

The Gill Doctrine A Model for 21st Century Counter- terrorism?[?]

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The defeat of politico-religious terrorism in the Indian state of Punjab represented a spectacular counterterrorist success. For the first time in history, the security forces of a democracy were able to comprehensively defeat a terrorist movement, instead of just containing it. No political compromises were made, no ‘root causes’ were addressed.¹ Yet, terrorism disappeared from Punjab with a swiftness and permanence that continues to surprise many.

What was truly impressive was the fact that Punjab represented one of the earliest examples of religious terrorism in modern times. Between 1981 and 1993, a total of 21,469 people

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¹ Ajai Sahni, “Responding to Terrorism in Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir,” in S.D. Muni, ed., *Responding to Terrorism in South Asia*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2006, p. 69.

died in the conflict, including 8,009 terrorists.² Although ostensibly a separatist struggle for the creation of an independent Sikh homeland, the so-called *Khalistan* movement was actually nihilistic. The terrorists' ostensible political aim was to win independence for Punjab from India. However, the manner by which they went about achieving it defied strategic logic. Instead of seeking to win adherents to the concept of Sikh separatism, the terrorists merely sought to create as much chaos within India as possible.³ Between themselves, the 162-odd terrorist groups fought bitterly for supremacy even while remaining generally united in their opposition to New Delhi.

Lacking any coherent blueprint for political action and forced to rely almost totally on foreign patronage, many so-called *Khalistani* militants focused on self-enrichment.⁴ The handful who were serious about secession were gradually but harshly disillusioned. In essence, although their objective of a separate Sikh state was tangible enough, and quite explicitly articulated, the terrorists basically remained anarchists. Their blueprint for translating vision into reality centred on the fond hope that New Delhi would simply lose the will to retain Punjab, or would be pressured by foreign Governments to grant independence.⁵

Terrorism in Punjab (hereafter called *Khalistani* terrorism) was an imported phenomenon, born out of an identity crisis within the Sikh Diaspora in the West.⁶ Migrants to Canada, the UK, the US and West Germany grew increasingly conscious of their ethnicity once abroad. Rediscovering religion, they began to fund religious militants in Punjab from the late 1970s. Among the Sikhs who remained in India, the concept of a separate Sikh homeland had practically no grassroots-level support. The biggest impetus for *Khalistan* only occurred in 1984.

² http://www.satp.org/satporegtp/countries/india/states/punjab/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm, accessed on June 24, 2007.

³ Manraj Grewal, *Dreams after Darkness: A Search for a Life Ordinary Under the Shadow of 1984*, New Delhi: Rupa, 2004, pp. 121-2 and pp. 137-9.

⁴ K.P.S Gill, 'Lucrative returns of terrorism,' accessed online at <http://satp.org/satporegtp/kpsgill/terrorism/Jan6Pio.htm> on May 21, 2007

⁵ Bhaskar Sarkar, *Tackling Insurgency and Insurgency: Blueprint for Action* New Delhi: Vision, 1998, p. 44.

⁶ Interview of former Indian intelligence analyst Bahukutumbi Raman, Chennai, December 28, 2004.

Reacting to a wave of violence by Sikh extremists in Punjab, on June 5, 1984, the Indian Government sent the Army into the Golden Temple, the Sikh faith's holiest shrine. The Temple had long been used as a headquarters complex by the terrorists, who had fortified it heavily. A bitter battle followed, during which the Temple suffered extensive damage. In retaliation, two Sikh Policemen assassinated India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

The murder of Mrs. Gandhi was followed by a horrific series of massacres across India, perpetrated by supporters of the ruling Congress party. In a disgraceful chapter of Indian history, over three thousand Sikhs, including women and children, were burnt alive in the national capital Delhi. The effect on the nascent *Khalistan* movement was electrifying. What had previously been a rag-tag politico-religious grouping within Punjab, sustained by expatriate donations, mutated into a separatist rebellion.

Hoping to conciliate the Sikh community, the Indian Government agreed to make substantial concessions. Before these could take effect however, terrorists began to assassinate moderate Sikh leaders. In an atmosphere of spiraling chaos, the Indian Army was withdrawn from counter-terrorist duties in Punjab. Henceforth, it would be the State's Police force that would bear the brunt of the fight against terrorism. Initially struggling to adapt to the unusual task of counter-terrorism, the Police were ineffective. This changed with the appearance of K.P.S Gill in Punjab.

Kanwar Pal Singh Gill was born in 1934 in the Punjabi city of Lahore, in what is currently Pakistan. After joining the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1957, he served for 25 years in India's northeastern States and in Jammu and Kashmir.⁷ Prior to being inducted into Punjab in 1984, he had directed counter-terrorist special operations in the State of Assam. Upon Gill fell the responsibility of helping the Punjab Police force structurally and psychologically adapt to the wholly unfamiliar phenomenon of political terrorism.

Recognizing his expertise, in 1988 the Indian Government elevated Gill to the post of Director-General of Police in Punjab.

⁷ Praveen Swami, "Punjab's Tussle," *Frontline*, Chennai, November 18, 1994, pp. 36-38.

His knowledge of terrorist psychology, both in general and especially in the case of Punjab, made him a natural leader of the counter-terrorist effort.⁸ As a member of the Jat caste within the Sikh community, Gill's identity grouping was a mirror image of the terrorists he was fighting.⁹ He argued that only a Jat Sikh could defeat another Jat Sikh – a credo that underpinned much of his subsequent success.¹⁰

Through a series of doctrinal innovations, Gill moulded the Punjab Police into India's most effective counter-terrorist force.¹¹ In 1992, this force launched a final and synchronized counter-offensive against the *Khalistan* movement that wiped out militancy in Punjab within 18 months.

Since 1994, a theory has emerged that attempts to rationalize India's highly atypical counter-terrorist success in Punjab. It posits that the Punjab Police under Gill carried out a campaign of 'state terror'.¹² The defeat of religious terrorism occurred in spite of, and not due to, the Government's counterterrorist efforts.¹³ Instead, a quasi-mystical force usually known as 'popular support' abandoned the militants' cause. Their defeat was thus a historical inevitability.

As explanations go, this theory is ahistorical and intellectually lazy. By arguing that terrorism in Punjab lost popular support, its proponents rid themselves of the need to examine the events of the time more closely. Perniciously, this narrative suggests that at some point, the terrorist movement actually did enjoy widespread popular support. Such intellectual confusion springs from a common tendency among academics to conflate counter-terrorism with counter-insurgency.

⁸ Interview of former Union Home Ministry official, Bangalore, August 12, 2004.

⁹ The majority of terrorists in Punjab were Jat Sikhs.

¹⁰ Julio Ribeiro, *Bullet for Bullet: My Life as a Police Officer*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1998, p. 322.

¹¹ Shekhar Gupta and Kanwar Sandhu, 'K.P.S Gill: True Grit', *India Today*, Delhi, April 15, 1993, p. 63.

¹² Paul Wallace (2006), "Countering Terrorist Movements In India: Kashmir and Khalistan," in Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson eds., *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past*, Washington D.C: United States Institute of Peace, 2006, p. 426.

¹³ K.P.S Gill, "Endgame in Punjab: 1988-93," in K.P.S Gill and Ajai Sahni, eds., *Terror and Containment: Perspectives on India's Internal Security*, New Delhi: Gyan, 2001, p. 24.

