
India-Myanmar Relations and the Management of Transnational Militant Threats

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Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Militant groups hiding in Myanmar launch cross-border attacks into India, killing soldiers and civilians. The Indian Army has responded by launching cross-border military incursions into Burmese territory. After decades of trial and failure to curb the militants, a reciprocated spirit of cooperation for the first time seems to characterize India and Myanmar's joint efforts in fighting them. This article analyses the evolution of these efforts and argues that a sum of dovetailing drivers have created space for enhancing countermilitancy cooperation in an ambivalent and distrustful relationship. Central elements are an overall improvement in bilateral relations, India's need to counter China's growing influence in its neighborhood, Myanmar's urge to diversify its benefactors, the urgency of stabilizing India's northeast, Myanmar's domestic security calculations, as well as a large untapped economic cooperation potential. Despite increasing countermilitancy cooperation, difficult challenges remain as Myanmar has ceasefire agreements with India-hostile militants residing on its territory. The relationship is caught in a complex interstate order in a mix of conflict and cooperation, between the use of extraterritorial force and its acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

What are the drivers behind the upsurge in Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation after decades of disengagement? The areas along the 1,643 km India–Myanmar border have since the 1950s been a scene of ethno-nationalist-driven, low-intensity conflict, deteriorating the state-to-state relationship. Cooperation in fighting transnational militant groups and Burmese attempts at curbing India-hostile militants for decades has been lukewarm, at best. Their relationship has despite periodical and partial upswings been characterized by disengagement and distrust, even hostility.¹ In early 2017, Indian Assamese police forces assessed that 2,500 Indian militants were residing in sanctuaries in Myanmar.² A further complicating matter is that the Burmese have a ceasefire agreement with militants that actively launch cross-border attacks into Indian Territory, and once were a shared security threat. India, on its side, no longer seems to host anti-Burmese militants.

Despite this severe and continuing challenge, in recent years a spirit of cooperation has appeared as a more prominent feature in Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation for the first time. In the past decade, the two states have signed comprehensive cooperative agreements on intelligence, border patrolling, as well as initiated exchange programs and joint exercises on counter-militancy.³

Grounded partly in a growing literature seeking to explain militant impacts on interstate relations and existing literature on India–Myanmar relations, this article furthers expectations regarding the drivers of increased Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation. Examining the drivers of enhanced cooperation in an ambivalent interstate relationship despite resilient militancy and a long conflict provides nuances significant for understanding the complicated dynamics of the regional great power–small power Indo-Burmese relations. It throws light on the impact of militancy on a complex interstate order in a mix of conflict and cooperation.

The following section generates assumptions about the drivers of counter-militancy cooperation, before providing a status of counter-militancy cooperation in the Indo-Burmese dyad. This is followed by an explanation of the cooperation, and finally, a conclusion.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT DRIVERS

Four central and intertwined categories of drivers that regulate the impact of transnational militancy on interstate relations are: The

historical and present nature of the interstate relationship; the base state and target states' relations with third-party states; perceptions of the security threat including the agenda of the militant groups; and, finally, economic cooperation including expectations for the future.⁴ The assumed drivers of Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation provide structure to the analysis.

First, counter-militancy cooperation is part of the overall progress in Indo-Burmese relations. Even though ambivalence still characterizes the relationship, it has seen general improvement in the 2010s. New Delhi, which for long supported the Burmese democratic opposition, and Myanmar's transition to quasi-democracy in the last decade, have made cooperation easier, despite the democratic letdown in Myanmar. India has offered US\$500 million for Burmese development projects, there are grand intensions of strategic economic cooperation, collaboration on maritime security, and high-level visits have rocketed.⁵ In addition, costly and sensitive military-to-military contact may serve as an entry point to improve relations further.

Therefore, understanding the nature of the interstate relationship is of the essence. In doing this, it is essential to note the power imbalance in relations. India has a nuclear capacity and in recent years has emerged as a regional great power. Myanmar is a small power struggling with its national security and economy. This may regulate how the host state and target state relate to one another in the context of militancy and impact the use of force and the acceptance of such.

