The International History Review

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rinh20

Where National and International Meet: Borders and Border Regions in Postcolonial India

Elisabeth Leake

To cite this article: Elisabeth Leake (2022) Where National and International Meet: Borders and Border Regions in Postcolonial India, The International History Review, 44:4, 856-873, DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2021.1900323

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1900323

Published online: 22 Jun 2021.

THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY REVIEW
2022, VOL. 44, NO. 4, 856–873
https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1900323

Where National and International Meet: Borders and Border Regions in Postcolonial India

Elisabeth Leake

School of History, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

Upon achieving independence, India's borders had to be institutionalized – given meaning and made visible – in order to make clear the state's power to its neighbours, the international community, and its own citizens. But institutionalizing border *regions* proved far more complicated. Following independence, Indian leaders continued to rely on imperial practices to subdue and integrate border communities, claiming these communities as subjects yet often treating them as outsiders who needed to be forcibly incorporated. This article specifically examines the political reorganization of northeastern India, during the first three decades of independence, to consider the interrelationship between India's foreign and domestic policies – its 'intermestic' affairs. The top-down creation of a unique regional governing structure reflected, on one hand, the exigencies of India's foreign relations – tensions with China, Pakistan/Bangladesh, and Burma – and, on the other, the perceived otherness of the region's inhabitants. While establishing the bureaucratic structures that officially linked the northeast to India's heartland, Indian leaders also institutionalized mechanisms that continued to treat the region as a space apart, a space not entirely Indian but not entirely foreign. Ultimately, this paper interrogates the boundaries between the national and the international, the colonial and the postcolonial, in post-1947 India.

KEYWORDS

India; foreign policy; borders; borderlands; intermestic

Upon achieving independence, India's leaders faced the task of turning fuzzy colonial-era frontiers into clearly demarcated borders that encircled the political and territorial space of the Indian state. India's borders had to be institutionalized – given meaning and made visible – in order to make clear the state's power to its neighbours, the international community, and its own citizens. But institutionalizing border *regions* proved far more complicated. Policymakers in Delhi faced a host of issues. Not only did many of India's borders remain contested or lack clear demarcation, but frequently communities in India's frontier regions had more tenuous relations with state power thanks to the British colonial precedent. It is no coincidence that the Indian state's attempts to assert the right to govern met with resistance, including local and regional leaders' attempts to declare their own autonomy and independence. The remit of state leaders for border-building thus extended beyond issues of demarcation and into asserting the government's sovereignty. But as the crossroads between the foreign and domestic, border regions also demanded forms of governance that were not fully either.

CONTACT Elisabeth Leake e.leake@leeds.ac.uk

In many of histories of decolonization, India has posed as a success story, a country whose independence predated the major wave of decolonization that hit its height in the 1960s and which was notable for its pursuit of democracy, development, and international engagement. Yet India's trajectory since 1947 has been complex and its relationship with imperial precedents fraught. The Indian government's ready turn to violence highlights this, as can be seen not only in the almost immediate outbreak of war with Pakistan over the future of Jammu and Kashmir but also in the decision to send troops into Hyderabad to force its accession to the Indian union.[1] Policy towards both of these former princely states demonstrated the primacy that Indian leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru among them, placed on top-down governance and a strong centre overseeing India's composite parts. So, too, did the Indian government's response to Naga demands for independence in northeast India, where again, state leaders turned to the power of the army to suppress an autonomy movement and reinforce the rule of law emanating from Delhi. While Nehru called for peaceful coexistence in international relations, in parts of India that had more tenuous ties with the centre, violence was used readily.[2]

Border regions problematized Indian efforts to create a strong union of states that functioned as a self-sufficient whole without disrupting relations with India's neighbours. India's bordering crises were twofold. Some took place *within* the new Indian state, as Nehru and his allies (forcibly) integrated the formerly semi-autonomous princely states.[3] Others took place on India's external borders – along the Radcliffe Line in Punjab, the McMahon Line separating India from China, or the boundaries between Assam and East Bengal (Pakistan) and Burma.[4] Those territories running up to India's borders had to serve two purposes: to demonstrate the reach of Indian governance and to serve as a buffer to outside incursion.[5]

This proved almost immediately problematic for the Indian government. The crisis in Kashmir combined these two exigencies, bringing together questions about the integration of a princely state *and* India's foreign relations with its new neighbour, Pakistan.[6] Border disputes starting in the 1950s between India and China, culminating in the 1962 Sino-Indian war, violently revealed competing narratives of where Indian territory ended and foreign territory began. The lack of a demarcated border with Burma brought into question who was 'Indian' and who was 'Burmese' and highlighted the lack of mechanisms for either identifying or monitoring groups moving across an ostensibly extant but largely invisible border. Similarly, the ability of individuals to slip between India and Pakistan (and later Bangladesh) served as a source of regional and domestic tensions alike.[7]

Border regions thus were simultaneously the site of India's domestic and foreign policies – its 'intermestic' policies. They were 'the arena in which domestic and foreign issues converge, intermesh, or otherwise become indistinguishable within a seamless web'.[8] Studies of Indian intermestic affairs thus far have focused on trade relations, yet much like that other federation, the United States, its central government has struggled with '"perforated sovereignties" that give the constituent entities of a federation access to new functions in the system and express the tendencies to merge international relations with domestic affairs'.[9] States within the Indian union not only responded to domestic initiatives from the centre but also could shape these enterprises, as well as India's foreign relations, through their own powers and geographical positions. This was particularly the case for parts of the union that shared borders with India's neighbours.

To highlight the significance of India's intermestic policies in the era of independence – and to demonstrate some of their continuities with the colonial period – this article considers the political reorganization of northeastern India from the perspective of the official mind. The northeast, as a borderlands, sat (and sits) at an intermestic juncture. Its populations had to be made Indian citizens (or at least subjects) to assert their belonging in the eyes of the Indian state as well as the international community. The establishment of the North-Eastern Council (NEC), accompanying the political reorganization of northeast India in the late 1960s and early 1970s, offered a means for the centre to assert a strict hold over this periphery.

But the populations of this frontier region, and its historically ambiguous relationship with the subcontinent's centres of power, complicated and problematized attempts to territorialize and clearly circumscribe state sovereignty. Border demarcation frequently took the form of pillars, not walls. Because of the potential for local communities to cross borders, they continued to be perceived by the state as not entirely 'Indian' and as a potential national security threat, thereby justifying top-down intervention and the use of force. The formation of the NEC offered one type of top-down initiative to make local populations 'legible' and incorporate them more fully in state structures, helping institutionalize the border, in turn, as a hard boundary between Indianness and otherness.[10] The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which legitimized the use of force and also is briefly discussed, offered another. The NEC and AFSPA, in other words, formalized intermestic arrangements, drawing colonial practices into a supposedly postcolonial world.[11]

The dual exigencies of foreign and domestic policy complicated the nature of Indian state sovereignty and citizenship in the northeast and its other borderlands. Strategic concerns underpinned decision-making towards these areas and were permeated jointly by tense regional relations and concerns about the ability of locals to take up the mantle of Indian citizenship. The government of India thus attempted to implement forms of politics that gave the centre extraordinary powers while limiting the remit of local leaders, perpetuating, and even strengthening, many of the uneven power structures that had defined British colonial frontier policy. While proclaiming the primacy of the border in territorializing the Indian state, Indian policymakers nevertheless persisted in treating border regions as frontiers where state sovereignty worked in different ways because of intermestic interests.

The attempted top-down creation of the NEC as a unique regional governing structure reflected, on one hand, the pressures of India's foreign relations – tensions with China, Pakistan/Bangladesh, and Burma – and, on the other, the perceived otherness of the region's inhabitants. While establishing the bureaucratic structures that officially linked the northeast to India's heartland, Indian leaders also imposed mechanisms that continued to treat the region as a space apart, a space not entirely Indian but not entirely foreign. The article thus highlights the ambiguities of state rule in border regions and the ways such regions created overlaps in Indian leaders' approaches towards their neighbours and their own citizens. It thus emphasizes one way in which imperial afterlives persisted and informed India's intermestic policies.

