



Navigating Historical Complexities: The Naga Struggle's Impact on India-Myanmar Relations

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ABSTRACT

This comprehensive analysis delves into the intricate dynamics of the ongoing Naga conflict and its significant impact on the bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar. The Naga struggle has played a crucial role in shaping the cultural, economic, and security bonds between these neighbouring nations since pre-independence times. Despite the security challenges posed by the insurgency, India and Myanmar are working together to strengthen their economic ties through various initiatives. Furthermore, the study highlights the striking cultural and ethnic similarities between the Naga people and tribes in Myanmar, which have led to closer cultural and people-to-people relationships. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of the Naga conflict, such as issues of identity, autonomy, and development, to achieve lasting peace in the region. It argues that a comprehensive and inclusive approach involving all stakeholders is necessary to resolve the Naga conflict and build sustainable peace.

Keywords: Naga struggle, insurgency, India, Myanmar, NNC, NSCN

I. INTRODUCTION

The Naga struggle for self-determination has been a defining feature of the political landscape in Northeast India and Myanmar, shaping the historical trajectory of the region and influencing bilateral relations between the two nations. The Naga people, consisting of various tribes with distinctive cultural and linguistic identities, have harboured aspirations for autonomy and self-governance in their ancestral lands for a long time. This struggle, rooted in a deep-seated desire for recognition and political rights, has had profound implications not only for the Naga people but also for the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region. The Naga struggle has a long and complex history, dating back to the colonial period when the British colonial administration sought to establish control over the Naga Hills, leading to

resistance from the Naga tribes. Despite their efforts, the British were unable to fully subjugate the Naga people, who maintained a degree of autonomy under their traditional tribal structures. This legacy of resistance laid the groundwork for the Naga nationalist movement that emerged in the post-independence period. On 14 August 1947, the Naga National Council (NNC) boldly declared Naga independence, a day before India's Independence. Following India's independence in 1947, The Indian state attempted to integrate the indigenous ethnic groups residing in the Northeast region into the Union. However, the Naga people, who were viewed as backward tribes by the colonial ruler, opposed and declined to become a part of the Indian Federation. The Naga people initially at that time resorted to peaceful forms of protest. Still, they had to take up arms and fight for their independence due to the forceful oppression from the Indian government leading to a protracted conflict with the Indian state. Since then, the movement has evolved and is now a socio-political struggle, with the Naga people seeking full autonomy and recognition. This struggle is rooted in a quest for a sovereign state, as the Naga people inhabit areas that span across the border of India and Myanmar.

The struggle has had far-reaching implications for both India and Myanmar. For India, it has been a persistent challenge to its internal security, with Naga insurgents often seeking refuge in Myanmar's border areas and carrying out attacks on Indian army convoys and retreating to the other side of the border. Myanmar, on the other hand, has faced accusations from India of providing sanctuary and support to these insurgents particularly the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) a faction of the Naga insurgent group. The frequent occurrence of tensions between the two countries has resulted in a complicated state of bilateral relations. Despite the intricate challenges presented by the Naga insurgency, it has paradoxically opened up avenues of cooperation between India



and Myanmar. As both countries share a common interest in addressing the protracted Naga conflict to ensure regional stability, the Naga struggle has become a salient factor that has impacted the wider landscape of India-Myanmar relations. In particular, this issue has influenced their interactions in various domains, including security, diplomacy, and regional cooperation, thereby shaping the broad dynamics of their bilateral relationship. This study aims to investigate the various effects of the Naga conflict on the relationship between India and Myanmar. Through an analysis of the historical intricacies of the Naga issue and its impact on bilateral relations, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by both nations in managing this long-standing conflict.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE NAGA STRUGGLE

The Naga tribes, which constitute more than 30 major tribes and sub-tribes, are indigenous communities residing in the northeastern region of India and northwestern Myanmar, each possessing a distinct dialect. These tribes hold a profound sense of community and belonging, which is reflected in their socio-cultural practices and customs. The social structure of the Naga society is notably intricate, with the tribes organized into villages and each being governed by a council of elders. The traditional Naga village is marked by its communal ethos, where resources and responsibilities are shared amongst the villagers. Such a practice exemplifies the community's strong sense of collectivism and social cohesion. Before the advent of British colonialism and the spread of Christianity in the northeastern region of India and northwestern Myanmar, the Naga people engaged in the practice of head-hunting. This traditional and ritualistic practice held a deep significance in their cultural and spiritual beliefs and was often associated with notions of bravery, honour, and spiritual importance. Despite the practice being perceived as barbaric by outsiders, it was an integral part of the Naga culture and represented a way to establish one's strength and status within the community. The act of taking a head was seen as a symbol of power and prowess and often served as a rite of passage for young men seeking to prove their worthiness as warriors.