Second, a driver that can lead to change in an interstate relationship is a third-party state. Balancing against China, an increasingly assertive regional and global great power and India's rival, is the primary factor scholars ascribe to the overall empowerment of the India-Myanmar relationship. The China factor is central and feeds into the counter-militancy cooperation both in a contextual and direct sense. Although transnational militancy has been a threat since the colonial period, fighting it is now strategically more important for New Delhi as China's involvement in the neighborhood is increasing in light of its Belt and Road Initiative unveiled in 2013. To counter growing Chinese influence, India in 2014 launched the Act East policy aiming to gain more influence and connectivity with ASEAN⁶ states and beyond. In Act East, India's regional security role was a heavier component compared to its predecessor, the Look East policy.⁷ There are also other external actors influencing Indo-Burmese relations, such as India's archrival and neighbor Pakistan. Pakistan plays a critical role for India's security, and its close alliance

with China amplifies Indian concerns. Moreover, changes in relations with neighbors, such as India's relations with Bangladesh and Bhutan, as well as Myanmar's relations with China, Pakistan and the international community, may influence Indo-Burmese counter-militancy collaboration.

Third, the target and host states' security considerations directly regulate the way they behave vis-à-vis one another in the context of transnational militant attacks. Most studies focus on the target state, although the host state's security perceptions are also central in understanding interstate counter-militancy cooperation.⁸ This article also includes the agenda of the main militant group, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Khaplang (NSCN-K). The host and target states' relations with the militants are significant in explaining interstate counter-militancy interactions.⁹ The growing importance of Myanmar in India's strategic priorities and its concurrent assertiveness is aligned with Myanmar's security calculations. India and Myanmar do not necessarily have an equal interest in defeating transnational militancy, nor is it in Myanmar's interest to create an unprofitable gap in its relations with China. However, it may be easier for Myanmar to let India handle the problem at the border, as it is facing worse pressure in its other border areas.

Fourth, economic cooperation in the relationship may regulate the impact of militancy, and more so if the economic cooperation is of a strategic nature.¹⁰ In addition to existing economic interests, this article also takes the potential for expanding such cooperation. Because of growing Indian economic power and assertiveness, combined with a reaction to Beijing's regional investments through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, New Delhi has launched a countering Act East policy. Act East includes an economic corridor eastwards with Myanmar as its gateway. Naypyidaw's opening to foreign investors, and, ironically, the recent condemnation by the international community of the minority Muslim Rohingya's exodus and massacre, has increasingly allowed this development.

These new dynamics have created, in sum, a new strategic environment for India and Myanmar, aligned their interests, and generated incentives for seeking costly and sensitive interstate counter-militancy cooperation despite continuous conflict-inflicting transnational militancy.¹¹ The two states have so far landed somewhere between fixing and managing the problem.

TRANSNATIONAL MILITANCY AND COOPERATION

India's Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram states border Myanmar's Kachin state, Sagaing Division and Chin state. Rakhine state,

where India has large-scale strategic and economic interests, is situated just south of Chin state, and borders Bangladesh. The Indo-Burmese border areas are home to a myriad of ethnic groups, which of many have led insurgencies aiming for increased autonomy against both India and Myanmar. In 2016 alone, groups hiding in neighboring Myanmar primarily conducted 50 violent incidents in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and 58 incidents in the state of Nagaland.¹² In early 2017, it was reported that about 1,000 Indian militants residing in Myanmar belong to the National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Khaplang (NSCN-K).¹³

The militants are sub or extra-national groups that use or threaten to use violence in order to fulfil separatist or ideological ambitions. The main militant group studied in this article, NSCN-K, strives for its own independent state consisting of both Indian and Burmese territory. The militants hide across borders, launch cross-border attacks, or target domestic landmarks, infrastructure, or people that are important to the target or host state. They may have friendly or hostile relations to the host state, or the host state may lack capacity to control them, and they may enjoy third-party sponsorship.