Borders, 'tribes', and the northeast as 'other' in the colonial era

Cultural, ethnic, and geographical factors have shaped northeastern India's perceived 'otherness'. Not only has it been seen as a predominantly 'tribal' society, but its populations' ethnic and cultural linkages with China and southeast Asia also have led the region to sit uncomfortably (at least in the eyes of officials) at a crossroads between south, southeast, and east Asia. British, and subsequently Indian, policymakers reaffirmed this policy of difference, and the process of political reorganisation in the late 1960s and early 1970s only confirmed the northeast as a region apart – and, as Sanjib Baruah has observed, usage of the term 'northeast' to define the entirety of the region to the dismissal of other local identifiers.[12]

Today, northeastern India comprises eight states within the Indian union: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim.[13] At the time of Indian independence in 1947, the region had fewer internal boundaries and included the British-governed province of Assam, the princely states of Manipur and Tripura, and the semi-independent, informally ruled Sikkim. Within Assam, British officials pursued two different forms of governance. Settled districts in Assam's plains and accessible hills, areas that produced tea, oil, and coal, were governed directly by the British, much like other Indian provinces. They were separated by an 'inner line' within Assam from the excluded and partially excluded, or 'tribal', areas, which were

governed indirectly and, much like the autonomous tribal areas between northwest colonial India and Afghanistan, were intended to serve as a buffer for British rule over the subcontinent.[14] The McMahon line, in turn, ostensibly demarcated the border between northeastern India and Tibet from 1914. Much as British, and later Indian, officials tried to assert their writ up to the line, so, too, did Chinese officials with ambitions to absorb Tibet, creating, in Bérénice Guyot-Réchard's words, 'an intimate entanglement between the imperial and the national' and overlaps in colonial and post-independence politics.[15]

As a borderland, northeastern India represented a space 'where the state is there but its power is incomplete and fragmented' and where 'The political and geographic limits of sovereignty imply the presence of competing authorities'.[16] Scholars have demonstrated that borderlands frequently are treated differently from state interiors, and violence and policing often occur as manifestations of a state's sovereignty and attachment to a territorially defined governing space. Because it was a border zone, situated at the intersection of Tibet, China, Burma, and India, northeastern India created particular concerns for colonial (and certainly later post-independence) leaders, who felt the need to affirm the territorial parameters of their rule, as well as their governance over local populations. Imperial and post-imperial border concerns manifested in two ways: attempts to create legible spaces in which officials could exert state power and attempts to make legible local populations in terms comprehensible, and thus governable, to the official mind.

Colonial officials made concerted efforts to map and demarcate the Raj's borders, for example implementing a series of 'lines' to mark the limits of British governance. These lines, in turn, increasingly indicated particular governing arrangements, delineating between regions that could be incorporated into provincial, then (post-1947) state governing structures and those that remained somewhat autonomous.[17] As in other regions of the British Empire where local populations resisted governance and integration, or simply did not fit into social organizations as understood by the British, colonial officials introduced their own, frequently limited, interpretations of local social and political structures. The legacies of colonial anthropology and ethnography have endured, particularly in the continued use of and reliance on the complicated idea of the 'tribe'.[18] British assumptions, particularly in northwestern and northeastern colonial India, that local populations comprised coherent communities (tribes), replete with established leaders, customs, and laws, shaped how officials perceived indigenous relationships and how the British governed.

Officials reaffirmed the otherness of frontier tribal society through the Sandeman system of indirect rule, established in Balochistan and exported to the northeast and elsewhere, through which British officials negotiated with tribal 'leaders' (as identified by colonial officials) to define colony-tribe interactions.[19] It was further embedded into colonial legal codes through laws such as the Frontier Crimes Regulation, discussed further below. In the northeast, colonial officials also used the practice of *posa*, a form of payment or subsidy, to identify, manage, and manipulate populations and lineages identified as tribal.[20] Tribal populations consequently were not integrated into the Raj's broader governing systems, even though they also faced imperial systems of domination (and punishment). As Noor Ahmad Baba has observed, 'the British used the policy of using different tribes and ethnic communities against each other in order to stay in the region'.[21] But local populations also could use these identifiers for their own means. As the anti-colonial struggle hastened, the Naga Club demanded self-government *because* (accepting colonial language) they were tribal and had not been fully integrated into the Raj: 'You [the British] are the only people who have ever conquered us and when you go we should be as we were'.[22] In response, Nehru would dismiss the Nagas as 'sensitive and proud and jealous of such freedom as they have', claiming 'Some of them are still in the head-hunting stage'.[23]

Under colonial rule, northeastern tribe-non-tribe and hills-plains divides were exacerbated. Nevertheless, as political borders implemented by the British cut across longstanding ethnic and cultural affiliations, these frontiers did not match lived realities. Individuals and communities still

moved across these invisible boundaries in pursuit of extant relationships and social and economic practices. As late as the 1960s, Indian state officials grumbled about 'tribals being coaxed across the border by the Chinese for the purposes of trade'.[24] In other words, local populations continued to live across the nexus of what would become the Sino-Indian-Burmese border regions, as well as between East Pakistan and India. These pre-existing relationships thus tied 'northeasterners' to India's neighbours as much as to the Raj, further shaping their relationship with the rest of the subcontinent.

Since officials could identify the northeast's 'difference' from the rest of the Raj through its geographical distance and borderland location, its populations' 'tribal' organization and ethnic (and consequently physical) appearance, British imperialists often treated the region in isolation from the rest of the subcontinent.[25] A sense of distinction subsequently shaped the region's transition into independence. The inner line system that allowed the British to demarcate the boundaries of their governance also helped them to limit the spread of India's nationalist movements into the region as well. The northeast remained largely isolated from the Indian National Congress's independence movement. While the state of Assam emerged in 1947 as part of independent India, its governance continued to follow colonial-era lines. While Assam was named as a state in the Indian constitution in 1950, and Tripura and Manipur were made union territories, the Indian government maintained the North-East Frontier Agency (what would become Arunachal Pradesh) to continue governing Assam's excluded areas separately from the state based on the assumption of tribal difference.[26] Notably, NEFA was overseen by the Ministry of External Affairs, not Home Affairs, until 1965, highlighting that for Delhi, such border regions were treated as foreign policy concerns, not just territories of the Indian union.

Northeastern India's integration proved difficult not only due to NEFA and its unique governing arrangements. The princely state of Manipur's merger with the Indian Union was fraught, as Manipuris initially pursued independence, even drafting a constitution, and the Maharaja was coerced into agreeing to a merger with India in 1949. Meanwhile, Nagas living in what became NEFA and in the neighbouring Naga Hills District also launched demands for autonomy and a Naga state. As unrest grew and persisted, Nehru's government deployed the Indian Army against the Nagas, while pursuing economic development in NEFA. Collectively, Indian officials concluded, as Guyot-Réchard argues, that 'counter-insurgency would have to be conjugated with hearts-and-minds policies'.[27]

Colonial continuities in independent India

Indian officials, like the British before them, were concerned with the strategic threat of the northeast to the rest of India and, likewise, how the region's weak power structures might further pave the way for foreign encroachment. After all, the region had witnessed battle during the Second World War, as Japanese forces tried to move through Burma into India. Indeed, suspicions about locals' loyalties – whether they had fought for the British or the Japanese – shaped colonial and post-independence state leaders' reactions to these populations in both India and Burma.[28] India's own independence and constitution-making coincided with Mao Zedong's victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, as well as Burmese independence in 1948. Even while making mutual pledges to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, Indian and Chinese officials both worked to extend their influence in the Himalayas, the Indian government notably using its 'NEFA Philosophy', intended to make use of and adapt local tribal practices to expand social and economic welfare. Meanwhile, despite the India-Burma Treaty of Friendship in 1951, Naga insurgents continued to evade the Indian state by crossing into Burma and taking refuge, helping lead to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act legalizing the northeast's militarization.[29]