The practice of head-hunting, which involved the taking of human heads as a symbol of power and prestige, was prevalent among the Naga tribes of Northeast India. However, with the arrival of the British in the region, efforts were made to

suppress the practice as a means of establishing colonial authority. In addition, the spread of Christianity in the region also contributed to the decline of head-hunting. Gradually, the practice declined among the Naga tribes, and by the mid-20th century, it had ceased. Nevertheless, head-hunting remains a significant aspect of Naga's history and cultural identity. It served as a means of establishing social status and honour and was often associated with religious beliefs and rituals. Today, head-hunting is no longer practised among the Naga tribes, but its legacy lives on in the form of myths, stories, and cultural practices. The decline of head-hunting can be seen as part of a broader process of cultural change and adaptation that has taken place over time in the region.

The colonial period in India was marked by complex dynamics between the British and the indigenous populations. In particular, the British encounters with the Naga tribes of northeastern India were characterized by a range of responses that included resistance, accommodation, and transformation. Although the British did not express any interest in extending their authority over the Naga-inhabited hill areas of the Northeast, they were primarily interested in developing tea plantations in the plains and foothills. The Nagas perceived the increasing British presence in the area as an intrusion and began to engage in raids and looting of villages located in the plains. Additionally, they also resorted to the kidnapping and killing of laborers and officers working in the tea plantations. It was primarily in response to these events that the British forces took action against the Nagas. The primary aims of these actions were to bring the Nagas under control and to safeguard the British colonial subjects and business interests in the plains from the frequent attacks of the marauding Naga tribes.

Despite the persistent resistance of the Naga tribes, the British colonial power eventually managed to bring them under its control through the combined use of military force, diplomacy, and the establishment of administrative structures. In their efforts to pacify the Naga tribes, the British colonial officials sought to strike a balance between recognizing the customary laws and practices of the Naga people and imposing the authority of the colonial administration. This was achieved by appointing tribal chiefs who were loyal to the British administration while also granting some degree of autonomy to the Naga tribes. In 1918, a pivotal organization was formed called the Naga Club with the assistance of British officials to work to promote the interest of the Nagas. It emerged



during the colonial period in British India when the Naga Hills were administered separately from the rest of India as an "Excluded Area." This administrative distinction meant that the Naga Hills were not directly governed by British India but were under the control of the Governor of Assam. The formation of the Naga Club was a response to the perceived threat of inclusion into the Indian political entity as a result of proposed constitutional reforms in India. This club was formed by educated Naga leaders, notably R.S. Ruichumhao and T. Takhe, who were concerned about the potential loss of Naga identity and culture should they be assimilated into the larger Indian state. The Naga Club, thus, emerged as a platform for the Naga people to assert their distinct identity and preserve their unique cultural heritage. The establishment of the Naga Club was a significant step in the Naga people's political consciousness.

In 1929, the Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission, a British parliamentary group assigned to recommend constitutional reforms for India. The memorandum conveyed the Naga people's wish to be left alone and not to be included in any political arrangement without their consent. The memorandum stated that the Naga people were a distinct entity with their own culture, language, and customs and should be allowed to determine their own future. It emphasized the need to protect Naga interests and preserve their way of life, which they believed could only be achieved through maintaining their separate identity. This marked the first formal articulation of Naga's aspirations for self-rule. Following the decision of the British to grant independence to India, the Nagas were confronted with the arduous task of acquiescing to their assimilation into the newly formed sovereign Indian State. The leaders of the Nagas posited that the Nagas, as a people possessing a distinct historical, racial, and cultural identity separate from that of the Indians, and having never been subjugated by Indian rulers, should be accorded the right to self-determination as an independent and sovereign nation upon the eventual departure of the British from India.

