

Sikh Ethnic Uprising in India and Involvement of Foreign Powers

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“...the emergence of [ethnic] separatism is not generally a function of international relations. Yet, to grow in strength, a movement may require outside help.”¹

- Donald L. Horowitz

The ubiquitous phenomenon of ethnic uprisings, which is at the centre of the political and intellectual discourses, has emerged as a potent source of challenges to the cohesion of states and of international tensions.² South Asian states, which secured liberation from British colonialism, have faced a difficult task of state-formation and nation-building. Since independence, they have had to encounter countless upheavals in one form or the other. In the absence of sufficient resources, planning, infrastructure, strong democratic traditions and institutions and farsighted leadership, they have by and large, failed to fulfil and

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¹ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p. 272.

² Ibid, p. XI.

satisfy the desires, demands and aspirations of diverse ethnic groups, which they had promised during the struggle against colonialism. Further, differences between the various ethnic groups in terms of culture and history have not disappeared. Instead, these have persisted and become more intense with the passage of time.³ Illiteracy of the masses, iniquitous social structures, inherited colonial administrative structures and values, inexperienced bureaucracies and a populace fractured by the divisive policies of the colonial rulers did not help the ruling leaderships to dilute and diffuse the ethnic differences vis-à-vis the post-colonial project of nation-formation.⁴ Biased, discriminatory, assimilative and suppressive measures followed by the ruling elites of these states sharpened inherited differences, leading to further alienation of ethnic groups from the national mainstream. The non-accommodative attitude of the states, further, forced minority ethnic groups to take recourse to secessionist patterns, while reviewing their future within the existing territorial frameworks and engaging in acts of terror and violence.⁵ Violent and secessionist movements like those of the Nagas, Mizos, Kashmiris, Manipuris, Bodos, Assamese and Sikhs in India, of Baloch, Mohajirs and Pushtoons in Pakistan, and of the Tamils in Sri Lanka were and are the product of the non-accommodative and negative responses that have been adopted by respective states.

Ethnic groups involved in conflict have attempted to secure external support to advance their cause. They have established contacts with external powers and have attracted their support by adopting 'mixed' strategies, such as channelling the interests of

³ Samita G. Sabhlok, "Nationalism and Ethnicity and Nation State in South Asia," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.8, No. 3, 2002, p. 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵ Jeyaratnam Wilson, "The Politics of Ethnicity and Ethno-Nationalism in South Asia," *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 2, No..3, 1993, p. 332.

potential supporters in an ongoing conflict.⁶ For example, most of the ethnic groups involved in 'homeland struggles' have obtained support from some other states, especially those hostile to the state against whom the secessionist struggle has been directed.⁷

Based on instrumental reasons, foreign powers have offered:

...tangible support consisting of military and material aid access to transportation, media, communications and intelligence networks, and services rendered either within or outside the [ethno-] secessionist region.⁸

Foreign powers have also provided the secessionists/or ethnic rebels with politico-diplomatic support, including statements of concern support in international governmental organizations (IGOs), diplomatic pressure, publicity campaigns for ethnic rebels' causes, and diplomatic recognition.⁹ However, such involvement, especially of small states and regional powers, has been influenced by numerous factors, such as world public opinion, super powers' response, character of the ethnic conflicts at that time, and whether other actors are involved or not.¹⁰ However, foreign powers have not created a conflict where none existed; the causes that gave a secessionist colour to these ethnic uprisings, were internal. Nevertheless, foreign powers have helped them to grow in strength.¹¹

⁶ Astri Suhrke and Lala Garner Noble, "Introduction" in Astri Suhrke and Lala Garner Noble, eds., *Ethnic Conflicts in International Relations*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977, p. 5; Robin M. William Jr., *The Wars Within: People And States In Conflicts*, New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004, p. 126.

⁷ Wilson, "The Politics of Ethnicity," and Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups In Conflict*.

⁸ Rajat Ganguly, *Kin-State Intervention in Ethnic Conflicts: Lessons from South Asia*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998, p. 13.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 15; P. Sahadevan, "Internationalization of Ethnic Conflicts in South Asia: A Conceptual Enquiry", *International Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1998, pp. 317-24.

¹¹ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups In Conflict*.

Further, international conditions have created a setting in which ethnic demands are seen as timely and realistic.¹² In a number of cases, the actions, involvement and support of outside hostile states have caused disturbances in the regional and international systems and in certain instances have led to full-fledged wars between the state against which the struggle has been directed and the states which have provided material, diplomatic and moral support to the ethnic groups engaged in the struggle against a particular state.¹³ In a few instances, ethnic movements, after gaining foreign support, have become so strong and powerful that the states had no option but to negotiate with them to ensure their territorial unity and integrity. Such powerful movements have also forced some states to seek external support to curb such movements and secure their own survival. There are a few cases in which foreign involvement helped particular ethnic groups to secure an independent ethnic homeland, even at the cost of disintegration of the state against which the struggle had been launched. The most striking example to be cited in this context is the backing of the Bengali ethnic uprisings of East Pakistan by the Indian state, which led to the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of the new state of Bangladesh.

The involvement of foreign/external powers in ethnic movements has been determined by two factors: the strategic position of the countries as well as of the ethnic homeland for which the ethnic groups are fighting against their states; and, how close a relation exists among the ethnic groups engaged in the struggle and their potential supporter states.¹⁴ Certain foreign powers have also involved themselves in trans-border ethnic conflicts due to compulsions of their domestic politics. Some ethnic groups put pressure on their Governments to interfere in

¹² Ibid, p. 5.

¹³ Wilson, "The Politics of Ethnicity."

¹⁴ Sabhlok, "Nationalism and Ethnicity."

the on going ethnic conflict in which their co-ethnics are involved.¹⁵

In their decisions to support a particular ethnic movement, external forces have been guided and directed by a common propensity to consider the “enemies of one’s enemies as friends.”¹⁶ States that have hostile relations with neighbouring states have supported ethnic rebels to weaken and destabilize such hostile states for economic, political and military gains.¹⁷ In turn, to counter such interference and support, whenever the hostile or affected state has had the opportunity, it has also followed the same strategy of supporting the ethnic rebels of that supporter state.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the nature of foreign involvement and support to any ethnic movement is neither permanent nor dependable. It is vulnerable at several levels. As Horowitz observes:

Foreign support tends to come and go. In the life of any ethnic movement, there may be periods of no support, multiple sources of support, or dramatically shifting sources of support.¹⁹

The multiple international objectives of the states force them to keep the option of *quid pro quo* open while providing aid to an ethnic group engaged in a ‘homeland struggle’. On many occasions, states have abruptly reduced support in the midst of a movement and even, in certain cases, have reversed support to back the state against the same movement of which had initially received support.²⁰ For instance, keeping in view domestic compulsions, India initially provided support to the Liberation

¹⁵ Ganguly, *Kin-State Intervention in Ethnic Conflicts*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups In Conflict*, p. 273.

¹⁷ Abdul Aziz Said and Luiz R. Simmons, “The Ethnic Factors In World Politics”, in Abdul Aziz Said and Luiz R. Simmons, eds., *Ethnicity In An International Context*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1976, p. 26.

¹⁸ F.S. Northedge and M. D. Donelan, *International Disputes: the Political Aspects*, London: Europa Publications, 1971, p. 131.

¹⁹ Horowitz, p. 273.

²⁰ Ibid.

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the name of humanitarian aid, but subsequently sent a peace-keeping force to assist the Sri Lankan Government in suppressing that very group.

One of the most important and persistent aspects of the involvement of foreign powers in an ethnic movement is that they never explicitly acknowledge involvement, especially where this has a military nature. At the same time, however, ethnic rebels have sought to maintain deniability regarding the sources from where they secure arms, ammunition and other assistance. It is always the affected state that has raised the issue of foreign involvement.

In the case of Sikh ethnic uprising in Punjab, the north-western border State of India, it was the Indian state that raised the question of the 'foreign hand', especially of Pakistan.²¹ The state was of the view that Pakistan was involved in this conflict, as well as in the conflict in Assam, since 1972. Pakistan, in the early sixties, especially before the India-Pakistan war of 1965, when the Sikhs were agitating against the Indian state for a Punjabi-speaking State within the Indian Union, had encouraged them through daily radio broadcasts and had also assured the agitators of full Pakistani support.²² In the mid-sixties, the 'too little, too late' response of the Indian state in creating a truncated Punjabi-speaking State, followed by the ill-treatment and harassment of Sikhs during the Asian Games, large scale use of suppressive measures such as *Operation Blue Star* and *Operation Woodrose*, and the ethnic riots of 1984 against the Sikhs, totally alienated them from the national mainstream.²³ A small section of Sikh society opted for violence to establish a separate state of *Khalistan*. A number of militant groups, such as the *Khalistan*

²¹ Khuswant Singh, *A History of The Sikhs, Vol.2: 1839-1988*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 370.

²² *Ibid*, p. 303.

²³ 'Too Little, Too Late' means that the Indian state accepted the demand of a Punjabi-speaking State after a long period of eighteen years and even then many Punjabi-speaking areas were left out of it.

Commando Force (KCF), Khalistan Armed Force (KAF), Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan (BTKF) and Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF), were formed to wage an armed struggle against the Indian state and to create *Khalistan*. In 1986, an apex body of the Sikh militant groups, popularly known as the ‘Panthic Committee’, was established. The ‘Panthic Committee’ comprised of five members – Arur Singh, Dhanna Singh, Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, Gurbachan Singh Manochahal and Gurdev Singh Usmanwala. In April 1986, the Panthic Committee declared the formation of *Khalistan* from the Golden Temple Complex in Amritsar. The five members of the apex body called upon the entire ‘Sikh nation’ to be ready for all types of suffering and sacrifice. Further, they demanded political recognition for *Khalistan* from the international community, especially the USA, UK, Pakistan, China and Canada and also from Governments that were signatories to the Warsaw Pact. The ‘Panthic Committee’ also appealed to the member-states of the United Nations (UN) to grant recognition to *Khalistan*, and assistance for their struggle.²⁴ These developments provided a God-gifted opportunity for Pakistan and the ruling elite of that country to exploit the situation for their own national and strategic interests.

The Government of India raised the issue of Pakistani involvement in the Sikh uprising at various national as well as international platforms. In 1984 after *Operation Blue Star*, in its official document, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation*, the Government labelled the Sikh militant activities as “secessionist and anti-national” with a declared “objective of establishing an independent State for the Sikhs with external support.”²⁵ The Sikh militants were receiving different types of active support

²⁴ “Document of The Declaration of Khalistan”, *Sant Sipahi* (Punjabi), June 1986, pp. 25-28.

²⁵ Government of India, *White Paper on the Punjab Agitation*, New Delhi: Govt. of India Press, 1984, p. 1.

from certain foreign sources,²⁶ and, at that time, the Indian Government was of the view that some “powerful forces” were at work to undermine the economic and political strength of India. For this purpose, they had made Punjab, a ‘sensitive’ border state, the obvious target for subversion.²⁷ The Government of India also referred to the involvement of Sikh Diaspora organizations and disclosed certain details relating to their activities. Though it alleged the involvement of other “foreign powers”, it did not divulge any specific information in the “public interest.”²⁸ Even till date, the Government has not provided complete details regarding the involvement of foreign powers in the Sikh uprising.