By importing Western counter-insurgency theories from the late 1950s and 1960s into the post-Cold War era, scholars do themselves or their readers no favours. Instead, they would do well to study conflicts like Punjab within their local and regional contexts, and only then decide if a political rebellion ever had ‘popular support’. The presence of such support would implicitly question the Government’s legitimacy, and make for a counter-insurgency war. The absence of popular support for the rebels on the other hand, would make the contest purely one of operational dominance, and thus a counter-terrorist war.

This paper hopes to take scholarship on the Punjab problem a step forward by examining Gill’s unique approach to counter-terrorist operations. It codifies the measures he took to combat the terrorist threat in Punjab into a discrete counter-terrorist doctrine. The ‘Gill Doctrine’ is thus not an official Indian Government policy on counter-terrorism. In fact, it is a suggested alternative to the current policy of stalling for time and allowing matters on the internal security front to drift on aimlessly.

Gill’s 1992 offensive offers a rare and perhaps isolated instance where purely kinetic (i.e., force-based) counter-terrorist efforts defeated a terrorist movement. Hitherto, academics have often asserted that security forces can only contain terrorism.¹⁴ They assert that the defeat of terrorism requires the implementation of a ‘political solution’ that addresses the ‘root causes’ of militancy. Gill dramatically proved this thesis to be false. The objective of this paper is to explain how he was able to do so. In particular, it shall demonstrate the fallacy of the theory that human rights violations contributed to his success. The reason the Punjab example has not been replicated elsewhere shall also be discussed.

The Conceptual Framework

At the core of the Gill Doctrine lies the view that terrorism has mutated from being merely a tactic of political rebellion, as it

¹⁴ Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson, ‘Conclusion’, in Art and Richardson, eds., *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past*, Washington D.C: United States Institute of Peace, 2006, p. 564.

was in the 1970s, to an entirely new way of waging warfare. Counter-terrorism in the closing decades of the 20th century and the early decades of the 21st cannot be denigrated as a mere 'law and order' issue. Instead, it is *the* major challenge to the security of individual nation-states, precisely because it is still being mistaken as an appendage to popular insurgency.¹⁵

Gill argues that extensive foreign sponsorship of terrorism by rogue states has dramatically increased the striking power of terrorist groups. Consequently, the traditional Police doctrine of minimal use of force can no longer be blindly applied. Instead, the use of force should be proportional to the threat posed by each particular terrorist movement.

When fighting terrorists armed with military-issue hardware, the definition of what constitutes 'minimal force' requires recalibration. If terrorism is after all a new way of warfare, then the Government must be prepared to combat it on a war-footing. At the same time, there remains an overwhelming need to insulate the local population from suffering disproportionate collateral damage. For this reason, the use of area weapons and airpower is to be avoided, even if the result is heightened casualties on one's own side.¹⁶

To do full justice to the Gill Doctrine, it is necessary to appreciate the nuances of K.P.S Gill's arguments. He does not reject the proposition that misgovernance has a role to play in fostering political militancy. Indeed, Gill has not spared the Indian bureaucracy for its corruption and general incompetence. He has warned that chronically poor administration within Punjab since terrorism was quelled raises the possibility of resurgent violence.¹⁷ Gill does, however, make a distinction between the 'root causes' of terrorism, and the dynamics that sustain it once violence actually erupts. His associate, Ajai Sahni, argues that far more important for counter-terrorist policymakers than addressing

¹⁵ Gill (2002a), pp. 1-3.

¹⁶ A point made by Dr. Ajai Sahni after reading an earlier draft of this paper. Email correspondence, June 24, 2007

¹⁷ K.P.S Gill, 'Foreword' in *The Punjab Story*, New Delhi: Lotus, Roli, 2004., p. x.

'root causes', is neutralizing the sustaining dynamic of terrorism.¹⁸

This point needs to be understood by critics of Gill's methods. At no point does he suggest that the security forces, as the coercive arm of the Government, can act as a substitute for the administrative wing. Nevertheless, the simple fact remains that one cannot develop areas one does not physically control, hence the Gill Doctrine's emphasis on kinetic counter-terrorist measures. As John Paul Vann noted in the context of counter-insurgency in Vietnam, "you can argue about whether security is 10 per cent of the problem or 90 per cent of the problem, but it's the first 10 per cent or the first 90 per cent."¹⁹

It has been suggested that the Gill Doctrine relies on coercion alone in order to succeed. Suggestions have been made that as chief of Police, Gill neglected to win local support in the fight against terrorism.²⁰ In fact, he spent much of his time trying to mobilize Punjab's Sikhs against extremist violence.²¹ Where he differed from his more politically-correct colleagues was in the depth of expectation he placed upon such efforts. Whilst pacifists in the Police attempted to put the cart before the horse and rally the population against terrorism *before* aspiring for operational dominance, Gill reversed these priorities.

One of the Gill Doctrine's most significant contributions to the study of low intensity conflicts has been the concept of a 'societal Stockholm Syndrome.'²² This concept holds that even in instances where popular support for militancy appears high, it may not be so in reality. Rather, such support might only amount to a survival tactic adopted by populations living continuously under the shadow of the gun. Once this point is appreciated by

¹⁸ Sahni, "Responding to Terrorism in Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir," pp. 32-33.

¹⁹ Ajai Sahni and J. George (2001), "Security and Development in India's Northeast: An Alternative Perspective," in Gill and Sahni, eds., *Terror and Containment*, p. 313.

²⁰ Ribeiro, *Bullet for Bullet*, pp. 305-306.

²¹ K.P.S Gill, 'Special Address by Mr. K.P.S Gill', in Lakshmi Krishnamurti, R. Swaminathan and Gert W. Kueck, eds., *Responding to Terrorism: Dilemmas of Democratic and Developing Societies*, Madras: Bookventure, 2003, p. 23.

²² K.P.S Gill, 'Dubious Things Called "Popular Support"', accessed online at <http://satp.org/satporstp/kpsgill/terrorism/Dec01Pio.htm>, on May 24, 2007.

counter-terrorist strategists, it becomes possible to develop a response to terrorist violence that balances political sustainability with operational effectiveness.

Gill argues that the first objective of counter-terrorism is to break the collective mental paralysis that terrorist violence imposes upon individuals living in its close proximity. To achieve this mass-psychological transformation, it was necessary for the Police to engage terrorists operationally and physically isolate them from the terrorized. Thereafter, mass contact programmes could impress upon local communities the impossibility of maintaining an ambiguous moral position on terrorism. Once these measures are taken, popular support for counter-terrorist operations shall appear, and in massive quantities. The Doctrine refers to this outpouring of popular support as the 'pressure cooker effect', and holds that it is as much a symptom of counter-terrorist success as a cause of it.²³

Gill's aggressive views on counter-terrorism were not immediately accepted when he articulated them in the context of Punjab. Tensions arose from the fact that his was a rationality-based view of counter-terrorism, up against a sentimentality-based one held by the administration. To elaborate on this point: the Gill Doctrine is grounded in hard-headed Clausewitzian principles. The very ruthlessness of these principles brought them into inevitable conflict with the Gandhian idealism that to this day, pockmarks Indian strategic thinking.²⁴

Gill operated on the Clausewitzian dictum of first trying to understand what kind of conflict he was engaged in, and then devising an appropriate strategy.²⁵ Many Police officers in Punjab however, stuck fast to the principle that force was only to be used when all other policy options were exhausted, not when the situation most demanded it. They continued to see Punjab as an ethno-nationalist conflict of the kind that had long troubled India's northeastern region. In the process, they missed out on the qualitative impact that the politicization of religion brought to the conflict.