Transnational militancy, referring to militant actions that affect both India and Myanmar, has significantly deteriorated relations. It has nonetheless also produced cooperative counter-measures. Two types of counter-militancy cooperation are identified in the ambivalent relationship: Direct counter-militancy cooperation and the host state's pragmatic acceptance of the target state's countermeasures. India and Myanmar engaged in direct, yet limited, counter-militancy cooperation in the post-colonial period. It was not until the late 2010s, however, that such cooperation started gaining ground.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, India and Myanmar cooperated in countering insurgency in form of limited arms and aircraft supplies, and curbing Naga insurgents' demand for autonomy in the border areas.¹⁴ In 1967, they signed a border agreement in light of their borderlands' restiveness and had limited collaboration on counter-militancy operations around the same time.¹⁵ In the mid-1990s, the two states agreed on the intention of increasing cooperation and preventing insurgency and crime, and the Indian Army Chief visited Myanmar.¹⁶ They launched a number of counter-militancy operations in following years aimed at curbing India-hostile militant organizations, where Burmese forces for instance contributed by blocking the militants' escape routes. However, this cooperation was not in full coordination or agreement, and Burmese efforts were sporadic and lacked effective border security regimes.¹⁷ The

joint efforts did not stop cross-border militant attacks from Burmese territory into India. Nonetheless, the security situation did improve in the following years.¹⁸ A significant factor in this improvement was India and Myanmar's ceasefire agreements with several militant groups.

India is believed to have supplied Myanmar with transport helicopters, armored personnel carriers, light guns, and tanks for countering militancy during the 2000s.¹⁹ Furthermore, intending to simplify movement for hill tribes residing in the border areas, India's Home Ministry and the government of Myanmar introduced a limited visa-free movement regime in the border areas in 2010, meaning, "local nationals of both sides can stay in the other country for three days within 16 km on either side."²⁰ According to Lionel M. Beehner, the agreement implies that India can pursue Indian rebels into Burmese territory.²¹ What it also signifies is free roaming for militants. Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh stated that it

"is misused by militants and criminals who smuggle weapons, narcotics, contraband goods, and Fake Indian Currency Notes. Taking advantage of the free-movement regime occasionally they, in other words the militants, enter India, commit crimes, and escape to their relatively safer hide-outs."²²

In recent years, counter-militancy cooperation has made unmatched progress. In 2015, the two countries agreed on more coordinated security arrangements, allowing for enhanced patrolling coordination and cross-border intelligence sharing.²³ In addition, the Indian Army trains Burmese soldiers in counter-militancy.²⁴ For instance, a Myanmar Army contingent trained at the India Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Mizoram in late 2017.²⁵ In November 2017, India and Myanmar carried out their first joint military exercise, IMBAX-2017, at the Joint Warfare Centre in Meghalaya, India.²⁶

Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation is dual-faced. Besides direct cooperation, Naypyidaw and the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces, have pragmatically accepted India's sovereignty-breaching moves. While India has increased its presence in its northeast and successfully established deals with many militants, other groups – such as the NSCN-K, the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I), and the Coordination Committee (CorCom)– remain active. They allegedly hide in Burmese territory and conduct cross-border strikes targeting Indian soldiers, particularly in the Indian provinces of Manipur and Nagaland.

