

Naga Insurgency [Internal Security UPSC Notes]

The Naga insurgency is an issue frequently seen in the daily news. It is an important topic in the larger issue of insurgency and security in the northeast region of India. This topic comes under the internal security section of the General Studies Paper III in the [UPSC exam syllabus](#).

Who are the Nagas?

The Nagas are a hill people belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid family. The Nagas are not a single tribe but an ethnic community who live in the state of Nagaland and its neighbourhood.

Insurgency:

Insurgency has been defined as a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order. Differences in language, religion and ethnicity often act as motivating factors for the insurgents.

Naga Movement Timeline

Pre-independence phase:

- The Naga Hills became part of British India in 1881.
- In 1918, the Naga Club was formed to bring unity among the Naga tribes.
- Since 1929, the Naga club has advocated for complete autonomy for the Nagas and had also petitioned the [Simon Commission](#) in 1929 to leave the Naga inhabited territories alone and not to club it with the larger Indian Territory.
- The Naga club metamorphosed into the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. Under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, the NNC declared Nagaland as an independent State on August 14, 1947, and conducted a referendum in May 1951 to claim support for a “sovereign Nagaland”.
- In June 1947, Assam Governor Sir Akbar Hydari signed the Nine-Point Agreement with the moderates in the NNC but Phizo rejected it outright.

Post-independence phase:

- In March 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army.
- The government of India sent in the Army to crush the insurgency and, in 1958, enacted the [Armed Forces \(Special Powers\) Act](#).

- A [16-point Agreement](#) with the Naga People's Convention (moderate faction) followed in July 1960 leading to the creation of Nagaland in December 1963.
- In April 1964, a Peace Mission was formed for an agreement on suspension of operations with the NNC, but it was abandoned in 1967 after six rounds of talks.
- The Shillong Accord of 1975 followed, under which a section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms. A group of 140 members led by Mr. Muivah, who was in China then, refused to accept the Shillong Accord and formed the NSCN in 1980. The outfit split in 1988 with one faction led by Mr. Muivah and the other by the Myanmar-based Khaplang.
- The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) — one of the largest Naga groups - signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre in 1997.

Latest developments:

- A framework agreement was signed in 2015. Also known as the **Nagaland Peace Accord**, it was signed between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), to end the insurgency in the state of Nagaland.
- An agreement on the political parameters of the settlement was worked out with the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs), in 2017.
- The peace talks between the Government of India and the NSCN-IM could not yield a peace agreement by October 31 2019, the government's deadline for concluding an accord. The negotiations seemed to have reached a stalemate.

Naga Insurgency - Concerns

Defying a lasting solution:

- Rooted in the politics of sub-nationalism, complexities of regional geopolitics and the evolving dynamics of counterinsurgency tactics, the Naga insurgency has defied a lasting solution.
- The much-touted peace accord is yet to be achieved, despite the Centre's push to have had it concluded by 2019.
- The Naga insurgency has evolved into a complex problem with political, social and economic ramifications.

Suffering for the general populace:

- The Naga insurgency has seen violent splits, ugly divisive tribalism, fratricidal feuds and untold sufferings for the general populace.

Law and order situation:

- The law and order is a major area of concern in the state with armed gangs who question the sovereignty and integrity of the nation wielding considerable influence.

Culture of extortion:

- The armed gangs have been engaging in extortion and siphoning off funds meant for development work. These illegal collections by armed groups have been an issue for several years.
- The organised armed gangs run their own parallel 'tax collection' regimes. Extortions in the name of taxes have been a thorny facet of the Naga issue.

External support factor:

- India's adversaries (China and Pakistan) have provided the Naga insurgents with vital external support at one point in time and this threat of external aid amounts to a major challenge to India's internal security.

Impediments to Peace settlement:

Non-negotiable aspects for India:

- Recognition of Naga sovereignty, integration of all Naga-speaking areas into a greater Nagaland, a separate constitution and a separate flag are demands that the Indian Government may find difficult to fulfil.
- The Indian Government is willing to allow for regional autonomy within the framework of the [Indian Constitution](#).
- Non-flexibility of the NSCN-IM on the issue of a separate Naga national flag and Naga Yezhabo (constitution) have delayed the peace settlement.