Tensions with Pakistan also persisted. Even as the passing of people and goods between the two neighbours became more regulated, the government of India worried about continued

movement across India and Pakistan's recently drawn borders, both in Punjab and between East Bengal and Assam. In 1956, for example, Assam's state government lodged an official protest with the government of East Bengal for the kidnapping of an Indian citizen and his bullocks by thirty Pakistani nationals, who allegedly had crossed into Assam. Local officials also reported ongoing Pakistani troop movements in the Latu and Patharia Hills on the border, which led to small-scale skirmishing. Regional relations were in flux, and unrest within northeast India only threatened to provoke further controversy.[30]As such, Prime Minister Nehru observed in early 1954, 'We are living in difficult times with international situations always on the verge of crisis and the possibility of wars etc. Border areas and border tribes have always to be remembered in this connection'.[31]

From an early stage, then, the Indian state's concerns regarding the northeast were as focused on national security as nation-building (if not more so). This served as a key impetus for ignoring local demands for the reconstitution of Assam into a series of smaller ethno-linguistic states during the 1956 States Reorganization Commission, which made adjustments to other state boundaries within India. The pleas of representatives from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, who sought further representation in the Lok Sabha and additional economic support, pointing out that their district's traditional economic markets now lay in East Pakistan, fell on deaf ears.[32] One observer told the Commission that if anything, the possibility of expanding Assam's geography and influence should be considered. As he reminded others, 'The State of Assam, situated as it is in the strategic North East Frontier of the Republic of India with its boundaries marching along those of Burma and China in one sector of this region and of Pakistan in another must undergo no territorial reorganisation'.[33] A larger, stronger state, he intimated, would better serve India's security interests.

Bisnuram Medhi, Chief Minister of Assam, pointed to the ongoing unrest in the Naga Hills as another reason for caution. 'The situation in the Naga Hills has brought to the forefront the grave dangers which lie to the security and integrity of India as a result of troubles which can be started by trained and armed guerrilla bands in a small area'.[34] The Nagas, by finding support and shelter beyond India's borders and, in the 1960s, seeking international recognition and representation, demonstrated how an otherwise small, peripheral conflict could have regional and global ramifications.[35] The dangers to Indian security not only lay external to India's borders, but could emerge inside the union's own borderlands. This helped underpin the government's intermestic concerns about military incursions waged by a foreign enemy (exacerbated by Chinese aggression in 1962), the potential impact of foreign meddling in border zone law and order, and the ability of local borderlands inhabitants to take advantage of regional ambiguities to advance their own autonomy demands.

For the Indian state, imposing the rule of law provided one response, though in terms of creating and imposing unique, region-specific regulations (following the precedent of colonial legal practice). The AFSPA was passed in 1958 to legalize the use of force in 'disturbed' areas, specifically the northeast, and continues to hold sway in the region. The AFSPA institutionalized the Indian Army's intermestic responsibilities and provided legal justification for the perpetual use of war-time measures such as arbitrary arrest and detention, forced resettlement, and the destruction of local villages in the name of national security. (As late as the 1991, the Attorney General of India justified the law as keeping northeast India part of the nation.)[36]

Alongside this, officials ultimately gave way to the creation of a Naga state within the Indian Union for the very reasons that they sought to avoid the break-up of Assam: regional and national security. Decision-making in Delhi was driven as much by international responses to the ongoing conflict in the region as by the fighting itself. As Nehru cautioned Medhi, 'These Naga troubles and revolts have a large significance for us in the international sphere and they give a handle to our opponents everywhere. More particularly, of course, Pakistan takes advantage of them'. The problem, Nehru noted, was not just that Indian Army mobilization undermined India's claims to democracy but that deploying troops in the northeast meant they were

unavailable to serve elsewhere. 'It is unfortunate that we should be tied up in the Naga Hills etc., when some other emergency might have to be faced by us'.[37] Ironically, a Naga state came to be justified because of the different governing arrangements in the region and the northeast's perceived difference. Nehru told the media, 'the Naga areas had been treated as a separate entity for many years. Under the new set-up these areas were not being separated from another entity: they were simply being given a higher status'.[38] The state of Nagaland, under a joint governor with Assam, was formalized in 1963.

Unsurprisingly the creation of a Naga state complicated regional dynamics and particularly the future of the state of Assam, from which territory had been hived off to create Nagaland. It briefly helped Nehru's government to save face internationally – in contrast to India's defeat in the 1962 clash with China – and claim to have ended the local conflict peacefully. However, it also precipitated additional demands for the region's political reorganization and exacerbated tensions between the region's Assamese-speakers and other ethno-linguistic groups. Many Nagas did not accept the creation of Nagaland as a resolution to their demands, and hostilities persisted.[39] Uprisings broke out in Mizoram, where ethnic Mizos also demanded independence. Other groups in the Garo and Khasi Hills reportedly traveled into East Pakistan to seek military aid to bolster their own separationist demands. Dabeswar Sarmah, an Assam government minister, went so far as to propose in 1967 the clearing of a mile-wide corridor 'of jungle and human habitation' along Assam's borders with Pakistan, China, and Burma to halt these insurgencies: 'So long as hostile Nagas, Mizos, [and] Khasis armed and trained in guerilla warfare can have unhampered ingress and egress there can be no security for this border region'.[40] The All Party Hills Leaders Conference also demanded the creation of a new hill state separate from Assam. In all of this, language and its ethnic implications were a huge source of tension. The Assam Official Language Act of 1960 made Assamese the state's official language, aggravating local relations and highlighting how the political fragmentation of the northeast, begun under the British, had only grown worse for the postcolonial Indian state. The region's ethno-linguistic diversity rose to the fore, with disputes arising between Assamese speakers and (frequently hills-dwelling) minorities.[41]

Local organizations across the northeast petitioned both the Assam state government and Delhi throughout the 1960s demanding either the creation of new states or the reaffirmation of Assam's statehood using dual languages of rights and security. In their correspondence, regional groups and leaders adapted their claims to the language of the Indian centre: focusing on the intersections between national security and nationalism. One Assamese trade union wrote to Assam's Chief Minister praising the state's 'non-communal political set up' and predicting that the state's division 'would set in motion the forces of disintegration jeopardizing the security and integrity of the country'.[42] In contrast, a resident of Nishangram, a town on what would become the border between Assam and Meghalaya, pointedly noted in a letter to the *Assam Tribune*, 'We [hill people] are also Indians and know of their own responsibilities to defend their own country' while pointing to the mistreatment of hill people by 'educated Assamese'.[43] Sarmah warned that a separate hill state would be, 'as every patriotic India is expected to know, highly detrimental to the unity and integrity of this strategic North East Frontier region of India'. He gloomily predicted, 'Once the rot starts here, it will, like gangrene, spread to the rest of India'.[44] Sarmah referred specifically to India's defence needs, pointing out that the 'People of Assam' had come together to combat Chinese invaders in 1962.

In this reading, the break-up of Assam would detrimentally weaken India's security, with ramifications for the rest of the nation. Presumably the 'gangrene' of reorganisation might undermine state structures elsewhere in the Indian union as well, again weakening the nation-state. The push for reorganization in the northeast coincided with renewed agitation to the south for a separate Telangana – part of Andhra Pradesh – in 1969, which partly intersected with a renewed Maoist insurgency in the region. Indira Gandhi would send in troops to crush resistance in 1971.[45] India's national security became bound up with the debate about political reorganization,

as those for and against the division of Assam claimed that their respective movement would better serve the Indian nation-state. Moreover, locals actively participated by taking advantage of the Indian centre's concerns about national security to promote different political alternatives.