Most studies, including some by scholars of international repute, have emphasised the internal dynamics of the problem, while ignoring the issue of Pakistani and foreign involvement in the Sikh uprising. For instance, Gurmit Singh,²⁹ Ajmer Singh,³⁰ Sangat Singh³¹ and Gurharpal Singh³² in their respective studies, *The History of Sikh Struggle, Vihvi Sadi Di Sikh Rajniti* (Sikh Politics in the Twentieth Century), *The Sikhs In History and Ethnic Conflicts In India: A Case Study of Punjab*, have made ‘*vitkre, davao ate julm di rajniti*’ (politics of discrimination, suppression and oppression) of the Indian state the main focus of their studies. Though Gurharpal Singh has mentioned various conspiracy theories, details are absent.³³ To a lesser extent, the same has been done by Cynthia Keppley Mahmood³⁴ in *Fighting*

²⁶ Ibid, p. 257.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gurmit Singh, *History of Sikh Struggles*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publications, 1991.

³⁰ Ajmer Singh, *Vihvi Sadi Di Sikh Rajniti* (Punjabi), Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2003.

³¹ Sangat Singh, *The Sikhs in History*, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2002.

³² Gurharpal Singh, *Ethnic Conflicts in India: A Case Study of Punjab*, London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

³³ Ibid, pp. 114-115.

³⁴ Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting For Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants. Mahmood has pointed out that help might have been received from outside, as the Khalistani militants would have been helped by Pakistan in the later states, “but the dynamic to be understood here is internal.”³⁵ According to her, “emphasizing the role of outside agencies... is a way of minimizing the seriousness of the challenge presented by Bhindranwale himself.”³⁶

Canadian Scholar Shinder Purewal, analysing the conflict within a Marxist framework, in *Sikh Ethnonationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, only discusses external involvement briefly, while concluding that Sikh ethno-nationalism was a “specific product of the capitalist mode of production.”³⁷

Harish K. Puri, Paramjit Singh Judge and Jagrup Singh Sekhon³⁸ have explored the ground realities of the Sikh militant movement in *Terrorism in Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality*. Indirectly, in a few words, they have accepted the Pakistani connection, as they have mentioned border-crossings by some top Sikh militant leaders like Wassan Singh Zaffarwal and Gurjit Singh.³⁹ However, their analysis throws little light on the external dynamics of the conflict.

Scholars like Darshan Singh Tatla,⁴⁰ Brian Keith Axel,⁴¹ Arthur Helweg⁴² and Therese Sue Gunawardane, along with

³⁵ Ibid, p. 80.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Shinder Purewal, *Sikh Ethnonationalism and Political Economy of Punjab*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 167.

³⁸ Harish K. Puri, Paramjit Singh Judge and Jagrup Singh Sekhon, *Terrorism In Punjab: Understanding Grassroots Reality*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publication, 1999.

³⁹ Ibid, p.50.

⁴⁰ Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*, London: UCL Press, 1999.

⁴¹ Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora"*, London: Duke University Press, 2001.

⁴² Arthur W. Helweg, “Sikh Politics in India: The Emigrant Factor”, in N. Gerald Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, eds., *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience Beyond Punjab*, New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1989, pp. 305-35.

many others have focused their attention on the Sikh Diaspora, while discussing the external dimensions. However, they have not even referred to the issue of foreign state involvement in any form. There are some scholars who are not prepared even to accept the reality of foreign involvement.⁴³

However, the question of foreign powers' involvement in the Sikh uprising is a complex issue and demands serious and wider attention. It is a fact that Sikh militants received moral and material support from Pakistan. The Pakistani ruling elite, intelligence services especially the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan Rangers, Pakistani media – both print and electronic – and some radical Islamic groups, for example, the Jamaat-e-Islami, provided varied assistance to the Sikh militants.⁴⁴

The aspect of alleged Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) involvement has also been mentioned. There are also many questions regarding the involvement of Pakistan, which require an objective appraisal. For example, what were the reasons behind the Pakistani involvement in the Sikh ethnic uprising? What kind of support did Pakistan provide, and what methods did it adopt? How did India react to the situation, and what preventive measures were adopted to check the Pakistani involvement? Further, what were the implications of Pakistani involvement for India as well as for relations between the two countries? In addition, what is the reality behind the controversy of CIA's involvement? The present article is a modest attempt to seek answers to these and related questions in a systematic way, using diverse sources.

⁴³ Reference is to those scholars who were closely associated with the Khalistan Movement and had supported it blindly.

⁴⁴ The term 'Pakistan' refers to the involvement of Pakistani ruling elite, Pakistan Rangers, Pakistani media, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and radical Islamic groups and political parties of Pakistan.

The Rationale behind Foreign Involvement

The Sikh ethnic uprising, which assumed a serious dimension throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s, received substantial foreign support, especially from Pakistan. The Indian Government had valid reasons to believe that ‘Sikh nationalists’ were receiving moral and material assistance from across the border, and the continuous supply of arms and ammunition along with training, shelter and support by Pakistan, was by and large obvious. The reasons why Pakistan aided and abetted the Sikhs in their movement against the Indian state, to establish a separate state of *Khalistan*, are not far to seek.

First, the Muslim elite who favoured the formation of Pakistan on the basis of the ‘Two-Nation Theory’, had mobilized the Muslim populace of diverse ethnic identities such as the Punjabis, Sindhis, Balochis and Pushtoons in their movement for Pakistan, to escape from the dominance of a hypothesised monster of post-colonial ‘Hindu India’. However, the formation of an Islamic state did not bring any respite to the ethnically diverse Muslim populations of Pakistan. People were deprived of even the most elementary human rights, and economic opportunities did not increase to the extent that was expected. Conflicts between Shias and Sunnis, and between the Mohajirs (migrants as a result of the Partition of India) and locals gradually became serious.⁴⁵ Further, in the absence of a common pre-colonial history and culture, the ‘Two-Nation Theory’ did not prove particularly effective in keeping the diverse Muslim ethnic groupings united. The ‘Six-Nation’ theory had challenged the basic foundations and the viability of the Islamic state. Therefore, even after the formation of a separate Islamic state, the construction of an external bogey and the threat of the ‘Hindu

⁴⁵ Satya Pal Dang, *Terrorism in Punjab*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2000, p. 61.

India monster', remained a compulsion of the domestic policy of the Muslim ruling elite in Pakistan. Irrespective of the fact whether democratic or despotic leaderships ruled Pakistan, the country remained steadfast in spearheading the 'hate campaign' against India. This was certainly a factor in provoking the Pakistani involvement in Sikh secessionism.⁴⁶

Further, Pakistan had not forgotten the humiliating defeat in the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, and the role played by India. It was India that had trained the 'Mukti Bahini' guerrillas and provided safe sanctuary to the leaders of the 'Bangladesh movement' on its territory. It had also engineered the surrender of the Pakistani armed forces and kept their prisoners of war in its detention camps. Further, the Shimla Agreement of 1972 had failed to sort out differences between the two countries. Under the circumstances, Pakistan was naturally looking for an opportunity to give the 'enemy India' a befitting reply.⁴⁷

Third, the breakup of Pakistan had disturbed the balance of power in South Asia, establishing an Indian hegemony in regional affairs. Consequently, as some Leftist scholars have argued, the disintegration of India was sought by Pakistan in order to restore the balance of power, and this provided the reason to support the Sikhs in their struggle for a separate sovereign state.⁴⁸

Fourth, Pakistan alleged that India had, through the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), actively engaged in creating disturbances in the Sindh, North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan. Some 'troubles' within India were thought necessary to counter this.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gopal Singh, *Politics of Sikh Homeland*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1994, p. 92 and Bhag Chand, *Politics of Violence And Terrorism in Punjab: 1978-92*, Shimla: Himachal Pradesh University, 1993, p. 183.

⁴⁷ D. P. Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1996, p. 269.

⁴⁸ The argument has been made numerous times by the Indian leftist scholars.

⁴⁹ V. D. Chopra, "US-Pak Collusion: The Punjab Theatre," in V.D. Chopra, et al, *Agony of Punjab*, New Delhi, Patriot Publishers, 1984, pp. 117-30.

Fifth, India became a nuclear power in 1974 and subsequently, Pakistan's efforts of achieving parity with India in the nuclear field had widened the chasm between the two countries. Pakistan was not in a position to match India's military might and take the risk of another conventional war. Thus, 'proxy war' or 'low intensity warfare' was adopted as the most appropriate weapon.⁵⁰ By supporting the Sikh militants, as Satya Pal Dang has argued, Pakistan had ambitions to cut Kashmir off from India and grab it. According to Dang, the movement was concentrated in the two border districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur, control over which could de-link Kashmir from India.⁵¹

Sixth, the US House Republican Research Committee's Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, headed by Bill McCollum, in its report entitled, 'The New Islamist International' argues that, by the late-1980s, the Sikhs were eager and ready to step up their militant campaign for their quest for self-determination or independence. The report mentions that a group of Sikh academicians and experts was preparing "a blueprint for a future independent Khalistan." The group had argued that "extremist terrorism" by the Sikh militants was building a popular awareness on the issue of a separate and sovereign Sikh state. Consequently, according to experts, a popular uprising was inevitable once the Sikhs acquired sufficient military capabilities. The report revealed, further, that Islamabad was eager to test the validity of this logic; hence, Pakistan's ruling elite increased its training and military support to the Sikh militants in Punjab.⁵²

⁵⁰ K. P. S. Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997, p. 17.

⁵¹ Satya Pal Dang had propounded the idea by referring a Pakistani Urdu book *Amritsar Was Burning-1947*. See, Dang, *Terrorism in Punjab*, pp. 151-2.

⁵² US House of Republican Committee's Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare, *Congressional Reports: Intelligence and Security: The New Islamist International*, February 1, 1993, pp. 37-51.

Finally, Pakistan was a member of Cold War military alliances, serving the interests of the United States. The military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, was widely perceived as a ‘puppet’ or ‘stooge’ of the United States, and certain scholars have argued, was working for the United States which, at that time, sought the destabilization and dismemberment of India, as a response to India’s tilt towards the Soviet Union and the ‘anti-American policies’ of the Indian state.⁵³

To sum up, since it is an Islamic state, Pakistan’s leadership has maintained a relationship of hostility with ‘Hindu India’. India’s role in Pakistan’s dismemberment and the creation of Bangladesh, its alleged interference in Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan, and its acquisition of nuclear capabilities had generated fear among Pakistan’s ruling elite and had widened the rivalry between the two states. The alienation of Sikh masses and Pakistan’s strategic interests encouraged it to provide support to the Sikh militancy in its struggle against the Indian state.