After the decline of the Naga club, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council was established in 1945 by the British colonial administration, the NHDTC aimed to represent the interests of various Naga groups. It served as a forum for discussion and a stepping stone for a more formalized political entity. In 1946, this council was reorganized into the Naga National Council (NNC). This marked a shift from a British-created council to a self-

determined political organization led by Naga representatives. After undergoing reorganization, the Naga National Council (NNC) appealed to British officials and Indian leaders for independence. However, despite being a small and underdeveloped community, the NNC rejected the arguments of the British officials and Indian leaders who believed that it was better for them to remain a part of independent India and negotiate autonomy within the Indian Union. In June 1947, following prolonged negotiations and discussions, Naga National Council (NNC) leaders Aliba Imti and T. Sakhrie entered into a Nine-Point Agreement with Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam. The clause in question caused great controversy among the Nagas as well as between their leaders and the Indian government during the years that followed its introduction. Zapo Phizo, an influential militant leader, interpreted the clause to mean that the Nagas had the right to achieve political independence after a period of ten years. The Naga National Council (NNC) delegation met with Mahatma Gandhi in July 1947 and received assurances that he would prevent the Indian government from forcibly integrating the Nagas into the Indian Union. Despite these assurances, the Indian government continued to disregard the Nine-Point Agreement, leading to widespread anger and frustration among the Nagas. In response, the NNC declared independence on August 14, 1947, and communicated the same to the Government of India and the United Nations Organization. Following India's independence, the Naga leaders' aspirations were disregarded during the drafting of the Constitution of India. The Indian state established a committee to accommodate hill tribes' interests and aspirations within the Indian Constitution, but the Naga National Council (NNC) refused to participate. The NNC rejected the Indian Constitution's Sixth Schedule, which only provided Autonomous District Councils for the hill tribes within the state of Assam, leading to a plebiscite in 1951 where the majority voted for independence. India did not grant independence to Nagas, and the NNC declined to participate in the 1952 Assembly and Parliamentary Elections. This situation led to prolonged violence and insurgency in the region.

In the years that followed the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC), the organization was unable to achieve a peaceful resolution. This failure can be attributed to a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internally, the NNC faced various challenges, including leadership issues, strategic disagreements, and ideological differences among its members. These internal



divisions undermined the NNC's unity and effectiveness in pursuing its goals. Externally, the NNC encountered strong opposition from the Indian government, which was committed to maintaining its territorial integrity and viewed the NNC's demands for Naga sovereignty as a threat to national unity. The Indian government's suppression of NNC activities, such as the detention of its leaders and the use of force against Naga insurgents, significantly weakened the organization's capacity to operate effectively. Eventually signing the Shillong Accord of 1975, agreed to surrender arms and accept the constitution.

In the aftermath of the Naga National Council's (NNC) failure to achieve its objectives through nonviolent means, a faction emerged within the NNC that advocated a more militant approach to the Naga struggle for self-determination. This faction, led by Thuingaleng Muivah, Isak Chishi Swu, and S.S. Khaplang, eventually broke away from the NNC and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980. The formation of the NSCN marked a significant shift in the Naga struggle, as it signalled the start of armed resistance against the Indian state. The NSCN's primary objective was to establish a sovereign Naga state that encompasses all Naga-inhabited areas in India and Myanmar. The group believed that armed struggle was necessary to achieve this goal since they felt that peaceful negotiations had failed to yield any meaningful results. The NSCN quickly gained support among the Naga youth who were disillusioned with the perceived failure of the NNC to secure Naga rights. The group's leadership, consisting of Muivah, Swu, and Khaplang, provided a strong and charismatic presence that resonated with many Naga people. Despite being initially formed as a single entity, the NSCN later split into two factions, with Muivah and Swu leading the NSCN-IM (Isak-Muivah faction) and Khaplang leading the NSCN-K (Khaplang faction). The split was primarily due to ideological differences and personal ambitions within the leadership of the NSCN.

The current state of affairs in Nagaland is characterized by the presence of over 15 Naga militant groups, among which the NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), NSCN (Unification), NSCN (R), NNC/FGN (Accordist), and NSCN (Non-Accordist) are the most prominent, each claiming to represent the Naga cause. Among these groups, the NSCN (IM) wields the most influence and holds the greatest power over the Nagas. The

NSCN (IM) has been able to strengthen its organizational and military capabilities, forge alliances with other insurgent groups in the northeast region, and internationalize the issue of the Naga conflict by taking it to international forums such as the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization (UNPO). This has made it almost impossible to conceive of any solution to the Naga conflict without the involvement of the NSCN (IM).

