



Police escort men arrested in connection with the killing of prominent Sikh politician Soran Singh after they were presented to the media at a news conference 25 April 2016 in Peshawar, Pakistan. (Photo by Khuram Parvez, Reuters)

# Bridging the Gap between Policing and Counterinsurgency in Pakistan

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**C**ounterinsurgency (COIN) best practices integrate an important role for the police. As Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, sums up: “The

primary frontline COIN force is often the police—not the military” because “the primary COIN objective is to enable local institutions.”<sup>1</sup> The national military

forces may suppress insurgents in some countries, but “the task of restoring public order invariably involves careful and sustained police work.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, the police have played a limited COIN role in Pakistan’s recent campaigns in the semiautonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Baluchistan. An experienced Pakistani military official described the police as “a weak link in Pakistan’s counterinsurgency efforts.”<sup>3</sup> Over half of Pakistan’s territory is not policed, which facilitates not only the proliferation of terrorism but also the graduation from terrorist organizations—characterized by clandestine groups using violence against civilians—to more powerful insurgent organizations that control territory and threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on evidence from four case studies, we argue that the police can and should play a larger COIN function. The police are particularly useful for consolidating a state’s legitimate authority through the reestablishment of law and order in areas previously contested or dominated by insurgents. Policing is also a key to preventing terrorist acts in areas of limited state authority from erupting in the first place, as well as from turning into a full-fledged insurgency. Even in areas where the state exercises considerable power, terrorism may be a looming threat.<sup>5</sup>

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## Police in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency

Counterterrorism (CT) is “activities and operations to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.”<sup>6</sup>

Successful CT keeps terrorist organizations from graduating to insurgent groups. While terrorism is widely seen as a weapon of small, clandestine organizations, insurgent organizations tend to be better trained and equipped to maintain control over territory. Successful insurgents create an alternative government structure, especially in semiungoverned areas where the writ of state is weak.<sup>7</sup>

COIN’s scope is broader than that of CT. Per Joint Publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, COIN is “the blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”<sup>8</sup> Insurgents usually start their campaign as terrorists and subsequently gain territory, size, and influence. They may continue to use terrorism as a tactic, especially in government-controlled areas. In the areas under their influence, insurgent groups often use symmetrical warfare. A successful COIN strategy recaptures territory from insurgents, thereby downgrading them to terrorists, which may result in increased use of terrorism as a tactic.

Most experts argue that the police should be used after the more heavily armed military establishes some level of territorial control.<sup>9</sup> The police are less capable than the military when it comes to defeating insurgents in direct combat, but they have some moral, practical, and tactical advantages over militaries. These can be leveraged to bring areas where the state exercises some territorial control back to normalcy. However, the military

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may still be necessary for maintaining control and keeping the insurgents from recapturing an area.

Police forces recruited from local populations offer the cultural and political advantages of governance by people coethnic with the general population. This may provide legitimacy for the government and help counter the insurgents' rhetoric that frames the conflict in "us versus them" terms. Practically, when the police recruit locally, this employment opportunity also provides an alternative to joining the insurgents for those who might otherwise do so out of

economic necessity or security concerns.

At a tactical level, coethnic and local recruitment provides intelligence advantages and enables the police to target rebels individually. Local police can be better than the military at gathering intelligence in areas where the military is seen as an outside force. Coethnic police are better able to infiltrate insurgencies. Last, if the police forces are competent at providing basic security and are capable of responding to civilian tips, they can gather more intelligence from civilians about individual insurgents, which leads to more discriminate targeting. The police are, therefore, not only essential for providing law and order after the insurgency ends but they can also contribute to defeating insurgents during the COIN campaign.

