

Secrets of COIN Success

Lessons from the Punjab Campaign

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The attack on the World Trade Center brought home the truth expressed succinctly by K. P. S. Gill that terrorism “transcends all international boundaries.... as it destroys those who tolerate it or succumb to it.”¹ Further, Gill points out that terrorism is a method that recognizes no limits of law and knows no constraint of morality, of honour, of human compassion, or even of the minimal rules of warfare.² The global focus on terrorism and insurgency is a welcome development from an Indian perspective.³ India has been battling the scourge of terrorism and fighting an externally supported insurgency for over three decades in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and the North-Eastern States of the country. During this period, India’s Security Forces (SFs)

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¹ K. P. S. Gill and Ajai Sahni, eds, *Terror and Containment Perspectives of India's Internal Security*, New Delhi: Gyan Publications, 2001, p. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3 on Irregular Warfare defines terrorism as a tactic which may be used to achieve an insurgency’s objectives (p 11) The words terrorists and insurgents are used interchangeably throughout this paper. See Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, 1 August 2007, United States Air Force, www.fas.org/irp/doddir/usaf/afdd2-3.pdf.

have gained valuable experience in battling the insurgencies in different States of the country.

The Indian Government and its SFs were spectacularly successful in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in the northern State of Punjab. The violent insurgency consumed 21,469 lives before it was comprehensively defeated in 1993.⁴ The Punjab campaign ranks as one of the bloodiest, technologically advanced, recent, and successful COIN campaigns in the world. Punjab provides a classic example of a COIN campaign in the modern era. It was a campaign fought in the glare of the media and telephone connectivity. It saw extensive use of AK-47s, rocket launchers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the terrorists. This makes it most relevant for studying the lessons to apply them in current and future COIN operations.

As the world grapples with the problems of insurgency, with the benefit of hindsight, two clear lessons emerge from the Punjab campaign. First, a strong, charismatic and innovative SFs' leader is essential for the COIN campaign. K.P.S. Gill, the then Director General of Punjab Police, was the chief architect of the Punjab COIN campaign and marshalled the SFs with charismatic élan. Secondly, the Government should utilize the SFs to create the environment for a political solution to the conflict. Before analyzing the Punjab COIN campaign, it is important to understand the background of the insurgency and the role of different players in the conflict.

History of the Sikh *Panth* and the Origins of Insurgency

Sikhs comprise just under two percent of India's population, with their principal concentration in the north-western State of Punjab, where the Sikh religion was born about 450 years ago. There are symbiotic links between Sikhs and Hindus as the first-born sons of several Hindu families frequently converted to Sikhism to defend the faith. Anti-Sikh persecution by Mughal rulers led the 10th Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, to establish the concept of a citizen soldier. He established the *Khalsa*, a militant

⁴ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 23.

social organization, to defend the Sikh and Hindu community against atrocities by Mughal rulers. Sikhs are renowned for their military prowess and form a disproportionately large part of the Indian armed forces.

The Sikhs are industrious, hard working and one of the most prosperous communities in the country. The Sikh Diasporas in USA, Canada and UK are a major source of material and financial support to the Sikhs living in Punjab. It is rare to find a household, which does not have relatives staying outside the country, and providing financial help. The Sikhs identify themselves as a part of a worldwide community known as the *Panth*. The concept of *Panth* bonds the Sikhs and is similar in concept to the Muslim *Ummah*. Several self-serving Sikh terrorist leaders manipulated the notion of the '*Panth* under attack' to mobilize the rural population.⁵

On numerous occasions after India's independence in 1947, the Sikh fear of being submerged as one of the many Hindu sects had intermittently prompted a call for a separate State. Khushwant Singh, a noted Sikh Indian writer, expressed this fear, stating, "If the present state of amalgamation continues, there is little doubt that before the century has run its course, the Sikh religion will have become a branch of Hinduism."⁶ Ved Marwah, a senior political analyst and retired Director General of Police, states, "Notwithstanding the many social and religious links between the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab, there has always been a vocal section among the Sikhs who considered Hinduism as a threat to the survival of Sikh religion."⁷ The Sikhs suffered terribly during the Partition of India in 1947. Over two million Sikhs, penniless and destitute, were driven away from their properties in Pakistan, even as hundreds of thousands were slaughtered. A majority of Sikhs feel that the consequences of Partition (at the time of Independence) have been unjust to them.⁸ The separatists argued

⁵ William Scott Latimer, *What Can the United States Learn from India to Counter Terrorism?*, California: Naval Postgraduate School, 2004, p. 14.

⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 185.

⁷ Ved Marwah, *Uncivil Wars: Pathology of Terrorism in India*, New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research, 1996, p. 153.

⁸ *Ibid.*

that this injustice could be set right by the creation of the independent Sikh State of 'Khalistan'.

After independence, the Indian State of Punjab was divided on linguistic lines to ensure a Sikh majority. Despite a Sikh majority in Punjab, the Sikhs' chief political party, the Akali Dal, could not immediately come to power. A number of other national parties appealed to the voters with a variety of political messages. The Akali Dal has traditionally espoused a fervent religious identity of the Sikhs. Petty politics motivated all the national and local parties to adopt extreme and violent positions against the Indian state in a bid to attract larger followings of the majority Sikh population.

Punjab at the Height of Insurgency

The Sikhs rallied behind the most prominent insurgent leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who made the Golden Temple (the holiest Sikh shrine) his seat of power. The Indian Government, piqued by the increasing violence, ordered the Army to rid the Temple of the terrorists. The Army carried out a heavy-handed attack on the shrine, code-named *Operation Bluestar*, in 1984, leading to an outcry against the Government. Sikh terrorists retaliated by assassinating Indira Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister who had ordered the attack. In the ensuing communal riots, over 3,000 Sikhs lost their lives.⁹

Gill argues that *Operation Bluestar* and the November 1984 Sikh massacres were the two most significant 'victories' for the cause of Khalistan, not won by the militants, but inflicted upon the nation by its own Government.¹⁰ The Indian Government, stung by the riots, vacillated for the next few years, as the terrorists launched even deadlier attacks on the population. Weak Union Governments under Prime Ministers V. P. Singh and Chandrasekhar attempted to make 'deals' with the terrorists with