In recent years, Bangladesh and Bhutan have largely ceased to function as a safe haven for India-hostile militants, and Bhutan has a comprehensive

security agreement with India.²⁷ The consequence is that non-signatory militant groups increasingly depend on cross-border sanctuaries on Burmese territory for survival, and allegedly also on Chinese territory.²⁸ Applying terrorist tactics, the militants launch cross-border attacks on the Indian Army and civilians. Naypyidaw's 2012 ceasefire agreement with NSCN-K limits Burmese security force presence in the group's territory.²⁹ This access to extraterritorial sanctuary has secured the effectiveness of the militants and limited India's room for maneuver in securing its strategically important northeast.³⁰ The challenge is amplified by the fact that, for the Burmese, the cost of curbing the India-hostile militants is likely lower than the benefit. Myanmar has more severe security challenges involving separatist militants on its borders with China and Thailand. The Tatmadaw has conducted cross-border raids into Thai territory and urged China to stop harboring Myanmar-hostile militants, which have added much tension in these relations.³¹

The Indian government and the NSCN-K called off their ceasefire agreement in 2015.³² In June the same year, the Indian army executed a military hot pursuit into Burmese territory, allegedly killing tens of Naga militants in their camps. It is believed that the incursion was in response to militants' killing of 18 Indian soldiers in a cross-border strike. The authorities in Myanmar initially denied that the cross-border operation ever took place. This is an expected reaction considering the immense importance for any nation of securing national sovereignty, and specifically pertinent for nations with several power centers such as Myanmar.³³ This type of signaling is seen for instance, in Pakistan's denial of Indian cross-border surgical strikes and Iranian cross-border hot pursuits, both following transnational militancy. In addition, admittedly, the Burmese government did have a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K.³⁴

In December 2017, Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat controversially confirmed that Indian troops had crossed the border into Burmese territory. His statements were not welcomed at a time when the Indian government was seeking a solution around deporting Muslim Rohingya refugees who had fled massacre from Myanmar's Rakhine state.³⁵ Beehner describes the Indian cross-border incursion as a permissive hot pursuit, with the Burmese leadership denying tacit acceptance.³⁶ The Indians followed up with a high-level delegation to Myanmar, but failed to formalize an agreement allowing military action on Burmese territory.³⁷ Their counterparts in Myanmar referred to the constitution's article 42b: "No foreign troops shall be permitted to be deployed in the territory of the Union."³⁸ According to the Hindu, the Indians were in 2017 considering asking Myanmar to revoke its ceasefire agreement with NSCN-K, as it,

among other militant groups, was involved in “anti-India” activities in the border areas.³⁹ However, it does not seem any progress was made on the matter, despite the threat.

A high-standing official from India’s ruling party BJP supports Beehner’s argument on the permissive hot pursuit. According to the official, it is likely that India did carry out incursions into Myanmar’s territory, although denied by both states. Moreover, “what is important is that if this is a fact, India did not carry out these specific-target incursions without consent from Myanmar’s government.”⁴⁰ He described increasing cooperation in fighting transnational militancy, and said that relations had improved overall. He expected that Indian Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Myanmar in September 2017 would result in counter-militancy cooperation in areas other than security. Modi’s agenda did include counter-insurgency talks and a land-border crossing agreement, which was approved by the Indian cabinet in January 2018.

In a similar 1995 raid, it was claimed that Indian and Burmese forces carried out a joint operation. However, in the words of an Indian officer and researcher who himself had a lead position in the raid; it was an operation solely under Indian command, with tension between Indian and Burmese forces.⁴¹ This supports the idea of Burmese pragmatic acceptance.

Although much points to the aftermath of India’s cross-border strike as a case of pragmatic acceptance, it is only rational to not totally dismiss the option that there was no acceptance from the Burmese side and that continuing cooperation was the result of a ‘rescue mission’ by the Indian high-level delegation that travelled to Naypyidaw shortly after. Regardless of whether the acceptance was pragmatic or forced, as it did not lead to higher levels of conflict, it illustrates a nuance between cooperation and conflict in interstate relations. The following section further examines what has made cooperation possible despite the highly conflict-inflicting factor of resilient transnational militancy and even breaches of sovereignty.

THE DRIVERS OF INDO-BURMESE COUNTER-MILITANCY COOPERATION

The following section focus on the four categories of drivers: The nature of the interstate relationship; the relations with third-party states; perceptions of the security threat; and economic cooperation.