The Contours of Support

Due to its hostile relations and strategic interests, support and sponsorship of separatist and secessionist movements in India became an integral part of Pakistan’s national policy and diplomacy. Pakistan allegedly provided both moral and material aid to the Sikh ethnic uprising in India. As a part of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s strategy of ‘forward strategic depth’ and his efforts to take revenge for India’s involvement in Pakistan’s dismemberment, Islamabad had, since the 1970s, continuously provided shelter, training, finance and weapons to the Kashmiri,

⁵³ This argument has been made by Parliamentarians like Basudeb Acharya, Geeta Mukherjee, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, and Mool Chand Daga in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) on different occasions.

Sikh and other secessionist movements in India.⁵⁴ It boosted the morale of the Sikh militants by assuring full support and projecting huge propaganda through radio, television and newspapers in support of the Sikh cause against the Indian state. This campaign commenced with the publication of statements by Sikh leaders regarding the ‘discrimination, deprivation and suppression’ of the Sikhs in India, and subsequently propagating the formation of the so-called Government of Khalistan in exile, in *Jung* and *Watan*, two Urdu dailies patronized by the Government of Pakistan.⁵⁵

On the day that Indian armed forces launched *Operation Blue Star* against the Sikh militants entrenched in the Golden Temple Complex at Amritsar, Pakistan Television telecast highly inflammatory excerpts of the speeches of militant Sikh leader, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale. The ‘revolt of the Sikhs’ and the ‘global’ Khalsa protest in the aftermath of the storming of the Golden Temple dominated headlines in the Pakistani media and evoked diverse comments from various leaders regarding the Sikh uprising in the sensitive north-western border state of India.⁵⁶ The Pakistani newspaper, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, reported that the Indian army had shot down many Sikhs trying to cross over to Pakistan, adding that, if anyone dared to give food and water to the injured Sikhs, they would be shot dead.⁵⁷ The Sikh religious centres located in Pakistan were also used by the Pakistan Government and Sikh militants for anti-India propaganda. There are more than 250 Sikh Gurudwaras in Pakistan, among which six have historical significance, including the Nanakana Sahib Gurdwara.⁵⁸ Sikh devotees from India visit these shrines four

⁵⁴ US House of Republican Committee’s Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare.

⁵⁵ *Indian Express*, June 20, 1984.

⁵⁶ A.T. Chaudhary, “Pakistan Trading on Punjab”, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, June 26, 1984.

⁵⁷ *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, June 26, 1984.

⁵⁸ Soon after the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, the Archaeological Department of Pakistan had conducted a survey of Sikh

times a year on the occasion of Baisakhi, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjun Dev and the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev. Thus, in addition to the use of electronic and print media for the dissemination of hostile propaganda against India, members of Indian Sikh *Jathas* (groups) who visited Pakistan to pay obeisance at the various Sikh Shrines in Pakistan were also used to fan secessionist feelings. In this context, *The Times of India* reported that Pakistan intelligence and security staff in civilian clothes mixed in with the members of *Jathas* and discussed the Khalistan movement in Punjab and also asked them to intensify the movement, assuring all possible support from Pakistan.⁵⁹

In order to control and promote the Khalistan movement, the Pakistan Government, in 1999, appointed Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Javed Nasir, who had served as the Chief of the ISI between 1981 and 1988, as the Chairman of a newly formed Pakistan Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (PGPC, the supreme body responsible for the administration of Sikh shrines in Pakistan).⁶⁰ Significantly, after his appointment, in an interview to the Urdu daily *Jung*, Nasir had reiterated his resolve to revive the Sikh militancy in Punjab by saying that he stood by the goal of *Khalistan* and would work to that end as the PGPC Chief.⁶¹

Gurdwaras. It had listed as many as 130 important historical Gurdwaras in Pakistan. Among these, 28 Gurudwaras were built in the sacred memory of Guru Nanak Dev. Gurudwara Janam Asthan Guru Ram Das, Lahore marks the memory of the fourth Guru Sri Ram Das. Eight Gurdwaras, including Gurudwara Budha Ka Awa, Lahore, Samadhi of Guru Arjun Dev, and Gurudwara Haft Madar, Shiekhpora, commemorate the fifth Guru, Sri Arjun Dev. Twelve Gurdwaras were built in the memory of the sixth Guru, Sri Hargobind Sahib. For details see, Khan Mohammad Waliullah, *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan*, Islamabad: Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan, 1962.

⁵⁹ *The Times of India*, New Delhi, June 27, 1984.

⁶⁰ Ajay Bhardwaj, "Ex-ISI Chief To Head Pak Gurdwara Panel", *Times of India*, April 27, 1999, p. 4.

⁶¹ *Jung*, April 23, 1999.

Pakistan had also used Sikhs from other countries, who were stationed in Pakistan permanently.⁶² Further, whenever militant Sikh leaders like Ganga Singh Dhillon, Jagjit Singh Chauhan and Gurmit Singh Aulakh, living in the United Kingdom and the United States, visited Nanakana Sahib, Pakistan allowed them to engage in anti-India activities, raise extremist slogans and organize conferences for the propagation of *Khalistan*.⁶³ Indeed, long before this, when Chauhan had visited Pakistan in 1971, the then military ruler, Yahya Khan, had lionized him as the 'Father of the Sikh Nation'. Similarly, in 1977 when General Zia-ul-Haq was in power, he cultivated and promoted Ganga Singh of the Nankana Sahib Foundation, Washington.⁶⁴

Though, Pakistan was involved in Punjab since 1971, it secured a real opportunity to promote the Sikh ethnic uprising only in June 1984.⁶⁵ A number of Sikh militants had escaped across the border to Pakistan before and immediately after *Operation Blue Star*, to avoid arrest by Indian security forces. Others escaped over subsequent months when the Armed Forces launched *Operation Woodrose* to flush out suspected hardliners. Some of the Sikh youth who crossed over to Pakistan were motivated and inspired by the mischievous imputation that Bhindranwale was alive in Pakistan.

Many leaders of Sikh militant organizations, e.g., Bhai Kanwar Singh of the Akal Federation, Balbir Singh Sandhu of the National Council of Khalistan, Sukhdev Singh Dossabal and Wadhawa Singh of the Babbar Khalsa, Atinder Pal Singh of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and Gurjit Singh of Damdami Taksal Jatha Bhindranwale, had crossed over to Pakistan even before *Operation Blue Star*. They established a

⁶² Chopra, et. al, *Agony of Punjab*, pp. 124-5.

⁶³ Sharma, *The Punjab Story*, pp. 275-6

⁶⁴ Rajiv Sharma, "War Against India: The ISI'S Nefarious Role", *Tribune*, December 2001, p. 1.

⁶⁵ The issue of Pakistan's involvement since 1972 was raised many times by the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

good rapport with the authorities there and also obtained facilities to accommodate the Sikh youth and to establish and organize training camps for them on Pakistani territory.⁶⁶ Prior to 1984, the local population in Pakistan also accommodated the Sikh youth. Scottish Anthropologist Joyce Pettigrew noted that Sikh militants gained a lot of sympathy within Pakistan for their 'fight against the Hindus'. For instance, the local Pakistani population had donated their trucks to the Sikh militants and allowed their homes to be used for storing weapons.⁶⁷ However, the involvement of the Pakistani masses was limited to the people of border areas and had its own limitations. It was principally sympathetic rather than instrumental.

Pakistani authorities provided safe haven to the Sikh youth in the jails at Kotlakhpat and Faisalabad in the initial stages. Gradually, a number of camps were established in the Sialkot Cantonment, Mianwali, Peshawar, Attock, Shahian Da Banga, Dalla Kothi, Changamanga Rest House, Suleiman Headworks near Fortabas Mandi, Lahore Barracks, Lala Musa Jalalpur and Sheikhpura.⁶⁸ Sikhs who crossed the border from India were kept in these camps. Some camps were also reportedly established in other places, including a Gurudwara of Emnabad in district Gujranwala, Rahim Yar Khan near the Rajasthan border, Atta Fort and Daud Fort. These camps were established to train Sikh militants in espionage and 'black propaganda' against the Indian state.⁶⁹

Besides these camps, all the important leaders of militant Sikh organizations, including Gurjit Singh, Kanwar Singh, Sukhdev Singh and Atinder Pal Singh were kept in big bungalows

⁶⁶ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*.

⁶⁷ Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab: The Unheard Voices of the State and Guerrilla Violence*, London: Zed Books, 1995.

⁶⁸ "Pakistan's support to Sikh Militants", www.satp.org/satportgtp/countries/india/document/papers/Pakistan_report/Annex_1.htm.

⁶⁹ *Indian Express*, June 27, 1984; "ISI Special Camps For Militants", *Times of India*, April 13, 1993.

near Lahore, and in the official guesthouses at Kohat, Islamabad, Qasur and Rawalpindi. A few of them were provided independent houses with telephone, fax and other communication facilities.⁷⁰ The main function of these leaders was to encourage and motivate Sikh youth to undertake training for violent and militant activities in India. For this purpose, these leaders used to visit the Kotlakhpat, Faisalabad, Sialkot and other training camps to spot potential trainees and deliver motivational lectures, talks and discussions.⁷¹ Indeed, Pakistan's ISI had formed a united front, mainly comprising of fringe extremist Sikh militant organizations – Khalistan Armed Force (KAF), the KCF, BKI and Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF). Establishment of a joint front by the Sikh militant organizations was a condition for an increased flow of military support from Pakistan.⁷²

State sources and apprehended Sikh militants provide different accounts of the number of training camps and their location, of trainees, training curricula and duration. In the beginning, there were reportedly only five training camps located at Kasur, Lahore, Sialkot, Faisalabad and Kotlakhpat. Among these, Lahore and Sialkot were the main training camps. In both these cities, small safe houses were also used as training and indoctrinating centres. Training was also imparted to Sikh militants in the military college at Abbotabad in batches of 200 to 300 trainees.⁷³ However, as the number of the Sikh youth increased, the number of training camps was also augmented. According to a report in December 1984, approximately 5,000 militants were being trained in 12 camps.⁷⁴ In May 1988, eleven training camps were allegedly operational on Pakistani soil.⁷⁵ In

⁷⁰ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 280.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 270.

⁷² US House of Republican Committee's Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare.

⁷³ *Times of India*, June 27, 1984.

⁷⁴ *Punjab Kesari*, Chandigarh, December 23, 1984.

⁷⁵ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 270.

September 1993, the US House Republican Research Committee's Task Force On Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare had reported that there were "some 6 camps in greater Lahore, and some 20 camps in the general Lahore area"⁷⁶ alone, where Sikhs, Kashmiris and other people who indulged in violent militant activities in India were receiving training.