Currently, both the NSCN (IM) and the 7NNPGs, a collective of seven Naga militant groups, are engaged in talks with the Government of India to bring about an early resolution to the conflict. Both these Naga Political Groups (NPGs) signed agreements with the GOI called THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT and THE AGREED POSITION in 2015 and 2017, respectively.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE NAGA STRUGGLE

The Naga struggle is a protracted conflict that has persisted in India's northeastern states for over seven decades. It is rooted in historical grievances and aspirations for self-determination and has had significant international dimensions, particularly impacting India-Myanmar relations. The porous India-Myanmar border has allowed Naga insurgents to evade Indian security forces, regroup and seek sanctuary in remote regions of Myanmar. This cross-border mobility has been a challenge for both countries, often straining their bilateral relations. Myanmar's internal complexities, marked by various ethnic insurgencies, have further complicated the issue, as it seeks to balance its internal security concerns with its relations with India. However, the Naga insurgency has precipitated heightened military collaboration between India and Myanmar. In response to this common security threat, both nations have engaged in coordinated military actions along their border regions, specifically targeting Naga insurgent factions. This collaborative approach underscores a mutual commitment to addressing the insurgency. While this military cooperation has contributed to an amelioration of bilateral relations in the security sphere, it has also underscored the complexities inherent in managing a dynamic and intricate security landscape.

The Naga insurgency has attracted attention from external actors, including neighboring countries and international powers, who have allegedly provided support in various



forms, perceiving the conflict as a means to advance their own strategic interests in the region. This external involvement has not only prolonged the conflict but also made it a part of broader geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. These external elements have played a significant role in both fueling the conflict and complicating efforts to resolve it. Understanding the involvement of external factors is crucial for comprehending the complexities of the Naga struggle. One key aspect of external involvement in the Naga conflict is the support extended to Naga insurgents by external actors. Some neighboring countries, such as China, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Bangladesh allegedly provided financial, military, and logistical support to the Naga rebels. This support has enabled the insurgents to sustain their armed struggle against the Indian state and has prolonged the conflict. The motivations behind this support vary, ranging from strategic interests in the region to ideological affinities with the Naga cause. In response, India has employed a multifaceted approach to address the international dimensions of the Naga struggle. The country has engaged with Myanmar both diplomatically and militarily to address the issue of insurgent sanctuaries. However, these efforts have been fraught with challenges, given Myanmar's internal complexities and the strategic calculations of external actors involved in the conflict. Efforts at bilateral cooperation between India and Myanmar to tackle the Naga insurgency have often been hindered by these broader geopolitical dynamics. The Naga insurgency, therefore, continues to be a complex issue that requires sustained and coordinated efforts from both India and Myanmar, along with constructive engagement with external actors.

On the economic front, the Naga insurgency has impeded efforts to bolster connectivity and economic collaboration between India's northeastern states and Myanmar. The persistent instability wrought by the insurgency has acted as a deterrent for both domestic and foreign investment in the region, hindering the development of infrastructure and industries. This instability has also disrupted trade routes and cross-border economic activities, undermining the potential for economic growth in the border regions. Furthermore, the Naga insurgency has hampered efforts to promote tourism and cultural exchanges between India and Myanmar. The region's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty could have served as a significant draw for tourists, benefiting both countries economically. However, the ongoing conflict has created an environment of

uncertainty and insecurity, deterring potential visitors and stifling the growth of the tourism industry. Moreover, the Naga insurgency has had indirect economic ramifications, affecting the broader economic ties between India and Myanmar. The instability in the region has contributed to a sense of insecurity among investors and businesses, dampening the prospects for economic cooperation and collaboration. Additionally, the diversion of resources towards managing the insurgency has strained government budgets, limiting the funds available for other development projects and initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth.

IMPACT ON INDIA-MYANMAR BILATERAL RELATIONS

Strategic, cultural, and historical links define the dynamic and diverse bilateral relationship between India and Myanmar. The long-running Naga struggle, in which nationalist Naga groups fought for increased autonomy or independence for the Naga-inhabited regions that crossed the border between India and Myanmar, had a major impact on the bilateral ties between the two nations. This paper examines the multifaceted impact of the Naga conflict on India-Myanmar relations, encompassing border security dynamics, humanitarian challenges, trade disruptions, military collaboration, diplomatic implications, and regional stability concerns.