First, in the India-Burma case one could argue that the dyad has ripened enough to forge counter-militancy cooperation. However, border and

counter-militancy cooperation regimes are rare and costly, and most likely appear in cases where the host and target states share a common militant enemy.⁴² The fact that an interstate relationship has improved does not imply automatic enhancement of counter-militancy cooperation. An implication is that the nature of the India-Myanmar relationship does not alone determine whether transnational militancy causes more conflict, cooperation, or both. However, it indicates the room for maneuver available to the two parts; close dyads have a better foundation for forging cooperation than troubled ones. The other way around, the presence of transnational militancy in a state-to-state relationship, may suggest—but not always—that it has conflict-prone characteristics. Besides, whether the current Burmese provision of militant sanctuary is a result of lack of will or capacity remains somewhat unclear.

Second, the host and target states' foreign policies vis-à-vis third-party states, as well as the target state's perceptions of third-party involvement in transnational militancy, may serve as drivers for cooperation. This becomes particularly pertinent if the relation to third-party states is a matter of overarching strategy.

For India, China represents both a threat at its border and possible supporter of anti-India militancy. India and China have been involved in a regional power competition for influence in Myanmar for decades, and India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Myanmar is permeated by the aim of countering Chinese influence in its neighborhood.⁴³ China, alongside Pakistan, is India's main regional competitor and the perceived threat from China and Pakistan has formed New Delhi's nuclear policy, maritime doctrine, conventional military border preparedness, and involvement in regional countries. The China complex in India's strategic thinking has likely also played a role in Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation because of the heavy Chinese involvement in Myanmar. India and China are involved with Burmese militants. Myanmar has served the Indo-Chinese regional power competition for decades, and China has been accused of supporting anti-India militants in Myanmar.⁴⁴

Likewise, closer Indo-Burmese military ties serve as a source of diversification for Naypyidaw in light of periodic deterioration of otherwise close Sino-Burmese ties. The Tatmadaw is heavily dependent on weapon imports from China.⁴⁵ Myanmar's outlook has been colored by nationalist sentiments and xenophobia in relations with other states, including its relations and foreign policies vis-à-vis China and India. Within this, Naypyidaw has balanced India and China effectively.⁴⁶ Myanmar would strategically benefit from balancing the influx of foreign states

through diversification and is probably also picking and choosing the most profitable deals because of the competition. An interesting example of cooperation diversification is Burmese acquisition of an air-search radar and an anti-submarine warfare sonar from India for use on a frigate imported from China.⁴⁷

India's strategically important Act East Policy, thought of as a counterweight to China's BRI, and implies increased Chinese interest in Myanmar. If India does not succeed in curbing insurgency and unrest in India's northeast, the Act East will remain unrealized. The more India in general can engage and cooperate with Myanmar, the more likely it is that India gains muscles as a competitor against China and moves closer to its overarching strategic aims. According to Gautam Sen, who has held a senior position in a northeast state government, unrest in Indian Nagaland has decreased. Despite this, the Indian central government has declared it a disturbed area, which has allowed for continued military presence.⁴⁸ As the situation between India and China has become increasingly tense in recent years, it is only to be expected that more security forces will be deployed in India's peripheries that are close to China.

Furthermore, a factor that has made India pick up speed is Myanmar's opening to the international community. This implies more international competition in Myanmar, and may contribute to explaining Modi's push for more cooperation with Naypyidaw at a time when the international community is threatening to pull out.