⁹ Bedi, Rahul (November 1, 2009). "[Indira Gandhi's death remembered](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8306420.stm)". BBC. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8306420.stm. Retrieved 2009-11-02. "The 25th anniversary of Indira Gandhi's assassination revives stark memories of some 3,000 Sikhs killed brutally in the orderly pogrom that followed her killing"

¹⁰ K.P.S. Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1997, p. 95.

their 'healing hearts' campaigns.¹¹ Emboldened by the weak-kneed response from the Government, the terrorists proclaimed that talks with the Union Government would only be held for the proclamation of Khalistan in Geneva under the aegis of United Nations.¹² The terrorist movement was at its peak during this period and as many civilians (5,058) were killed during 1990 and 1991 as during the preceding 12 years.¹³

1990 and 1991 saw the collapse of the Indian bureaucracy in Punjab. The terrorists' writ ran in villages and small towns. The success of the terrorists in defying the Government, their open brandishing of weapons and refusal to talk to the state, made them feel that the formation of Khalistan was a mere formality. 'Shadow Governments' were constituted in the US and UK with 'Prime Ministers' and 'Presidents' waiting to take over.¹⁴ The scent of an impending victory spawned several new groups waiting to grab a share of power. A frightened bureaucracy started towing the line of terrorist diktats. The terrorists ensured censorship of information by killing non-compliant press editors and journalists.¹⁵ Overall, the intensity of the movement grew rapidly and paralyzed the entire State machinery. At this stage, the terrorists were winning the guerrilla war against the Government. The insurgency enjoyed popular support and the COIN campaign lay in tatters.

David Galula defines five steps of a successful insurgency: the creation of a party, putting up a united front, successful guerrilla warfare, movement warfare and an annihilation campaign.¹⁶ The Punjab insurgents had completed the first three steps of an orthodox insurgency. The newly formed shadow Governments in foreign countries were dreaming to take over the reins of administration after talks with the Indian Government. The terrorists had the support of the local population since a significant proportion of the population was convinced that the

¹¹ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 56.

¹² Ibid, p. 63.

¹³ Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

¹⁵ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 165.

¹⁶ David Galula and John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era, Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006, pp. 30-33.

insurgents were fighting for a noble cause, which was just and moral. The targeting of Hindus had been successful in driving them away from their homes in many areas of Punjab. Only the last two steps of mobile warfare and an annihilation campaign to ensure a defeat of the Indian armed forces were necessary before forming the independent State of Khalistan. The success of the insurgents in a future conventional battle against India's SFs did not appear far-fetched with generous external support from neighboring Pakistan.

Galula notes, "Outside support to an insurgency can take the form of moral, political, technical, financial or military support."¹⁷ The Pakistani Government was quick to grab the opportunity to foment trouble in India. It had perfected the art of fomenting trouble in Afghanistan in the 1980's by supplying arms, training and finances to willing fighters in Afghanistan at the behest of the US. After the success against the erstwhile USSR in Afghanistan, Pakistani authorities felt that they had a winning idea ready for implementation in India as well. Using the Afghan template, they started encouraging the Punjabi separatist movement. Documenting the external support for the Sikh insurgency, Ved Marwah notes that "The Pakistani Government set up terrorist camps where the Sikhs were trained, supplied them with safe haven, hosted the Khalistani leadership, provided arms and explosives."¹⁸ The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's external intelligence agency, provided AK-47 rifles and IEDs to the terrorists. The impact of terrorism was strongest in the border Districts abutting Pakistan. The international border provided a safe haven for the terrorists and worked immensely in favor of the spiraling insurgency.

Punjab, at the height of insurgency, was a deeply divided State as alienation between the Hindus and Sikhs was complete. Several Police officers had deep sympathies with the cause of the terrorists. This made the Police force vulnerable and left it deeply divided. Incidents where the Police force fled after abandoning their weapons when fighting the terrorists, were common. The

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 177.

spirits of the law enforcement agencies had plummeted to abysmal depths.¹⁹

The terrorists were emboldened by the deeply divided Police force and they plotted, executed and nearly pulled off an attempt to assassinate the top Police officer in Punjab, J. F. Ribeiro, with inside help from Policemen.²⁰ Ribeiro did attempt to improve the morale of a deeply divided and demoralized Punjab Police, but was constantly let down by politicians who interfered in law enforcement. He advocated a ‘bullet for bullet’ approach, which exhorted the Police to take strong action against the terrorists.²¹ The slogan itself became a subject of controversy in the State due to divisive politics. However, it was successful in galvanising the Police force. K.P.S. Gill, who replaced Ribeiro in 1988, was a charismatic and courageous Sikh Police officer. He inherited an unmotivated and deeply divided Police Force, damaged by internal strife and with embedded Khalistani sympathisers. His leadership turned around the Police and made it a dreaded force for the insurgents.

The Importance of Leadership

It is important for the political leadership to choose a central COIN leader. In the Malaya campaign, Field Marshal Montgomery emphasized the importance of leadership after a series of debacles in tackling the insurgency. In his letter to the Colonial Secretary Alfred Lyttelton, Montgomery wrote, “We must have a plan. Secondly, we must have a man.”²² The British Government chose General Sir Gerald Templer to head the COIN campaign. Templer was able to rally all instruments of state power to present a coherent response to the guerrillas. Templer displayed personal leadership and organizational ability early in the campaign.²³

¹⁹ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 29.

²⁰ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 184.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 215.

²² John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002, p. 87.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 89.

Gill displayed similar characteristics during the Punjab campaign. He was the unquestioned leader of the SFs. Gill's charismatic leadership was singularly responsible for transforming the Punjab Police from an unmotivated and deeply divided force to a task oriented, disciplined and united force.