Border Security Dynamics

The Naga conflict has had a significant impact on border security dynamics between India and Myanmar, particularly in regions inhabited by the Naga people along the border. This conflict involves Naga insurgent groups operating on both sides of the border, leading to concerns about cross-border movement, arms smuggling, and other illicit activities. Consequently, India and Myanmar have enhanced their collaboration in border security to effectively address these challenges. This includes measures such as increased intelligence sharing, joint border patrols, and coordinated efforts to monitor and control insurgent and arms movement across the border. The cooperation in border security between India and Myanmar in the context of the Naga conflict demonstrates their mutual recognition of the security risks involved and their shared interest in maintaining stability along their shared border. It also reflects the evolving nature of their bilateral relations as they work together to address common security challenges, moving beyond historical disagreements. Therefore, the Naga conflict has played a role in fostering closer security cooperation between India and Myanmar,



underscoring the importance of addressing internal conflicts in promoting regional security and stability.

Humanitarian Challenges

The protracted Naga insurgency, straddling the India-Myanmar border, creates a dire humanitarian situation with repercussions for bilateral relations between the two countries. This analysis explores the conflict's human cost and its impact on India-Myanmar ties. The primary challenge lies in displaced populations. Civilians caught in the crossfire flee their homes, generating refugee flows across the porous border. This strains resources in both countries, as formal refugee management frameworks are lacking. The conflict further disrupts access to essential services, leading to deprivation of basic needs like healthcare, education, and clean water. Insecurity restricts movement, hindering aid delivery and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the conflict raises concerns about human rights abuses. Allegations of extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detention by security forces mar the conflict. This fuels distrust and hinders efforts towards a peaceful solution. The humanitarian crisis subsequently impedes regional cooperation. Divergent approaches to conflict and competition for influence create a lack of coordination on humanitarian issues, ultimately hindering aid delivery and prolonging civilian suffering. Mitigating the humanitarian impact necessitates collaborative efforts. Establishing refugee management frameworks and facilitating cross-border aid delivery are crucial initial steps. Additionally, advocating for respect for human rights is imperative to fostering trust and building a sustainable solution.

Trade Disruptions

The Naga conflict has created a security environment that poses a significant threat to trade activities in the region. The persistent insurgent activities, violent incidents, and the presence of landmines along crucial trade routes in the border regions have constrained the movement of goods, disrupted supply chains, and restricted investments in essential infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. The porous border, while facilitating the movement of people, has presented significant challenges in customs control and obstructed legitimate trade. The unstable security situation has further discouraged foreign investments in the border areas, which are vital for enhancing cross-border trade and economic growth. As a result,

businesses are cautious of the risks associated with conflict, leading to stagnation in the progress of cross-border trade infrastructure and hampering the economic potential of the region. While formal trade has suffered, the conflict has created opportunities for informal cross-border trade and smuggling activities. The permeable border has facilitated the transportation of goods, often evading customs regulations. Although this may provide some economic advantages to local communities, it has undermined the formal trade sector and posed security threats. Moreover, disruptions in trade relations have exacerbated existing tensions between India and Myanmar, leading to diplomatic friction. To mitigate the impact of the Naga conflict on trade, a comprehensive approach is necessary. Enhancing cooperation on security matters between India and Myanmar, including intelligence sharing and joint patrols, can improve the security environment along the border. Investing in infrastructure development in the border regions can facilitate movement and promote legitimate trade. Additionally, promoting economic development and creating sustainable livelihoods for Naga communities can potentially reduce their reliance on the informal sector. Such measures will go a long way in reducing the security risks associated with the conflict and enhancing cross-border trade between India and Myanmar.

Military collaboration

While military collaboration can provide immediate security benefits, it can also have long-term consequences if not carefully managed. Local populations may develop distrust and resentment, hindering future cooperation and hindering regional stability and economic development. The international community closely monitors military operations in the region, particularly regarding human rights concerns. As a result, India and Myanmar face pressure to conduct military operations within legal frameworks and address human rights violations. International pressure and potential sanctions can complicate military collaboration and damage reputations on the world stage. It is essential to consider political solutions that address the root causes of conflict, rather than relying solely on military action. This includes pursuing dialogue with Naga insurgents, addressing their grievances, and potentially seeking greater autonomy. A multi-pronged approach combining security measures with addressing underlying political and social issues offers a more promising solution. Military collaboration can be part of a



broader strategy to address the Naga conflict, but it must be pursued alongside efforts to promote peace talks and address the underlying issues fueling the insurgency.

