum of the Nagaland Assembly led by Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio that they support an 'interim solution' and are ready to resign from their present positions in order to facilitate a final resolution to the Naga conflict by March 2013.

What could count as a feasible resolution package in this context? For one, it should not threaten the present territorial boundaries of the states of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. As is well known, the NSCN (IM)'s Greater *Nagalim* demand is based on the territorial unification of all Naga-inhabited areas in Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. These include: Manipur's four hill districts of Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul; Assam's Dima Hasau and Karbi Anglong districts; and Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap and Changlang districts. Hence, any resolution based on territorial changes will not be acceptable to these states as was demonstrated by the violent protests in Manipur in 2001. However, what will work is a non-territorial resolution and this is what the Union Home Minister appears to be hinting at. That would mean greater autonomy for the Naga-inhabited areas in these other states. This would encompass separate budget allocations for the Naga-inhabited areas with regard to their culture and development issues. For it to be practically feasible, a new body should be constituted that would look after the rights of the Nagas in the other northeastern states besides Nagaland.

This is a resolution framework that is worth considering by the other states, especially Manipur as it would enable it to maintain its territorial *status quo* while only giving up developmental privileges in its Naga inhabited areas to a new Naga non-territorial body. This arrangement should serve Manipur well as, under the present circumstances, the ethnic divide and distrust between the Meiteis and the Nagas is so immense that most Nagas residing in Manipur believe that they are discriminated against when it comes to development packages by the Meitei dominated Manipur state assembly. It would also mean that Manipur can then concentrate on the development of its other ethnic minorities and not have to constantly worry about Naga dissatisfaction. A non-territorial resolution framework also favours the Nagas as their other core demands such as recognition of their 'unique history' and culture, Naga leverage over deciding the development path for the Naga-inhabited areas in the Northeast, etc., will all be met through greater autonomy based on a non-territorial resolution package. This is an optimal gain for all affected parties under the present circumstances. For the India government too, it would result in recognizing the Naga's 'unique' history and culture within the territorial integrity and sovereignty framework of the Indian Constitution. This is something worth working for in the near future.

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