Gill displayed a unique brand of leadership while commanding the Police force. He was fearless and led from the front. Unmindful of the heavy premium on his head, he moved around Punjab frequently to personally direct operations and to meet the personnel involved in the campaigns. Gill displayed a direct action-oriented persona to his subordinates. On an average, he spent more than 25 days in a month touring the terrorist infected areas.²⁴ The most successful commanders have always led by example on the battlefield.²⁵ This maxim holds true, whether the war is fought in the air, the sea or on the ground. Gill's personal bravery acted as a catalyst for several other officers. Several junior officers, motivated by his leadership, volunteered for postings to the most sensitive and dangerous areas, which were critical to the anti-terrorist campaign. Gill also brought in a number of courageous officers from other State cadres and from the para-military forces. The move automatically weeded out officers with low motivation, loyalty or courage, who opted for 'soft postings' at safer places.²⁶

This turnaround in leadership style, which placed a premium on leading from the front, fostered great camaraderie at all levels. It energized the lowest ranks who were confronting the terrorists daily. It is extremely important for the SFs to have complete faith in their superiors. Strong leaders display bravery, command respect, and act as force multipliers. History is replete with stories of Generals like George S. Patton, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Viscount Bernard L. Montgomery, whose personal courage was an example to the foot soldier. The leader acts as the hub of the wheel, around which the COIN campaign revolves. Strong leaders galvanize the SFs into accomplishing acts of courage and

²⁴ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 46.

²⁵ Mark K Wells, ed., *Courage and Air Warfare: The Allied Aircrew Experience in the Second World War*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1995, p. 154.

²⁶ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 45.

endurance previously unimagined. Gill's strong personality also appealed to the general population who supported a strong and powerful leader.

A charismatic leader who enjoys a larger than life persona has a large impact on the COIN campaign, which is a continuous struggle between the insurgents and the SFs for the support of the local population.²⁷ The insurgent must win the support of the general population to attack the Government. It is important for the Government to project an aura of invincibility while retaining a sense of solidarity with the local population. Historically, all successful COIN campaigns, be it in Malaysia or Algeria, owed their success to strong leadership. While it was Sir Gerard Templer in Malaysia, the mantle fell on T.R. Bugeaud in Algeria. Gill donned the mantle of the unquestioned SFs' leader of diverse agencies in Punjab, as he led them bravely, with a flair for brilliant strategy and innovative tactical decisions.

Gill's twin-pronged strategy focused on organizing, training and equipping the Police force into a cohesive fighting unit, and developing a principle of 'cooperative command' between diverse SFs operating in the State. Gill also endeavored to improve the working conditions of the Police force. He reformed the Police into a more professional fighting force through improvements in force strength, transport, communications and weaponry.²⁸ There was an urgent requirement to increase the strength of the SFs. The Government recruited an additional 20,000 Home Guards and 6,000 Special Police Officers (SPOs).²⁹ In addition, the state deployed 35 Army brigades and 350 companies of paramilitary forces in Punjab. The estimated ratio of the number of terrorists' vis-à-vis the SFs was 1:10 to 1:12.³⁰ This provided the troops with the numerical superiority essential to the COIN campaign.

It is important to understand that these forces included all types of SFs deployed in Punjab. The role of Army and paramilitary companies deployed in Punjab was to cordon off the areas while the Police was carrying out anti-terrorist operations. Thus, all Forces had the capability to fight, but the Punjab Police,

²⁷ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 52.

²⁸ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 39.

²⁹ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 218.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 216.

which directly engaged against the insurgents, was numbered at 65,000.

The ratio of the SFs versus the insurgents is important for undertaking COIN operations, which are work force intensive. Any COIN campaign that lacks the requisite numbers will not be able to counter the insurgents, who enjoy some local support and use the anonymity of urban areas to hide from the SFs. The key factor in a COIN campaign is not the availability of sophisticated firepower but numerical strength. A force lacking numerical strength will attempt to use firepower to make up for the deficiency in numbers, as witnessed in Iraq.³¹ This will inevitably lead to collateral damage and civilian deaths. It will further alienate the population, increase the sympathy for the cause of the terrorists, and drive the people towards the movement that the SFs are trying to quell.

The Punjab Police, armed with ancient .303 bolt-action rifles initially, fought against the AK-47-toting terrorists. The Police were issued self-loading rifles only towards the later part of the campaign. It was important for the morale of the Police to display superiority in firepower as compared to the terrorists. The Punjab Police installed old unused Light Machine Guns (LMGs) at sensitive Police stations and atop the escort vehicles of station house officers.³² The LMGs were clumsy, heavy and hardly a match for the light and reliable AK-47. However, the LMGs provided a sense of superior firepower and boosted the morale of the Police. The Army and the para-military forces jointly provided additional firepower, supporting the Police.

It is important for diverse SFs carrying out COIN operations to integrate seamlessly. Parochial interests, personal egos and organizational conflicts have derailed many COIN campaigns. This was evident in Malaya, which was characterized by a “confused organization structure” and lack of co-operation between the military and the Police.³³ It took the British many years before they grasped the political nature of the conflict in Malaya. One of the first step taken by Sir Harold Briggs (after

³¹ Thomas E Ricks, eds., *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, New York: Penguin, 2007, p. 96.

³² Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 38.

³³ Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, p. 68.

taking over as director of operations in Malaya in April 1950) was the creation of the Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee in May 1950. This Committee coordinated the collection, analysis, and distribution of intelligence on insurgent locations, activities, and plans from whatever source – civil, police, or military.³⁴

The SFs in Punjab shared intelligence and organized coordinated operations. Gill set up systems and procedures, which ensured greater co-ordination between the Punjab Police, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), and the Indian Army. Instead of different organizations competing for authority, Gill developed a concept of ‘cooperative command’, which focused on co-ordination, joint actions and unity of effort by the SFs.³⁵ He created joint interrogation teams to handle prisoners.³⁶ This ensured that intelligence was shared between all the organizations. At one time, the Inspector General of Police (Operations) was dual-hatted for the CRPF and the Punjab Police. Similar systems were set up with the Army as well. The Indian Army worked in the background, with the Police taking center stage. “The Army units usually cordoned off a target area... and the Police was left to undertake the anti-terrorist operations.”³⁷ The co-ordination between the Army and the Police resulted in well-planned operations. Gill built up healthy working relationships with Army commanders to ensure seamless co-operation.

The COIN campaign requires a central leader. He should stand far above all the other leaders to avoid diverse pulls in the campaign. The co-ordination between different organizations is easy to preach but difficult to achieve. It is important for the leader to ensure that all organizations work together to defeat a common enemy rather than fighting at cross-purposes. An uncooperative attitude between the various forces complicates matters, delays tasks and makes the operations difficult to execute. Gill understood the importance of synergy and applied it with resolve, dedication, and fairness.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

³⁵ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 73.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 42.

³⁷ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 217.