Internal divisions among Naga groups:

- Internal divisions in the Naga society threatens to delay a final agreement. While the NNPGs want a solution for Nagas within Nagaland, the NSCN-IM seeks integration of Naga-inhabited areas beyond the geographical boundary of Nagaland.
- Also, other Naga groups namely the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) have already promised a settlement with or without the NSCN (IM).

Distrust:

- Realising that the NSCN (IM) cannot be the sole representative of the Nagas, in 2017 other Naga underground factions were also brought to the negotiating table, lowering the prestige of the NSCN (IM).
- Today there are seven of these factions under an umbrella organisation, the Naga National Political Groups (NNPG), taking part in the negotiations.
- The Central government's move to bring in other Naga armed groups on board the peace talks, though well-intentioned, had a negative effect on the process. It bred suspicion about Delhi exploiting divisions within the Nagas on tribal and geopolitical lines.

Speculation:

- Speculation among the Naga society is high that the Central government may renege on the principles of “shared sovereignty” for co-existing as two separate identities, as was stated in the framework agreement. This has been fuelled by the nationalism driven policies of the Centre like the abrogation of [Article 370](#) and the call for “one nation, one constitution”.

Opposition by neighbouring states:

- The demands for greater Nagaland or Nagalim from the NSCN-IM is bound to lead to a redrawing of the state boundaries in the northeast. The territorial integrity of the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur are bound to be affected and hence they are wary of a peace settlement. Manipur has issued a strong statement against any move which would compromise its territorial integrity.
- ‘Greater Nagaland’ or Nagalim — includes apart from the present-day state of Nagaland, other Naga-dominated areas in neighbouring Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and parts of Myanmar.

Latest irritant:

- A letter written by the [Governor](#) to the CM of Nagaland has become the latest irritant between the NSCN-IM and the government. The Governor had expressed anguish over the culture of extortion and the collapse of the general law and order situation in Nagaland.
- In its response, the insurgent National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) had said the group was only engaged in collecting taxes and called for the removal of the interlocutor from further negotiations.

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Naga Issue - Way forward

Acknowledging the potential of a peace agreement:

- To find a solution to the decades-old Naga issue is in the interest of both the Nagas as well as the Centre. It will help India address a decades-old security issue on the one hand while it will bring in the much-needed growth in the region to the benefit of the Nagas.
- The unresolved contentious issues must be pursued earnestly post a peace settlement, politically and democratically.

Involving all stakeholders:

- The centre must negotiate with all factions and groups of Naga insurgents to have long-lasting peace.

Finding middle ground:

- Both sides should try to end the current stalemate and find a middle ground so that talks do not collapse.
- Both sides should acknowledge the fact that most of the armed insurgencies across the world do not end in either total victory or comprehensive defeat, but in a grey zone called compromise.
- The geo-political situation demands the Nagas to be pragmatic and realistic in their negotiations with the Government of India. There is scope for regional autonomy as per the Indian Constitution. The principles of “**shared sovereignty**” for co-existing as two separate identities is possible under the Indian Constitution. But there is no scope for secessionism.
- Demands of NSCN-IM have toned down from complete sovereignty to greater autonomous region within the Indian constitutional framework with due regard to the uniqueness of Naga history and traditions. This must be considered by the Indian Government. The peace accord must safeguard the Naga’s right to self-determination. There should be maximum decentralization of powers to the tribal heads and minimum centralization at the apex level, which should mainly work towards facilitating governance and undertaking large developmental projects.
- However, given the fact that the peace settlement would lead to counter-movements from other groups in the region, there is the need for a well-deliberated agreement considering the views of all stakeholders.

Tackling the factions not taking part in the negotiations:

- While the Indian Government continues to negotiate with the major factions, it should also be open to tackling groups which are not taking part in the ongoing negotiations. This could involve extensive area domination, selective intelligence-based targeting of the leadership and overground workers’ support network. This should be done in collaboration with Myanmar’s army.
- This would force the insurgents to the negotiating table.

Nagaland centred truce:

- The willingness of the NNPG, most of whose leaders are Nagaland-based, to keep in abeyance demands such as a Greater Nagaland, in exchange for enhanced autonomy is a strong indication of the shift in demands. A Nagaland-centred truce looks like the most possible solution to the issue.
 - Greater autonomy for the Naga inhabited areas in the neighbouring states can be provided which could encompass separate budget allocations for these areas with regard to their culture and developmental issues.
 - This looks the most likely way out of the Naga conundrum.
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