²³ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, January 3, 2005.

²⁴ At least two of Gill's most prominent detractors in Punjab were self-confessed Gandhians.

²⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, London: Everyman's Library, 1993, p. 100.

Unlike the northeastern rebellions, violence in Punjab, according to its initiators, was legitimized by the ultimate identity differentiator: religion. In the terrorists' view, massacres of innocents were part of a larger offensive conducted in the name of the Sikh community worldwide. Thus, the fact that the majority of terrorism's victims in Punjab were Sikhs was explained away by a belief that other Sikhs supported the killers.²⁶

Gill recognized that the religious element of the *Khalistan* movement meant it was closer to being an identity-driven struggle than one that was ideology-driven.

The difference is crucial. While ideologically motivated terrorists can be induced to defect through intellectual persuasion, identity-driven terrorists create a psychological barrier between themselves and members of the out-group. Surmounting this barrier by non-coercive means is near-impossible, particularly when the differences between the terrorists and the out-group are clearly visible. Racial and religious differences are two particularly potent dividers of identity. Political views are not, because they can be moderated through dialogue and prolonged discussion. For example, in the 1950s, a communist terrorist in Malaya could be induced over a period of time to change sides and become a capitalist. Today, a *jihadi* fighting in the name of his religion cannot change the fact that he is a Muslim.

As a Sikh, Gill knew the tenets of his religion better than anyone else. He knew that the *Khalistani* terrorists had developed a perverted interpretation of Sikhism to resolve their own personal identity crises. Aware that they had inured themselves against Government propaganda, he did not waste time trying to engage them in theological debates. Instead he appealed directly to their natural instinct for survival. Gill offered the terrorists a stark choice: they could either die for their idea of God, or live for themselves. There was no third option. Many *Khalistanis* responded as per logical dictates and surrendered. Those that did not, engaged in gun battles with the Police, and frequently ended up meeting their Maker.

²⁶ According to one estimate, sixty percent of those killed by terrorists were Sikhs. Sarkar (1998), p. 45.

The uniqueness of the Gill Doctrine lies in the fact that it offers a template for counter-terrorism which is potentially applicable across time and space. All terrorist movements share a common weakness: the need to constantly replace cadres lost to security forces action.²⁷ Failure to match recruitment rates to operational losses means that terrorist groups start to experience a manpower deficit. If this goes on long enough, it can lead to the terrorist movement simply withering away. In order to be effective therefore, counter-terrorism needs to be conceived of as a *war of attrition*. The challenge for the Government is to develop an operational capability for attrition levels which are intolerable for the terrorists but politically sustainable for itself.²⁸

By 'politically sustainable', what is meant is that counter-terrorism should make every reasonable effort to avoid violations of human rights. Democracies by their very nature are conscious of the need to preserve individual freedoms and curtail the power of the Government's coercive apparatus. It is therefore essential for security forces to develop excellent intelligence and investigative capabilities in order to ensure that only the guilty suffer.²⁹

The Gill Doctrine provided a mechanism by which the rate of terrorist neutralization in Punjab could be raised to exceed the rate of terrorist recruitment. It involved the targeted repression of terrorists and their active supporters, based upon good local intelligence. Since the vast majority of the noncombatant population was left unaffected by security forces' action, sympathy for the terrorists did not automatically increase. Furthermore, by carrying out synchronized operations, the security forces could create large manpower deficits within the terrorist movement in a short space of time. These greatly

²⁷ Phillip Heymann, *Terrorism and America: A Commonsense Strategy for a Democratic Society*, Cambridge, MA: BCSIA, 1998, p. 106.

²⁸ It must be noted that there is a difference between 'attrition rates' and 'kill rates.' Attrition rate refers to the number of terrorists killed or otherwise neutralized within a certain time-frame, relative to the number freshly recruited within that same period. Kill rate refers the number of terrorists killed vis-à-vis own losses in combat. By 1993, the kill rate was fifteen terrorists killed for every Police or noncombatant fatality. Manoj Joshi, 'Punjab's Progress,' *Frontline*, April 23, 1993, p. 63.

²⁹ Michael Freeman, *Freedom or Security: The Consequences for Democracies Using Emergency Powers to Fight Terror*, London: Praeger, 2003, pp. 11-12.

hampered the ability of terrorist groups to carry out diversionary attacks and thus helped in keeping the counter-terrorist effort focused. Once the political establishment was prepared to acquiesce in the continuation of such an attritional counter-terrorist policy, terrorism could be wiped out without any concessions having to be made.

In line with what has been said above, one may deduce that the success of the Gill Doctrine hinged upon three crucial variables:

- ✍ The Quality of Local Intelligence
- ✍ A Capacity for Synchronized Operations
- ✍ The Degree of Political Resolve

Each one of these variables helped security forces achieve one of the 'three possibles' of attritional counter-terrorism, upon which the Gill Doctrine was based. These were to:

- ✍ Surgically neutralize as many terrorists as possible,
- ✍ As quickly as possible,
- ✍ For as long as possible.

The 'three possibles' outlined above triangulate the actions encapsulated within the Gill Doctrine, enclosing it within a complete analytical model that captures its essentials. Rapid and Sustainable Attrition (RASTA – an Indian word for 'way') was the guiding objective according to which the progress of counter-terrorist efforts was measured. While the Punjab Police were able to attain the first two 'possibles' within 19 months of Gill's appointment as Police chief, the third was not achieved until 1992. Terrorists could be identified and surgically neutralized on the basis of good local intelligence, and at a very rapid pace, but lack of political resolve undercut the Punjab Police's efforts. Not until the political establishment in New Delhi allowed Gill to continue his efforts without interference from would-be peacemakers, did attrition of terrorist cadres become both rapid *and* sustainable.

In 1992, three distinct and separate factors converged to defeat the terrorist movement. These were: an intelligence-led Police offensive, a massive influx of supplementary manpower to assist the Police, and the acquisition of a political mandate to eradicate terrorism. Previously, none of these factors had existed alongside the other two, and in isolation, each was insufficient to

bring about a situational transformation in Punjab. By bringing together all of the 'three possibles' at the same time, Gill put the *Khalistan* movement under unbearable pressure through high-paced attrition. Its implosion was thus a foregone conclusion. The next three sections shall enunciate the relationship between local intelligence, operational synchronicity and political consensus on the one hand, and each of the 'three possibles' on the other.

Local Intelligence Helps Distinguish Between Terrorist and Noncombatant

Intelligence helps the security forces discriminate between those involved in terrorist activity, and ordinary members of the population. It thus helps minimize harassment and inconvenience to the public at large, leaving the common man free to go about his business. Intelligence helps meet the first 'possible', by allowing for the surgical neutralization of terrorists and their active supporters.³⁰ The reason that such intelligence is produced locally, rather than at the federal level, comes down to simple constraints of resources, doctrine and legality.

Federal intelligence organizations have to cater to a multiplicity of consumer requirements of which counter-terrorism is only one. Such organizations strive to assist policymakers before all other categories of consumer. The informational requirements of security forces at the tactical level are only fulfilled once higher priorities have been met.³¹ In effect, operational units in counter-terrorism have to take the initiative in developing their own intelligence-gathering capabilities. The only alternative is to wait until the intelligence bureaucracy can free up resources to begin meeting their requirements.