The Assam Legislature Congress Party, led by Medhi, also produced a memorandum decrying the creation of a new hill state, arguing 'it would go against national progress and security' and pointing out the potential 'disruption of Assam's economy due to partition'.[46] He and others also turned to statements made by Nehru before his death that a hill state simply could not ensure India's security or contribute to the region's economic development. However, these arguments carried less weight with Nehru's daughter, the new Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, who proved more amenable to the prospect of reorganisation, potentially due to her search for new political allies across the nation.[47] Hence, her government announced on 13 January 1967 that some form of organization would take place in the northeast, and a committee comprising local and national officials was formed to decide how best to satisfy the 'political aspirations of the hill areas of Assam'.[48] On 30 December 1971, the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act passed, resulting in the establishment of the states of Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya (comprising the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo Hills) and the union territories of Arunachal Pradesh (formerly NEFA) and Mizoram, alongside a much-reduced Assam and Nagaland.

What would become immediately clear was that while reorganization spoke to some of the discontents of local groups who sought autonomy from the Assamese ethno-linguistic majority, the central government planned to undertake the division of Assam in a way that would ensure that the region could stand as a stronghold against foreign intervention. Discussions of internal reorganization were accompanied by exercises in Indian foreign policy, most notably the demarcation of the India-Burma border in 1967. This regional engagement, with India's neighbours and own citizens, demonstrated the centre's intention to further secure control of the region and reinforce its position as a buffer against foreign incursion. The Chinese move into NEFA as part of the 1962 war had demonstrated the Indian state's weaknesses in the northeast.[49] Rather than passing control to local representatives, Delhi used reorganization to push for the centre's continued oversight of the region. In promoting intermestic policies, Indira Gandhi's government in fact attempted to institutionalize intermediary sovereignty arrangements that had often defined colonial-era frontier encounters. The creation of the North-Eastern Council highlighted how intermestic security required alternative governing structures to those practiced in India's heartlands.

The North-Eastern Council's political alternatives

The North-Eastern Council was an attempt by officials based in Delhi to institutionalize and make formal political arrangements that prioritized intermestic policy concerns. Sanjib Baruah, writing about the NEC and the 1971 reorganisation act, has discussed how it reflected a 'new vision of the Northeast', one that focused on 'cosmetic federalism' – presenting the appearance of autonomy and states' rights within the Indian union, rather than the reality.[50] By taking a closer look at the discussions leading up to the formation of the NEC, this cosmetic federalism becomes apparent, as do the central government's concerns with regional security. But what becomes equally obvious is the ways that colonial ideas of backwardness and civilization continued to pervade many officials' thinking on the region, which in turn informed discussions of the NEC and its purposes. The architects of the NEC looked to the imperial toolbox to deal with concerns about regional stability, particularly colonial practices of melding foreign and domestic policies and the creation of intermediary structures of sovereignty. That the NEC failed to take the shape envisioned by some of its architects is telling: political actors based in the northeast pushed back against the centre's plans, leaving in place a watered-down NEC. As much as the central government sought to assert its governance up to and in India's peripheries, it also had to take into account (at least limitedly) local responses and demands. Regionally based political

actors, alongside state leaders and foreign relations exigencies, helped shape the intersections between India's domestic and foreign policies.

The creators of the NEC had two clear goals for council activities: ensuring the region's (and thereby India's) security and the political, social, and economic development of local communities. These twin foci were unquestionably interlinked. The NEC had to make the northeast secure for state officials to pursue the modernization of Indian citizens within it, while by making locals modern, active Indian citizens, ostensibly they would create better protectors of India. The irony of this was that in focusing on development of local peoples, state officials made clear their reliance on colonial governing ideas and practices that 'civilized' locals. The subject-citizen divide remained ambiguous.

B.K. Nehru, Governor of Assam and Nagaland at the time of the northeast's reorganisation (and cousin once removed of Jawaharlal Nehru), played a critical role in ensuring the northeast's common administrative structures. While the government of India agreed, in principle, to the division of Assam in 1967, in practice, less thought had been given to the logistics and mechanisms of reorganisation. Despite the precedent set with the establishment of Nagaland - whereby it shared a common governor with Assam - the Ministry of Home Affairs debated the merits of shared governorships or the division of duties between multiple governors. To coordinate economic development and the region's general security, Nehru advocated for a shared governor and an influential NEC.

As Governor of Assam, Nehru placed emphasis on the need to develop the region's economic potential and structures, as well as the necessity of making the local population feel assimilated with the rest of India for the sake of national security. As he proclaimed in a 1968 broadcast, 'What in essence is required, in the self-interest of each constituent unit of the Indian Union and, indeed, of each individual, is for every citizen of India to feel that when the security of any part of India is threatened his own security is threatened and when a calamity befalls any Indian that calamity befalls him'.[51] For Nehru, security, economics, and consequently a sense of belonging to India went hand in hand. He thus mooted the creation of an advisory body to help coordinate the newly formed and existing states and union territories of the northeast, what ultimately became the NEC.

In public pronouncements and private correspondence, Nehru made much of the northeast's difference from other parts of India. He maintained that the region's economic advancement was critical, explaining, 'No amount of lecturing to a tribesman in a backwoods hamlet is going to give him an idea of the modern world. But if a road is brought to his hamlet and he is enabled to sit in a bus or a jeep and go down to the nearest town, the educative effect of what he sees, what he does and the people he meets, is enormous'.[52] This thinking also underpinned his support for the NEC. He warned Prime Minister Gandhi about the perils of Assam not joining a regional council, cautioning this would lead to the 'formation of a tribal State which is, in my view, not in the interests either of Indian security or of the integrity of Indian territory'.[53] The plains of Assam, in Nehru's reading, provided the closest thing to a model of modern statehood within the region and thus needed to be tied to, and serve as a guide for, the other newly formed hill states and territories. In this sense, Nehru followed in the footsteps of many administrators before him in his belief that security and modernization intertwined.

B.K. Nehru's approach to governing the northeast relied on colonial-era notions of the 'tribe' and the assumption that such local, ostensibly 'backwards' populations needed to be introduced to 'modernity'. He was not alone in this, as Baruah has shown. His colonial and postcolonial predecessors in the region also drew on the idea that the northeast belonged to a 'Mongolian fringe' and that inhabitants of the 'backwards areas' had 'Mongoloid' features.[54] Notably the British official, Olaf Caroe, who coined the term 'Mongolian fringe', went on to write one of the most influential texts of the twentieth century on another set of 'fringe' people, the Pashtuns of northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan. Clear linkages can be seen in how he engaged with the security of borders and their 'tribal' inhabitants in both northeast India and northwest Pakistan.

Much as he warned, as early as 1940, against Chinese irredentism in northeast India, he also emphasized the potential Soviet threat to Pakistan's northwest throughout the twentieth century. (Not only that, but his writings helped inform later US approaches to the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands and their emphasis on the region's 'tribal' nature.)[55] Such thinking clearly percolated into post-independence perspectives in both India and Pakistan, as they wrestled with border disputes and border populations.

In order to make local tribes modern, Nehru argued, strong central leadership was fundamental. In a telling observation to the Home Minister, he wrote, 'I trust my strong insistence on a common Governor will not be construed as an exercise in empire-building. I am too lazy to want to be an Emperor; and if I wanted an Empire I would choose a less primitive one'.[56] Nehru's positions, in fact, spoke to empire-building in numerous ways. Not only did he reveal a sense in government circles that the northeast was 'primitive', but he made the case that 'the problems of this area require a great deal of specialisation'.[57] Prime Minister Gandhi echoed this view in correspondence where she cited the northeast's 'peculiar circumstances'.[58] Such statements showed how colonial frontier governing practices continued to reverberate in Delhi's halls of power: because such borderlands zones were strategically important and because their inhabitants did not conform to the state's idea of responsible, contributing Indian citizens, they needed to be governed differently. This ethos had informed British policy and legal codes. Most notably, the Frontier Crimes Regulation legalized collective punishment and specific modes of 'frontier governmentality' and was exported from colonial northwest India to the subcontinent's other frontiers and further abroad. It took the form of the 1896 Chin Hill Regulation in the northeast and clearly paralleled, and likely informed, the AFSPA.[59] After 1947, such perspectives continued to provide justification for forms of political (and military) intervention that were generally unacceptable in the democratically governed Indian heartland. They also underpinned calls for the overarching influence of the central government in Delhi despite its distance from the northeast.

