



INDIA AND COUNTERINSURGENCY



Lessons Learned



**Edited by Sumit Ganguly
and David P. Fidler**




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India and Counterinsurgency

This edited volume focuses on India's experiences waging counterinsurgency campaigns since its independence in 1947.

Tracing and assessing the origins, evolution, and current state of India's counterinsurgency strategies and capabilities, the book focuses on key campaigns waged by India within and outside its territory. It also analyzes the Indian doctrine on counterinsurgency, and locates this within India's defense and security policies. Counterinsurgency has been an integral part of India's security policy, and India's experience can impart much to leaders in other states.

The book highlights innovations that the Indian Army and security forces made to deal with insurgent movements. Simultaneously, it examines how the civilian–military nexus enabled India's policy makers to utilize existing, and formulate novel, institutional means to address political grievances. India has been most successful where it used calibrated force, obtained trust within the aggrieved population, and made commitments to political and institutional reform. Examination of these elements of India's counterinsurgency performance can be compared to counterinsurgency doctrine developed by other countries, including the United States, and thus yields comparative policy prescriptions and recommendations.

This book will be of great interest to students of counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, Indian politics, Asian Security Studies, and Strategic Studies in general.

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S.G.
D.P.F.
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Abbreviations

ABVP	Akhila Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad
AD(L)	Akali Dal–Longowal
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act
AICCC	All India Communist Revolutionaries Coordination Committee
ARTRAC	Army Training Command
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSF	Border Security Force
BTFK	Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan
CAT	Concealed (or Covert) Apprehension Technique
CFM	<i>Counterinsurgency Field Manual</i>
CIJWS	Counterinsurgency and Jungle Warfare School
CMP	Common Minimum Program
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Maoist)
CPI (M-L)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPMF	central paramilitary force
CRP	Central Reserve Police
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
DSCO	<i>Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations</i>
ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
EPRLF	Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students
GoM	Group of Ministers
HUM	<i>Hizb-ul-Mujahideen</i>
IAD	Indian Army Doctrine
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICG	International Crisis Group
IED	improvised explosive device
INC	Indian National Congress
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate
ISLA	Indo–Sri Lanka Accord
ITBP	Indo-Tibetan Border Police

JKLF	Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front
JKNC	Jammu and Kashmir National Conference
JNM	Jana Natya Mandali
KCF	Khalistan Commando Force
KLF	Khalistan Liberation Force
KLO	Khalistan Liberation Organization
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MCC(I)	Maoist Communist Centre (of India)
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MKSS	Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti
MNA	Mizo National Army
MNF	Mizo National Front
MNFF	Mizo National Famine Front
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEPC	North-Eastern Provincial Council
NFA	Naga Federal Army
NGO	non-governmental organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NNC	Naga National Council
NSG	National Security Guards
OBC	Other Backward Caste
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PGPC	Pakistan Gurudwara Prabhandhkak Committee
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam
PUCL	People's Union for Civil Liberties
PUDR	People's Union for Democratic Rights
PWG	People's War Group
QRT	Quick Reaction Teams
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RR	Rashtriya Rifles
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
RSU	Radical Students' Union
RYL	Radical Youth League
SGPC	Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee
SLA	Sri Lankan Army
SLG	Sri Lankan Government
SLSF	Sri Lankan Security Forces
SOG	Special Operations Group
SPO	Special Police Officer
SRE	Security Related Expenditure
SSTR	stability, security, transition, and reconstruction
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization

TNT	Tamil New Tigers
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UMFO	United Mizo Freedom Organization
UN	United Nations
USI	United Service Institution of India
VDC	village defense committee

Introduction

Sumit Ganguly and David P. Fidler

Counterinsurgency today: why India?

The importance of counterinsurgency (COIN) has exponentially increased in the past few years, especially for the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The difficulties the United States has faced from fierce insurgencies in those two countries resurrected COIN writers and theories long marginalized in U.S. and Western military doctrine and civilian policies and re-oriented the study and practice of COIN for the challenges of an uncertain and dangerous future. Other countries, too, confront on-going or potential insurgency movements, which also inform predictions that COIN will be one of the great and growing challenges of twenty-first century international relations.

These predictions concerning the contemporary and future importance of COIN contribute to the incentives experts and practitioners have to scour past and present COIN campaigns for lessons and best practices to appropriate. The burgeoning COIN literature of the past few years has repeatedly mined the great COIN case studies of the British success in Malaya, the French failure in Algeria, and the tormented U.S. experience in Vietnam. Even the World War I-era sagacity of “Lawrence of Arabia” has been trotted out time and again as classic advice on how to pursue the task of understanding and overcoming insurgencies.