Furthermore, the limited federal intelligence capabilities that are devoted to the collection of tactical intelligence are usually oriented towards conventional military targets. Order of battle analyses of foreign armies and target acquisition in wartime constitute their main roles in supporting operational-level

³⁰ Sarkar (1998), p. 128

³¹ Stephen Sloan, "Meeting the Terrorist Threat: The Localization of Counter Terrorism Intelligence," in *Police Practice and Research*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2002, London, pp. 340-1.

consumers. The asymmetric structure and tactics of terrorist groups makes them a highly unusual challenge for intelligence systems. Barring counter-intelligence experts, who are accustomed to tracking down clandestine networks, many intelligence professionals have little knowledge of combating non-state actors.³²

Also, intelligence organizations face certain legal handicaps in counter-terrorism. It has generally been the case that Police officers, with their executive powers, possess a comparative advantage in handling agents. A Policeman can negotiate deals with an informer, which trade-off a reduced prison sentence in exchange for his collaboration. By comparison, intelligence officers in democracies are usually constrained from independently extending such offers to potential or actual terrorists.³³

According to one Police officer who served in Punjab, in any counter-terrorist effort it is always the local Police who stand the best chance of acquiring actionable intelligence.³⁴ Traditional human intelligence systems, consisting of paid informers and professional handlers, virtually disintegrate in the face of targeted assassinations by terrorists. Relying on professional intelligence officers to furnish information on terrorist activity is thus a recipe for perpetual intelligence failure. The only alternative is to empower operational units of the security forces to meet their own intelligence requirements. This requires the infusion of large sums of money into the counter-terrorist effort, and its dispersal among tactical-level commanders.

The lynchpin of Gill's intelligence strategy was the *thana*, or local Police station. *Thanas* were first introduced into the subcontinent by the British East India Company in 1793. From 1810 onwards, they began to be systematically used for intelligence-gathering. An elaborate network of informers, usually very disreputable characters, functioned as the eyes and ears of

³² Ralph O. Baker, "HUMINT-CENTRIC OPERATIONS: Developing Actionable Intelligence in the Urban Counterinsurgency Environment," in *Military Review*, March-April 2007, p. 13.

³³ Heymann, *Terrorism and America*, p. 27.

³⁴ <http://www.india-seminar.com/1999/483/483%201a1.htm>, accessed May 30, 2007

the Station House Officer (SHO). Following the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, *thanas* became the central nervous system of the British Empire in India. They served to detect the very first murmurings of discontent against colonial rule and were very effective in suppressing these.³⁵

With the transition to Indian independence however, internal security policing ceased to occupy the same priority for the political establishment. It was assumed that democracy would act as a palliative to societal unrest, thus obviating the need for a large coercive apparatus. The Police system in India thus began to lag behind external requirements posed by changing political and demographic trends. Infrastructure inherited from the colonial authorities was not built upon at a rate commensurate to population growth.³⁶

As a first step towards reinvigorating Police intelligence networks, Gill introduced a regime of meticulous documentation of terrorist crimes.³⁷ The purpose of this was to detect alarming trends and patterns in terrorist activity before they gained momentum and became irreversible. Furthermore, data would be collated to facilitate link analyses of relations between terrorist groups and individual members within these. Thereafter, the Police prioritized their man-hunting efforts, focusing on interdicting those terrorists who constituted the most active nodes of the movement. The idea was to exert a ‘demonstrative effect’ upon the terrorist movement, without undergoing the prohibitive costs of chasing down rank-and-file cadres.

Bounties were placed upon the heads of particularly notorious terrorists. To aid in the process of prioritization, terrorists were classed into ‘A’, ‘B’ or ‘C’ categories on the basis of their commitment. Hardcore or category ‘A’ terrorists were generally extremely violent and were targeted for special attention. Whenever less ruthless category ‘B’ or ‘C’ terrorists were captured by the Police, they were usually required to co-

³⁵ Basudeb Chattopadhyay, “State Intelligence Network and Surveillance in Colonial India,” in Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Dipankar Sinha and Barnita Bagchi eds., *Webs of History: Information: Communication and Technology from Early to Post-Colonial India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2005, pp. 197-8.

³⁶ D.C Nath, 2004, *Intelligence Imperatives for India*, New Delhi: India First Foundation, 2004, p. 139.

³⁷ Gill (2001a), pp. 43-44.

operate in neutralizing their more fanatical comrades if they wanted to be let off. During 1992, many such betrayals took place and had a cascading effect on the fortunes of the *Khalistan* movement.

The number of terrorists classed as priority targets for neutralization usually ranged between 30 and 40.³⁸ Though few in number, these individuals' continued liberty in defiance of the Government made them poster-boys for terrorist recruitment. Capturing or killing them translated into a psychological victory for the Government and thus became the focus of Police counterterrorist efforts. Here, the *thanas* played a crucial role. As bastions of Government authority situated squarely amongst the local community, they possessed an institutional memory which no external agency could match.³⁹ Police officers knew the association matrices of prominent terrorists, right down to their distant relatives and childhood friends. They thus knew whom to approach for information while hunting for a particular individual, without having to question those unconnected with him. Federal counter-terrorist forces on the other hand, could not help but harass the innocent along with the guilty during man-hunting efforts.

The Indian Army's counter-terrorist operations in Punjab during 1984 provide a ready example of this point. Writing retrospectively, Gill outlined the intelligence challenges faced by the Indian Army when it chose to operate independently of the Police:

[T]he classical defects of Army intervention in civil strife – an extraneous and heavily armed force suddenly transported into unfamiliar territory; mistrustful (in this case, exceptionally so) of the local Police and intelligence, but with no independent sources of information; dealing with a population, large elements of which had become hostile; and operating under a political fiat that not only condoned, but emphasized the use of punitive force. Operating blindly, the Army arrested large numbers of people, many innocent, others

³⁸ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, January 3, 2005.

³⁹ Email correspondence with Dr. Ajai Sahni, April 10, 2007.

perhaps merely sympathetic to the militant cause, but by no means associated with any terrorist or criminal activity. Lacking in adequate information to distinguish effectively at the local level, the [Army's] indiscriminate sweep ... pushed many a young man across the border into the arms of welcoming Pakistani handlers.⁴⁰

By contrast, the Police possessed an in-built 'surge capability' to gather intelligence on terrorist related activity, which could be rapidly activated in a crisis. State Police officers possessed an awareness of local geographic, demographic and cultural factors that simply lay beyond the reach of their federal counterparts. Such knowledge proved invaluable in operational planning. For instance, a number of terrorists often pursued sexual relations with favoured women in both rural and urban areas. Once the Police identified these women and where they lived, it was relatively simple to put surveillance on their houses and wait till the terrorists came calling.⁴¹ Once provided with additional funds for intelligence-gathering, Police Stations were able to intensify their coverage of terrorist activity within their jurisdictions. In Tarn Taran, the area of highest terrorist activity, an elaborate system of informers allowed the Police to accurately identify terrorist harbourers in each village. Typically, the terrorists would come calling at night, enjoy the hospitality of their hosts, and depart before daybreak. Within hours, Policemen would descend upon the harbourers' houses and demand an explanation for the nocturnal visitors.⁴²

By repeatedly carrying out such raids, the Police conveyed to the population that hidden sympathies for the terrorists would not remain a secret. At the same time, raids on harbourers established a cause-and-effect relationship between the presence of militants in a neighbourhood, and subsequent Police activity. The Police were thus not seen as a hostile force, intent on disrupting the lives of local residents, but as a force engaged in pursuit of specific individuals. The fact that only those who actually sheltered the

⁴⁰ Gill (2001a), p. 30.