While Nehru and the central government had different ideas of how reorganization should take place and the NEC function, both affirmed the idea that intermediary organs would necessarily shore up the region's security and help its economic and social development. In his pronouncements, Nehru placed particular emphasis on his desire to coordinate politics and development across the region, and he remained adamant in the belief that a multitude of governors would prevent this. He ultimately succeeded in the establishment of a single shared governor for all states in the region and used the centre's decision on this to negotiate further on the nature of the NEC.

While Nehru originally suggested an advisory body to help coordinate the activities of the states and territories of the northeast, the NEC envisioned by policymakers in Delhi had more far-reaching powers. The union government hoped to use the council to assert the sovereignty of the centre and to direct the development of the northeast. Prime Minister Gandhi advocated a powerful NEC in a draft letter to the Chief Ministers of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Assam in 1970, observing, 'it seems to me that it would be of advantage not only in the overall national interest, not only in the interest of the North-Eastern region but also in the interests of each individual political unit of the area'. She pointed to the region's limited economic infrastructures and its location 'on the frontiers of India bordering countries which are inimical to us and which are a challenge to our security not only through external attack but through internal subversion'.[60] The council, Gandhi hinted, would help the northeast contribute to the national political project through its defence, while also providing local states with a mutual support system.

The NEC offered a potential mechanism through which officials in Delhi could not only oversee but actively interfere in the northeast's political and economic development while barring foreign encroachments. Even as the Home Minister assured the Chief Minister of Nagaland that the proposed body would only be 'a high level advisory forum which would bring about the much desired coordination', the Ministry of Home Affairs mused over 'a special constitutional provision making it obligatory on the participating States to carry out the decisions of the

Council and imposing on the Governor the special responsibility to give effect to such decisions'.[61] Such a measure, alongside additional discussions of the Home Minister or another official from the centre overseeing the council, rather than a more local representative, indicated the obvious intent of the central government to use the NEC to manage northeastern statehood and the region's place within the Indian union. In effect, the NEC would eliminate one of the primary difficulties the centre faced in governing the northeast - its geographical distance - by bringing the centre *to* the periphery.

Unsurprisingly, a number of local officials, Nehru among them, balked at this. Representatives from Assam argued that such a change to the constitution infringed upon the rights and autonomy of India's member-states, while Nagaland's leaders resisted participating.[62] Nehru, while acknowledging the security and economic concerns that drove the Home Affairs thought process, also emphasized the need to respect state autonomy. Instead, the shared governor, he argued, served as a perfect intermediary who could represent and negotiate with the states while engaging with Delhi. While community leaders in the northeast wanted their states to be treated the same as others in the Indian union, Nehru argued the region required a unique governing alternative. 'The whole idea behind the formation of this Council', he insisted, was 'that while we cannot get a constitutional federation of the various political units which form our North-Eastern region, we should make an attempt to have, as it were, an administrative federation through this Council'.[63] He tried to persuade the Home Minister, 'The North-Eastern Council should be an Advisory Body not only to the States which are constituent members of it as now it apparently is but to the Government of India also'.[64]

Nehru's description of the NEC, under its governor head, as guiding the northeastern states and union territories *and* the central government offers a distinctly different reading of the council and its responsibilities. Nehru's vision for the governorship moved away from that of a mere constitutional head of state and towards an individual who oversaw all the northeastern territories as well as the NEC. His ideas had clear parallels with British political agents and officers of colonial times, both those who represented the Raj in the princely states and those who represented the arm of the state in the northwest's 'tribal' areas. Political agents had served as representatives of central government but also had their own extensive decision-making powers. The British political agent in Manipur, for example, had guided policy towards local Kukis and Nagas.[65] For Nehru, the governor and 'advisory' council similarly did not lack the ability to effect change, but instead could initiate shifts both within the northeast and in Delhi. In effect, for him, these could serve as an intermediary power rooted in, and taking account of, the region's unique history, economic weakness, and potential security threat.

The fact that Nehru advocated for an army representative on the NEC's coordinating council indicated his appreciation of the region's national security importance. 'In this strategic border area', he noted, 'questions of internal security and public order get mixed up with external security as well as on general ground'.[66] He further explained, 'the North Eastern Council is to be a coordinating body of the States in this region … for safeguarding security and generally for the better governance of the region without detracting from the powers vested in them under the Constitution and the status that they will enjoy as States of the Indian Union'.[67] For Nehru, the NEC and its governor leader effectively would serve as an intermediary between centre and state(s), while also bridging the gap between India's foreign policy needs and the region's advancement. It would, in other words, institutionalize intermestic arrangements.

The North-Eastern Council unfulfilled

The NEC envisioned by either the central government or Governor Nehru would never fully materialize. Delhi ultimately backed off on suggestions of constitutional reform, but the fact that this was even considered within the Ministry of Home Affairs indicates the region's significance

and that, in the eyes of the centre, unique governing arrangements could be made for the northeast due to its security and economic implications. The amendment would have fundamentally changed the nature of politics within the region and, potentially, across the Indian union. However, it also would likely have faced widespread resistance and could have aggravated relations with a range of local groups, to the detriment of India's domestic and foreign affairs. The Home Minister thus assured the Chief Minister of Nagaland, 'Our intention was not to curtail the authority of the States' by extending the powers of the NEC.[68] The NEC that came into being was a shadow of that discussed in the Ministry of Home Affairs, with only limited powers to shape local decision-making.

An improvement in regional relations might provide another explanation why the central government chose not to pursue its idealized NEC. Discussions of the northeast's future coincided with the 1971 war in East Pakistan and the emergence, with Indian support, of an independent Bangladesh. The war, itself, initially sparked concerns about increased Pakistani infiltration into, and a potential attack on, the northeast.[69] However, with Pakistan's defeat, many in the central and local governments believed that a friendly Bangladesh, grateful of India's help in the war, would lessen India's security concerns. Officials in the northeast ostensibly would no longer need to worry about potential Pakistani intervention, as a result eliminating one of the region's major foreign threats. Thus an editorial in the *Times of India* pointed out in December 1971 that a 'watered-down' NEC was 'just as well, for with a friendly regime in Bangla Desh, the political and defence problems of the north-east will become much more manageable and the opportunities for co-ordinating the economic development of the entire eastern region will be greatly enlarged'.[70] An adviser to the government of Meghalaya similarly predicted in a 1973 speech that 'with the opening up of river routes through Bangladesh, and the impetus that this will give to the setting up of new industries, with more accessible markets', economic progress in the northeast would 'be felt in the very near future'.[71]

Against this backdrop, the central government opted to take a more muted public line on potential foreign security threats to the northeast. As talks progressed with Pakistan in the aftermath of the 1971 war, the central government chose not to publish a Ministry of Defence white paper on foreign involvement in local insurgencies. One draft had excoriated Pakistan and China for 'fomenting and sustaining the tribal insurgence in north eastern India with the sole intention of disintegrating and weakening India'. Instead, officials concluded they were better off avoiding new entanglements with either regional power while enjoying the reprieves (at least temporary) offered by the creation of Bangladesh and good relations with Burma.[72]

Given the changing international and regional context, the centre arguably had fewer security concerns in the northeast - although China still loomed large - and so did not need the NEC to serve such an interventionist role.[73] The North-East Council Act of 1971 consequently outlined that 'The Council shall be an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in that Council, or the Union and one or more of the States represented in that Council, have a common interest and advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter'. Its responsibilities included 'securing the balanced development of the north-eastern area', assessing and coordinating interstate development projects, and reviewing 'the measures taken by the States represented in the Council for the maintenance of security and public order therein'.[74]