Tactical Innovations

Gill employed innovative tactics to achieve his tasks. He developed the concept of ‘focal point patrolling’ to create an enormous psychological impact on the ground.³⁸ All available Police vehicles of the District were brought to a single location in the night. This created an impression of a much larger force than actually existed. Senior officers called for late night meetings in sensitive areas, which required the attendance of all subordinate officers. This participation led to large movement of Police vehicles throughout the night. The transient but significant Police presence was a key morale booster for the SFs and a big dampener for the terrorists. Areas, which had seen little or no Police presence for years, were now rife with speculation about the massive increase in Police strength that belied the reality.

When Gill took over the mantle of command, the teeth to tail ratio of the Police force was extremely unfavorable, with a 40 to 50 per cent of Policemen employed on static and non-productive duties.³⁹ These included innumerable barricades, which created an illusion of security but were unsuccessful in catching any terrorists. However, these barricades were extremely popular with politicians who thought of this as the best strategy for policing.⁴⁰ Without offending the political masters and in a move that exemplifies Gill’s organizational acumen, he developed the concept of mobile- barricades. These were Police contingents that were rapidly deployable. Under the guise of mobile barricades, he was able to reallocate a large number of personnel to active duties. Due to these efforts, as much as 85 percent of the force was mobilized for operational duties.⁴¹

This single shift portrays not only operational brilliance displayed by the leadership but also an ability to understand diverse compulsions. There are many pulls and pressures exerted on the SFs during any COIN campaign. These could be from politicians, human rights groups, journalists, etc. It is important

³⁸ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 40.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 40.

for the leader to carry all the participants together as perceptions are of utmost importance in a COIN campaign.

Gill worked on improving the safety of the Force. A Special Cell was set up in February 1990 to assess the operational skills of the terrorists and the technologies available to them.⁴² The cell established a working alliance with research labs all over the country. The emphasis shifted to locally produced, low-cost improvements, rather than expensive imported equipment. Locally available tempered steel was used for bullet-proofing Police vehicles. A dramatic development was the use of bullet-proof tractors to chase terrorists in the sugarcane fields. The sugarcane fields provided excellent cover for ambush and escape. A large number of Police officers had succumbed to terrorist bullets while pursuing them in the fields. The introduction of locally developed bullet-proofed tractors tilted the advantage irrevocably in favour of the Police, causing large-scale changes in terrorist tactics. The local laboratories also developed an electronic timer detector for time-bombs. The device was, at that time, not available even in the international market. The cost of this device was four percent of the commercial cost of comparable equipment after it was subsequently launched in the international market.⁴³

All insurgencies face typical problems that are specific to geography, culture, technology and ideology. The resources available to counter the terrorists require ingenuity, flexibility and synergy. The idea of integrating the dormant capabilities available inside the country for improving the safety of security personnel boosted their morale, improved the survivability of the security personnel and displayed the leadership's ability to ameliorate the problems faced by the troops.

Gill laid tremendous emphasis on systematic intelligence gathering and analysis. As Inspector General of Police (Operations) of the Punjab Police, he had set up a skeletal structure with borrowed officers from other organizations.⁴⁴ Police Stations were categorized and graded based on intensity of

⁴² Ibid, p. 194.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 196.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 43.

insurgent activities. Information on sources, flow of weapons, safe houses, informers, etc., was compiled to assess patterns of operation in the State.⁴⁵ Out of 13,000 villages in Punjab, it was found that 75 percent of the terrorists came from just 220 villages.⁴⁶ All terrorist groups and their main operatives were identified with the help of Human Intelligence (HUMINT).

During COIN operations, HUMINT should be the primary source of intelligence. In Galula's opinion,

Intelligence is the principal source of information on guerrillas, and intelligence has to come from the population, but the population will not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken.⁴⁷

The population will not share information unless it feels secure against the insurgent. However, HUMINT is crucial to break the insurgency. This vicious cycle can be broken by cultivating a secret group of supporters in the population. The Punjab Police carried out a village and District level analysis to ascertain individual allegiance. Special attention was paid to those villages, which were supportive of the insurgency. The combination of HUMINT and analysis provided trends that helped predict the trouble-spots, decide Force deployment and launch precision counter attack by the Police. As the Police acted on specific intelligence and analysis, it reduced public harassment and increased public confidence in the Police Force. This made the terrorists lose public sympathy. At the strategic level, it ensured that the initiative passed from the terrorists to the SFs. This enabled swift justice and a feeling amongst the public and terrorists that the perpetrators of crimes would not get away. The swift and clinical targeting of the terrorists due to intelligence analysis enabled the Police to win over the 'conditional support' of the population.

During COIN operations, the SFs should involve the general population in schemes and activities that provide the SFs an indication of the level of support of the population. In Punjab,

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ K.P.S. Gill, "The Danger Within: Internal Security Threats," in Bharat Karnad, ed., *Future Imperilled*, New Delhi: Viking, 1993, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 50.

voluntary Village Defense Schemes (VDS) were put into effect and Special Police Officers (SPOs) were appointed in the villages. According to Gill, “The objective was to arm volunteers in vulnerable villages to resist terrorist action at the local level.”⁴⁸ Many SPOs were Army or Police veterans. The Police provided weapons, training, pickets, and bunkers with Police patrols to build confidence amongst the villagers.

Initially, the villagers were afraid that the terrorists would target them for acting in self-defense. As expected, the initial response to the schemes was lukewarm. The schemes did not become popular until the tide had effectively turned against the terrorists. The initiative was scarcely subscribed to in 1989, but became gradually popular in 1990 and 1991. By the end of 1990, there were 1,075 Village Defense Committees (VDCs) with more than 15,000 volunteers.⁴⁹ Despite the popularity of the VDCs, terrorism was crushed only by mid-1992. As there was a progressive shift in the loyalty of the general population, a state of flux existed for over 18 months. During this period, Police gained the upper hand progressively.

The scheme to appoint VDCs and SPOs was an innovative idea to gauge the support of the population. In any COIN campaign, it is crucial to set up similar but uniquely tailored and innovative proposals that will provide a true indicator of general support. In Punjab, the enthusiasm for the VDCs in the second half of 1990 was a direct reflection of the tide turning in favor of the SFs. There is a gradual but perceptible shift in the support from the population, which is initially conditional, when the tide is turning. It is important for the SFs to discern and nurture this gradual shift.