Each militant Sikh organization had its own training centre. Besides, Sikh militants had also been trained alongside the *mujahideen* groups from Afghanistan, in training camps located in both Pakistan and the border areas of Afghanistan. For instance, during a Soviet raid on an Afghan *mujahideen* training camp, numerous Sikh trainees of the Dal Khalsa were killed.⁷⁷ This pattern was further confirmed in 1992 during the interrogation of some Sikh militants arrested by the Indian security forces, who revealed that some *mujahideen* imparted training to the Sikh militants. Sikh groups were attached with the *mujahideen* for a 22-day training programme near the Afghan border. The training included handling of General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG), automatic weapons like AK-47 and AK-56 rifles, the lobbing of hand grenades and laying of mines.⁷⁸ In most of the other camps as well, the Sikh trainees were provided regular training in sophisticated weapons, chemicals and improvised high explosive devices. In his book *The Punjab Story*, D.P. Sharma, a high ranking official of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), on the basis of first hand information, has provided a detail account of training and other activities of Sikh militants in Pakistan. Regarding the training procedure, he writes that, apart from the leaders of Sikh militant organizations:

⁷⁶ US House of Republican Committee's Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare.

⁷⁷ Prashant Dikshit, "Weaponisation of Societies; Selected Region Studies on Processes and Impact of Proliferation of Small Arms and Minor Weapons", *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, Vol. 18, No.7, 1995, pp. 903-4.

⁷⁸ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 274.

... only the very trusted and motivated activists of various groups were imparted such training. Before selecting persons for training, their *bona fides* and antecedents were carefully verified, screened, tested and checked and rechecked and their calibre and ability was assessed. Dedicated youth, especially those known to the militant leaders, were segregated and housed separately. Persons not found suitable were pushed back into India. Even such discarded persons were thoroughly brainwashed against Hindus and were told to foment communal disturbances.⁷⁹

It is obvious that Pakistani officials were very particular in their selection of trainees among the Sikh youth. These precautions were taken, perhaps, to ensure that there were no agents of the Indian state among the youth, and to assess whether the selected candidates could serve the purpose or not.

After taking these necessary precautions, selected persons were trained in using various types of modern weaponry. The training curriculum ranged from indoctrination against the Hindu majority to the handling of firearms like .455 and .38 bore revolvers and pistols, stenguns, Kalashnikov AK-47 rifles, its Chinese variant Type-56, self-loading rifles (SLRs), .303 rifles, etc. Furthermore, training also included preparation of improvised explosive devices, fabrication of timed bombs, use of chemicals and low and high explosives. During the training, leaders of Pakistan-based militant Sikh organizations undertook motivational lectures, talks and discussions with the trainees. Some selected militants were even imparted guerrilla training and advanced training in the use of improvised explosive devices, including remote controlled devices.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 270.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 271.

The period of training ranged from two days to three months and was part of a strategy to keep the Sikh youth in jails from nine to eighteen months as a garb for their specialized and intensive training. During interrogation, Sarabjit Singh, one of the Sikh youth who had attended the training programme, gave a clear picture of the basic training schedule and curriculum followed in training camps in 1985: there was a six-day training programme in which different subjects of teaching were included. Among them, operation and handling of weapons like revolvers, pistols and stenguns, from different positions, and use of chemicals and high explosives, were prominent. Trainees were also lectured about some of the targets against which plastic explosives could be used effectively. In such elaborations, the teaching of destruction of public property, specifically, railway lines, transformers, official buildings and houses, bridges, Police and Army convoys and vehicles were included.

This information was entirely consistent with the ground realities in Punjab and with the patterns of the use of weapons and other militant activities in the Indian State. For example, stenguns, which were an integral part of the training programme, were used by the Sikh militants on a large scale at this stage.⁸¹

After the daily training schedule, minor tasks were assigned by Pakistani handlers to unverified, unsponsored, untested and lesser-motivated Sikh youth. However, major responsibilities were reserved for those who had the full trust and confidence of the militant Sikh leaders based in Pakistan.⁸² The main tasks assigned were the engineering of communal riots and violence between Hindus and Sikhs, killing of politicians, destruction of temples and pilgrimages, liquidation of 'collaborators' and 'traitors' to the 'Sikh nation', subversion of the Army by infiltrating into its ranks, luring serving Sikh Army personnel to

⁸¹ Buta Ram, *Kale Dinan Di Dastan* (Punjabi), Jalandhar: Kuknus Prakashan, 2002, pp. 11-12.

⁸² Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*.

provide information regarding the deployment and movement of the Indian armed forces, arranging safe shelters for lodging Sikh militants and storing firearms in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Punjab.⁸³

Sabotage of vital buildings and installations like the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, creation of guerrilla and political cells and winning over of ideologues to propagate the Sikh cause were other tasks assigned by Pakistan's Field Intelligence Unit (FIU) and militant Sikh leaders to their trained cadres. This information is confirmed by various militant Sikh leaders who had crossed over to Pakistan and were later arrested by the Indian security forces after their return. Thus, Bhai Amrik Singh, then the Working President of the Akal Federation, and Wassan Singh Zaffarwal, a member of the 'Panthic Committee', had crossed over to Pakistan along with 100 Sikh youth. Bhai Amrik Singh was subsequently arrested in 1986 by the Indian security forces and, during interrogation, revealed that Sakif Sufi, a Pakistani intelligence officer, was imparting training to the Sikh youth in the Dalla Kothi camp. He trained Sikh militants in the preparation and handling of explosives and their use to destroy railway lines, bridges, oil tankers and power houses. In 1987, Bhai Anokh Singh, a leader of the Babbar Khalsa, disclosed after his arrest that he and Sukhdev Singh Dossupal, then the Chief of Babbar Khalsa, crossed the border with the help of Pakistani Rangers in the Ferozepur Sector. There, Pakistani intelligence officers trained them in the preparation of explosive devices. Anokh Singh and a few others fully utilized this training in the preparation of transistor bombs that were planted extensively in Delhi in June 1985.⁸⁴

In addition to the training, to realize and fulfil their assigned tasks, planning and strategies, funds and weapons, were also

⁸³ Jagbani, October 21, 1984.

⁸⁴ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, pp. 273-4.

required by the militants. Pakistan provided the Sikh leaders living on its territory with funds and weapons, and helped them chalk out their plans. As Bhai Amrik Singh disclosed after his arrest, Pakistan helped them chalk out strategies to strengthen the Sikh uprising in India. For this purpose, regular meetings were held at the Faisalabad jail in which Pakistani intelligence officers, 'Malik', 'Bhatti' and 'Asif' participated actively.⁸⁵

Pakistan not only facilitated the Sikh youth in training and planning, but also in infiltration back into India to bring their strategy to its logical culmination. A group of 500 Sikh militants, for instance, infiltrated into the Punjab in December 1984 alone, after completing their three month training in Pakistan.⁸⁶ A number of intelligence officers and Pakistani Rangers were involved in this task to provide assistance to the Sikh militants. Similarly, in 1986, one Pakistani Intelligence Officer, 'Malik', infiltrated 12 teams of Sikh militants comprising more than 100 trained youth, into Indian Punjab. During the infiltration process, in most cases, Pakistani Rangers provided covering fire to facilitate the border crossing.

Sikh militants infiltrated into Punjab from various points in Jammu, Rajasthan and Punjab, to carry out terrorist operations. These points included Hira Nagar in the Kathua District of Jammu, Bassaobarwan Sector in the Gurdaspur District, Khemkaran and Dull posts in Amritsar District, the Memdot Sector in Ferozepur District and Ganganagar in the State of Rajasthan.⁸⁷ The Indian Government reported infiltration from these points on many occasions, as did the Indian media. For example, on June 29, 1984, it was reported that a group of 30 Sikh militants were arrested by the security forces in the Ganganagar District while trying to cross over from Pakistan.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 272.

⁸⁶ *Punjab Kesari*, December 23, 1984.

⁸⁷ *Indian Express*, June 22, 1984.

⁸⁸ *Times of India*, June 30, 1984.

Most of the sophisticated weapons and expertly crafted explosive devices that were used by the Sikh militants were smuggled from Pakistan. The Pakistani military adopted a very liberal approach towards the Sikh militants. Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, the two *BBC* correspondents in India, noted that, “arms were regularly smuggled across the border, and... more than likely... President Zia turned a blinder eye... he did not object to Bhindranwale’s terrorists crossing the border.”⁸⁹ It appears that the Sikh militants freely crossed the border into Pakistan and secured weapons from diverse official and non-official sources, certainly without any hindrance by, and with possible facilitation from, the Pakistani authorities. According to Human Rights Watch, available evidence suggested that most of the weapons obtained by Sikh and Kashmiri militants came from three sources inside Pakistan:⁹⁰

1. The arms bazaar of the NWFP – a vast black market for weapons;
2. Members of the ISI operating either on their own or with the tacit or explicit complicity of the Government of Pakistan and;
3. Afghan *mujahideen*.

Most of the weapons acquired from these sources were ‘siphoned off’ from US arms transfers to the Afghan *mujahideen* fighting against the Soviet Forces. In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US had established a secret arms supply, generally known as ‘Afghan pipeline’, to arm the Afghan *mujahideen* resistance. However, in order to conceal US involvement, the CIA exercised little oversight over the workings of the pipeline and had imposed virtually no effective controls.

⁸⁹ Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi’s Last Battle*, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985, p. 212.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “India: Arms and Abuses in Indian Punjab and Kashmir”, *Human Rights Watch Project*, Vol. 6, No. 10, September 1994, pp. 22-41; Human Right Watch, “Sources of Weapons for Militants in Punjab and Kashmir,” www.hrg.org/campaigns/kashmir/1994-02.htm.

The CIA was, in fact, merely a “supplier” of weapons from different sources. On the other hand, its ally the ISI was the “intermediary and distributor.”⁹¹ As soon as the arms arrived in Pakistan, these came under the control of the ISI, which was solely responsible for their movement, allocation and distribution among the Afghan *mujahideen*. Both the CIA and the ISI kept no records of the total numbers of weapons that had been transferred through the Afghan pipeline. The ISI also allowed a proportion of these weapons to be siphoned off into other theatres, and this included the Sikh militancy in Indian Punjab. Further, some Afghan *mujahideen* sold their weapons to raise cash for field supplies or for personal gains. Massive quantities of weapons siphoned out of the Afghan pipeline were found in the NWFP arms’ bazaars in Pakistan and were available to any purchaser. Large numbers of the pipeline arms available in these markets eventually reached the Sikh militants. Some of the Sikh militants, especially those from the Dal Khalsa, also directly received weapons from the Afghan *mujahideen*.⁹²

The NWFP is a remote and insecure province within Pakistan, where the ‘gun culture’ is an integral part of the daily life of the people. Arms are available easily throughout the region and frontier towns such as Darra Adam Khel, Miranshah and Landi Kotal are notorious sources of a wide range of weaponry. The weapons for sale in Pakistan’s arms’ bazaars were of four categories:⁹³

1. Weapons acquired from the Afghan pipeline;
2. Soviet stocks captured during the Afghan war;
3. Locally produced arms and;
4. Arms that arrived through miscellaneous routes such as the Middle East or Southeast Asia.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Sikh and Kashmiri militants acquired and used all four categories of weapons. Sometimes, these were obtained from the black market and at other times, from the ISI, from Pakistani weapons' smugglers and from Afghan *mujahideen*. The ISI funded the Sikh militants, along with Kashmiris and Afghan fighters. The CIA in its report, *Heroin In Pakistan: Sowing the Wind*, released in 1993, disclosed that Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's brother-in-law, Sohail Zia Butt, Asham Butt, Haji Iqbal Butt, Chaudhary Shaukat Ali Bhati, Muhammad Ayub Khan alias Haji Ayub Zakha Khel, and a number of ISI officials were involved in heroin smuggling. The ISI had reportedly "used heroin profits to fund the Kashmiri 'freedom fighters' in Kashmir and the Sikh secessionists."