Diplomatic implications

The ongoing Naga insurgency, spanning territories within both India and Myanmar, casts a long shadow on diplomatic relations between the two countries. A primary diplomatic challenge lies in accusations of cross-border support for the Naga insurgents. India raises apprehensions regarding potential safe havens for Naga rebel groups in Myanmar, while Myanmar accuses India of supporting anti-government elements. These accusations contribute to a lack of trust and complicate open dialogue on the matter. India and Myanmar adopt different strategies in addressing the Naga insurgency. India emphasizes a security-focused approach, centring on military actions. Conversely, Myanmar has displayed some willingness to engage in political discussions with select Naga factions. The absence of a unified strategy impedes collaborative endeavours to reach a lasting resolution to the conflict. The Naga dispute fosters an atmosphere of suspicion and obstructs cooperation on broader security concerns. Limited information sharing and coordinated border patrols persist due to apprehensions about each other's motives. This impedes efforts to tackle other regional security challenges, such as drug trafficking and militant operations. Both India and Myanmar encounter international scrutiny over human rights issues linked to the conflict. Allegations of human rights violations by security forces in both nations can tarnish their global standing. Consequently, adept navigation of the diplomatic arena is essential to manage international pressures.

Regional stability concerns

The ongoing struggle for autonomy by the Naga people, who reside in both India and Myanmar, poses a major obstacle to maintaining stability in the region and casts a long shadow over the bilateral relations between the two countries. The porous border and shared ethnicity among the Naga population facilitate the movement of insurgents and resources across the India-Myanmar border. This creates a safe haven for insurgent groups, enabling them to operate in one country while seeking refuge in the other. Such cross-border activities undermine regional stability by impeding efforts to control and dismantle insurgent networks. The conflict also has a spillover effect on

security, with violence and instability potentially spreading to neighboring regions. This further destabilizes border areas and empowers other insurgent groups operating nearby. Moreover, the conflict facilitates the proliferation of arms and ammunition, posing a significant threat to regional security and increasing the potential for violence. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict breeds mistrust and hampers effective cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar on security matters. Sharing intelligence, conducting joint patrols, and coordinating strategies become more challenging due to suspicions and fears of escalation. This lack of cooperation impedes efforts to effectively combat the insurgency and address the underlying issues that fuel it. The challenge of maintaining regional stability significantly impacts the relations between India and Myanmar. Tensions arising from the conflict create obstacles to cooperation on various fronts, hindering progress in economic development, infrastructure projects, and other bilateral initiatives. Additionally, disagreements on how to address the insurgency can lead to diplomatic friction and hinder efforts to build a more trusting and collaborative relationship.

GEO-POLITICAL IMPLICATION

The Naga conflict holds immense geopolitical significance for India, particularly in the Northeast region and the wider Indo-Pacific context. India views its Northeastern states, including Nagaland, as crucial to its security and connectivity strategies, especially in countering China's influence in the area. The Naga insurgency presents a complex interplay of political, social, and economic consequences, challenging India's internal security and territorial integrity. Additionally, the conflict has implications for India's relationships with neighboring nations, particularly Myanmar. The presence of Naga insurgent groups in Myanmar has strained India-Myanmar relations at times, with Myanmar being accused of offering sanctuary and support to these groups. This has led to intermittent tensions between the two countries and impacted their bilateral cooperation across various domains. Furthermore, the Naga insurgency is intertwined with broader regional security dynamics. The Northeast region of India shares borders with several countries, including China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar, making it strategically significant. The ongoing Naga struggle in the Northeast region of India has stood as a formidable source of instability and violence, with the potential to spill over into neighboring states, creating a



domino effect that could jeopardize the overall security landscape. The conflict not only creates a breeding ground for other insurgent groups but also hinders India's efforts to achieve its broader foreign policy objectives, particularly its "Look East" policy aimed at deepening ties with Southeast Asian countries. The instability fueled by the Naga conflict can impede India's efforts to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation with countries like Myanmar and may tarnish India's image as a stable and reliable partner in the region. Moreover, India's inability to resolve the Naga conflict may undermine its image as a responsible and powerful regional actor, which may, in turn, affect its credibility and influence in dealing with other regional security challenges. The instability arising from the Naga conflict may potentially create opportunities for China to exert greater influence in the region. This could be through supporting insurgent groups or furthering economic ties with Myanmar, both of which could undermine India's strategic interests.