Speaking at the inauguration of the NEC on 7 November 1972, Nehru declared, 'The establishment of the Council seems to me to be the logical culmination of the process of separating the North East into different political entities'. He noted, 'in the situation in which we are placed in the North East, there is no escape for any of the individual political units of which we are composed from acting together for the economic development and progress of the region as a whole as well as of each of its individual parts'.[75] Nehru thus portrayed the NEC as an innovative means for ensuring the advancement of the entire region, while also trying to assure his audience that the council did not impinge upon each state's sovereignty. While he acknowledged

the NEC's security responsibilities, he emphasized its importance for economic development and drew parallels with the European Economic Community, arguing, 'the fact that more and more countries of Europe wish to join that community is a pointer to us in the North East of how necessary it is, in the circumstances of today, for even countries who are politically sovereign, to cooperate with each other and to coordinate their policies in the economic field'.[76]

Against this backdrop, unsurprisingly, later reporting on the NEC and its workings indicated that the council's predominant role turned out to be economic rather than strategic. This was guided, in part, by Nehru, the NEC's first chair, and his emphasis on development. The NEC gave out funding for hydropower and irrigation schemes across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura, and pursued road building.[77] But the NEC's limited scope was unsurprising. Not only was its economic remit limited, but policymakers in Delhi also found the means to work around the NEC by appointing retired military generals and intelligence and political officers with 'ties with the security establishment' into positions of influence across the northeast. This, Baruah argues, created a 'parallel political structure' in the region that was 'both directly controlled from New Delhi and autonomous from the formal democratically-elected governmental structures of the states'.[78] With or without the NEC, leaders at India's centre remained intent on overseeing a region that still shared borders with three of India's neighbours, where local autonomy movements, particularly among Mizos and Nagas, persisted, and where 'tribal' dynamics supposedly kept the region a step behind the rest. The nature of sovereignty in the region persisted in its difference.

Despite the potential the NEC initially seemed to offer for institutionalizing the centre's hold over the region, its possibilities as a mechanism for directing an intermestic policy fell short in reality. While top policymakers drew on colonial precedents to suggest alternative sovereignty arrangements that would allow the central government to intervene in state affairs, or which would give a single governor extraordinary powers, local leaders resisted this imposition. In a move that demonstrated a rupture with the colonial past, regional representatives asserted states' and citizens' rights within the Indian union. Assam's members of parliament wrote to Gandhi protesting an interventionist NEC, pointing to its 'infringement of their [Assamese] inherent democratic rights to manage and conduct their own affairs through their elected representatives'.[79] The central government avoided a constitutional crisis by accepting the NEC as merely an advisory council, but the elected chief ministers of the northeast's member states were initially excluded from the NEC, which remained under the remit of the states' governor(s).[80] As such, even then, the NEC remained one of a series of tools deployed by the government in Delhi to assert its influence in the northeast and keep an eye on its economic development while, increasingly, using the central government's right to appoint certain leadership positions to oversee intermestic threats to India's security.

Conclusion

The Indian government's attempts to create a North-Eastern Council with constitutional powers mirrored earlier colonial policies towards northeastern India which treated the region as a space apart and also reemphasized the ways in which the centre saw the region as a security concern. The northeast's internal political, economic, and social development could not be divorced from its borderlands location, and thus the possibility that foreign powers might use the region's distance from Delhi and weak structures to encroach on India's sovereignty. India's leaders, however, faced a tension. The northeast's precarity as a border region gained new urgency following India's independence because of the central government's need to assert its right to govern, which corresponded with the need of India's neighbours equally to proclaim their own power. But Indian leaders found the colonial practices of treating borderlanders differently from residents of the interior useful and effective, even as the government pursued democratization and

constitutionalism elsewhere. The exigencies of Indian foreign policy, and particularly regional tensions, required the Indian state to assert its governance in the northeast, but to do so, Indian leaders looked to alternative governing arrangements rather than accepting full statehood and citizenship for the region's inhabitants. The colonial practice of treating the region as an intermestic frontier, a zone where governing functioned differently and power dynamics favoured a strong centre, appealed to and continued to be used by union officials even as they pursued democracy in the Indian heartland.

India was not alone in pursuing policies towards it border regions that it could not typically justify in the state's interior. Borderlands policy provided a clear link between post-independence India and Pakistan, though not in ways that either country cared to recognize. Both states' central governments turned readily to military force and alternative governing arrangements. Much as Indian officials sought to use the NEC to intermediate between the centre, the northeast's states, and their inhabitants, the government of Pakistan kept a tight grip on policy towards the autonomous tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, which continued to be ruled under the FCR and divorced from provincial governments. The ready use of violence to quash autonomy movements in Balochistan also demonstrated how Pakistan's foreign and domestic policies intersected. Likewise, Bangladeshi and Burmese/Myanmarese counterinsurgency activities in the Chittagong Hills Tract and Kachin province, respectively, highlighted the army as a key tool in intermestic policy, where a force ostensibly intended for external security instead was deployed internally.[81] Further abroad, facing local secessionist demands along their northern border with Somalia, Kenyan leaders also passed a series of security acts that introduced the military into this frontier zone. They also notably claimed that locals' 'tribalist' nature differentiated their demands from nationalists', similarly highlighting borderlanders' supposedly less integrated, less modern nature.[82]

In the northeast, the 1971 act did not succeed over the longer term in eliminating resistance and autonomy movements in the region. Communities like the Cachars and Bodos felt slighted for not receiving their own states, and resentment in Assam also grew, resulting in organizations such as the United Liberation Front of Assam, which looked to secession from the Indian union.[83] Continued violence in Nagaland and Mizoram demonstrated that reorganisation had failed to satisfy the demands of all factions that had wanted changes in their status. Moreover, the central government's (and the Indian Army's) critical role in confronting these conflicts confirmed that despite the presence of new local state controls, the centre remained dominant and ready to circumvent state officials to ensure the nation's security.[84] The division of Assam also led to a number of boundary disputes between the new states, which further complicated interstate relations within the northeast.[85] Again, in this instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs had to step in to moderate disputes and oversee the work of boundary commissions.[86] While officials like B.K. Nehru promoted the NEC as a mechanism to assure regional cooperation, later intra-Indian border disputes provide an obvious example of a circumstance in which the NEC failed to function, instead necessitating the centre's direct intervention.

Even as nation-states with firm territorial boundaries came to prominence in decolonizing processes, border regions persisted in complicating projects of nation- and state-building. These processes have been explored in terms of postcolonial states' domestic development, state leaders' attempts to assert their governance in these regions, and locals' numerous means to avoid, combat, or subvert state-run border controls. But more still needs to be said by historians about how borderlands and their governance inform foreign policy. While the licit and illicit movement of people has been examined in terms of border regulations (or lack thereof) and bilateral engagement, historians have more work to do in considering intermestic policies, both in border regions and in other realms of governance. Examining state controls in border regions highlights some of the ways in which the nation-state, despite becoming the main unit of international relations, has faced constraints and continues to wrestle with the uneven exertion of sovereignty. Northeast India reveals the colonial underpinnings of Indian foreign policy and the ways that

this reverberated into and fundamentally shaped India's border regions. As such, it demands further questioning of the colonial-postcolonial divide in thinking about newly independent states' foreign policies and further reflection on how states' perceptions of their neighbours and the international community shaped their approaches to the domestic as well.