Sikh militants also received financial and weaponry assistance from their co-ethnics based in Canada, USA and the United Kingdom. Talwinder Singh Babbar, for instance, supplied arms and ammunition worth USD 20 million to Sikh militants in Pakistan, from Canada.⁹⁴ Similarly, Mohan Inder Singh a Sikh militant associated with the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), Canada, who was arrested by the Indian security forces on January 5, 1987, sent a consignment of arms worth USD 250,000 under the guidance of Satinderpal Singh Gill, for transshipment to Sikh militants in Punjab.⁹⁵ In brief, it is evident that Sikh militants acquired weapons from the ISI, the black market and the Afghan *mujahideen*, as well as from certain co-ethnic Diaspora organizations based in Canada, UK and USA. Nevertheless, these weapons were all smuggled to Punjab with the help of the ISI, Pakistan Rangers and other Pakistani officials. In the combined operations conducted by the Indian security forces, a huge arsenal of weapons and explosives bearing

⁹⁴ "Terrorist Training Camps in Pakistan & Revelations by Terrorists: Indian and Foreign Sources", Strategic Affairs-Special Report, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2001, www.stratmag.com/issue2 Nov-1/kargil.htm.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Pakistani and Chinese markings was captured.⁹⁶ The lists of arms recoveries during the period of March-October, 1988 (See Table 1) and from 1986 to 1993 (See Table 2) clearly highlight the phenomenon and scale of arms smuggling from Pakistan.

In the initial stages of the Sikh uprising, on the basis of the interrogation of certain Sikh militants, Birbal Nath, a former Director General of the Border Security Force, had reported two principal routes of arms' smuggling along the International Border with Pakistan. The first concentration was the Suratgarh-Henumangarh areas of Rajasthan across a railway track, which marked the border between India and Pakistan. These areas were ideally suited for smuggling, with the desert extending across more than eight kilometres on either side of the border. The second concentration was Patti, Khemkaran and Khalra in Amritsar District and a village to the east of Lahore in Pakistan.⁹⁷

In 1992, Indian security forces identified another locus for the smuggling of arms, the Satalpur *Taluka* in the Banaskantha District of the State of Gujarat. Pakistani intelligence agencies had cultivated a large number of local agents in these areas for arms transfers and to provide sanctuary to Sikh militants, and also to help them cross over into India and back to Pakistan.⁹⁸ In the beginning, arms and ammunition were passed in sealed crates across the border and were carried from Rajasthan, primarily by train, to Punjab. However, as the Sikh uprising became more vigorous, militants developed different delivery methods for different places.⁹⁹

Large quantities of weapons were smuggled into Punjab during General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. Zia, in a telephonic interview to *India Today*, admitted the possibility of an arms' flow into Indian territory from his country, through smugglers and

⁹⁶ Dikshit, "Weaponisation of Societies."

⁹⁷ *Times of India*, June 20, 1984, June 22, 1984; *Indian Express*, June 22, 1984.

⁹⁸ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 281.

⁹⁹ *Indian Express*, June 29, 1984.

other sources, over a period of time. He stated that “it may be possible because these days gunrunning between Pakistan and India is as common as anywhere in the world.”¹⁰⁰ However, he denied his Government’s involvement: “We neither tried nor have thought of interfering in the internal affairs of India. Allegations of Pakistani involvement are wrong, baseless and false.”¹⁰¹ For the General, arms smuggling across the border was a routine affair, and he argued that:

A few months ago we had detected and hauled up a gang of smugglers caught in the process of smuggling gold and weapons to Pakistan from India. If this can take place obviously the converse too can happen.¹⁰²

Though General Zia had tactically denied Pakistan’s involvement in the Sikh uprising, most of the arms dealers in Darra Adam Khel, a tribal area of Pakistan near the Afghan border, were dependent on his Government for the survival and growth of their business.¹⁰³ Most of the weapons for Sikh militants were bought from these merchants and Sikh militant organizations were thankful to General Zia for his support. This became clear in 1985, through a letter written by the National Council of Khalistan to President Zia-ul-Haq, which stated explicitly:

Hindu Government is crushing the Sikhs, but Sikh fighters are facing this boldly. Sikhs in general are helping in this fight, but we are thankful to you for the help given to us in the shape of weapons, ammunition, training and shelter.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Shekhar Gupta, “Darra Adam Khel: Arms for the Asking,” *India Today*, New Delhi July 31, 1989 as cited in Paul Wallace and N.G. Barrier, “International Dimensions of Sikh Political Violence”, in Gurnam Singh ed., *Ethno-Nationalism and the Emerging World [Dis] Order*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publications, 2002, pp. 293-4.

After General Zia's death and the subsequent emergence of a democratic set up in Pakistan, the flow of arms and ammunition from across the border declined marginally, but was not stopped. In August 1999, for instance, Charanjit Singh alias Sukha of the KCF, reportedly came across the border from Pakistan with explosives and weapons.¹⁰⁵ On June 17, 1999, the Punjab Police stopped him on a scooter carrying 16 packets of RDX weighing about eight kilograms, 10 electronic detonators, non-electronic detonators, two plastic caps, two pencil bombs and one roll of tape. After his interrogation, it was found that these weapons were sent from Pakistan.¹⁰⁶ Further, police also arrested two human bombs with 10 kilograms RDX in Batala and Gurdaspur on September 20, 1999.¹⁰⁷ Sources revealed that between the period of January and mid-September 1999, Punjab Police seized 124 kilograms of RDX, five AK-series rifles, 47 pistols and revolvers, stenguns, three rocket launchers and 12 bombs. All these instruments of destruction were brought from Pakistan.¹⁰⁸ On October 15, 2004, Punjab Police arrested two ISI agents, Hanif and Shakrula. The former was closely linked with Neeta, Chief of the Khalistan Zindabad Force, and was engaged in smuggling of arms and ammunition across the Punjab border. On the basis of information provided by Hanif and Shakrula, the Punjab Police arrested three Sikh militants from Gurdaspur District and recovered a huge cache of arms, including 15 kilograms of RDX, some AK-47 rifles, hand grenades, pistols and cartridges, as well as fake currency.¹⁰⁹

A majority of reports confirm that Pakistan was the principal source of arms and ammunition for Sikh militants in India. The Field Intelligence Unit (FIU) and ISI helped and encouraged the

¹⁰⁵ *The Economist*, July 9, 1990.

¹⁰⁶ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁷ *Tribune*, November 30, 1999.

¹⁰⁸ *Tribune*, June 18, 1999.

¹⁰⁹ *Tribune*, September 20, 1999.

Sikh militants in their subversive and secessionist uprising in Punjab and in J&K. Unsuccessful attempts to assassinate the Indian Ambassador to Romania, J.F. Ribeiro, a former Director General of the Punjab Police, and the abduction of the Romanian Charge d’Affairs, Liviu Radu, from Delhi, were organized by Sikh militants under the guidance of the ISI.¹¹⁰ Various reports demonstrate clearly that the ISI and FIU were involved in the Sikh uprising since 1984, and they facilitated the Sikh militants with training, guidance and arms. The agents of these agencies regularly escorted militants across the border and provided safe havens for their shelter and dumps for weapons and explosives. Many of the Sikh militants from India and abroad, including members of the ‘Panthic Committee’, were settled permanently in Pakistan. Further, it was again the ISI that, after the announcement of elections in Punjab in June 1991, issued specific instructions to the militant Sikh leaders to unleash a reign of terror by escalating violence and carrying out assassinations of candidates, irrespective of their party affiliation. Consequently, Sikh militants killed a number of candidates. The same strategy was repeated in the Punjab legislative elections of February 1992. The decision to boycott the elections in 1992 was worked out in December 1991 at a meeting between the ISI and chiefs of the militant Sikh organizations, including Wadhawa Singh of the BKI, Paramjit Singh Panjwar of the KCF-Panjwar, Daljit Singh Bittoo of the Sikh Students Federation (SSF-Bittoo) and Wassan Singh Zaffarwal of the KCF-Wassan Singh. Paramjit Singh Panjwar contacted the different Akali factions and the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF-M) to force them to boycott the elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly.¹¹¹

In May 1992, the Punjab Police disclosed that Pakistan was trying to forge an understanding between Sikh and Kashmiri

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Tribune*, October 16, 2004.

militants and had moved to install a private radio station in Lahore to broadcast programmes for these target groups.¹¹² Pakistani intelligence agencies were, consequently, not limited to spearheading the Sikh ethnic violence in Punjab, and their tasks varied from securing hard intelligence on matters of strategic importance, like military secrets, locations of armed forces and sensitive installations, to the exploitation of religious, ethnic and cultural difference among diverse sections of the Indian population. Data on Pakistani spies arrested in India from 1986 to 1989 clearly establishes the extent to which Pakistani agencies were interested and involved in the Sikh ethnic uprisings, support to other insurgent movements, and the provocation of communal violence in India (see Table 3).

Sikh militants were also guided, motivated, funded and weaponized by the radical Islamist groups and political parties of Pakistan. The Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) was at the forefront in this context. The JeI had established close links with the leaders of Sikh militant organizations and had helped them in training, fund-raising and acquisition of weapons from the NWFP, forming a nexus through the ISI with the Sikh militants.¹¹³ On various occasions, the JeI pressurized Pakistani officials to accommodate Sikh militants on diverse issues. Dr. Sohan Singh, one of the prominent Sikh militant leaders, disclosed during his interrogation that when he was living in Pakistan along with other Sikh militants, they had not been allowed to meet with anybody by the officials. However, it was the JeI that intervened and helped them organize meetings with other individuals and groups. On one occasion, they were able to invite four persons, Gurcharan Singh Dhillon, Dr. Surinder Singh Grewal, Amarjit Singh and one more

¹¹² Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, p. 279.

¹¹³ Sheela Bhatt, "The Rediff Special: Chronicle of Terrorism Now Told," www.rediff.com; B. Raman, "Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami: The Hidden Agenda," South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 76, <http://www.saag.org/papers/paper76.html>.

member of the World Sikh Organization (WSO), Canada, with help provided by the JeI. While meeting these four persons, Dr. Sohan Singh and others had reportedly discussed the issue of establishing a radio station for Khalistanis at Lahore and funds required for this.¹¹⁴ Further, on November 17, 2000, the JeI organized a separate reception for the Sikh militants of the BKI at its headquarters in Mansoor, where the Jamaat chief, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, exhorted BKI cadres to revive militancy in Punjab.¹¹⁵ In Pakistan, besides the JeI, Sikh militants also had close links with the Afghan *mujahideen* groups, primarily from Gulbuddin Hekmatiyar's Hizb-i-Islami.