Curiously missing from this frenetic interest in COIN theory, practice, and doctrine has been the experience of a country that has fought many COIN campaigns from the very beginning of its existence to the present day—the Republic of India. This book focuses on India’s experiences with COIN in order to illuminate the lessons India’s COIN campaigns can contribute to the search for how best to prepare, equip, and utilize military and civilian personnel in waging this most difficult kind of conflict.

The number, nature, and diversity of India’s COIN campaigns make the Indian experience fighting insurgencies a rich collection of case studies on COIN that simply have not been sufficiently analyzed outside India. India has fought COIN campaigns from the mountains of its northeast provinces to the Vale of Kashmir to the jungles of Sri Lanka; it has confronted insurgencies inspired by tribal desires for independence, fueled by religious zealotry, driven

by Maoist extremism, and manipulated by foreign powers seeking to weaken India. Of particular relevance to the United States and its like-minded allies is that India has faced these insurgencies as a democracy dedicated to civilian control of the military and the importance of the rule of law as a principle of governance.

Analyses of India's COIN campaigns by Indian experts, especially the works of Rajesh Rajagopalan (2000, 2004, 2008) and Vivek Chadha (2005), have not been frequently (if at all) scrutinized by U.S. and European experts struggling to overcome the West's decades-long neglect of COIN theory and practice. As John H. (Jack) Gill and David Lamm argue later in this volume (Chapter 10), "No evidence exists that insights gained from Sri Lanka, or any of India's many internal COIN operations, have influenced any doctrinal thought in the U.S. military" (p. 174). Many reasons can be identified that help explain this neglect of India's experiences in the Western discourse on COIN. To begin, all but one of India's COIN campaigns have been fought inside India, whereas the U.S. and European heritage in the COIN context concerns fighting insurgencies far from home. The cool and prickly relationship India and the United States had during the Cold War may also be a factor in U.S. disinterest in India's civilian and military history of countering insurgencies.

Finally, much of the thinking and writing on COIN within India has appeared in military publications (e.g. *Journal of the United Services Institution of India*, *Indian Defence Review*, *Journal of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis*) which are not often primary source material for Western analysts of security and military policy. Other relevant works are personal memoirs or journalistic accounts of specific campaigns written by key participants or investigative journalists, which also have been neglected except by specialists of Indian politics or South Asian security. The academic writings on COIN in India are also not extensive, which itself is curious given the sheer number of COIN operations India has undertaken, the dangers to the Republic the insurgencies have posed, and the controversies the insurgencies and the COIN campaigns have ignited in the Indian polity.

Given this reality, we see this book as an opportunity to bring closer together the intense U.S. and Western interest in COIN and India's rich history of waging COIN campaigns. As described below, the book's organization attempts to produce cross-fertilization by combining analyses from Indian practitioners and experts with reflections on the Indian experience by U.S. authors.

This approach serves two policy-relevant purposes. First, the book makes more accessible to Western audiences leading case studies of Indian COIN operations written by individuals who fought in COIN campaigns as officers in the Indian Army or as leaders of police forces. Through these case studies, the reader can learn how India approached its COIN conflicts and witness India's triumphs and tragic mistakes across decades of Indian history. These lessons from India's experience can feed into the iterative refinement of COIN theory, doctrine, and practice taking place in the United States and other

countries, which anticipate having to wage COIN more frequently in the decades to come.

Second, the book's substantive analysis speaks as well to India itself. The "lessons learned" from these case studies matter as much, and probably more, for India as for any other country. The Indian and U.S. authors reveal serious problems that India still has not confronted effectively in how it prepares for and executes COIN campaigns. One of the haunting themes emerging from the renaissance of interest in COIN in the United States is that the U.S. military and civilian government agencies have proven very inept at learning the lessons of past COIN operations. The same theme appears time and again in the Indian case studies in this book. This reality is sobering for those in the United States attempting to integrate COIN learning into policy in more sustainable ways because it reveals a fellow democracy struggling rather unsuccessfully to pass on COIN wisdom and best practices to future leaders. In addition, the failure to learn from past mistakes is a wake-up call to Indian policy makers and military officers that perhaps the time has come to make more concerted efforts to avoid repeating the mistakes of yesteryear.

