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BOOK REVIEWS

Ethnic Subnationalist Insurgencies in South Asia: Identities, Interests, and Challenges to State Authority, by Jugdip S. Chima (ed.), London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 197.

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In this edited volume editor Jugdip S. Chima and the book's various contributors have produced a valuable addition to the literature on insurgency. The book is useful on two fronts. The first is as a descriptive and historical guide to the most severe and intractable of South Asia's dizzying number of insurgencies. In addition to the introduction and conclusion there are eight chapters that separately deal with ethnic insurrections in Kashmir, Assam, Punjab, northeast India, Sri Lanka, Balochistan, the Chittagong Hills in Bangladesh, and one chapter that covers Maoist ideological insurgencies in India, Pakistan and Nepal. These well-written and deeply analytical chapters provide an important resource to researchers of insurgency on purely historical grounds.

Of even greater importance is how the volume draws common lessons from the disparate case studies that offer important insights into ethnic subnationalist insurgencies as a phenomenon. The volume goes beyond viewing ethnicity as the sole variable in ethnic insurgencies and asks the questions why each of these insurgen-

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cies erupted when they did and what other factors caused ethnic differences to turn violent. Ethnicity itself cannot answer these questions since there may have been ethnic differences in a particular society for hundreds of years, yet only at certain times have those differences enflamed into violence. According to Chima, ethnicity itself is a necessary, but not sufficient, cause of ethnic subnationalist insurgencies (p. 3). In addition to the causes of these insurgencies, the volume also draws lessons, further discussed below, about the outcomes of these conflicts and why some insurgencies drag on while others are successfully quashed.

Regarding the first set of questions, Chima comes to the conclusion that “ethnic mobilization and insurgency only emerge when it is ‘activated’ by tension emerging from political competition between ethnic and central state elites” (p. 2). Attempts by the central state, and dominant ethnic group, to homogenize the society at the expense of minority ethnic groups, “make the ethnic masses primed to accept the often symbolically rich appeals from their leaders to mobilize against the central state” (p. 2). This homogenization can take the form of symbolic or tangible changes in government policy, but they almost always result in the majority group being advantaged over the minority and the minority feeling as if they have been relegated to second-class citizens. Another form of domination by the central state is economic, such as resource extraction from minority areas without compensation to the local people. In sum, ethnic difference is not enough to generate insurgency, it must be accompanied by social, political, or economic policies by the ethnic majority that exclude or disadvantage the minority.

This conclusion is borne out by the case studies. For example, the Tamil minority and Sinhalese majority co-existed peacefully for generations in Sri Lanka. According

to Jayadeva Uyangoda, in his chapter on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), it was only in the 1950s, shortly after Sri Lanka gained independence from Great Britain, that severe discord began. Uyangoda contends that conflict arose due to Sinhalese insistence that Sri Lanka become a unified, centralized state, with Sinhalese culture dominating, while the Tamils wanted autonomy in order to protect their own cultural practices and values (p.102). The Sinhalese used their majority to institute discriminatory policies, such as citizenship and franchise legislation in 1948 and 1949 and making Sinhalese the official language in 1956, that pushed Sri Lanka in the direction of becoming a monocultural state. The feelings of exclusion that this generated in the Tamil minority, coupled with their failure to make any changes through the parliamentary system due to their perpetual minority status, led some to believe that violence was the only way to protect their ethnic interests.

Adeel Khan, in his chapter on Balochistan province in Pakistan provides an example of economic domination of the central state over a minority ethnic group. In 2001, the Pakistani government announced that it would construct a port in Gwadar along the southwestern coast of Balochistan. This decision was made without local input and few of the benefits were slated to be returned to the local Baloch people. While wealthy outsiders from other parts of the country flooded the area, building a five-star hotel and lush accommodations for themselves, the local people saw little improvement in their access to basic needs, such as health, education, or sanitation. At the same time, the traditional livelihood of many local people, which revolved around fishing, was disrupted (p. 130). Though just one factor in the Balochistan conflict, this example illustrates the role economics can play in the genesis of ethnic subnationalist insurgencies and how it can be the spark that turns mere ethnic difference into ethnically-based violence.

The other major issue the volume explores is that of the outcomes of insurgencies. Chima notes that none of the insurgencies discussed have been successful in obtaining their primary goals of independence or robust autonomy. Some of these insurgencies have managed to carry on with their struggle, however, while others have been dismantled. Chima concludes that larger states are better able to handle localized insurgencies than smaller states, which by their nature will be less able to contain conflict to certain segments of the country. Secondly, insurgencies are most successfully defeated when there is significant political instability and internal dissonance within the insurgent minority group (p. 183).

This volume will amply reward researchers interested in South Asian insurgent conflict. The case studies are valuable in themselves as histories and descriptions of individual conflicts. But more than that, the volume draws out commonalities that provide broader lessons on the causes and outcomes of ethnic insurgent warfare. The case studies support Chima's conclusion that "primary political conditions conducive to ethnic insurgency include either a restricted 'conception' of national identity not inclusive of minority ethnic groups, or the erosion of federalism with the centralized power at the national level" (p. 179).

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