There was also some coordination between Sikh militants and the Islamist groups in J&K.¹¹⁶ This was allegedly the result of a 'long-term' programme called 'K-2'. The 'K-2' programme was the brainchild of Brigadier (Retd.) Imtiaz of the ISI. Named after Pakistan's highest mountain and indicating the objectives of its strategy, "Kashmir-Khalistan,"¹¹⁷ it was launched to unify and coordinate the Sikh and Kashmiri militants under a single umbrella so that they could intensify acts of violence in Punjab and J&K.¹¹⁸

Some scholars, such as V.D. Chopra, argue that Pakistan was interested in India's disintegration. However, despite the fact of its moral and material support to the Sikh uprising, Pakistan's role was instrumental in nature, and its agencies were never directly involved in the secessionist movement, as India had done in East Pakistan in 1971 to liberate Bangladesh. Pakistan was interested in seeing a disturbed India vis-à-vis the Sikh uprising and not a disintegrated India vis-à-vis an independent Sikh state.

¹¹⁴ Excerpts from the disclosures by Dr. Sohan Singh, published in, "Terrorist Training Camps in Pakistan and Revelations By Terrorists: Indian and Foreign Sources", Strategic Affairs-Special Report.

¹¹⁵ Rajiv Sharma, "Revive Militancy in Punjab", *Tribune*, April 4, 2002.

¹¹⁶ US House of Republican Committee's Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare.

¹¹⁷ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Unconsciously, in 1985, the National Council of Khalistan had made Pakistan aware of the potential dangers of the formation of *Khalistan*. Through an open letter, the militant Sikh organization placed the following demands before General Zia-ul-Haq:¹¹⁹

- i. Lahore, the Pakistani city, was named after the son of a Hindu God, Rama, and should be renamed 'Ranjit Pura', as it was the Capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire. Further, a statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh should be installed on the Mall Road of 'Ranjit Pura'.
- ii. Gurdwara Panja Sahib, which is located in Hassan Abdal, is intimately connected with the Guru Nanak Dev. Thus, Hassan Abdal should be renamed as 'Nanak Devji Pura'.
- iii. The portion of the Grand Trunk Road linking Lahore to Peshawar should be named after Guru Gobind Singh and, similarly, the Attock town should be renamed 'Nalwa Town' after Hari Singh Nalwa, the great Sikh warrior and commander of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces.
- iv. Peshawar, which was named by Kanishka, a Hindu King, should be renamed as 'Joga Singh Pura' after Bhai Joga Singh, a devotee of the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who was born in Peshawar, where a Gurudwara in his memory stands.
- v. Gurmukhi should be taught in Pakistani Punjab as a 'compulsory' language and a 'Gurmukhi Study Centre' should be opened to promote the language by establishing a university named 'Maharaja Ranjit Singh University'.
- vi. Sikh Gurdwaras, excluding Nanakana Sahib, were badly maintained in Pakistan. Hence, to look after the Gurudwaras, a Managing Committee should be established.

To appease the Sikh militants operating from its territory and abroad, Pakistan did announce that, after the formation of *Khalistan*, it would accord to Nanakana Sahib a status equal to the

¹¹⁹ Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decades of Turmoil*, pp. 283-4.

Vatican City. However, Pakistan never gave any assurances on the demands made by the National Council of Khalistan. It was aware of the fact that *Khalistan*, if created, could not be friendly with Pakistan. Lahore was the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Kingdom and number of holy Sikh shrines and Gurdwaras, including Nanakana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh Faith, are located in its territory. It was evident to Pakistan, consequently, that after the establishment of *Khalistan* the Sikhs would not be satisfied with the territories of *Khalistan*, and would attempt to revive the old boundaries of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's, for which the inclusion of Pakistani Punjab and parts of the NWFP would be necessary. And this would clearly not be acceptable to the Islamic state of Pakistan.¹²⁰ Thus, while it withheld a complete commitment to the *Khalistani* cause, Pakistan continued to wage a proxy war against India through the Sikh militants, as a tactical manoeuvre.

Academically, it would not be fair to blame Pakistan alone for its support to the Sikh militants. Indeed, the militants received some support from the local population in Punjab as well. As Joyce Pettigrew remarks, "local population fed the guerrillas, hid their weapons and let them take shelter in their fields and homes."¹²¹ As some sources indicate, certain elements from the Indian security forces (within the Home Guards, Punjab Police and Border Security Force), also provided support or helped the militants in some form or the other. The Sikh militants had links in the Army, Police and local administration. Indeed, their success "depended on the linkages established within the Army, administration, transportation and Police."¹²²

In rural Punjab, because of the smallholder economy, many kin and friends of the militants were serving in the Indian Army and Police. Moreover, the border Districts of Amritsar and

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 284.

¹²¹ Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*.

¹²² Ibid, p. 89.

Gurdaspur had a high percentage of people in the Army, Police and in smuggling and criminal operations. Many of them joined/supported the *Khalistan* movement in one form or the other. For example, those serving in the Army and Police often tipped off their kin about approaching dangers. Militants used such links to collect basic information about Police and Army deployment, and also about suitable safe houses.¹²³ Rachhpal Singh Bhola, 'Lieutenant General' of the KCF, thus disclosed:

...we have close links with some in the Home Guard. We give them some money from time to time. When they're on guard they'll help us by stealing weapons. Some join us. There are also some sympathetic soldiers... at the moment there is not much active support coming from Army... they (Army men) say they'll join the struggle when there is a war.¹²⁴

Bhola's revelations made it clear that some Army men were only sympathetic to the Sikh militants, but were not actively involved in the movement. However, some personnel from the Home Guards, a auxiliary force of the Punjab Police, were involved, directly or indirectly, in the movement. A few of them had joined the militancy directly and some secured and passed on weapons for which they were paid by the Sikh militants. It is also possible that some of them provided support for financial reasons. Further, a few local smugglers and some BSF personnel were also involved in the movement for personal gains. On many occasions, they ignored cross-border infiltration of Sikh militants and the transfer or smuggling of weapons, after being bribed.¹²⁵ Pettigrew notes:

Mercenary elements in the BSF occasionally and in places, and as a result of prearranged plans, desert their

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 178.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch, "India: Arms and Abuses in Indian Punjab and Kashmir", *Human Rights Watch Project*, Vol.6, No.10, September, 1994.

positions at night in return for a few AK-47s. For a large cash payment of 200,000-300,000 rupees a crossing, they... allowed one guerrilla cell to cross the border.¹²⁶

Human Rights Watch also mentions that, in November, 1993, two consignments of weapons were smuggled by the militants through the Ajnala sector in Punjab, to the north of Amritsar, with the collusion of BSF personnel.¹²⁷ Later, five BSF personnel were suspended and one of them was jailed for “waging war” against the Indian state.¹²⁸

In sum, Pakistan provided motivation, guidance, training, safe houses and weapons to the militants in Punjab. However, it was elements within the Indian security forces that gave them relevant information regarding the deployment of forces and allowed them to cross the border with weapons. Moreover, support of the local population was crucial for the militants. They received food and shelter from the local population, and the success and failure of militant activities was, consequently, closely linked with the rise and decline of such support in Punjab. The movement started to decline in 1991 due to the changed behaviour of the local population towards Sikh militants.

Indian Allegations and Pakistani Response

Immediately after *Operation Blue Star*, the Government of India raised the issue of foreign involvement, especially that of Pakistan, in the Punjab militancy. Pakistan, however, denied these charges. On June 14, 1984, a Government of Pakistan spokesperson stated in Islamabad that the Indian allegations “are completely baseless, tendentious and misleading.”¹²⁹ Pakistani

¹²⁶ Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, p. 128.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch, “India: Arms and Abuses in Indian Punjab and Kashmir”, Human Rights Watch Project, Vol.6, No.10, September 1994, pp. 22-41.

¹²⁸ *Times of India*, April 10, 1993.

¹²⁹ *Indian Express*, June 15, 1984.

President, General Zia-ul-Haq, in an interview to *Time*, stated that there was ‘no truth’ in the Indian charges that Pakistan was providing support to the Sikh militants. He claimed, on the contrary, that whereas there were accusations that some Pakistani missions in Europe and the US were contacting Sikhs radicals in a bid to incite them against India, the truth was that Pakistan had gone out of its way to normalize relations with India.¹³⁰ He termed the reports “totally wrong and baseless”.¹³¹ In response to the Indian charges, Pakistan also sought to project its position on the Sikh uprising at various international forums, including the leadership of United States and United Kingdom.

The then Pakistani Foreign Minister, Sahabzada Yaqub Ali Khan, also categorically denied Indian charges and described them as totally ‘absurd’ and without any ‘proof or substance’. He also warned that, “If India continues to use Pakistan as a ‘whipping boy’; it might blight the renewed prospect of regional *détente*.”¹³² Khan visited London and discussed the issue of Indian charges with Margaret Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe, the then Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, respectively.¹³³ Further, Islamabad and its embassies in the western world tried their best to convince western leaders that they had absolutely nothing to do with the Sikh uprising. The news of the ‘Pak hand’ was published in leading Indian newspapers, but Humayun Khan, Ambassador of Pakistan in India, responded in a letter to *The Indian Express*, claiming:

Pakistan regards the situation in the State of Punjab to be exclusively an internal affair of India... It is neither our policy nor desire to interfere or become involved in any way in India’s domestic matters. We remain convinced that good relations between our two countries on the

¹³⁰ *Times of India*, June 27, 1984.

¹³¹ *Indian Express*, June 29, 1984.

¹³² *Indian Express*, June 26, 1984.

¹³³ *Indian Express*, June 20, 1984.

basis of independence, sovereign equality and non-interference in each other's internal affairs are in the interests of both countries and of our region.¹³⁴

Pakistan did not, consequently, accept Indian allegations at any stage; indeed, it presented its own case before the international community, while denying all charges. Further, Pakistani scholars like Ghani Jafar, Sadia Nasir, Mohammad Jahangir Khan and Rasul B. Rais also defended the establishment position. Rais argued that the Indian charges lacked "consistency and conviction."¹³⁵ According to him, the problem of the Sikh uprising was not a creation of Pakistan, but was rooted in the alienation of Sikhs since the 1940s. Rais argued that the Government of India and sections of the Indian Press had exploited popular distrust of Pakistan to make the Indian public believe that the deteriorating situation in Punjab was a result of Pakistani manipulation. He opined that the Indian Government and Press were trying to shift the public focus away from the hard realities of domestic politics to the doorstep of the 'enemy'.¹³⁶

Corroborating Rais, another eminent Pakistani scholar, Ghani Jafar, claimed that, "New Delhi has... not come out even with a shred of sound evidence to prove Pakistan's involvement in the Punjab tangle."¹³⁷ Responding to allegations of the supply of arms and ammunition, Pakistani scholars like Jafar argued that Sikh militants had acquired most of the weapons from the Indian side. Quoting different sources, he stated that, during the two wars in 1965 and 1971 with Pakistan, lost weaponry was picked up by the people and was never accounted for. Further, since 1960, the Indian Government had issued arms to certain 'reliable

¹³⁴ Humayun Khan, "No Pakistan involvement," *Indian Express*, June 21, 1984.