As the support from the population grew, specific intelligence became increasingly available to the SFs. It was also ensured that the actions of the SFs did not inordinately inconvenience the public. As the SFs grew in confidence, they formulated a strategy to ensure swift response against terror attacks with precise intelligence. The killer of M.L. Manchanda, the Station Director of All India Radio in May 1992, died in a gun

⁴⁸ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

battle on the same day, while his accomplice met a similar fate six days later.⁵⁰ Such responses disheartened the terrorists and instilled confidence amongst the people that the criminals would swiftly be brought to justice. Gradually, such incidents reduced the hold of terrorists on the population and created a positive image of the SFs. Terrorism declined in most areas, except some of the Districts bordering Pakistan.

Analysis of intelligence demonstrated that the border districts with Pakistan were the worst affected by terrorism. Gill observes, Pakistan was strenuously and openly directing the terrorist campaign at this stage (1989), to the extent that terrorist training camps were being organized even within 75 meters of the international border.⁵¹

This outside support was vital for the insurgency to flourish. It provided moral, political, technical, financial and military support.⁵² Pakistan provided a safe sanctuary for the terrorists and also provided a steady flow of arms and training for young recruits. There was an increased sophistication of arms. IEDs appeared, courtesy Pakistan, with plastic explosives like RDX (Research Department Explosive/ Royal Demolition Explosive or Cyclotrimethylenetrinitramine) used in bombing innocent civilians.

It was important for the COIN campaign to stem the free flow of arms and ammunition from Pakistan. The Indian Government started an ambitious plan to fence the entire Punjab border (533 kilometres) with Pakistan. By August 1989, the fencing of 122 kilometres of sensitive areas was completed. By 1993, the entire Punjab border with Pakistan was fenced.⁵³ The fencing of sensitive areas reduced cross-border infiltration significantly. The terrorists found new ways to smuggle weapons and people across extended routes from the States of Gujarat and Rajasthan. However, longer supply routes and hostile populations created problems that made the quick replenishment of terrorist arsenals and cadres difficult.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 78.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 53.

⁵² Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 25.

⁵³ Government of India, "2003-04 Annual Report," Union Ministry of Home Affairs, www.mha.nic.in/AR0304-Eng.pdf.

Insurgency receives a large boost if outside support is available to the terrorists. If neighbouring States are friendly to the COIN campaign, it makes it easy to stop the insurgency. However, few countries in the world have friendly neighbours. More often than not, neighbouring States are ever too willing to stir the pot, just as Iran and Syria continue to provide outside support to the terrorists in Iraq. The fencing of the Iraq border with Iran and Syria is likely to reduce the inflow of arms, IEDs and terrorists. It would have a significant impact on the violence in Iraq.

COIN operations should focus on stifling the outside support, using all possible instruments of power, be they diplomatic, informational, military or economic. In Punjab, the border fencing helped dramatically in reducing the infiltration and choking the insurgency. The large investments in building the fence saved the lives of innocent civilians and soldiers. The fencing was opposed by Pakistan and by Khalistani sympathizers in Punjab.

The Punjab Police itself was riddled with sympathizers of the Khalistani cause.⁵⁴ The para-military forces from outside Punjab viewed the predominantly Sikh Punjab Police with suspicion. There was a deep communal divide within the State. Gill tackled the sympathizers in this charged environment with finesse, to prevent further polarization in the force. Gill segregated the compromised elements within the Punjab Police and reduced their involvement in sensitive duties. These personnel were removed from frontline anti-terrorist activities and shunted to inconsequential desk jobs, where their ability to generate intelligence for the insurgents was significantly reduced. This was done discreetly so as not to exacerbate communal sentiments. This policy yielded rich dividends.

It is impossible in an insurgency to hire completely trustworthy soldiers. Having hired them, it is even more difficult to terminate their services because the act further alienates the population and feeds the rumour mills. The compromised elements, once removed from sensitive tasks, do not have a significant ability to impact COIN operations. However, their potential to cause troubles far out weighs the utility of removing

⁵⁴ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 41.

them from service. They retain the ability to become poster boys for the radical campaign as wronged champions of the public. Gill displayed political acumen by keeping them engaged in superfluous activities that were not essential to the core task. The COIN authorities must not allow the sympathizers to excite public resentment. It is better to make them irrelevant.

It is important for the leadership, at all levels, to understand the grand strategy, and not be distracted by disgruntled elements within the Force. In all COIN operations, it is essential to maintain the pretence of bonhomie within the Force, even though there may be sporadic instances of discord. Galula alludes to the importance of the Police for the insurgent: “In the early stages of insurgency, they (the Police) are the first counterinsurgent organization that has to be infiltrated and neutralized.”⁵⁵ Officers leading the campaign should be free of any communal biases. COIN leaders will do well to ignore the sympathizers, utilize them for mundane tasks, or use them to spread misinformation while staying focused on the grand strategy to reduce violence and gain support of the population.

During an insurgency, the violence is partly ideological but also privately driven, based on local grievances and agendas. The progressive breakdown of law and order, collapse of the bureaucracy, and ineffective policing, provide many citizens an opportunity to settle old scores. In the mayhem, criminals take advantage of the collapsed rule of law. Personal interests, mostly economic, come to dominate, but could also relate to previous clan, ethnic or communal rivalries. Truth is the greatest casualty in such uncertain times. As Kalyvas notes,

...many acts of violence that on surface appear to be generated by exclusively political motivations often turn out, on closer examination, to be caused not by politics but by personal hatreds, vendettas, and envy.⁵⁶

Kalyvas records examples ranging from Afghanistan, Albania, and the American Civil war among others. Abraham Lincoln described the Civil War in the American West as a

⁵⁵ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspective on Politics*, No. 3, September 2003, p. 483.

situation in which murders for old grudges, and murders for pelf, proceed under any cloak that will best cover for the occasion.⁵⁷ Similarly, in present day Afghanistan, “local factions accused one another of being Taliban or Al-Qaeda so as to have rivals bombed by the US Air Force.”⁵⁸

While analyzing the reasons for the violence, all incidents during the lawless period are painted with the broad brush of terrorism. Gill understood that many families were solving old feuds and disputes with the gun during the insurgency. Unscrupulous criminal elements had taken over the campaign for petty gains. It was important for the SFs to focus on strategic goals rather than getting embroiled in civic feuds.