⁴¹ Kesava Menon, "Terrorism: New Ethics," *Frontline*, 29 April - 12 May, 1989, p. 114.

⁴² Subrata Talukdar, "In Sheer Terror," *Frontline*, March 4-17, 1989, p. 11.

terrorists were questioned also split the large majority of the population from the militants and their active supporters.

If *thanas* were the building block of Police intelligence in Punjab, money-power was its lifeblood. The quality of information provided by informers was directly related to the financial inducements offered.⁴³ The experience of Punjab in this respect tallies with what has been observed in asymmetric wars elsewhere.⁴⁴ Human intelligence was crucial to the effectiveness of counter-terrorist operations, and such intelligence was usually the result of good policing and an established security forces presence at the local level. Since the Police were part of the state's civil administration, they were able to set up intelligence networks under the guise of civic action programmes. For instance, a number of Police Stations established hockey clubs in their jurisdictions to reach out to local youths. Some of these were subsequently recruited as undercover operatives.⁴⁵

Increments of money had a positive effect on the outcome of counter-terrorist efforts, provided such increments were directed at the tactical level of the intelligence hierarchy, and not the strategic one. Even indirect investments in local infrastructure could yield intelligence dividends, as became evident when the Government expanded the state telecommunications network. A number of individuals phoned in anonymous tip-offs regarding the whereabouts of wanted terrorists, usually motivated by personal vendettas.⁴⁶ Although strategic intelligence on the terrorist movement was excellent, it was of little actionable value at the grass-roots level. Indian intelligence agencies did not share a lot of their data on the *Khalistan* movement with the Punjab

⁴³ Praveen Swami, "To bottle the genie," *Frontline*, November 18, 1994, p. 42.

⁴⁴ For instance, during anti-Thuggee operations in 19th century India and in colonial Malaya during the 1950s. The key to British success in both campaigns was the introduction of large financial rewards for actionable intelligence, which were distributed by tactical-level commanders rather than sanctioned centrally. Mike Dash, *Thug: The True Story of India's Murderous Cult*, London: Granta, 2005, p. 200. Also see Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs*, London: Fontana, 1973, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁵ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, June 20, 2007.

⁴⁶ Interview of former Union Home Ministry official, Bangalore, August 12, 2004.

Police.⁴⁷ When it came to tactical intelligence, the volume of information locally developed and exploited by the Police was far greater than that provided by Federal agencies.

Synchronized Operations Increase the Neutralization Rate

Gill's experience of counter-insurgency in northeastern India allowed him to study and map out the comparative advantages of the Police and the military.⁴⁸ Police forces possessed a vital asset which could not be easily acquired by the military, namely, local intelligence networks. The Army on the other hand, had two advantages which could be replicated by the Police over time: manpower and firepower.⁴⁹ Both of these were essential to attaining area dominance over a terrorist-infested region. Area dominance in turn, helped maintain intelligence dominance since an improved incident response capability led to more terrorists being captured. More captures meant more information could be obtained from interrogations. They also emboldened the people to increasingly volunteer information on terrorist activity as public confidence that quick action would follow increased.⁵⁰

Therefore, after developing the capability to distinguish terrorist from noncombatant, the next priority was to neutralize terrorists at the highest possible rate. Gill aimed to improve the neutralization rate in Punjab by empowering first responders to react with maximum speed to terrorist incidents. Towards this end, he advocated militarizing the Police force: a move that brought him into conflict with more conservatively-minded colleagues.

For a start, there was strong bureaucratic resistance to the idea of upgrading Police weaponry to match the Kalashnikov assault rifles available to the terrorists. A view existed that no matter how grave the security situation, an ostensibly 'civilian'

⁴⁷ Interview of former Indian counter-intelligence officer, New Delhi, June 19, 2007.

⁴⁸ Gupta and Sandhu, "K.P.S Gill: True Grit," p. 64.

⁴⁹ Manoj Joshi, "Combating terrorism in Punjab: Indian democracy in crisis," *Conflict Studies* 261, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, London, 1993, p. 13.

⁵⁰ A point made by Dr. Ajai Sahni after reading an earlier draft of this paper. Email correspondence, June 24, 2007.

force such as the Police could not be armed with ‘military’ weapons. These fears stemmed in part from worries that equipping the Police with assault rifles could lead to widespread human rights violations.⁵¹ In fact, the opposite turned out to be the case. Confident of their fighting capacity once provided with a suitable counter to the AK-47, the men of the Punjab Police grew more willing to close in with the terrorists during shoot-outs. By extension, civilian casualties dropped as the Police were better able to distinguish terrorist from noncombatant.

Less controversial changes included efforts to strengthen the vehicle fleet and the Police radio network. Eventually, the number of vehicles available for Police response teams was tripled, while INR 140 million was spent on improving the extent and quality of Police communications. In addition, the Police radio network was interlinked with those of the central paramilitary forces, who had been specially inducted into the state to contain terrorism. The Police force itself was expanded from 35,000 men to 60,000 men, 65 per cent of whom were Sikhs.⁵² As had been done with the terrorists, Police Stations were graded into ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ categories to prioritize resource allocation. Category ‘A’ stations were those within whose jurisdictions the largest number of terrorist incidents occurred. Their vulnerabilities and inadequacies were subject to intense scrutiny, and additional resources were allocated to rectify these. Different stations were afflicted by different types of shortages, ranging from manpower deficiencies in some, to poor communications and transport in others.

To a large extent, manpower shortages were offset by improved operational co-ordination between the Police and central paramilitary forces. As chief of Police, K.P.S Gill was given operational control over central paramilitary forces within Punjab.⁵³ Upon his instructions, joint Police-paramilitary interrogation teams were created to improve intelligence-sharing and exploitation at the tactical level. This minimized turnaround time on intelligence inputs and thus enhanced their actionability.

⁵¹ Gill (2001b), p. 187

⁵² K.P.S Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1997, p. 106.

⁵³ Ved Marwah, *Uncivil Wars: A Pathology of Terrorism in India*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1995, p. 219.

Prolonged interaction between local and central security forces also dissipated the initial suspicions that each held of the other.

One of Gill's biggest innovations in employing Police manpower was the near-complete abolishment of static checkpoints. Having observed the limited utility of barricades and roadblocks in interdicting terrorists, he did away with them. Instead, Policemen were reallocated to the task of actively pursuing terrorists. By this simple expedient, the operational strength of the Punjab Police shot up from 50 per cent of total manpower, to 85 per cent.⁵⁴ Gill set a high standard of operational readiness for the Punjab Police. He aimed to attain a reaction time of 3-5 minutes in urban areas, and 15-20 minutes in rural areas. By a combination of the measures described above, and massive manpower support from the Indian Army, this standard was achieved in 1992.

Ever since its assault on the Golden Temple in 1984, the Army had stayed out of internal security duties in Punjab. The reason was strategic: Punjab was a vital operational area in the event of war with Pakistan. For reasons already outlined, the Army's counter-terrorist operations had alienated the local population. This was viewed as alarming, particularly when some Sikh battalions mutinied following the attack on the Temple. Eager not to worsen the situation, the Central Government focused on handing over responsibility for counter-terrorism to the local authorities. For this reason alone, the Army did not come to dominate the counter-terrorist effort in Punjab.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, the pattern of low intensity combat operations in India has been markedly different, and more in tune with that seen across the world.