¹³⁵ Rasul B. Rais, "Internationalization of The Punjab Crisis," in K.M. De Silva and R. J. Ray, eds., *Internationalization of Ethnic Conflicts*, London: Pinter Publications, 1991, p. 42.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³⁷ Ghani Jafar, "Operation Blue Star: 'Resolving' The Sikh Nationality Question?" *Regional Studies*, Islamabad, Vol. 3, No.1, 1984, p. 93.

persons' living close to the border for security purposes. There were, thus, large numbers of unaccounted weapons in circulation in Punjab, and these were often used in family feuds, property disputes and dacoities. The buying and selling of these weapons was a "lucrative trade" in Punjab and, as such, Sikh militants may have used these weapons. Jafar, however, admitted that, due to large-scale smuggling on both sides of the border, some gunrunning may have taken place from the Pakistan side, but that Sikh militants had close links with some high-ranking Indian ex-military officers. Indeed, according to Jafar, due to their contacts, Sikh militants had received most of their equipment from the Indian armed forces.¹³⁸

Pakistani scholars' assertions that Pakistan was not the creator of the *Khalistan* movement were an unpalatable element within Indian politics. To some extent, their arguments regarding the sources of weapons in India may have been true. However, it was impossible to deny the 'Pak hand' in the supply of arms and ammunition, and in the training of Sikh militants, which was also confirmed by a number of foreign reporters, scholars and neutral international observers, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

Reaction and Response of the Indian Government

India reacted sharply to the Pakistani involvement in the Sikh uprising, arguing that 'foreign powers', especially Pakistan, did not want a peaceful, stable and prosperous India. and were consequently providing all types of moral and material support to the Sikh militants. To counter this alleged involvement, India raised the issue on various national and international platforms. From time to time, the issue was also discussed in the Indian

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 93-94; Ghani Jafar, *The Sikh Volcano*, Lahore: Vanguard Publication, 1987, pp. 193-201.

Parliament and media. Speaking in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) on March 24 and April 30, 1986, Geeta Mukherjee, Priya Ranjan Das Munsri and Basudev Acharya, criticized Pakistan for its alleged support to the Sikh militants.¹³⁹ Similarly, on July 23, 1986, Mool Chand Daga stated:

... Pakistan may do utmost to destabilise the country but it will not succeed in its sinister designs... the dream of Khalistan of some Sardars will never be fulfilled. Only our dream of "Sare Jahan se achha, Hindustan Hamara" will be realized.¹⁴⁰

Again in the Lok Sabha, on April 6, 1989, P. Chidambaram, the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, disclosed in the House that the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, was aiding Sikh militants in their training and infiltration across the border to India. He also laid bare facts on how the ISI had brought the Afghan *mujahideen* and Sikh militants onto a single platform.¹⁴¹

India also made diplomatic efforts at the international level and repeatedly appealed to the global leadership to pressurize Pakistan to terminate its support to the Sikh militancy. In addition, India marshalled substantial resources to combat the militancy on the ground and also sought to curb the influx of small arms on the north-western border, deploying larger security forces and patrolling parties. Further, it constructed a 433-kilometre long security fence in Punjab and another 214 kilometres in the Rajasthan sector of the India-Pakistan Border.¹⁴²

Due to its diplomatic efforts, the Indian Government was able to secure certain positive results. For example, the United States, on various occasions, asked Pakistan not to provide any

¹³⁹ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 15, No. 22, March 24, 1986, Col. 466; Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 17, No. 43, April 30, 1986, Cols. 396 and 398.

¹⁴⁰ Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 18, No. 5, July 23, 1986, Col. 353.

¹⁴¹ *Times of India*, April 7, 1989.

¹⁴² Jasjit Singh "Small Arms and Minor Weapons in Southern Asia: Security Implications and Need for Cooperation," as quoted in Dikshit, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 18, No.7, 1995, p. 905.

support to militants fighting against the Indian state. On February 1, 1994, in an interview to *CBC TV*, Robert Gates, the then Deputy National Security Adviser to the US President, disclosed:

When President Bush sent me to Pakistan and India in May 1990, one of the specific requests that I made of the President of Pakistan was that they close the training camps that were providing people to carry out operations in Kashmir as well as Indian Punjab.¹⁴³

Islamabad also repeated its assurances that no official Pakistani agency was involved either in the Sikh uprising or in the Kashmir insurgency in India.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, despite such assurances, allegations of Pakistani involvement in fanning cross-border terrorism reached a crescendo in December 1992 and the United States warned that it would declare Pakistan a 'terrorist state'.¹⁴⁵ Further, during Nawaz Sharief's regime, the US Ambassador to Islamabad, Nicholas Platt, delivered a letter from the Secretary of State, James Baker, to the Pakistani Prime Minister, stating that the US Government had information indicating that the ISI and others "intend to continue to provide material support to the groups that have engaged in terrorism" in India.¹⁴⁶ Ambassador Platt had added verbally:

We are very confident of our information that your [Pakistan's] intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and the elements of the Army, are supporting Kashmiris and Sikh militants who carry out acts of terrorism... This support takes the form of providing weapons, training, and assistance in infiltration... We are talking about direct, covert

¹⁴³ As quoted in Strategic Affairs-Special Reports.

¹⁴⁴ John Kaniyalil, "ISI: The Master Manipulator," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 16, No. 8, 1993, p. 989.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 993; John Ward Anderson, "Pakistan aiding Rebels," *Washington Post*, May 16, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism In Central Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 186-7.

Government of Pakistan support... Please consider the serious consequences to our relationship if support continues.¹⁴⁷

The uncomfortable questions and warning from Washington leadership gradually forced Pakistan to transfer a bulk of its subversive activities to 'private' organizations. Nevertheless, former Pakistani Army officers and ISI officials continued to operate and control these private organizations.¹⁴⁸

Impact on India and India-Pakistan Relations

Pakistani involvement helped Sikh militants establish, for a short period, the so-called 'Bhauan Da Raj' (Rule of Brothers) or 'Singhan Da Raj' (Rule of Lions) against the Indian state.¹⁴⁹ Without such support, it would have been difficult for the Sikh militants to rebel against a mighty state like India. All this had an adverse affect on the state, society and economy in India and also on India-Pakistan relations. Many civilians, Sikh militants and security force personnel were killed in the movement. A total of 21,608 people, including 11,776 civilians and 1,748 security force personnel, were killed in the militancy in Punjab between 1981 and 2001.¹⁵⁰

Increasing expenditure on security, including the outlays on the building of the border fence and the deployment of increasing forces and patrolling parties along the border, resulted in a significant increase in Punjab's annual security budget. For example, in 1985, Punjab's Annual Security Budget was approximately INR 150 million; by 1992, it ballooned to INR three billion rupees, and Punjab also incurred a debt INR 60

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Jasjit Singh "Small Arms and Minor Weapons in Southern Asia," as quoted in Dikshit, *Strategic Analysis*, p. 905.

¹⁴⁹ The people of rural areas of Punjab to refer the Sikh militants commonly use words 'Bhau' and 'Singh'.

¹⁵⁰ Source: *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, www.satp.org.

billion at that time.¹⁵¹ There were further and great ‘invisible’ costs. In the border areas, during the movement or routine activities of security forces, crops of local peasants were destroyed on a large scale.

Pakistani involvement in the *Khalistani* movement deepened the suspicion and hostility between the two countries, and these deteriorated to the point that the dialogue on the ‘No-War Pact’ and ‘Friendship Treaty’ was discontinued.¹⁵² India, through its then Foreign Minister Bali Ram Bhagat, told Pakistan in February 1986 that relations between the two countries could not improve if that country continued to support the Sikh militants in Punjab.¹⁵³

The Question of CIA’s Involvement

Besides Pakistan, it was also alleged that the CIA was helping the Sikh militants in India by supplying arms and ammunition through Pakistan. A leading Indian newspaper, *The Indian Express*, reported that intelligence agencies had suspected that the CIA was the mastermind behind the subversive strategy, and Pakistan was only being used as a channel for its execution.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, the Sikh militants were trained in Pakistani camps under the direct supervision of American CIA agents, one of whom was designated as station chief and another as second-in-command.¹⁵⁵ The Soviet daily *Pravda* also linked militant Sikh leader Bhinderanwale with the CIA and Pakistan.¹⁵⁶ According to *New Times*, a prominent Soviet foreign affairs weekly, the “strings of the conspiracy” were extended further to

¹⁵¹ *Hindustan Times*, June 4, 1992.

¹⁵² Rita Manchanda, “Double Speak in Indo-Pak Relations,” *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1986, p. 688.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Indian Express*, June 14, 1984.

¹⁵⁵ *Indian Express*, June 27, 1984.

¹⁵⁶ “The Watcher in the Wings,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hong Kong, June 21, 1984, p. 17.

the CIA than Pakistan.”¹⁵⁷ According to V.D. Chopra, US policy-makers had developed a passion for India’s disintegration since the ‘notorious’ Coupland plan. Though the game started with the ‘Kashmir dispute’, they had drawn the maps of India with new ‘Sikh’, ‘Christian’ and other American satellite states. He added that the Indira Gandhi regime had pursued anti-American policies on a number of issues, including Afghanistan and South East Asia. India, moreover, was a friend of the Soviet Union. The possibility of the ‘balkanisation of India’ was, therefore, perceived as a direct threat to Soviet interests, but was thought to serve US interests during the Cold War period.¹⁵⁸ Jean Kirkpatrick, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, had allegedly authored the blueprint of ‘Operation Balkanisation of India’ and presented the broad contours of this plan before a group named the ‘Conservative Political Action Conference’ in Washington D.C. on February 27, 1982.¹⁵⁹ It was within this broad context that the CIA was allegedly arranging shipments of arms, as well as paying the bills and organizing the training of Sikh militants in various camps in Pakistan.¹⁶⁰

On the same lines, Satya Pal Dang argued that the U.S was irked by India’s anti-imperialist role in the international arena and its refusal to go neo-colonial. It, therefore desired to ‘weaken’, ‘destabilise’ and even ‘disintegrate’ and balkanize India. With this objective, it encouraged, aided and abetted the slogans of ‘Khalistan’, ‘Free Kashmir’ and fighting ‘Hindu Raj’, and subsequently helped the Sikh militants.¹⁶¹

Reiterating Dang’s position, Parliamentarian Basudeb Acharya argued in the Lok Sabha on April 30, 1986, that the United States was trying to destabilize and dismember ‘our

¹⁵⁷ *Times of India*, June 27, 1984; *Indian Express*, June 27, 1984.

¹⁵⁸ V.D. Chopra, et al, *Agony of Punjab*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁹ Jeans Kirkpatrick’s “Operation Balkanisation of India” in Chopra, et. al, p. 199-214.

¹⁶⁰ V.D. Chopra, et al, *Agony of Punjab*, p. 124.