India's experience in the state of Punjab during the late 1980s and early 1990s bears this out. The

Khalistan insurgency was a secessionist movement that sought an independent homeland for Sikhs in India. The Indian Army's attempt to rid the militants of a safe haven in the Golden Temple (a holy site) destroyed the Temple, which delegitimized the Indian

Army in the region.<sup>10</sup> This required the Punjab police to take the lead in COIN operations that sought to eliminate individual insurgents, though the Indian Army and paramilitaries would play the important support roles of denying safe havens for Khalistanis in the countryside and along the



(Graphic by Trevor Cloen, Skidmore College)

## Pakistan

Pakistani border. After considerable investment in a more capable force, the Punjab police were able not only to provide law and order in the cities but also to conduct offensive operations against armed insurgents. They did so by leveraging their moral, practical, and tactical advantages stemming from local Sikh and Punjabi recruitment. Notably, the police recruited new officers who could provide local intelligence, and they infiltrated Khalistani and criminal organizations. Then, they used these advantages to find and target the insurgents.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding the clear advantages, using the police for COIN also risks drawbacks that should be taken into account. There is a wide variation in the level of professionalism within and across the police forces. In Pakistan, many police forces are corrupt or inadequately trained.<sup>12</sup> Corruption hampers the rule of law,

and ill-trained forces cannot be effective in intelligence gathering or even supplying basic order. The lack of professionalism and accountability allows the police to harass and abuse the civilian population. This behavior hurts not only the credibility of the government but also the COIN efforts.

The characteristics outlined above were present in Punjab during COIN against the Khalistanis. The police were incapable of countering the militants in the early stages of the insurgency. Instead of targeting individual insurgents, the police arrested petty criminals and others from vulnerable populations and passed them off as terrorists. The Punjab police's lack of accountability resulted in abuses of the civilian population. This need not be the case in Pakistan. The more the police operate within the bounds of the rule of law, the easier it should be to gain the favor of the civilian population.

The following case studies explore the Pakistani police's experience in COIN. The first two cases demonstrate that Pakistani police have played, in the past, an important role in COIN. The last two studies represent cases in which the police have not, but certainly could have, played an important role. In the conclusion, we consider why Pakistani police have been kept from contributing to COIN and offer policy recommendations for moving forward.

### **Hashtnagar (1969–1974)**

Due to the status of Pakistan's military forces, Pakistani police played an important COIN role in a little-known peasant rebellion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) (then called the North-West Frontier Province) from 1969–1974. The military forces were, at the time, largely preoccupied with the rebellious eastern wing of the country (now Bangladesh) and the ensuing war with India. On 16 December 1971, following a two-week war with India, the Pakistani military forces surrendered to the Indian Army and Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters). After their surrender to a joint Bangladesh–India command, the political and social influence of the military forces declined severely. This created an opening for the police to play an unusually active role in confronting the peasant rebellion in KPK Province, which took off from a small KPK town called Hashtnagar in 1969.

According to Kamran Asdar Ali, the Hashtnagar movement began as a struggle “for the eradication

of feudal taxes and the introduction of a more just tenancy system.”<sup>13</sup> The peasants challenged Pakistan's powerful landlords. Tenant peasants and laborers adhering to the Marxist ideology of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (Workers and Peasants Party, or MKP) drove many large landowners away from their property. The lands were then confiscated and distributed among the landless peasantry.

The police operations began after the rebels took over the lands. The provincial police were ill trained and poorly equipped to confront the insurgency. Nevertheless, they were sent as reinforcements to the district police. Young officers, such as assistant superintendents of police Afzal Shigri and Tauqir Haider, led their forces in violent conflict against the peasants. Their strategy was incremental, primarily because of their limited resources.<sup>14</sup> However, they managed to contain the insurgency to Hashtnagar and the surrounding areas, thereby preventing it from spreading to other parts of the province where landlords were holding large tracts of land.

Notwithstanding, a final conclusion was hindered by the landlords' refusal to return to their areas even after the police drove the insurgents away. One result was that the insurgency lingered on for five years, until MKP leaders were arrested, killed, or fled to neighboring Afghanistan.