The prolonged Naga insurgency, which straddles territories within India, has emerged as a critical challenge to the country's internal security apparatus and is part of a broader narrative of ethno-nationalist aspirations in India's Northeast region. The Naga conflict has its roots in historical injustices, neglect, and marginalization, which have fueled the Naga people's struggle for self-determination and autonomy. The conflict serves as a potential catalyst for other ethnic groups in the region, leading to solidarity movements with existing or dormant insurgent groups, and poses a significant threat to national unity and territorial integrity. The resolution of the conflict requires a delicate balancing act between addressing the grievances of the Naga people and maintaining national cohesion, which is crucial to achieving peace and stability in the region. Allegations of human rights abuses by security forces in the Naga-inhabited regions cast a shadow over India's internal security efforts. Instances of extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions can damage India's international reputation and legitimacy in its approach to counterinsurgency. This can strain relations with human rights organizations and potentially lead to international scrutiny and pressure, further complicating the security situation. The resolution of the Naga conflict is vital for addressing these geopolitical challenges. A peaceful settlement can contribute to India's internal security and stability, enhance its regional influence and connectivity initiatives, and foster improved relations between India and

Myanmar, as well as other neighboring countries. Ultimately, this can lead to greater regional cooperation and stability.

II. CONCLUSION

The Naga struggle has played a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of India-Myanmar relations, involving a complex interplay of historical legacies, geopolitical interests, and regional security concerns. The conflict emerged as a response to the colonial policies of the British Empire, which aimed to integrate Naga-inhabited areas into Indian and Burmese territories. The Naga National Council's declaration of independence in 1947 marked the beginning of a prolonged conflict with the Indian state, leading to the militarization of the region and the emergence of various Naga rebel groups. Myanmar's role in providing sanctuary to Naga rebels added a cross-border dimension to the conflict, complicating India's relations with its eastern neighbor. The Naga issue has both challenged and provided opportunities for cooperation between India and Myanmar. The presence of Naga insurgents in Myanmar's territory has been a source of tension, with India accusing Myanmar of harboring rebels and Myanmar expressing concerns over Indian insurgent groups operating from its soil. This has led to diplomatic tensions and occasional cross-border skirmishes. However, the Naga conflict has also provided a shared challenge for both countries, fostering cooperation in areas such as intelligence sharing and border management to address the common threat posed by insurgent activities.

The Naga conflict presents several challenges and opportunities for India and Myanmar to manage their bilateral relations better. One of the main challenges is to prevent the issue from further destabilizing the region. The presence of armed groups and the potential for cross-border movements of insurgents pose security risks for both countries and the wider region. Additionally, the unresolved conflict undermines efforts toward regional integration and economic development, hindering the full realization of the India-Myanmar relationship's potential. However, there are also opportunities for cooperation and conflict resolution. Both India and Myanmar have a shared interest in addressing the root causes of the Naga conflict and finding a lasting solution. The recent peace talks between the Indian government and Naga rebel groups, as well as Myanmar's efforts to engage with ethnic armed organizations through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process, are positive steps towards peace and stability in the



region. To capitalize on these opportunities, India and Myanmar should continue to engage in dialogue and confidence-building measures. The grievances of the Naga people and other ethnic groups in the region should be addressed by promoting inclusive governance, socio-economic development, and cultural rights for ethnic minorities. Additionally, both countries should enhance border management and intelligence sharing to prevent cross-border movements of insurgents and illicit activities. In conclusion, the Naga conflict has significant implications for India-Myanmar relations, presenting both challenges and opportunities for cooperation. A peaceful resolution of the conflict would contribute to regional stability and prosperity. Therefore, both India and Myanmar must address the root causes of the conflict and engage in meaningful dialogue to find a lasting solution that meets the aspirations of the Naga people and other ethnic groups in the region.

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