Structure and substance of the book

The book contains four parts, each of which focuses on an aspect of India's experiences engaging in COIN. The first part of the book concentrates on India's COIN campaigns in Nagaland and Mizoram, located in India's remote northeast region. D. B. Shekatkar analyzes India's first and longest-running COIN campaign in Nagaland (Chapter 1), an analysis informed by Shekatkar's experiences fighting in this campaign in the 1960s. Vivek Chadha, a serving officer in the Indian Army, details the COIN campaign in Mizoram (Chapter 2), a very interesting episode that ends with the former insurgent leader becoming head of the post-conflict civilian government of the state of Mizoram. Walter C. Ladwig III then looks across the Nagaland and Mizoram case studies to identify lessons on COIN tactics, strategy, and doctrine (Chapter 3).

Part II of the book contains chapters on Indian COIN campaigns in the Punjab, Kashmir, and against the Maoist Naxalites. V. G. Patankar describes the evolution of the COIN effort in Kashmir (Chapter 4), an effort in which he participated as an officer in the Indian Army. Sumit Ganguly reflects on the COIN campaign in Kashmir to highlight important features of the campaign worthy of broader consideration in the on-going analysis of COIN (Chapter 5). Ved Marwah, who is one of India's leading experts on the role of police forces in domestic security, examines India's COIN operations against Sikh extremists in the Punjab—operations that illustrated how critical robust police capabilities are to effective COIN actions (Chapter 6). C. Christine Fair deepens the Punjab case study by reflecting on what other countries can learn from the Punjab experience (Chapter 7). Part II concludes with a detailed analysis by Jennifer L. Oetken of the long-running Indian COIN efforts against the Naxalite movement, a Maoist-inspired movement that began in

the 1960s but has, according to current Indian Prime Minister Mamohan Singh, emerged as one of the greatest threats to India's national security (Chapter 8).

Part III turns the book's attention to India's only COIN campaign conducted beyond India's shores—the COIN fought by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in the 1980s. Ashok K. Mehta, who served with the IPKF in Sri Lanka, explores why India intervened militarily in the Sri Lankan domestic conflict, what happened to transform the IPKF from a peacekeeping force into a COIN combatant, and whether the IPKF's mission in Sri Lanka should be considered a total failure or a qualified success (Chapter 9). Jack Gill and David Lamm, of the U.S. National Defense University, analyze why the lessons of the IPKF's COIN campaign in Sri Lanka are particularly salient for the United States and its overseas COIN challenges (Chapter 10).

The last part of the book contains two chapters that focus on COIN doctrine. In a fortuitous coincidence, both the Indian Army and the U.S. Army and Marine Corps released new COIN doctrinal documents in December 2006. The development of these new doctrines occurred independently but simultaneously, creating an excellent opportunity to compare the most recent doctrinal thinking on COIN in India and the United States. Dipankar Banerjee, another veteran of the Indian Army and current director of a leading Indian think tank, analyzes the new Indian *Doctrine for Sub-Conventional Operations* (Chapter 11). David P. Fidler then compares the Indian doctrine to the contents of the U.S. Army's and Marine Corps' *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chapter 12). We close the book with a chapter of concluding thoughts on key policy-relevant messages the book's substantive analyses send to India and other countries about the nature of COIN and how best to wage this unusual and wickedly difficult form of armed politics.

Counterinsurgency tomorrow: whither India and democracy's counterinsurgents?

We intend the book to be of immediate relevance to current efforts to improve military and civilian capabilities for COIN operations in India, the United States, and elsewhere. This challenge is urgent, and its successful handling will have profound implications decades into the future. Experts predict that the United States will increasingly face asymmetrical threats of many varieties, including insurgencies in key countries and regions of the world beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. The less than stellar record of the United States in waging COIN and learning the lessons of such endeavors is sobering and underscores the need to avoid the tendency to marginalize COIN capabilities in favor of the traditional "American way of war." Drawing on India's history with COIN, both the good and the bad, is valuable because, as the chapters in the book demonstrate, the Indian experience validates much of contemporary U.S. and Western thinking on COIN and challenges such thinking to avoid the complacency that has seeped into Indian behavior in this realm. India serves

both as a mirror and a foil for other democratic countries struggling to master COIN theory, doctrine, and practice.

Within the boundaries of the Union, India has never lost a COIN campaign. Despite making the same mistakes repeatedly and not achieving sustainable COIN competence in military and civilian institutions, India has proved remarkably resilient in the face of repeated insurgency threats. Once moving in the appropriate directions, Indian democracy gains traction and does not break in the face of secessionist and extremist threats. India and other democracies will continue to confront violent threats to order and peace at home and abroad, and these threats may, as experts expect, arise through insurgency movements of varying degrees of ferocity and scope. India's history with COIN puts it on the cutting edge of what may be looming on the horizon for democracies and the international system more generally.