### **Malakand (2009)**

In 2009, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliate, Tehreek-e-Nizam-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TSNM), managed to wrest control over the Swat Valley and adjacent districts of the Malakand Division of KPK Province.<sup>15</sup> They had already taken over the semiautonomous FATA, and they were advancing toward KPK's settled area. The Pakistani Army was called in. Following Operation Rah-e-Haq, the Islamist insurgents were ousted from Malakand. Following a “clear, hold, build, and transfer” strategy, the police moved in to reestablish law and order, and helped to return the troubled area back to normalcy.<sup>16</sup>

Pakistani police played a supporting role in curbing and rooting out the remnants of insurgents and their sympathizers. The return of the police to the contested areas was designed to regain the confidence of the local populace. Legal proceedings were initiated against the insurgents arrested by the military during the COIN



operations, and TSNM founder and ideologue Sufi Mohammad was booked under sedition charges after the police registered thirteen cases against him.<sup>17</sup>

The military did not leave the area, but administration was handed over to the civilian authorities. The police thus played an important role in the “transfer” and “shape” stages of the COIN campaign. In addition, during the Malakand military operations, the police were responsible for securing and maintaining the internally displaced people camps, which were established in the adjacent districts, as many of the TTP rank-and-file had taken refuge there.

### **Federally Administered Tribal Areas (2004–2009)**

Between 2004 and 2009, during the height of the Islamist insurgency in FATA’s Khyber District, the police thwarted numerous direct attacks on civilian and military installations in Peshawar City. The KPK government was even considering shifting the provincial capital from Peshawar to Abbottabad because

of the proximity of Peshawar to the tribal areas from where the Islamist militants were launching their attacks.<sup>18</sup> Police had taken the primary responsibility of securing the access points to Peshawar in order to check the movement of TTP militants. In response to this security arrangement, the TTP beheaded a number of police officers patrolling the area in the outskirts of Peshawar.<sup>19</sup> Two superintendents of police were killed while on duty. Superintendent of Police Khurshid Khan was leading a patrol when he was surrounded and beheaded by the TTP militants on the spot in October 2012, whereas Abdul Kalam Khan was killed in a suicide bombing in March 2012.<sup>20</sup> Since the police had no jurisdiction in the tribal areas, the insurgents took full advantage of this by using these areas for strategic depth, moving back and forth into Peshawar from the tribal areas.

Training officers of the Special Security Unit attend a field briefing 30 November 2015 at the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Police Training School, Razzakabad, Karachi, Pakistan. (Photo by Farhan Zahid)

## Baluchistan (2004–Present)

The police have played a minimal COIN role in Baluchistan. The military operation ongoing since 2004 is managed by the Frontier Corps, a paramilitary force commanded by Pakistan army officers. Baluchistan has been divided into “A” and “B” areas for administrative and law enforcement purposes since the British colonial period. Paramilitary forces called the Baluchistan Levies are responsible for maintaining law and order in the B area, which represents 95 percent of the province, whereas the police are limited to the remaining A area.<sup>21</sup> Most of the insurgent-hit areas are in the B area of the province and, hence, are out of police jurisdiction.

The role of the police is not well defined in the COIN operations led by the paramilitary forces in cooperation with the Pakistani military. However, the police have to deal with terrorist attacks committed by the Baluch separatists in the urban centers of Baluchistan, which are under police jurisdiction. For example, when the insurgent group Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) burned down a historic government building, the Quaid-e-Azam Residency in the Ziarat district in June 2013, the local police investigated the case and traced the individuals involved.<sup>22</sup> The BLA insurgents were later killed by the Frontier Corps in an operation outside of police jurisdiction.

## Conclusion

The role of police in COIN in Pakistan is limited. However, even though the police forces are better trained and armed than before, the military authorities seem uninterested in trusting the police with COIN functions. There is no policing in over half of Pakistan’s



Training officers of the Special Security Unit exhibit their repelling skills at the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Elite Police Training School 30 November 2015 in Razzakabad, Karachi, Pakistan. (Photo by Farhan Zahid)

territory, and those areas have become breeding grounds for insurgents. The lack of initiative in reforming the police and increasing its role in COIN presents a missed opportunity.