Notes

1. Sumantra Bose, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Sunil Purushotham, *From Raj to Republic: Sovereignty, Violence, and Democracy in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021); Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
2. Marcus Franke, *War and Nationalism in South Asia: The Indian State and the Nagas* (London: Routledge, 2009); Elisabeth Leake, 'At the Nation-State's Edge: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-1947 South Asia', *The Historical Journal*, 59 (2016), 509–39.
3. Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 271–6; Purushotham, *From Raj to Republic*, 52–66; Yaqoob Khan Bhangash, 'Betrayal of Trust: Princely States of India and the Transfer of Power', *South Asia Research*, 26 (2006), 181–99.
4. I use 'Burma' rather than 'Myanmar' to reflect the geopolitical circumstances of the time under consideration in this article.
5. Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), ch. 1.
6. Elisabeth Leake and Daniel Haines, 'Lines of (In)Convenience: Sovereignty and Border-Making in Postcolonial South Asia, 1947-1965', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 76 (2017), 963–85, 968–71, 975–7.
7. See Lucy P. Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States: India, China and the Himalayas, 1910-1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, 'Tangled Lands: Burma and India's Unfinished Separation, 1937-1948', *Journal of Asian Studies* (2020), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911820000017.
8. James N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent* World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5. See also R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
9. Franz Gress, 'Interstate Cooperation and Territorial Representation in Intermestic Politics', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 26 (1996), 53–71, 55. On the Indian intermestic, see Arijit Mazumdar, 'India's Search for a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy: Domestic Constraints and Obstacles', *India Quarterly*, 67 (2011), 165–82, 175; Amrita Narlikar, 'India's Trade Politics: Continuity and Change' in Oluf Langhelle (ed), *International Trade Negotiations and Domestic Politics: The Intermestic Politics of Trade Liberalization* (London: Routledge, 2014), 102–20. On the possibilities that the intermestic provides for studying US politics, see Fredrik Logevall, 'Politics and Foreign Relations', *The Journal of American History*, 95 (2009), 1074–8, Christopher R. W. Dietrich, 'The Business In Between: U.S. Foreign Relations and Domestic Politics', *Perspectives on History* (2011), https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2011/the-business-in-between.
10. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
11. In its encounter with the Indian centre, the northeast was not alone in its experiences of political and military force and the blurring of the civilian-military divide, and comparisons could be made with Kashmir and other border hotspots. The heavily militarized line of control in Kashmir, which serves as the de facto border between India and Pakistan, too, speaks to the violence of bordering and the intermestic (Leake and Haines, 'Lines of (In)Convenience', 978).
12. Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4–6.
13. This article is focused on the first seven states, not Sikkim.
14. Sanjib Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 31–2.
15. Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, 3.
16. Reece Jones, 'Spaces of Refusal: Rethinking Sovereign Power and Resistance at the Border', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102 (2012), 685–99, 695; Willem Van Schendel and Itty Abraham, *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 23.
17. Joy L. K. Pachuau, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12–13. See also Thomas Simpson, 'Bordering and Frontier-Making in Nineteenth-Century British India', *The Historical Journal*, 58 (2015), 513–42.

18. Colonial discourses regarding 'tribes' as distinct, frequently static, social and political organizations extended beyond South Asia. See Ajay Skaria, 'Shades of Wildness: Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 56 (1997), 726–45; Kate Crehan, '"Tribes" and the People Who Read Books: Managing History in Colonial Zambia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23 (1997), 203–18; Thomas Spear, 'Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 3–27. Of course, 'tribe' was not the only category given new meaning by the British, as scholars such as Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks have shown. See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
19. Benjamin Hopkins and Magnus Marsden, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), 56–7; see also Peter Robb, 'The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s', *Modern Asian Studies*, 31 (1997), 245–83, 258.
20. On the evolution and ambiguities of *posa*, see Bodhisattva Kar, 'Nomadic Capital and Speculative Tribes: A Culture of Contracts in the Northeastern Frontier of British India', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53 (2016), 41–67, 44–55.
21. Noor Ahmad Baba, 'Northeast and Kashmir: Problems in a Comparative Perspective' in Sandhya Goswami (ed), *Troubled Diversity: The Political Process in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 167–85, 172.
22. Cited in Udayon Misra, 'The Naga National Question', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 (1978), 618–24, 619.
23. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bisnuram Medhi, 2 Feb. 1951, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN),* vol. 15, part 2 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 184.
24. N. K. Rustomji, 19 July 1961, [Delhi] N[ehru] M[emorial] M[useum and] L[ibrary], N. K. Rustomji papers, subject files, file 10.
25. As Nandana Dutta notes, 'The attention to Mongoloid facial features has been one of the most notable aspects of the description of tribes of this region contributing to the diversity picture and yet at the same time causing a degree of ambivalence to attach to its perception of links with the rest of India' (Nandana Dutta, 'Constructing and Performing Diversity: Colonial and Contemporary Processes', in Goswami, *Troubled Diversity*, 3–23, 5). Furthermore, the fact that a large proportion of the north-east's population is Christian, due to longstanding missionary activities in the region, also differentiates it from other areas in South Asia.
26. Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, 38.
27. Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, 128.
28. See Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire & War with* Japan (London: Penguin, 2005).
29. Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, ch. 4; Avinash Paliwal, '"A Cat's Paw of Indian Reactionaries"? Strategic Rivalry and Domestic Politics at the India-China-Myanmar Tri-Junction', *Asian Security*, 16 (2020), 73–89; Franke, *War and Nationalism*.
30. Private Secretary to the Chief Minister, 'Incidents in Pak-India (Burma) Border with Effect from Mid January Up-to-Date', 8 Mar. 1956 [Guwahati] A[ssam] S[tate] A[rchives], CM S[ecretariat] 122/56; A.N.M. Saleh, Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, to Chief Secretary to the Government of East Bengal, Dacca, 'Trespass into Indian Territory by Pak Nationals and Kidnapping of an Indian National', 5 Apr. 1956, ASA, CMS 122/56.
31. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bisnuram Medhi, 19 Mar. 1954, in *SWJN*, vol. 25 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 211.
32. 'Memorandum Submitted by the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Congress Committee to Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the Union Home Minister, on the Occasion of His Visit to Shillong from October 31 to November 2', 1957, ASA, CMS 178/57.
33. K. N. Dutt, Draft Memorandum on the State of Assam for Submission to the States Reorganisation Commission, 1954, ASA, CMS 257/B/54.
34. B. R. Medhi to Jawaharlal Nehru, 26 May 1956, NMML, B[isnuram] M[edhi papers], file 1.
35. See Lydia Walker, 'Decolonization in the 1960s: On Legitimate and Illegitimate Nationalist Claims-Making', *Past and Present*, no. 242 (2019), 227–64.
36. Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, 62–3; ibid., *In the Name of the Nation*, chapter 6.
37. Jawaharlal Nehru to Bisnuram Medhi, 13 May 1956, *SWJN*, vol. 33 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 172.
38. 'Increased Autonomy for Hill People: Reforms Promised by Mr. Nehru', *The Times of India,* 12 Aug. 1960, 1.
39. See Jelle J. P. Wouters, *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency: Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially chapter 1.
40. Dabeswar Sarmah, 'A Note on Naga Depredation on the Sibesagar District Border', 25 Apr. 1967, NMML, D[abeswar] S[armah Papers], Subject Files, 4-I.
41. 'Proceedings of the Conference Held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on Wednesday, the 30th November and Thursday, the 1st December, 1966', undated, NMML, M.C. C[hagla Papers], file 92; Mr. Nichols-Roy,