Whether India remains resilient, and whether democracies respond effectively to insurgent violence locally and globally, remains to be seen. In the meantime, COIN continues to be a profound challenge in learning and adapting, and it is to this challenge that we offer this book.

Part I

India's counterinsurgency campaigns in the Northeast

1 India's counterinsurgency campaign in Nagaland

D. B. Shekatkar

Where it all started

I could see the ambush's aftermath. It had been a blood bath. In 1964, I was deployed as a young Captain in the Indian Army in Nagaland at a village called Khonoma. Just prior to my arrival, Naga insurgents had killed Indian Army troops at a river where the troops bathed. I learned, to my astonishment, that women from the village who collected water from the river had helped the insurgents stage the ambush. This ambush was my initiation into a different kind of war, a kind of war that Indian Army soldiers had not been trained to fight, but one that the Republic of India was forced to wage. At that river, and in the surrounding jungles and mountains of Nagaland, India first confronted the challenge of mounting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations.

This chapter explores India's COIN campaign in Nagaland in order to illuminate this important case study in India's history of waging COIN and low-intensity conflicts and to draw from this episode lessons for other governments facing the need to engage in civilian and military COIN operations. To achieve these objectives, the chapter analyzes the insurgency movements in Nagaland, how the Indian government responded to the challenge, and what lessons the Indian government's successes and failures can teach others interested in mounting more effective COIN operations. My experiences fighting COIN campaigns in Nagaland and elsewhere in India inform my analyses, but I have attempted to make my "war stories" transcend personal experiences in order to contribute to the growing interest in finding the most humane and effective ways to counter the threats violent insurgencies pose to countries and peoples.

Brief overview of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Nagaland

Nagaland is in India's northeastern region, located east of Bangladesh and with its eastern border touching Myanmar. Nagaland is mountainous, with the average altitude ranging from 900 to 1,500 meters above sea level. Most of Nagaland's 16,488 square kilometers is covered with thick, tropical forest and is very humid. Nagaland's relative isolation and difficult geographical terrain help explain how, over time, the complex and diverse mix of up to

sixteen different tribes developed in the area, each with its own cultural and language features. The Naga tribes had come into contact with the British in the nineteenth century, through their imperial rule of India, and with Japanese military forces during World War II. Despite attempts at exerting control over the Naga tribes, the British never achieved sustainable control over what they called the Naga Hills District, which left the Naga peoples space to evolve their own societies relatively free from outside interference (Youno 1974; Murkot 1988).

British withdrawal from India reflected the difficult status of the Naga region. For example, the Government of India Act of 1935 declared that the Naga Hills District was an “excluded area” within the province of Assam. Technically, this provision meant that the Naga region was part of British India, but the seeds were already planted for the difficulties that would later arise with incorporating the Naga area into the governance structure of India after its independence in 1947. As is explored on pp. 11–12, these seeds germinated as demands for autonomy within India, but later became a violent attempt to secede from India and form an independent country.

This insurgency movement, which began in the 1950s, has, in some form or another, continued until the present day. Over this more than fifty-year period, the insurgency and the Indian government’s COIN responses have changed significantly, making it difficult within a short space to capture the true texture of the politics and military facets of the Nagaland struggle. As a general matter, Indian civilian and military authorities have gradually learned more effective ways of countering the insurgency threat and have succeeded in limiting the threat the insurgency poses to Nagaland’s place within India. The insurgency has not, however, been completely defeated politically or militarily, and it still remains an obstacle to political, economic, and social development in Nagaland and India’s northeast. The successes and failures of the Indian COIN campaign in Nagaland have influenced the Indian government’s and Army’s approaches to later COIN and low-intensity conflicts in other regions, so this five-decade struggle has marked significance for India’s experiences with COIN (Gundeiva 1975; Misra 2000; Misra 2003).

The insurgency

Origins of the insurgency

Nationalist sentiment stirs

The origins of the insurgency in Nagaland stem from the waning days of British imperial rule in India. The Japanese invasion of Nagaland during World War II, and the subsequent fighting between the Japanese and the British Indian Army, shattered the region’s economy. After World War II, British administrators in India attempted to rebuild and develop the region’s economy and, in the process, formed the Naga Hills District Council in April