Militaries are usually tasked with responsibility for counter-terrorism when the level of violence escalates beyond what is considered locally manageable. In such situations, soldiers are strongly inclined to either elbow out local Police forces or subordinate them to military command. The presumption is that terrorist violence could not have escalated had the Police not been

⁵⁴ Gill (2001a), pp. 39-40

⁵⁵ Manoj Joshi, "Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis," *Conflict Studies* 261, Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, London, 1993, p. 12.

partially subverted.⁵⁶ A fairly common tactic used in India is for the military to call for the setting up of a Unified Headquarters to combat terrorism.⁵⁷ Although nominally a meeting point for various services to come together and work out a joint strategy, in practice such headquarters cement the Army's dominance of the counter-terrorist effort. In Punjab after 1984, there were no such maneuvers. Once suitably armed and equipped, the Police amply demonstrated that they were more than willing to confront the terrorists. Accordingly, when the Army was redeployed to Punjab in aid of civil power in late 1991, it was content to accept a secondary role.

Under what Gill termed the 'cooperative command' concept, the Army formed the anvil of the counter-terrorist effort while the Police acted as the hammer. Senior terrorists were pursued across the length and breadth of the State by Police teams armed with specific intelligence.⁵⁸ Meanwhile soldiers set up static checkpoints on every road in the state to restrict the terrorists' freedom of movement. In contrast to 1984, their behavior towards the local population in 1991-92 was impeccable, owing to the very tight supervision exercised by senior officers. When troops moved out on patrol, they were accompanied by Police guides.⁵⁹ Army personnel provided the manpower that constituted the outer cordons of Police cordon and search operations. This freed up large numbers of Policemen to be deployed elsewhere to carry out simultaneous raids, increasing the pressure felt by the terrorists at any one time.

Through a system of interlocking radio networks, the Army was able to saturate the countryside with section-sized quick reaction teams. These were authorized to respond immediately when asked for help by local Police detachments. Their firepower

⁵⁶ In Northern Ireland for instance, the British Army classified certain data 'For UK eyes only', in order to prevent the local Police from seeing it. Brian A. Jackson (2007), 'Counterinsurgency Intelligence in a "Long War": The British Experience in Northern Ireland', in *Military Review*, January-February Issue, p. 76.

⁵⁷ <http://www.india-seminar.com/1999/483/483%201a1.htm>, accessed on May 30, 2007.

⁵⁸ Subhash Chander Arora, *Strategies to Combat Terrorism: A Study of Punjab*, New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1999, p. 163.

⁵⁹ Manoj Joshi, 'Fear in the fray,' *Frontline*, February 28, 1992, pp. 4-10.

helped Police personnel overcome the deleterious effects of sophisticated weapons used by the terrorists. Thanks to Pakistani largesse, by 1992 these included anti-tank rockets, landmines, medium machine guns and armour-piercing bullets. Although the Punjab Police had developed countermeasures against some terrorist weapons, the Army's assistance helped tip the tactical balance.⁶⁰

The cooperative command concept was sustained by extensive liaison arrangements between the Army and the Police. Here, the nature of individual personalities counted for a lot. K.P.S Gill had an excellent rapport with his military counterparts, some of whom he had previously befriended during postings in the Northeast.⁶¹ Orders were sent down the chain of command within both services, stressing the need for unity of effort and close co-operation in the field. From the strategic level down to the tactical, Police representatives interacted closely with their Army counterparts. Tactical intelligence was immediately disseminated to the widest possible audience, so as to ensure total situational awareness on the part of all units.⁶²

The Indian Army played a significant behind-the-scenes role even prior to its active deployment in counter-terrorist duties in 1991-92. It trained 20,000 civilian volunteers and 9,000 Police officers in combat tactics, through programmes which lasted between 4 and 10 weeks. In addition, the Army complemented the Police's meager staff resources by helping to prepare operational plans for securing large urban centres.⁶³ Lastly, the Army helped set up a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) capability within the Punjab Police. The SWAT teams eventually grew to a total strength of over 10,000 personnel, or just over one-sixth of the state Police force. With their high standard of operational readiness, their contribution in helping control terrorism during 1992 and 1994 was crucial.

Lastly, the Police made very effective use of the mass media as an instrument of psychological warfare. K.P.S Gill had taken a decision way back in 1988 to allow journalists unprecedented

⁶⁰ Joshi, 'Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis.'

⁶¹ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, June 20, 2007.

⁶² Gill (2001a), p. 73.

⁶³ Ibid.

access to Police operations. The idea at the time was to counter terrorist allegations of Government atrocities. Once the media was given a ringside view of events in Punjab, it gradually grew to appreciate the difference between fact and fiction. For a start, journalists were able to independently investigate allegations of Police brutality, and noted that many were exaggerated. One correspondent summed up the situation: “when there is no guarantee of security of life and property, citizens tend to believe anything.”⁶⁴

During the 1992 operations, Gill switched from defensively using the media to counter terrorist propaganda, to employing it offensively. The neutralization of terrorists well-known for their brutality automatically made for a newsworthy story. From June 1992 onwards, the press in Punjab was flooded by a series of reports on spectacular Police successes. With almost dazzling speed, the Police began arresting or killing all the top terrorists in the State. These individuals had, just six months previously, seemed beyond the reach of the law. Their deaths in shootouts with the Police were greeted with marked indifference and occasional glee from ordinary Sikhs, a point that the media noted.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, their confederates in the terrorist movement noted both the rate of Police successes, and the lack of popular reaction. Many began to defect from their terrorist groups, opening a floodgate of intelligence information for the Police.

Political Will is Needed to Sustain Operations

So far, the first two ‘possibles’ that triangulate the Gill Doctrine has been discussed. To recap, these are: to surgically neutralize as many terrorists as possible, as quickly as possible. Doing so for as long as possible however, proved to be the biggest stumbling block for counter-terrorist efforts in Punjab. The Police were repeatedly stymied by political machinations at both the State and Central Government levels. Eager to ingratiate

⁶⁴ Pankaj Vohra, “Lawless in Punjab,” *Frontline*, September 15-28, 1990, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Praveen Swami, “Signs of Peace,” *Frontline*, April 23, 1993, p. 71.

themselves with the militants, many politicians actively shielded them from justice.

The political dimension of the *Khalistan* movement represented the only overlap between terrorism's 'root causes', and its sustaining dynamic. During the 1980s, one of the factors that had permitted the emergence of militancy in Punjab was high-level complicity from New Delhi. Eager to consolidate its political hold over the State, the ruling party in the Central Government was prepared to ignore political violence when it served to intimidate opposition parties at the State level. Politicians of all hues thus rushed to align themselves with militant factions, realising that this gave them extra clout while dealing with the top policy-making elite in Delhi. In neutralizing the sustaining dynamic of terrorism in Punjab, Indian security managers necessarily had to split the politician-terrorist nexus. This was the toughest part of the counter-terrorist effort, and the most murky. Details of how it was done are non-existent, with only the scantiest of outlines available.

Basically, the Indian Government started by devolving power in 1985 to a prominent regionalist party in the hope that it would combat terrorism. The scheme backfired. Regionalist politicians were not compelled, for reasons of political ideology, to confront the militants.⁶⁶ Attempts to create a rift between extremists and moderates in Punjab's political climate thus died stillborn, particularly when the terrorists assassinated moderates. The next step taken was to impose direct rule from New Delhi.