We believe that the COIN efforts in Baluchistan and FATA would benefit from a greater role for police in consolidating government control and maintaining law

and order. The laws restricting their contribution are outdated and should be updated to allow for a more expansive police role. In doing so, the police should recruit and train officers from affected areas to maximize their moral, practical, and tactical advantages. They should

also continue improving their performance through internal reform. The police's role should be clearly defined from the very onset of the COIN operations. Moreover, the officers should be adequately trained and armed to carry out their duties effectively and responsibly. ■

## Notes

1. Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 15 December 2006), 6-19. (This manual was superseded in May 2014 by FM 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*.)
2. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, "The Police in Counterinsurgency Operations," in *Policing Insurgencies: Cops as Counterinsurgents*, eds. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.
3. Shaukat Qadir, "The State's Response to the Pakistani Taliban Onslaught," in *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Asia: Through a Peacebuilding Lens*, ed. Moeed Yusuf (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2014), 149.
4. Christopher K. Butler and Scott Gates, "Asymmetry, Parity, and (Civil) War: Can International Theories of Power Help Us Understand Civil War?" *International Interactions* 35, no. 3 (2009): 330-40.
5. Huma Yusuf, "University Radicalization: Pakistan's Next Counterterrorism Challenge," *CTC Sentinel* (February 2016): 4-8.
6. Joint Publication (JP) 3-26, *Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 24 October 2014), GL-3.
7. Timothy Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), chaps. 8 and 11; Stahtis Kalyvis, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chap. 5.
8. JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 22 November 2013), III-1. The defeat of an insurgency means a return to normalcy—that is, recapture territory from insurgents, end their use of violence, and govern that territory in accordance with the rule of law.
9. Sir Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966); FM 3-24.
10. C. Christine Fair, "The Golden Temple: A Tale of Two Sieges," in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, eds. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
11. C. Christine Fair, *Urban Battlefields in South Asia: Lessons Learned from Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005); Prem Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India: Strategic Intelligence and National Security in South Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company Ltd., 2012); Jugdep Chima, "The Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency against Sikh Militants in India: The Successful Convergence of Interests, Identities, and Institutions," in *Policing Insurgencies: Cops as Counterinsurgents*, eds. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), 258-90.
12. Adnan Naseemullah, "Police Capacity and Insurgency in Pakistan," in *Policing Insurgencies: Cops as Counterinsurgents*, eds. Fair and Ganguly, 189. Police corruption can be linked to poor pay. According to Naseemullah, underinvestment in police salaries carries "predictable [negative] effects on morale, police-society relationships, and recruitment."
13. Kamran Asdar Ali, "Pakistan's Troubled 'Paradise on Earth,'" *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 29 April 2009, accessed 13 September 2016, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero042909>.
14. Afzal Shigri (inspector general of police [retired]), interview by Farhan Zahid, 10 February 2016, in Islamabad, Pakistan. Shigri served as assistant superintendent of police in Charsada and played a pivotal role in the counterinsurgency, which includes Swat, Buner, Shangla, Swabi, and Dir districts of the Malakand Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province.
15. These included Swat, Buner, Shangla, Swabi, and Dir districts of the Malakand Division in KPK Province.
16. C. Christine Fair, "Obama's New 'Af-Pak' Strategy: Can 'Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer' Work?" *The Afghanistan Papers* 6 (July 2010), 5, accessed 26 September 2016, [https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan\\_paper\\_6.pdf](https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_paper_6.pdf).
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18. Names withheld, Senior police officers of KPK Province, interviews by Farhan Zahid, February 2016, in Peshawar, Pakistan.
19. "Policeman's Beheaded Body Found in Peshawar," *Daily Times* website, 3 April 2009, <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/national/03-Apr-2009/policeman-s-beheaded-body-found-in-peshawar>.
20. Ali Hazrat Bacha, "Officer's Beheading Raises the Questions about Police Preparedness," *Dawn* website, 17 October 2012, <http://www.dawn.com/news/757312/officers-beheading-raises-questions-about-police-preparedness>.
21. Name withheld, Baluchistan police officer, interview by Farhan Zahid, 20 February 2016, in Islamabad, Pakistan. The reintroduction of Levies is linked to tribal patronage networks in Baluchistan. While police forces are controlled by the Inspector General of Police of Baluchistan Province, the Levies are beholden to tribal networks and local politicians.
22. "BLA destroys Jinnah's Residency in Ziarat," *Express Tribune* website, 16 June 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/563877/bla-destroys-jinnahs-residency-in-ziarat/>; name withheld, senior Baluchistan police officer, interview by Farhan Zahid, 20 February 2016, in Islamabad, Pakistan.