In Punjab, newspaper stories of the terrorists responsible for rape, extortion and murder of innocent civilians greatly helped the cause of the SFs. The degeneration of an insurgency into a petty criminal movement greatly aids the SFs. This signifies the start of the withdrawal of public support to the extremists. According to a case study on the arrested terrorists in Punjab, only 10 percent were committed to the cause of Khalistan, 50 percent took the gun out of a spirit of adventure, and the remaining 40 percent were driven by poverty to take up the gun.⁵⁹ Terrorism provided a means of livelihood as poor people were able to make money by looting and extortion.⁶⁰

Gill points out that, “terrorist organizations were making fresh recruitments at salaries between Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 5,000 per month, with a range of perquisites, including huge compensations to families in the event of death.”⁶¹ The ensuing economic prosperity raised the stature of the family and simultaneously earned the terrorists respect for serving the ‘Sikh cause’. Several of the terrorists were smugglers prior to the movement and found it useful to increase their profits and trade by joining the movement.

It is important to concentrate the COIN efforts on the top ideological leadership. Without the leadership, it is difficult to

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 476.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 478.

⁵⁹ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 206.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 207.

⁶¹ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 61.

carry the momentum and the ideological drive that sustains a movement.

Each incident of crime in the area should be examined thoroughly. On several occasions, violent crimes and shootings could be a result of rivalries but misunderstood as terrorism. The SFs should not waste their time and resources on chasing petty criminals. Gill implemented this strategy by concentrating the available forces disproportionately on the leaders, planners and the ideologues of the movement.⁶² This strategy, combined with accurate intelligence, killed 139 designated hardcore terrorists in 1992 alone and broke the back of the Khalistan movement.

Not all petty criminals and terrorist cadres were punished for their crimes in Punjab. Most of the 'misguided youth', the proverbial foot soldiers, returned to their homes. As law and order returned to Punjab, these youth rejoined the mainstream to lead a normal life. Not all criminals can be punished in a COIN campaign and SFs have to focus on the bigger picture rather than being caught in the weeds.

The population, which initially supports the insurgency, is not blind to the moral degeneration of the terrorists. The groundswell of public anger gradually builds up against the insurgency. The majority is silent during the build-up, as the insurgents promptly punish any challengers. If the SFs time their efforts well, they can tap the public anger against the insurgents. This is precisely what happened in Punjab. The anger against the insurgents, coupled with a coherent COIN strategy launched in November 1991, finished the insurgency in less than 12 months, after paying a heavy price in human and material costs for over a decade.

COIN operations, by nature, are costly to execute. As Galula points out, "Insurgency is cheap, counterinsurgency is costly."⁶³ The British calculated the cost of every rebel in Malaya at more than \$200,000.⁶⁴ This places a huge demand on the COIN operations to be cost effective. In developing countries, where resources are scarce, it is very difficult to invest in costly high-

⁶² Ibid, p. 69.

⁶³ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

tech equipment. Even for rich countries, tackling insurgencies can be very costly. The enormous impact of the Iraq war on the US is visible, as it affects development plans, training of armed forces in particular, and the economy in general.

The key is to invest wisely in high-tech equipment that provides a decisive capability in specific areas. The Punjab Police used Night Vision Goggles (NVGs) along with locally developed Infra-red Filter Glass Torches which provided a visibility of 250 metres at night.⁶⁵ This enabled them to engage the terrorists in the sugarcane fields in the night, denying the terrorists effective sanctuary. The investment in NVGs provided an asymmetric advantage to the Police force.

In contrast, providing a marginally improved quality of weapons could be wasteful. In Punjab, the Police fought the entire campaign with relatively inferior weapons, but still emerged triumphant. Improved training of a larger proportion of SFs is more important than providing small improvements in weapon systems.

According to news reports in 2008, the US Army was “replacing the AK-47s of Iraqi forces with M-16s.”⁶⁶ This costly and inconsequential move is unlikely to result in any improvement on the ground. According to General Scales and Murray, “Technology is useful in unconventional warfare... But machines alone will not be decisive in this new phase of the Iraq war.”⁶⁷ In the end, US Army and Iraqi Army soldiers will waste time, effort and, regrettably, some precious lives in the transition to M-16 rifles. The key is to conserve the resources and spend them wisely in decisive sectors of the campaign.

Better technology helps in reducing friendly casualties in specific fights, but is not a substitute for sound COIN strategy. If the SFs enjoy the advantage of better weapons, it ensures fewer friendly fatalities during specific COIN missions. This does not translate into fewer fatalities in the entire war. In the absence of

⁶⁵ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 195.

⁶⁶ Christian Lowe, “Iraqi Army to Ditch Ak-47s for M-16s,” http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,162878,00.html?ESRC=eb_nj.

⁶⁷ Robert H. Scales, Williamson Murray, Jr., *The Iraq War: A Military History*, 2005 ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). 236.

sound strategy, the COIN campaign will drag on for a longer duration, and the SFs will lose more soldiers spread over the total period of the war. In Iraq, the technologically superior US forces could not contain the local insurgency by force in 2003. It required the launch of a comprehensive COIN strategy to counter the insurgents. The center of gravity in the COIN campaign is not technological capability but the support of the population.

Creating an Environment for a Political Solution

Prior to Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao's administration, successive Indian Governments had experimented with many options, like negotiations, appeasement, relying on goodwill and even one-sided gestures to win over the terrorists. Under Prime Ministers Chandra Shekhar and V.P. Singh, the Government negotiated with the terrorists from a position of weakness, attempting to appeal to the 'hearts and minds of the terrorists'. The terrorists, as expected, spurned these gestures. As a unilateral gesture of goodwill, on December 18, 1990, K.P.S. Gill was transferred from Punjab.⁶⁸ Gill was puzzled by the decision that, ...despite the enveloping mayhem in the State, the Army had, inexplicably, been withdrawn from the State by this time, and para-military force levels had been cut drastically.⁶⁹

The writ of the terrorists ran in Punjab. With disheartened SFs, an anaemic bureaucracy, a polarized population, and a large influx of armed extremists, years 1990 and 1991 clearly belonged to the terrorists.

