

**Police and Counter-Insurgency: The Untold Story of Tripura's COIN Campaign**, by Kuldeep Kumar, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2016, pp. 344, Rs 1,095

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The role of the state police in combating insurgencies has not been given due acknowledgement in India despite the success stories of Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal where police forces successfully deployed to counter insurgency movements. For instance, in Punjab, with support from the central paramilitary forces, the state police successfully neutralised terrorists who were demanding a separate state of Khalistan. In Andhra Pradesh, the state police played a highly critical role through the efficient Greyhounds model of security force operation. West Bengal adopted a similar strategy where police compelled the insurgents to dissipate into the surrounding region, resulting in drastic reduction in the level of extremist violence in the state. The police forces in these states were able to augment their capacities, infuse dynamic leadership and reorganise their structure and strategies to counter the insurgencies effectively.

Tripura has become the fourth success story where the state police has been able to effectively counter insurgency, eventually leading to the withdrawal of the Disturbed Areas Act and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from the state in 2015. In *Police and Counter-Insurgency: The Untold Story of Tripura's COIN Campaign*, Kuldeep Kumar, former Additional Director General of Police of the Tripura State

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Rifles (TSR), analyses how good policing can help the state governments in their fight against insurgencies. He illustrates how the Tripura Police successfully enforced law and order with the aim to re-establish a secure environment for civil governance, development and welfare in areas 'liberated' from the insurgency.

In Tripura, the core of the police strategy was to dominate the most remote areas in the state and to minimise the reaction time for insurgents to launch a counter-attack. Analysing the success of the state police to counter insurgency, the author states that there were innumerable incidents wherein police forces lived in close proximity with the civilians in the areas of conflict. As a result, there was an increase in protective patrolling, collection of more intelligence and other related data and liaising with local leaders on regular basis, all of which helped in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. In addition, promotion of 'peace and development' initiatives through large-scale meetings of locals and state administration, effective political mobilisation of women, devolution of powers to local bodies and encouraging the youth to renounce violence contributed to countering insurgency in the state.

The book describes the efforts made by the police force to reorganise, revamp and reorient in order to emerge as an efficient COIN force. Fresh instructions were issued in a four-page document titled 'Concept and Conduct of CI Operation', in which the components of police strategy to defuse insurgency were as follows: battalion-level planning and coordination of operations among security forces; establishment of operating bases within area of responsibility with a quick reaction team; recognition of junior leadership; small unit operations in guerrilla-infested zones; and organising synergised operations periodically as per directions of State Level Operations and Intelligence Group (SLOG). This strategy was complemented by state government's further initiatives such as psychological interventions, focusing on changing the tribal person's negative perception about the state, vocational training and rehabilitation package comprising of monetary benefits.

The book is organised into three parts. Part one provides a conceptual understanding of policing and COIN, and presents an overview of India's COIN strategies. It argues that the fusion of external and internal threats to national security has blurred the boundaries between the police and army in modern-day conflicts, necessitating fundamental changes in their strategies. In other words, both police and military personnel need to adopt advanced tactics and skills in order to understand the perplexing

complexities of the conflict. This is because the traditional distinctions between insurgency, terrorism and organised crime have been largely obliterated due to globalisation.

However, Kumar states that establishing a comprehensive approach to COIN that encompasses political, economic and social dimensions is more likely to earn legitimacy than the overwhelming use of force. According to him, India has failed to develop a coherent counter-insurgency–counter-terrorism (CI–CT) policy in the areas that are highly affected by Naxalite violence and insurgencies due to lack of governance and political influences. He also argues that over-reliance on the federal and paramilitary force for internal security is the consequence of persistent neglect by the state governments in building their own core capacities.

Part two of the book presents a thematic overview of insurgencies and the government's COIN policy, while describing in detail the situation in violence-prone states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Here, Kumar attempts to unravel the linkages of insurgent groups with Muslim fundamentalist groups and drugs and arms smuggling. This section also discusses the evolution of insurgency and violence, including internal and external linkages of the two main insurgent groups of Tripura: the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). According to the author, Tripura's comprehensive approach to COIN mainly focuses on the economic and developmental initiatives for the tribal and ethnic groups; political initiatives of engagement with insurgent groups; ways to strengthen institutions of local self-government; and mobilising people against insurgency in the region.

In addition, the state police has also adopted strategic measures, including the radical transformation of police, improved intelligence and increased police–public interface, which have succeeded further in marginalising insurgent influences in the state by reducing their capacities and eroding their popular support. The last part of the book narrates five case studies from Tripura that illustrate the operationalisation of the new concept of COIN in different situations. The case studies pertain to recovering Takarjala from insurgents, successful establishment of a primary school by 5th Battalion of TSR, a rescue operation for release of a railway engineer, avoiding collateral damage in COIN operations and instituting civil police initiatives in insurgency-prone Teliamura.

Tripura followed a model in which the number of police stations were increased, eventually leading to the withdrawal of the army from the state. One cannot say if the same strategy can be adopted by other states to mitigate insurgency. This is because India faces a wide array of insurgencies with each one being different in its ideology, aims, structures and strategies. Thus, the counter strategies need to match to the specific strengths and weakness of the insurgent group.

Insights from COIN in Tripura provide a judicious mix of effective policing and comprehensive political strategy to be adopted by the state to combat insurgency. However, this book could have also dealt with methods to ensure security for the local population to resume normalcy while improving quality of life through development initiatives. Rather than adopting complete police or military strategy to curb insurgency, the ideal approach should be the deployment of small, paramilitary armed units to control the region, post-insurgency period. An effective cooperation and coordination between the police force and paramilitary force is significant to stop insurgents from recapturing the territory. This strategy will pave the way in curbing insurgency in the region.

Overall, this book is a good starting point for the policymakers who are yet to consider the possibility of deploying local police force when deciding military measures to counter insurgency in the region. It also provides a practitioner's perspective on a subject that needs greater focus in terms of research and academic inquiry.