General Secretary, Council of Action, All Party Hill Leaders Conference, Shillong, Assam, to the Prime Minister, 12 June 1962, ASA, CMS 79/62.
42. Asoka Mehta to G. L. Nanda 23 Mar. 1966, ASA, CMS 276/67.
43. Lipson Sangma to the Editor, *Assam Tribute*, 27 Oct. 1967, ASA, CMS 276/67.
44. Dabeswar Sarmah, undated, NMML, DS, Subject Files, 4-I.
45. G. Haragopal, 'The Telangana People's Movement: The Unfolding Political Culture', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45 (2010), 51–60, 53–4; Jonathan Kennedy and Sunil Purushotham, 'Beyond Naxalbari: A Comparative Analysis of Maoist Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Independent India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54 (2012), 832–62, 848–9.
46. 'Congress MLAs not for Assam federal plan', *Times of India*, 13 June 1967, 9.
47. Some arguments have been made that Gandhi supported reorganisation, at least in Mizoram, to gain renewed support for the Indian National Congress. See Jyotirindra Dasgupta, 'Community, Authenticity and Autonomy: Insurgence and Institutional Development in India's North-East' in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (eds), *Community Conflicts and the State in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183–214, 210.
48. Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Resolution F.24/4/67-SR, 22 July 1967, ASA CMS 276/67.
49. Avinash Paliwal, '"How Many Miles Make an Inch?" Center-State Relations and the 1967 India-Burma Boundary Agreement', *India Review*, 18 (2019), 596–612; Guyot-Réchard, *Shadow States*, ch. 7.
50. Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, 26; ibid., *Durable Disorder*, 43–4. This also speaks to Louis Tillin's argument that the northeast comes the closest to representing *de jure* asymmetrical federalism within the Indian Union. Louise Tillin, 'United in Diversity? Asymmetry in Indian Federalism', *Publius*, 37 (2007), 45–67, 55–8.
51. B. K. Nehru, 'National Integration - As I Understand It', 19 Oct. 1968, NMML, B. K. N[ehru papers], Speeches/ Writings by him, File 10(I).
52. B. K. Nehru, 'Inaugural Address at 23rd All India Adult Education Conference in Gauhati', 30 Oct. 1969, NMML, BKN, Speeches/Writings by him, File 10(I).
53. B. K. Nehru to Indira Gandhi, 3 Aug. 1971, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
54. Baruah, *In the Name of the Nation*, 17–19.
55. See Peter John Probst, *The Future of the Great Game: Sir Olaf Caroe, India's Independence, and the Defense of Asia* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2005); Parshotam Mehra, 'Managing India's Nepal Policy the Raj and After', *Economic and Political* Weekly, 29 (1994) 849–52; Elisabeth Leake, 'Elphinstone and the Afghan-Pathan Elision: Comparative British and American Approaches in the Twentieth Century' in Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (ed), *Mountstuart Elphinstone in South Asia* (London: Hurst & Co., 2019), 299–317.
56. B. K. Nehru to K. C. Pant, 8 Oct. 1970, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
57. B. K. Nehru to Govind Narain, 25 June 1971, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
58. Draft of Letter from Indira Gandhi to Chief Ministers of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam, undated, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
59. Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of the Modern State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 57 and ch. 2.
60. Draft of Letter from Indira Gandhi to Chief Ministers of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam, undated, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
61. Y. B. Chavan to T. N. Angami, 8 Dec. 1969, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19; Ministry of Home Affairs, 'Reorganisation of North-Eastern Region', undated, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
62. Copy of the memorandum submitted by Assam MPs to the Prime Minister in connection with the proposed North-East Council, 10 Aug. 1971, ASA, CMS 127/71.
63. B. K. Nehru to M. G. Pimputkar, 30 Jan. 1970, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
64. B. K. Nehru to K. C. Pant, 8 Oct. 1970, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
65. See Yasir Bashir, 'Role of British Political Agent in the State of Bikaner', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 76 (2015), 426–36; S. N. Pandey, 'Tribal Uprising in North East-India During the British Rule: Kuki and Naga Revolts in Manipur', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 56 (1995), 545–50; Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Office and Tribal Administration on the North-Weset Frontier 1877-1947* (Ashgate: Fanham, 2011).
66. B. K. Nehru to M. G. Pimputkar', 30 Jan. 1970, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
67. B. K. Nehru to Indira Gandhi, 3 Aug. 1971, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
68. K. C. Pant to Hokishe Sema, 12 Aug. 1971, NMML, BKN, Subject files, File 19.
69. Assam's Chief Minister wrote worriedly to the Prime Minister in this regard, proposing the establishment of an additional voluntary organisation to provide local security. See copy of a secret letter addressed to the Prime Minister of India by the Chief Minister of Assam, 2 Sep. 1971, ASA, CMS 127/71. See also Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
70. 'New Opportunities', *Times of India*, 25 Dec. 1971, 8.
71. N. K. Rustomji, Speech on Meghalaya - Arunachal Pradesh, 1973, NMML, N.K. R[ustomji papers], Speeches/ Writings by him, File 14.

72. Ministry of Defence Draft White Paper, 'Foreign Involvement in Insurgency in North Eastern India', 1 June 1972, [New Delhi] N[ational] A[rchives of] [India], H[ome] A[ffairs] NII/102/33/72; S. Loveraj, 13 Dec. 1972, NAI, HA NII/102/33/72.
73. Of course, concerns about Chinese infiltration persisted, and the fact that demarcating the border between India and Bangladesh soon ran into difficulties complicated this. See K. S. Puri, 'Foreign Involvement in Insurgency in North-Eastern India', 19 June 1972, NAI, HA NII/102/33/72; Ministry of External Affairs, Historical Division, 'Brief on Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Problems', 6 Oct. 1980, NAI, E[xternal] A[ffairs] HI/102/32/80.
74. The North-Eastern Council Act, 1971 (Act no. 84 of 1971), 30 Dec. 1971, available on India Code Text Base, indiacode.nic.in, accessed 10 Aug. 2020.
75. B. K. Nehru, 7 Nov. 1972, NMML, BKN, Speeches/Writings by him, File 10(III).
76. Ibid.
77. Suresh Kumar to D. S. Bhakhandra, 24 Oct. 1975, NAI, HA III-14013/3/75; Secretary, North Eastern Council, to Director (NE), Ministry of Home Affairs, 20 Oct. 1975, NAI HA III-14013/3/75.
78. Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, 44 and ch. 3.
79. Copy of the memorandum submitted by Assam MPs to the Prime Minister in connection with the proposed North-East Council, 10 Aug. 1971, ASA, CMS 127/71.
80. Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, p. 44.
81. Aftab Ahmed, 'Ethnicity and Insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region: A Study of the Crisis of Political Integration in Bangladesh', *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 31 (1993), 32–66; Sourabh Jyoti Sharma, 'Ethnicity and Insurgency in Myanmar: Profiling of Non-State Insurgent Groups', *World Affairs*, 13 (2014), 150–68; Elisabeth Leake, *The Defiant Border: The Afghan-Pakistan Borderlands in the Era of Decolonization, 1936-65* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ch. 5; Leake, 'At the Nation-State's Edge'.
82. Julie MacArthur, 'Decolonizing Sovereignty: States of Exception along the Kenya-Somali Frontier', *American Historical Review*, 124 (2019), 108–43, 138, 140.
83. See Udayon Misra, *India's North-East: Identity Movements, State, and Civil Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), sections C and D.
84. The grouping of villages and the forced resettlement of many Mizos so that the government could keep tabs on their whereabouts provides a particularly striking example of this. See, for example, R. Natarajan, 'Report on the Situation in Mizo District for the Month of March 1968', 9 Apr. 1968, ASA, CMS Nil/68; R. M. Agrawal to G. K. Bhanot, 13 July 1974, NAI, HA 13018/2/73-MZ; Ministry of Home Affairs, MZ Section, Extracts of Notes from F-I Section's File 4/1/68-F.I., 21 Jan. 1974, NAI, HA 13024/1/74-MZ.
85. See minutes of the meeting held at Gauhati on 20th March 1979, NAI, HA 13011/2/74-AP vol. II.
86. See Ministry of Home Affairs, 'Brief That May Be Considered for Use by the Union Home Minister for Press or for His Speech at Along', 26 Apr. 1979, NAI, HA 13011/2/74-AP vol. II.

Notes on contributor

Elisabeth Leake is Associate Professor of International History at the University of Leeds.

Funding

This work was supported by the Leverhulme Trust under Grant ECF-2013-214.

ORCID

Elisabeth Leake http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1277-580X