Another incentive for India's interest in Myanmar is Pakistan's relations with Myanmar. Pakistan and China have together supposedly supplied the Tatmadaw with arms.⁴⁹ According to Jane's Defence in June 2017, Myanmar's Air Force had ordered Chinese-Pakistani produced JF-17 fighter jets.⁵⁰ Furthermore, there have been decades-long allegations of Pakistani support to India-hostile militants in the area. India's perceptions of Pakistani and Chinese support of Naga militants in Myanmar can serve as an incentive for India to engage in counter-terrorism cooperation, regardless of whether it is a fact. Perceptions of third-party involvement softens Indian views on Myanmar's responsibility as a host state, as long as New Delhi considers Naypyidaw's provision of sanctuary a result of lacking capacity. Moreover, Indian cross-border incursion in Myanmar may partly be intended to signal India's cross-border military capability. Beehner argues that India carried out the "surgical strike" across the Burmese border with an aim to warn archrival Pakistan about its new, more offensive, military doctrine. This may make sense as the Pakistani Federal Interior Minister reacted by saying that Pakistan is not Myanmar,

and that Pakistan would respond to foreign aggression. In addition, India executed a so-called “surgical strike” into Pakistani territory in late 2016.⁵¹

For India, cooperation with Myanmar would be beneficial also in these terms, as it could point to Chinese and Pakistani involvement in supporting anti-India separatists. Pakistan is India’s archrival and enjoys close strategic and economic relations with China. In the coming years, China aims to invest \$62 billion in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). New Delhi is the primary opponent to CPEC. Had New Delhi perceived Myanmar as welcoming of Chinese and Pakistani support of anti-India militants on Burmese territory, it would likely affect the possibilities of counter-militancy cooperation with Myanmar.

Third, states’ perceptions of the threat and their experience in dealing with transnational militancy regulate cooperation with other involved parties. Having experienced resilient transnational militancy, states develop a consequence consciousness of their possible coercive or cooperative actions. Even troubled interstate couples may choose more cooperative counter-measures, even if it is only to avoid intractable interstate conflict. Moreover, if a host state, after pressure from the target state, is likely to compel but fail in curbing the militants, the militants may grow stronger and the host state’s capacity weaker: A so-called compellence dilemma. This may again cause a deteriorated security situation for the target state. In such cases, the target state may refrain from coercion and punishment of the host.⁵² In addition, counter-militancy cooperation can serve to de-escalate crises in the form of, for instance, permissive hot pursuits.⁵³ Important to note is that target states’ behavior vis-à-vis host states in the wake of transnational militancy can at times be explained by triadic deterrence, meaning that the target state applies threat and punishment against the host state in order to coerce it into curbing the hostile transnational militants.⁵⁴

Furthermore, and importantly, the agenda of the militants and the threat they pose to the host and target states is central in forming the incentives for counter-militancy cooperation. Cases where the militants also work against the interests of the host state indicate low capacity rather than lack of will of the host state to combat them. This point of departure is less intimidating than direct support where the host state, for instance, provides the militants with arms and training facilities. In addition, the principal conflict-inflicting problem of sanctuary as a condition for militant organization survival becomes a bit more approachable. The target state’s perception of the host state’s efforts in curbing the militants is also important. A total lack of interest from the host state in hindering

the threat would likely serve as provocation, while at least an intention to do so may open up for cooperation. The following section examines the Indo-Burmese dyad in light of security gain assessments and consequence consciousness considerations regarding transnational militancy.

Internal security is a baseline for India's counter-militancy cooperation with Myanmar, as militants have hampered economic development and inflicted casualties on both soldiers and civilians. Although numbers are decreasing, there were 3,639 militant incidents in India's northeast in the years 2012-2016. One hundred and fifteen security force personnel and 510 civilians were killed in militant violence, and militant groups kidnapped 1,440 individuals.⁵⁵ Yet the need for improving the security situation in India's northeast and Myanmar has been there since the colonial period and does not alone explain the recent upturn in cooperation. In recent years, in light of Modi's Act East policy and increasing conflict with China, stability in the northeast has moved higher up on the Indian agenda. What has changed is that India has become more assertive and willing to actively counter Chinese influence, and that Myanmar is increasingly the main base for the militants. Moreover, India has successfully expanded counter-militancy cooperation with Bhutan and Bangladesh, which are central to stability in the northeast. This may nurture the optimism concerning similar cooperation with Myanmar.