¹⁶¹ Dang, *Terrorism in Punjab*, p. 65.

country' using Pakistani soil for the training of Sikh militants and also by smuggling arms and weapons into the country through Pakistan.¹⁶² Despite various arguments, reports and allegations, the question of CIA involvement is complex and remains uncertain.

The United States, however, denied all such alleged involvement. On June 14, 1984, when *The Indian Express* reported the CIA's involvement in Punjab, the United States categorically refuted the allegations. The American Attaché in New Delhi described the report as 'unfounded and unfortunate.'¹⁶³ He referred to a statement by the US State Department spokesman Alan Romberg on June 7, 1984, on the Sikh uprising in Punjab, and stated that America believed that the Indians themselves must settle this matter, adding: "We regret the loss of life, and hope that further violence can be avoided. As we have said on the record before, the United States strongly supports the unity and territorial integrity of India."¹⁶⁴

To further clarify the US viewpoint on the situation, the US Attache further referred to the comments of then Vice-President George Bush Sr., in New Delhi on May 15, 1984, where he stated,

I would like to reiterate the firm commitment of the United States to a strong and United India. We see India as a major, pivotal power and a key element in a peaceful and prosperous South Asia."¹⁶⁵

Again, on June 27, 1984, responding to certain reports published in Indian newspapers, Michael Pister, Minister Counsellor for Public Affairs of the American Embassy in New Delhi, denied the charges of US or CIA's involvement in the training of Sikh militants in Pakistan. He unequivocally stated

¹⁶² Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 17, No. 43, April 30, 1984, Col. 376.

¹⁶³ *Indian Express*, June 15, 1984.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

that these allegations concerning the United States were untrue. Similarly, on the very next day, US official John Hughes denied such involvement while strongly supporting the unity, integrity and stability of the Indian state.¹⁶⁶

On its part, the Indian Government remained ambiguous on the CIA's role in the Sikh ethnic imbroglio, and gave no proof of such involvement. For example, on June 19, 1984, in an interview, *BBC* asked the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, whether she had "told recent visitors that you believe that American CIA may have had a hand in stirring up the trouble there (in Punjab)." Indira Gandhi responded:

No, This is what they try to get me to say.... whether it is involved in this or not I do not think I have specifically asked, nor have I said anything about it.¹⁶⁷

The Government of India, consequently, did not make such allegations on the official level. The then Pakistani President, General Zia-ul-Haq, also denied charges of a Pakistan-CIA nexus, stating that he did not see any reason for the CIA's involvement in arming somebody in India to create disturbances.¹⁶⁸

However, Sikh militants had secured training in camps set up for Afghan *mujahideen* by the ISI in collaboration with the CIA, though the CIA did not participate in these activities. In fact, the CIA was kept away by the ISI from this vast training programme. It should be noted that, during General Zia's regime, the ISI had acquired a 'special status' and 'immense power' in domestic affairs and in Afghanistan, in collusion with the CIA, the ISI conducted one of the biggest covert operations since the end of the Vietnam War. The ISI used the *mujahideen* infrastructure to help the Sikh and Kashmiri militants. In this context, the US House Republican Research Committee's Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare mentions that:

¹⁶⁶ *Times of India*, June 28, 1984.

¹⁶⁷ *Times of India*, June 20, 1984.

¹⁶⁸ *Indian Express*, June 29, 1984.

The ISI opted to keep US/CIA out of the camps in order to hide the extent of the ‘volunteers’ training programme. Indeed, thousands of Islamist trainees from Indian Kashmir, and to a lesser extent Sikhs from Punjab, as well as hundreds of Islamists from all over the Arab and Muslim world, were routinely trained in camps originally set up strictly for the training of Afghan Mujahideen.¹⁶⁹

In the light of such allegations, arguments and reports, it appears that the CIA did not have any direct involvement in the Sikh uprising in India.

A few Indian Leftist scholars and parliamentarians did make arguments and allegations regarding the CIA’s involvement, but all of them had a pro-Soviet prejudice and anti-American sentiments due to the Cold War rivalry between the two Superpowers. Secondly, Indian security forces had arrested a number of Sikh militants who had come back after getting training from Pakistan and, during interrogations, they had disclosed the role of ISI, but the CIA’s name did not emerge in even a single instance. Indian security forces, furthermore, failed to make any such claim. Undoubtedly, the Sikh militants had used training camps, weapons and other infrastructure originally created for the *mujahideen* by the CIA. However, this infrastructure was under the control of the ISI and was misused against the Indian state without any information being passed on in this regard to the CIA. Reports and facts indicate that the CIA had no intention of involving itself in the Sikh uprising.

Neither did the Government of India make any such allegations at any national or international platform or in its official reports.

¹⁶⁹ US House of Republican Committee’s Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, 1993.

Finally, from time to time, the US leadership itself had demonstrated faith in a strong and stable India and had even brought pressure to bear on Pakistan not to support the Sikh militants against India. In January 1993, after reading the CIA report on the involvement of the ISI in providing aid to the Sikh and Kashmiri militants, the then US President Bill Clinton had given four to six months to Islamabad to disprove the Indian and CIA charges.¹⁷⁰ Further, the US warning of declaring Pakistan a ‘terrorist state’ was also a major development in this regard.

Conclusion

In nutshell, foreign powers, especially Pakistan, were involved in the Sikh uprising in India. Since Pakistan’s inception, its relations with India have remained hostile. Moreover, India played a decisive role in the break-up of Pakistan during the Bangladesh War of 1971 and, further, was alleged to have been creating disturbances in Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan. Pakistan was, consequently, looking for an opportunity to hit back. When alienated Sikhs began the *Khalistan* movement in Indian Punjab, Pakistan started encouraging their demands and designs and when large numbers of Sikh militants crossed over to Pakistan, they were provided shelter, training, funds and weaponry to create disturbances in India. Though Pakistan does not acknowledge its involvement in the Sikh uprising in India, available evidence suggests that the Pakistani ruling elite supported the Sikh militants, both at the moral and material level. Nevertheless, some points should be kept in mind while assessing the Pakistani role in the *Khalistan* movement.

First, though the local population had accommodated Sikh militants, Pakistan’s involvement in the *Khalistan* movement could not be labelled as the ‘involvement of common masses’ of

¹⁷⁰ “Pak PM’s kin in heroin racket,” *Statesman*, Kolkata, February 26, 1993.

Pakistan. Rather, it was the ruling elite, intelligence agencies, Pakistan Rangers and radical Islamist groups and political parties, which were involved on a large scale.

Second, all support or involvement was restricted, tactical and instrumental in nature. Such support, both moral and material, cannot be compared with what was, and is being, provided to the Kashmiri militants. Indeed, on the issue of Kashmir, Pakistan has confronted India diplomatically as well as militarily. In addition to the political and weaponry support to militants, Pakistan has fought three wars with India on the Kashmir issue. On the issue of self-determination or the creation of *Khalistan*, however, it did not use diplomatic or military means openly. Pakistan, it can be argued, had no implicit or explicit territorial designs while providing support to the *Khalistan* movement, something that it explicitly has on the issue of Kashmir.

Third, the emergence of the Sikh uprising was not a function of Pakistani action or initiatives. It was largely the non-accommodative, discriminatory and repressive approach of the Indian state that led to the revolt in Punjab. Pakistan sought to exploit and aggravate the situation for its own national and strategic interests by providing moral and material support to the Sikh ethnic uprising.

Fourth, the ISI and Pakistan Rangers helped Sikh militants to infiltrate into Indian territory and to smuggle weapons across the border. But they succeeded also because a few elements from the Indian side, including local smugglers, helped them for personal gains.

Fifth, Sikh militants acquired weapons not only from the ISI. Within Pakistan, they also purchased weapons from the black market in NWFP. To some extent, the Afghan *mujahideen* and elements within the Sikh Diaspora were also a source of weapons.

Sixth, the Pakistani involvement has not come to an end. Pakistan is still looking for an opportunity to revive Sikh

militancy in Punjab. Even today, several Sikh militant leaders, including Lakhbir Singh Rode of the International Sikh Youth Federation, Paramjit Singh Panjwar, Chief of the KCF-Panjwar, Gajinder Singh of Dal Khalsa International, Ranjit Singh Neeta of the Khalistan Zindabad Force and Wadhawa Singh Babbar of the BKI, continue to remain in safe havens in Pakistan. Further, the ISI is allegedly training Sikh youth at huge private farmhouses in Muscat, Thailand, Dubai and Iran. Reports have also been received regarding the efforts by the ISI to help the BKI and KCF-Panjwar to establish bases in China, but these initiatives have been thwarted by the Chinese, who are not enthused by the project.¹⁷¹

Table-1
Arms and Ammunition recovered in Punjab,
March-October 1988

Sr. No.	Items	Number/Quantity
1.	Pistols	706
2.	Revolvers	198
3.	Ak-47 Rifles	227
4.	Other Rifles	120
5.	Guns	261
6.	Stenguns	13
7.	Carbines	19
8.	LMG/SMG/MG	11
9.	Rockets	79
10.	Rocket Launchers	27
11.	Rockets Empty Shell	3
12.	Rocket Charger	6
13.	Missiles	16
14.	Power Charge Unit of Anti-Tank Grenades	14
15.	Lever Device with keys	18
16.	Hand Grenades	129
17.	Bombs	41

¹⁷¹ K.P.S. Gill, "Khalistan in Waiting," *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, February 21, 2004.

18.	Plastic Explosives	15 Packets
19.	Explosive Material	4 Kilograms
20.	Detonators	162
21.	Magazines	216
22.	Cartridges	64,384
23.	Bullet Proof Jackets	1
24.	Binoculars	1
25.	Propeller	1

Source: Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. 43, No. 8 (November 21, 1988), Cols. 159-160.

Table-2
Small Arms and Explosive Captured in Punjab, 1986-1993

Weapons	1986-89	1990	1991	1992	1993 (January-March)
AK Rifles	766	646	475	479	131
Handguns	3125	556	789	542	79
Other Rifles & Guns	1253	405	833	1118	186
RPG-7	48	33	23	45	11
Machine Guns	29	50	33	26	2
Remote Control Devices	0	11	0	0	0
Explosives (in KGs)	0	300	202	1604	197

Source: Manoj Joshi, "Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis," *Conflict Studies*, No. 261 (May 1993).

Table-3
Statistics of Pakistan's Spies Arrested in India, 1986-1989

Punjab	Jammu-Kashmir	Rajasthan	Delhi	Gujrat
375	168	68	11	8

Source: D.P. Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decade of Turmoil*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1996, p. 285.

Table-4
Fatalities in Punjab, March 1988-October 1988

Month	No. of persons killed by the Sikh Militants	No. of Police and Para-military forces personnel killed	No. of Sikh Militants killed	No. of Militants arrested
March 1988	265	9	25	277
April 1988	214	11	25	292
May 1988	343	10	66	677
June 1988	160	15	40	529
July 1988	147	3	27	344
August 1988	104	9	26	328
September 1988	97	11	31	239
October 1988	112*	7	30	247
Total	1442 *	75	270	2933

*Including 75 police/para-military forces personnel.

Source: *Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol. 43, No. 8, (November 21, 1988), cols.157-158.