It is impossible to control the insurgency by attempting a political solution from a position of weakness. The Narsimha Rao Government realized that reaching out to the population was unlikely to succeed unless effective Police action broke the vice-like grip of the terrorists. Galula supports this view and states that, "effective political action on the population must be preceded by military and Police operations against the guerilla

⁶⁸ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 64.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 65.

units and the insurgent political organizations.”⁷⁰ It was important to convey the resolve of the Government to the terrorists. The Government worked towards a political solution to the conflict. However, it used the SFs to shape the conditions prior to restarting the political process.

The center adopted a policy of non-negotiation with the terrorists. The Government of Prime Minister Rao sent an unequivocal message to the terrorists by posting K.P.S. Gill back to Punjab and redeploying the Army in the State. The SFs were given an unambiguous mandate to restore order. This time, Gill says,

...there was no back seat driving from Delhi, no dubious political moves and maneuvers, no deals with terrorists and their over-ground agencies, undermining strategic and security initiatives. The Government vested a certain, clearly defined, responsibility on the Security Forces; and the Forces did not fail the nation.⁷¹

The central policy of clear directives was in sharp contrast to the years of dithering that had brought the situation to the precipice. Instead of confused signals from the Centre, a single message of no negotiations was sent out to the insurgents.

The redeployment of the Army, the return of a dynamic Police chief, and the backing of political leaders rejuvenated the SFs and produced immediate results. The Army saturated the entire countryside in large numbers. During the first month itself, the impact of adequate forces, higher morale, and the transformed political mood was visible on the ground with a sharp drop in the number of civilian casualties. Of the 154 civilians killed in November 1991, 110 were killed in the first fortnight, and only 44 killed in the second fortnight.⁷² The terrorist groups scurried to protect their leaders by advising them to shift outside Punjab. The sympathizers of the movement, who were whipping up a communal frenzy, immediately went underground. The willpower of the state was visible to the insurgents and yielded results.

⁷⁰ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 55.

⁷¹ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 73.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 74.

The Union Government used the momentum generated by the SFs to announce the elections for the Punjab Legislative Assembly in February 1992. Even while maintaining a no-negotiations policy, the Union Government understood “that the political power is the undisputed boss as a matter of principle and practicality.”⁷³ The Government utilised the SFs to control the insurgency and provide an environment for restarting the political process. Free and fair elections provided people with a voice in the Government. It gave them an overwhelming feeling of empowerment and having a say in the running of their lives. The Union Government, under Narsimha Rao, never lost touch with this aspect even as it saturated Punjab with SFs, and simultaneously announced the elections.

COIN operations should strive to ensure that the terrorists boycott the political process and don’t acquire legitimacy through them. In Philippines, Edward Lansdale executed a plan that included printing counterfeit leaflets urging the Huks to boycott the elections. He used seized Huk typewriters and locally made paper to ensure that the leaflets appeared genuine. The Huk politburo bought his idea and boycotted the elections.⁷⁴ This decision prevented the Huks from gaining legitimacy as political leaders with broad approval of the masses. It is essential for the Government to empower the people but simultaneously deny the terrorist groups an opportunity to contest the elections. It is also important to time this process precisely. If the elections are announced too early, then leaders opposed to the insurgency will not take part in the elections due to security concerns. If the elections are delayed, then the Government loses a valuable opportunity to crush the campaign by tapping the support of the population at the right instant.

The decision of the terrorists to boycott the 1992 State elections proved to be a strategic blunder. The militants had hoped that the elections would either be postponed, or the turnout would be low enough to discredit the Government’s democratic credentials. An intimidation campaign to scare away the voters

⁷³ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 62.

⁷⁴ Cecil B. Currey, “Edward Lansdale, the Unquiet American,” in *Leadership in Warfare Academic Year 2008 Coursebook*, Mathew Schwonek, ed., Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Command and Staff College, 2008, p. 133.

was launched with posters, handbills, leaflets, press notes, statements and paid advertisements in the newspapers.⁷⁵ Candidates, voters and election officials received direct threats. The terrorists announced a total curfew on the election dates. The militants attempted to incite violence prior to the elections.

The terrorists' decision to boycott the elections contrasted sharply with their participation in the 1989 Parliamentary Elections in which, the pro-militant groups had won 10 of the 13 parliamentary seats.⁷⁶ The 1989 elections had provided them legitimacy, immunity and power. The overt anti-national activities of the ideologues weakened the power of the Government in the eyes of the population. Abusing their powers as elected representatives, the terrorists launched public campaigns with coercive mobilisation to create enormous law and order problems for the SFs. The power of the insurgents peaked after they successfully mixed politics with religion, legitimacy, propaganda, and used their political immunity to further the separatist agenda. The roots of the sharp escalation in terrorism in the State in 1990 and 1991 were directly linked to the victory of the overt Khalistani ideologues in the parliamentary elections.

Although, the Indian authorities did not make any special efforts to ensure that the terrorists boycott the elections, this proved to be a blessing for the State. The SFs had to ensure peace in Punjab prior to the elections to create an environment for secure polling. The Union Government provided 220 paramilitary companies for the protection of the candidates before and during the elections.⁷⁷ An entire platoon handled each candidate's security. Not even a single candidate was killed during the election process. The SFs were able to control the violence prior to the elections to a manageable level. The elections passed off peacefully with only one person killed on Election Day.⁷⁸ The masses viewed the elections as free and fair. The Government achieved its strategic aim of using the SFs to transfer the political power to the people.

⁷⁵ Gill and Sahni *Terror and Containment Perspectives of India's Internal Security*. 75.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 55.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 74.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 75.

The free and fair elections made the people feel relevant, although voter turnout during the elections was a measly 21.6 percent.⁷⁹ The new Government focused on the socio-economic development of Punjab. The elected representatives worked towards improving living conditions. The presence of SFs provided the population the courage to support the Government without the fear of reprisal from the terrorists. The elections ripped the mask of politics from the terrorists and they stood exposed as criminals, masquerading as martyrs for personal gains. The militant organizations melted away. Prominent ideologues ran away to Pakistan and many found shelter in the UK, USA and Canada, hiding behind legal loopholes to escape punishment for their crimes.⁸⁰ The Government was finally able to win over the support of the population in Punjab by rejuvenating the political process by skillfully using the SFs.