Dismissing the elected State Government did not affect the security situation on the ground in practical terms. By 1988, the Punjab terrorist conflict was rapidly escalating into a proxy war between India and Pakistan. Events within the State started to be shaped more by operational, rather than political, dynamics. K.P.S Gill's efforts to strengthen the Police and integrate counter-terrorist efforts within a common strategy thus proved highly important in containing violence. Once Gill had demonstrated a capability to suppress terrorism however, politics intervened to assume primacy once again.

⁶⁶ Gill (1997), p. 21.

In December 1989, a change of Government occurred in New Delhi. Eager to embarrass its predecessor over the issue of terrorism, the new regime set about consciously undoing all that had been achieved. It initiated talks without preconditions with the *Khalistanis*, but primarily for public relations purposes. Over the next two years, successive Indian policymakers sought to smooth-talk the terrorists into giving up their demands. All the time, they avoided making any meaningful concessions as a *quid pro quo*.

Terrorist violence skyrocketed in Punjab as a result of these sham negotiations. In a bid to prove its goodwill, the Government issued unwritten instructions for the immediate release of hardcore terrorists.⁶⁷ These men had been captured at great risk to the security forces and the impunity granted them by the political establishment damaged morale. In addition, the Police were ordered to go slow on those terrorists who were still at large. While the Police were forced onto the defensive, recruitment rates to terrorist groups shot up. It was because of this that the Army eventually had to be redeployed to Punjab in 1992.

Notwithstanding the impressive results delivered by the Police, the surge in terrorist numbers between 1990 and 1992 forced the military to return. During this period, the terrorists scored a significant psychological victory when the Indian Government conceded their demand to post K.P.S Gill out from Punjab. Realizing that Gill was their biggest nemesis, the terrorists and their allies in the State's political establishment actively pressed for his removal.⁶⁸ It was only when New Delhi forged a political consensus on eradicating the terrorist movement, and after another change of Government at the Centre, that Gill was posted back to Punjab in December 1991.

During Gill's absence from the State, violence in Punjab escalated and eventually settled at a quantitatively new equilibrium level. Conciliation had encouraged more individuals to take up arms in the belief that the Government was powerless to stop them. Between 1981 and 1989, 5,521 people were killed

⁶⁷ K.V Lakshmana, "A new offensive," *Frontline*, April 14-27, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Ajai Sahni, "Responding to Terrorism in Punjab, and Jammu and Kashmir," p. 43.

by terrorists. During the following two years (1990-91), when the Indian Government made repeated negotiation offers, over 6,000 people were killed. The terrorists were so emboldened by the Government's keenness to accommodate them, that they felt free to target the Police. While 451 Policemen were killed by terrorists between 1981 and 1989, the years 1990-91 alone saw 973 policemen killed. The terrorists went so far as to massacre the families of Policemen, including the women and children.⁶⁹

Between late 1989 and early 1992, the Police fought an essentially tactical war against terrorism. Attrition of *Khalistani* groups was high, but was carried out more on an *ad hoc* basis. Political mood-swings in Delhi decided if and for how long aggressive operations against the terrorists could be initiated. True to form, Indian policymakers would order an offensive against the *Khalistan* movement, and then suspend operations to reopen negotiations. They did not comprehend that the terrorists saw willingness to talk as a sign of weakness, and that this was keeping recruitment rates high.

The essence of the Gill Doctrine was prioritization of resources and co-ordination of efforts. In order to produce a strategic effect, counter-terrorist planning had to be extended into at least the medium-term. Time was needed to work down the list of operational priorities, so that, instead of just fire-fighting, the Police could begin to rollback the terrorist movement. Starting at the top with the category 'A' terrorists, they would work their way down towards the rank and file. Crucial to the Doctrine was the view that counter-terrorist attrition could be made both rapid and sustainable. By the early 1990s, the enlarged terrorist movement threatened to swamp the overworked Punjab Police. Policymakers in New Delhi, for their part, prevented the Police from operating aggressively. As a result, counter-terrorist attrition in Punjab was neither rapid nor sustainable, despite the higher fatality rates in all categories.

In effect, Police efforts were dealt a body blow whenever mandarins in New Delhi sought to try out yet another 'political solution'. Initiating negotiations with the terrorists inevitably raised fears within the force of a political sell-out. No rational

⁶⁹ Joshi, "Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis," p. 4.

Policeman was prepared to risk his life and that of his family combating terrorists, if there was a possibility of being abandoned by the Government. A number of terrorists had promised that they would pursue vendettas against the Police if rehabilitated. Thus, whenever talk of a political solution was aired, many Policemen were compelled to hedge their bets.⁷⁰

In order to ensure some continuity in the counter-terrorist effort while New Delhi vacillated, the Punjab Police began a programme of civic outreach. Police officers actively mobilized peasants (particularly in the areas of the State bordering Pakistan) against terrorism. Since most terrorist attacks occurred in the border regions, the people living here had no love lost for the *Khalistanis*, but were justifiably reluctant to actively oppose them. By continuous liaison with community leaders, Police officers gradually helped dissipate this sense of fear.

First, the Police provided firearms to selected rural settlements, so that their inhabitants could take responsibility for their own defence. This became particularly necessary when the quantum of terrorist activity in 1990-91 exceeded the capacity of the Police force to de-escalate violence.⁷¹ Owing to their excellent local knowledge, Police Stations knew from past voting trends where the political loyalties of each settlement lay. They began to arm those with Leftist sympathies first, as Punjab's communist parties had long been opposed to the concept of *Khalistan*.⁷²

Thereafter, Police parties of around 20-30 men would camp out in the settlements for days at a stretch in order to reassure the inhabitants of their support. These parties also provided arms training to volunteers in local self-defence forces. The nucleus of these forces consisted of former Sikh soldiers of the Indian Army, who were willing to take the lead in mobilizing their neighbourhoods to fight terrorism. In addition, the Police held public meetings, where the victims of terrorist violence could narrate their experiences without fear of retribution. Since, in many cases, the victims were known to members of the audience,

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁷¹ K.V Lakshmana, "A New Offensive," *Frontline*, April 14-27, 1990, p. 17.

⁷² Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, June 20, 2007.

such meetings served to create a collective sense of anger against the *Khalistani* terrorists.

What eventually transformed the situation was the election of a State Government in February 1992, which was implacably hostile to the terrorists. Ever since the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Congress party had been bitterly opposed to the *Khalistan* movement. A fortuitous electoral victory brought the party to power at both the Central and State Government levels. There was thus a strong unity of purpose across the political establishment, which had been missing previously. The Congress party, consequently, had only one agenda, to carry on the counter-terrorist fight to its logical conclusion and without let-up.⁷³

It is commonly believed that the Congress Government gave K.P.S Gill a free hand to suppress terrorism in Punjab. Before the accuracy of this statement can be evaluated, the specific implications of the phrase 'free hand' need to be understood. If taken to mean that the Police force was allowed to run riot, then the impression is wholly inaccurate. At no point did Gill ask for the right to commit excesses upon the local population or for political acquiescence in whatever excesses did take place. What he did receive from policymakers was an assurance that his force would not be ordered to call off its drive against the terrorists halfway, just when results were starting to appear.

