

Although surrounded by conflict over the last two centuries, the Himalayan nation of Nepal has been resilient in the face of colonialism. Even during the British Raj, the feudal rulers of Nepal managed to stay relatively independent by offering diplomatic and military support to the British. However, for 10 years, contemporary Nepal was beset by a civil war that killed 13,000 people. A fragile peace agreement signed in 2006 led to historic elections in April 2008, but the years of internal strife exacted a serious toll on the country.

Overtly, the conflict began as an ideological clash between a monarchic system and a socialist egalitarian ideology influenced by the writings of the Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong. The Maoists differentiate themselves from classical communists because the strength of Nepal's proletariat lies with the rural peasantry rather than the urban working class. While many of the key Maoist leaders are highly educated intellectuals (including Baburam Bhattarai, who was trained in environmental planning), they clearly tapped key grassroots factors that supported the rise of this movement among the masses, such as elite corruption and marginalization of rural areas by the