India has been seeking to seal the Indo-Burmese border without much success. There was no mutual agreement regarding the border until 1967, and it has since been semi-demarcated by boundary pillars. In 2013, India unsuccessfully attempted to build a 10 km border fence.⁵⁶ According to debates in the Indian parliament, the Indo-Burmese border issue was still unresolved as of March 2016. There were still unsettled boundary pillars and allegations of Burmese constructions on Indian Territory.⁵⁷

The Tatmadaw may experience additional unrest if it attempts to curb militants after signing the ceasefire agreement. The security gain may be higher in tacitly accepting that the Indians breach national sovereignty, then express anger towards them, than letting it turn into a less approachable or even intractable conflict.⁵⁸ Myanmar has a fluid relationship between its militant groups, private security forces, the civilian government, and the Tatmadaw. As Paul Staniland notes, in Myanmar "[t]here is extraordinary diversity in the rules of the game that structure interactions between state forces and non-state armed groups."⁵⁹ Myanmar's pragmatic acceptance of cross-border raids signals that it lacks capacity to fight the militants on its territory. Its lack of capacity and priorities that far overshadow India-hostile militants, as well

as a physically difficult mountainous terrain for countering militants, may outplay India's wishes in this case. In agreement, Beehner argues that the main logic behind the consented hot pursuit India conducted across the Burmese border is that the Tatmadaw is preoccupied with conflict at other borders and has stretched its capacity. Additionally, in the 2010s the Rohingya issue in Rakhine state has preoccupied military forces.

In practice, India has largely driven the cooperation. The Burmese have traditionally not exhibited capacity to curb militant groups enjoying sanctuary on its territory. They have shown little, if any, will in half-hearted participation in counter-militancy operations against certain India-hostile militants. The Tatmadaw has at times directly supported India-hostile militants, seeing them as an asset in dealing with the Indian government.⁶⁰ However, this attitude may be changing. Reports from January 2017 indicating that the Burmese are building border fences apparently in agreement with Indian authorities, demonstrate that the Burmese are investing more in counter-militancy cooperation with India.⁶¹ The Indians may be reluctant to acknowledge such cooperation keeping in mind previous local unrest caused by erecting fences. A quick solution to the problem is to state, "[w]e cannot stop them from constructing fences on their side."⁶² Rather than admitting to failure, such statements may indicate that the Burmese fencing is in India's interest. Furthermore, the Indo-Burmese joint military exercise also indicates genuine cooperation.

In addition, the main agenda of NSCN-K, which has posed the most significant challenge in recent years, is to fight for an autonomous Naga state consisting of both Indian and Burmese territory. It has previously carried out attacks in both India and Myanmar. NSCN-K has been designated a terrorist organization by India. In essence, the group's original agenda implies that it poses a threat towards India and Myanmar, both target and host. However, the lack of safe hideouts decreases long-term survivability of transnational militants, which may lead to loose and complicated agreements between host states and militants. NSCN-K's original agenda may contribute to easing counter-militancy cooperation for the target state, but is complicated by Myanmar's ceasefire agreement with the group. As long as India views the Burmese sanctuary as a question of a lack of capacity to curb the militants, rather than will, it may serve as a driver of cooperation.

Fourth, if the target state needs to clear the militants out of the way for reasons of strategic economic development, there is no other way to do so than to cooperate with the host state.⁶³ This may appear as a possible scenario after increased incidents of transnational militant attacks have

become a severe challenge to existing or future economic interests that require a stabilized region. It may also happen that states take larger security risks to fulfil strategically important economic cooperation. Thus, a large economic cooperation potential in a state dyad may create room for counter-militancy cooperation, especially if the cooperation is of the strategic type. However, one idea that has been launched argues that the target state's micro-level economic-strategic interests may affect its macro-level interstate conflict behavior towards the host state in the aftermath of transnational militancy.⁶⁴ On the other hand, it may be just as beneficial for the target state to cooperate in order to reach its economic aims, depending on the character of the state dyad. The following paragraphs examine the economic cooperation potential in Indo-Burmese relations and influences counter-militancy cooperation.