The so-called 'free hand' only allowed the Police to do what they were in any case supposed to do, but had long been held back from by interfering politicians. It was a principled no-negotiations policy rather than a "string 'em up" policy. Had it been the latter, the Police would have relied on inducing fear among the population and browbeating it into silence. Instead, the Police worked throughout the conflict to restore normalcy to the lives of the citizenry, and allow them to go about their daily business without fear of being killed. The free hand theory proved immensely beneficial to the terrorists as it helped sustain allegations of human rights violations by the authorities. These were usually leveled by terrorist front organizations or political

⁷³ Joshi, 'Combating Terrorism in Punjab: Indian Democracy in Crisis,' p. 8.

figures with terrorist links.⁷⁴ Upon investigation, many such allegations were found to be either grossly exaggerated or complete fabrications.

Conclusion

Questions began to be asked even as the 1992 counter-terrorist offensive was still raging. Why had it been able to effect so sudden and massive a turnaround in Punjab's security situation? Gill, despite his unique experience and immense skill, had previously been unable to completely eradicate militancy from either Punjab or the northeastern States. There was something different about the 1992 operations, which made them far more successful than past counter-terrorist efforts. The fact was that, unlike his earlier efforts, in 1992 Gill was left to conduct operations untrammelled by politically-imposed handicaps.⁷⁵

The counter-terrorist offensive of 1992 was so effective because all the three 'possibles' were satisfied at the same time, creating the perfect mix of conditions to crush terrorism. The first was the strengthening of Police intelligence and response capabilities, which had hitherto been allowed to atrophy. The second factor was the massive deployment of the Army, which provided manpower to supplement Police operations. The third was the existence of a political consensus that the Police would be allowed to get on with its job without interference. This last factor was perhaps the most important of the three.

At no point of the conflict till then, had there been a clear political consensus on whether it was possible to negotiate a peace deal with the terrorists. For local politicians, there had always existed a possibility that today's terrorist could be rehabilitated under a peace settlement, to become tomorrow's political ally. Consequently, each major terrorist had a political

⁷⁴ For instance, a known terrorist ideologue was Professor Brajinder Singh, who was a close confidante to Sukhdev Singh Dasuwal, leader of the notorious Babbar Khalsa group. In addition to advising Dasuwal on terrorist strategy, Prof. Singh also worked as an over-ground human rights campaigner against the Police. Praveen Swami, "Life after terrorism," *Frontline*, September 23, 1994, p. 115.

⁷⁵ V.N Narayanan, *Trust with Terror: Punjab's Turbulent Decade*, New Delhi: Ajanta, 1996, p. 17.

patron to shield him from Police action. It was only when these politicians realized that their terrorist protégés would be liabilities rather than assets in the State's future political climate, that they abandoned them to the Police.⁷⁶ For this, the Police needed to be seen as unquestionably in the ascendant and terrorism steadily on the wane.

Allegations that the Police achieved ascendancy through brutality were proven to be demonstrably false, but not before they tarnished the force's reputation. One officer complained that "[t]he kind of actions that are treated as human rights violations when committed by the Punjab Police are treated as normal policing in other states."⁷⁷ The general consensus among Sikhs in the areas worst-affected by terrorism was that Police action made their lives easier. They rejected the thesis that instances of Police harassment alienated the population, provided such harassment was directed at the right person.⁷⁸

Perhaps the most important lesson of all is that today's terrorist movements differ fundamentally from those of yore. Massive noncombatant casualties are almost a necessary feature of identity-based rebellions, where ethnic cleansing and cultural separation is the desired objective. Like the present-day al Qaeda movement, *Khalistani* terrorists were not interested in winning the hearts and minds of those who were not already within their identity group. On the contrary, the more Hindu-Sikh relations in Punjab deteriorated as a consequence of terrorist outrages, the closer the concept of *Khalistan* came to reality.

Given the high standard of living enjoyed by Sikhs in India, the terrorists had no choice but to opt for a purely destructive strategy, bereft of any forward-looking political agenda. Their only weapon against the moral authority and legitimacy of the Indian democratic system was religious absolutism enforced under a climate of fear.

India's previous counter-terrorist experiences have demonstrated that it is far harder to effect intelligence penetration of identity-based terrorist movements than those that are

⁷⁶ Gill (1997), pp. 105-106

⁷⁷ Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Punjab: A Festival of Politics," *Frontline*, May 6, 1994, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Subrata Talukdar, "In sheer terror," *Frontline*, March 4-11, 1989, p. 11.

ideology-based. Recruitment efforts in counter-terrorism become much more complicated when a handling officer's ethnicity or religious faith differs from that of his source.⁷⁹ Even the Sikh-dominated Punjab Police got off to a slow and painful start when it came to penetrating terrorist groups. Much of their intelligence data in the early years of the campaign came from interrogation reports and it was only later that inside information could be obtained on a systematic basis.⁸⁰ By contrast, Indian security forces have had little or no difficulty penetrating ultra-Left insurgent groups, since these are always on the lookout for ideological converts.⁸¹

Furthermore, terrorist movements are increasingly drifting towards concepts of 'leaderless resistance' and 'netwar'.⁸² Gone are the days when political rebels needed a centralized decision-making apparatus to guide them. Modern communications technology and banking systems allow groups of like-minded individuals to come together for specific operations, wreak havoc and disperse. The *Khalistan* movement could not be defeated by political conciliation because religion proved to be a particularly potent fuel for self-starters in the terrorism business. Consequently, the movement lacked a centre of gravity which could be bought off or otherwise induced to renounce violence and persuade others to do so as well.

The Gill Doctrine offers a blueprint for future counter-terrorist efforts, as more and more political violence starts to coalesce around issues of identity rather than ideology. The Doctrine holds that, while terrorism in any region cannot be defeated by a force from without, neither can it be appeased through conciliation.⁸³ The only viable solution in the long-run is to steadfastly improve the quality and extent of local policing, and

⁷⁹ B. Raman, *Intelligence: Past, Present and Future*, New Delhi: Lancer, 2002, pp. 257-8.

⁸⁰ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, June 20, 2007.

⁸¹ Interview of K.P.S Gill, New Delhi, January 3, 2005.

⁸² Leaderless resistance is in particular, an attractive strategic option for right-wing terrorist groups as their objectives usually involve preserving the existing order rather than ushering in revolutionary change. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security*, Volume 31, Number 1, 2006, pp. 23-24.

⁸³ Gill (1997), p. 108.

leave the fight against terrorism to individuals recruited from the communities that the terrorists themselves claim to 'represent'.

Within India, a number of factors have conspired to prevent the Punjab experiment from being replicated. First, the lessons of the 1992 campaign have been forgotten because of a poor institutional memory. Second, the Indian Army has been less willing to accept a secondary role in internal security management. It did so in Punjab on an exceptional basis, due to over-riding strategic considerations.⁸⁴

Lastly, local Governments have a vested interest in perpetuating the Army's presence. The presence of central forces allows them to shift the financial burden of responsibility for counter-terrorism to New Delhi.⁸⁵ Indian policymakers need to make a concerted effort to overcome this last obstacle. Only once the operational capabilities of Police forces are improved at the local level, can counter-terrorism eradicate militancy. Otherwise, the use of military force shall succeed in containing terrorism, but not in defeating it.

⁸⁴ The success of 'cooperative command' between the Police and Army in 1992 was largely due to the military's eagerness to avoid a repeat of *Operation Woodrose*. See Gupta and Sandhu, "K.P.S Gill: True Grit," p. 64.

⁸⁵ K.P.S Gill, "The Danger Within: Internal Security Threats," Bharat Karnad ed., *Future Imperilled*, New Delhi: Viking, 1994, p. 129.