



A new order

Use the smarts of the Nepali people

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A year after the historic Jana Andolan II, the contours of a new political order are emerging in Nepal.

The political parties and the Maoists have made significant progress towards ending the conflict. Political structures and decision-making mechanisms have been created. There is a timeframe for the transition and consensus on key reforms. A high degree of trust has been established in this homegrown process between the prime minister and the Maoist leadership.

Given the complicated transitions precipitated by the People's Movement, and the size and scope of Nepal's problems, the successes are significant. Nepalis are in an open historic moment in which they can shape their own future.

However, the past year's accomplishments are under-appreciated or misunderstood because of a failure of communication between the political elite and the Nepali people, and an unpredictable political process. In a highly politicised environment where rumour and innuendo substitute for deliberation and discussion, a perception of inefficient or unfair process has a high cost. The people's impatience with the disconnect between Nepal's decision-makers and the movement which brought them to power has begun to manifest in violent actions, such as the madhesi uprisings.

Significant risks must be managed to create conditions for a new, prosperous, democratic Nepal. First, the Maoists must indicate a true commitment to a pluralistic, multi-party political system. A test will be how far the leadership can control the violence and extortion still carried out by the rank and file.

Second, demands for inclusion from communities mobilised on the basis of group identity must be channelled through a legitimate political process, not extra-legal means. This requires a two-way process for communication and management of expectations between the nascent government and the Nepali people.

Third, development, rule of law, and security of property are essential to ensure the economic environment for investment and job creation, which in turn support political progress.

Fourth, elections for the constituent assembly must be as free and fair as possible, and be the mechanism used to address exclusion. If the parties field sets of candidates that will result in an unrepresentative assembly, the potential for further unrest will be extremely high. They must learn from the Maoists' efforts to ensure that their candidates reflect Nepal's diversity.

The security risk posed by the cantonment of Maoist and government troops must be mitigated through a coherent, adequately funded reintegration plan to ensure sustainable disarmament and demobilisation efforts. Ex-combatants go back to arms again if they do

not have the opportunities needed to become productive members of society.

A centrist consensus is emerging predicated on the idea of the state as an instrument for inclusive development and the realisation of collective goals. The message from the Nepali people, who have not yet reaped a peace dividend, is clear: govern with us and for us, not despite us.

The people want to be partners in a system that recognises and relates to their concerns. This requires redefining the political system, and radically restructuring the relationship between citizens and state. At the village level, Nepal has in many ways reversed the tragedy of the commons. Impressive community micro-hydroelectric power, forestry, and education programs demonstrate the power of collective action. This energy and ingenuity needs to be mobilised at the national level.

It is important that leaders within civil society, the business community, and the government jointly articulate a vision for the future that is both credible and actionable. This is a precondition for the support of the international donors and partners who can assist in making it a reality. Hesitation or failure may freeze Nepal in a state of stalled development or prolonged insecurity. The collective will, determination, and resourcefulness of the Nepali people must be drawn upon to work towards shared national goals and to overcome the risks that threaten progress to a new political order. The opportunity is too important, and the consequences of failure too great.

Ashraf Ghani is former finance minister of Afghanistan. He has advised the governments of Sudan and Lebanon on peace-building and state effectiveness.

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