Indo-Burmese relations house a great, untapped potential for mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Militancy is the biggest challenge for expanding economic and infrastructure cooperation of the strategic sort.⁶⁵ India's Act East policy aims to increase economic and infrastructural connectivity between India's mainland and South East Asia and necessarily traverses India's restless northeast and Myanmar. Main projects are the \$484 million Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport System, the Sittwe deep-water port, a special economic zone and a proposed natural gas pipeline, all situated in the Rakhine state. The state is full of natural resources, and located strategically in the maritime sense at the Bay of Bengal. Besides, Rakhine state is also at the core of Chinese strategic and economic interests, as a hub in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Cross-border trade has remained low because of the high security risk posed by militants to Indian workers.⁶⁶ Beyond that, securing Indian economic-strategic interests in Rakhine state has become more costly after the outburst of ethnic cleansing and exodus of the minority Rohingya inhabitants. India, along with China, has been reluctant to condemn the Tatmadaw's persecution of the Rohingya, despite the otherwise in-chorus condemnation from the international community. There are indications that further development of India's northeast, implemented by the central government, would see a heightened risk of insurgency and militant attacks against workers and infrastructure.⁶⁷ Turned around, militancy poses the biggest threat to the success of the Act East Policy.⁶⁸ Large-scale foreign infrastructure projects in unsettled territory come with a security price tag, as also seen in China's economic expansion abroad. The strategic nature of the economic cooperation potential is a significant driver in Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation and, more importantly, the region will see no settlement without Burmese

cooperation. As observed for decades, if the Burmese do not contribute in curbing the militants, the problem will not go away and economic cooperation will remain limited.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed the evolution of Indo-Burmese counter-militancy cooperation. Resilient transnational militancy challenges are a common source of conflict between states. Despite continuous transnational militancy in India and Burma's ambivalent relations, the two have been able to forge limited, but growing, counter-militancy cooperation.

A primary driver of increased counter-militancy cooperation is the overarching strategic aim of a more assertive India to counterbalance China's influence in its neighborhood. India is also worried that the Chinese are lending support to India-hostile militants in Myanmar, which may feed directly into New Delhi's wish to engage the Tatmadaw in advantageous but costly cooperation. Balancing against Chinese influence is partly done by introducing strategic economic projects in the region that are viable competitors to Chinese interests and BRI, and partly by making the stakes of cooperating with India higher for Myanmar through mutually beneficial strategic security and economic cooperation. The strategic end aims of the security and economic cooperation respectively are interlinked. They are also accomplished by supporting Myanmar at a time when few others are. The key to moving towards materialization of the Act East Policy is stabilizing India's northeast and Myanmar.

The target state's perceptions of the host state's capacity and efforts to curb the militants are central in furthering cooperation. In addition, extraterritorial militants cannot be curbed without cooperation of the host state. Either because of lack of will or capacity, Naypyidaw and the Tatmadaw are providing sanctuary to the militants that sustain transnational militancy – the success factor for transnational militants. By pragmatic acceptance of Indian hot pursuits across the border, they do signal lack of capacity rather than will. The perception that the host state lacks capacity is an enabler for counter-militancy cooperation. The fact that Naga militants in their primary aim of an autonomous state pose a threat to both India and Myanmar, eases cooperation and adds to the view that the Tatmadaw lacks capacity to curb the militants.

From an Indian perspective, engaging Myanmar, in combination with striking deals with militant groups, has till now proven to be the most

efficient way of fighting militancy and getting closer to the achieving the overarching strategic aim of countering Chinese influence in the region.

Existing literature focuses solely on either transnational militancy, state-to-state relations or on state-militant relations within one state. This case study merges elements from these traditionally divided scholarly traditions and provides a reminder that target states do not respond to militancy in a vacuum. More empirical and theoretical studies are needed to fill this gap.

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ENDNOTES

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