The Government moved rapidly to establish democracy at all levels in Punjab. Within six months after the elections for the State Legislative Assembly, Municipal Committee elections in September 1992 saw a voter turnout of over 75 percent. In February 1993, the Panchayat Elections, for governing the villages, had a voter turnout of 82 percent.⁸¹ The general population had decisively indicated support for the ballot over the bullet through the elections. Subsequently, residual support for the terrorists dissolved in a matter of months.

The Government used this opportunity to display its benevolent nature. The terrorists were offered an informal general amnesty, allowing former cadres simply return home, which provided a bloodless option to end the insurgency. The Government executed a grand strategy to end the bloodshed without compromising security. Unlike previous occasions, this offer was made from a position of strength after the Government's will and power had been decisively demonstrated. The insurgents understood the situation and acted in their self-interest. Over 1,000 terrorists laid down arms in 1992-1993.⁸²

⁷⁹ US Library of Congress, "India Political," <http://countrystudies.us/india/115.htm>.

⁸⁰ Marwah, *Uncivil Wars*, p. 220.

⁸¹ Gill and Sahni, *Terror and Containment*, p. 80.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 81.

Peace finally prevailed in Punjab as the Government effectively utilized the SFs to achieve a political solution to the conflict. Insurgency died down as people felt empowered and democracy regained its rightful place in society. On several occasions during the conflict, the Government had negotiated with the terrorists from a position of weakness to find its peace overtures rebuffed. In contrast, the Narsimha Rao Government used adequate strength of SFs to demonstrate the Government's will. The COIN strategy of using Police to shape the environment for elections worked in Punjab.

Lessons from the Punjab Campaign

India continues to fight a lone, painfully slow, but successful battle against terrorism that is funded and supported by Pakistan. David Galula noted that, "Low intensity conflict has been more common throughout the history of warfare than has conflict between nations represented by armies on a 'conventional' field of battle."⁸³ The Indian SFs, with their vast experience, have developed new COIN techniques. Nowhere are the results of these techniques more visible than in the spectacular peace dividend in the State of Punjab. The Punjab campaign stands out among the most recent, successful and victorious COIN campaigns in the world. This was largely made possible by a coherent grand strategy and tactical innovations on the ground. This campaign provides interesting lessons that are applicable to all COIN campaigns.

First, the importance of promoting an anti-insurgency leader needs greater emphasis than observed in available COIN theories. The battleground in Punjab pitted two evenly matched opponents. However, the COIN leader, K.P.S. Gill, displayed stellar leadership and decisively tilted the war in favour of the Government. Political leaders must choose a capable, charismatic leader to lead the SFs in the COIN campaign. The COIN leader has the ability to unite a divided and poorly trained Force into a dreaded force on the basis of his leadership skills.

⁸³ Galula and Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p 15.

Secondly, it is essential that Governments must demonstrate the resolve for a political solution of the conflict only from a position of strength. Galula opines that political, social, economic, and other reforms are inoperative when offered while the insurgent still controls the population. The counter-insurgent cannot enter into negotiations except from a position of strength.⁸⁴ A Government which negotiates from a position of weakness will never win over the insurgents. Appeasement measures relying on goodwill and one-sided gestures to win over the terrorists through a 'hearts and minds' campaign will fail, unless offered from a position of strength. The Government must use the armed forces to provide security and win the support of the population.

Thirdly, election of insurgents for constitutional posts creates even bigger problems for the COIN campaign. While the importance of the democratic process to empower the people cannot be overemphasized, its misuse by insurgents must be avoided at all costs. If the insurgents participate in elections when their popularity is high, then the elections will further empower the insurgents, besides granting them legitimacy and immunity. Ideally, the elections should be held when the popularity of the insurgents is declining. However, if it is imperative to hold the elections even when the terrorists are popular, then the Government should ensure that the insurgents boycott the elections. Under no circumstances should the Government disbar them from the elections, as this would only strengthen the insurgent.

Fourthly, COIN campaigns are inherently labour intensive. The Punjab campaign was successful with the insurgent to SFs ratio of 1:12. Attempts to use excessive firepower or technology instead of the foot soldier will be counter productive in the war. An inadequate number of SFs personnel will rely on excessive firepower to quell routine disturbances. This will increase the support for the insurgents. Inadequate force levels have severely hampered the US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. A large increase in the number of local or US soldiers is critical for the success of the Iraqi campaign.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 55.

Fifthly, cutting-edge technology has a limited role to play in COIN campaigns. Technology in specified areas like night operations can, however, provide a decisive advantage for the SFs. Nevertheless, technology is not a panacea for all ills in a COIN campaign. HUMINT is the most critical capability to counter insurgencies. Technology plays a limited role in breaking into the inner circle of insurgents.

Sixthly, the insurgency's sympathizers in the SFs should be handled sensitively. They should be posted in inconsequential desk positions far away from core tasks. The chaotic environment in an insurgency will not offer completely trustworthy forces. The sympathizers' ability to derail the COIN campaign by claiming a status of injured innocent parties bullied by a vindictive state justifies keeping them in the Police force, but removing them from operational positions, and making them irrelevant.

Seventhly, the COIN campaign should focus on the leaders and ideologues of the insurgency instead of every petty criminal that joins the fight. On several occasions, leaders at the tactical and operational level may need to choose an appropriate response to minor incidents involving small players. The SFs in Punjab focused on the major leaders rather than everyday miscreants. The danger of the campaign losing strategic focus and meandering into the weeds should be avoided at all costs.

Eighthly, external help to the insurgency must be stifled using all instruments of state power. Moral, political, financial, technical and military support sustains the insurgent, perpetuates the violence and extends the period of insurgency. Physical restrictions like border fencing are critical for COIN campaigns.

Lastly, the campaign must develop specific measures of effectiveness to gauge the level of popular support. The large-scale enrollments into VDCs and SPOs in 1990 indicated a shift in the popular support towards the SFs. Similar schemes tailored to local requirements must be launched to generate support for the Government. The achievement of the scheme lies not in the security it provides to the population, but as a broad indicator of the success of the COIN campaign.

Punjab now enjoys security and prosperity. The anti-terrorist campaigns provide dramatic lessons for current and future COIN operations. If the US learns the lessons offered by the successful COIN campaign in Punjab, a similar bright future awaits Iraq and Afghanistan.

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