

Policing Insurgencies: Cops as Counterinsurgents,
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Counter-insurgency, referred to as COIN with the usual military fondness for abbreviations, is commonly understood as a military-centric effort that seeks to overwhelm the insurgents with superior numbers, firepower, technology, and funds. In countries like India, central paramilitary forces are enjoined to do so. The central premise in traditional COIN discourse is that insurgency is a military problem requiring a military solution. But looking at successful amelioration of insurgent movements, it is clear that COIN requires an approach that attacks the root of the insurgency as well as the immediate problems of security; and such approaches have involved a police-centric doctrine. *Policing Insurgencies: Cops as Counterinsurgents* is a vigorous attempt at documenting this approach.

Part of a larger series of books on international relations in South Asia—the ‘Oxford International Relations in South Asia’—*Policing Insurgencies* is a collection of case studies of various police responses to counter-insurgent movements worldwide. While the series is focussed on a particular region, the series editors have ensured that a reader is afforded lessons that are not restricted to South Asia alone but also cover Latin America, Europe, Africa and South-East Asia. Additionally, the common structure of the individual case studies lends itself to a convenient comparative analysis of the historical backdrop, the kinds of forces used,

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junctures at which they were brought into the conflict, the peculiar political and institutional considerations, the degree of preparedness of police forces for COIN, evolution of their capability, the extent of inter-agency (non)cooperation, and, finally, an assessment of their performance.

Continuing COIN efforts in the Kashmir Valley, the Philippines and Afghanistan utilize the local police forces in a supporting role, rarely requiring them to remodel themselves specifically for COIN. The urge and justification for such an approach lies in the belief that superior firepower, better fighting skills and larger numbers, which the army and paramilitaries possess, will save the day. However, it is increasingly being realized that since COIN is by default a long, protracted, resource and morale-draining exercise, it is ill suited for the army or the paramilitary. Instead, COIN efforts should be spearheaded by the police, owing to their natural advantages of local knowledge, established human intelligence (HUMINT) network, and being the first responder to a law and order problem, which is what insurgencies usually begin as. Having said this, the challenges faced by police forces all over the world are well known. From rampant corruption to antiquated weaponry and training, a policeman faces several factors rendering him ineffective to carry out his ordinary duties let alone COIN operations. This well-known fact is reiterated in each chapter, and is especially well fleshed out in Chapter 1 (on the Philippines and the Hukbalahap).

The book's central message is one of police reform. By means of the preceding chapters, Chapter 11 arrives at the conclusion that in order to reform the police, there is an ever-present and urgent need for conceptual and capability reform. Moving from an idea of a police force to a police service, *Policing Insurgencies* maps out the manner in which Rule of Law versus Extraordinary Laws are part of the former discourse and force expansion, while capacity enhancement and force specialization are examples of the latter.

The most valuable take away from this collection is not the recurring observation of the indelible link between a sympathetic polity, functioning institutional mechanisms and effective policing, nor is it the correlation drawn between a weak police force and criminality turning into insurgency or even the benefits of cops as counter-insurgents, which are quite standard and well known already. Rather, it is the account of how nine countries dealt with insurgencies within and outside their territories. In other words, the significance of the book is not in the 'what', but in the 'how'. The outlining of the police responses combined with a pithy

rendition of the philosophy behind the said responses is excellent. The manner in which Colonel Young of the London Police transformed the Malayan police force into a 'police that is part of the people' (Chapter 2 on Malaysia and Malayan Communist Party [MCP]) reveals just how important sound leaders are, and also holds crucial lessons for dealing with conflicts in an alien territory. There are different kinds of leaders as well. An archetype of a problematic policeman is General Matiullah Khan, a warlord/police chief who is respected for being an effective anti-Taliban fighter and a social contributor (responsible for infrastructure-building in Kandahar), while engaging in smuggling, corruption and coercion (Chapter 7).

Chapters 5 (on Colombia and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [FARC]), 6 (on Pakistan), 7 (on Afghanistan) and 9 (on Sikh militancy in India) offer a backdrop of COIN operations with a transnational angle where insurgency, narcotics, terrorism, organized crime and sectarianism overlap.

As far as the intended audience goes, the book would be of interest for scholars trying to arrive at greater conceptual clarity with regard to the idea of policing itself, and also those who require well-researched, well-articulated, evidence-based case studies on the subject. Policymakers would perhaps benefit by one of the other messages of this book: that excessive militarization of the police will only lead to erosion of community policing that has proven itself to be the *de facto* requirement to achieve primary goals of the policing, such as protection of life and property, maintenance of law and order, and, most importantly, repose faith in the rule of law. Policy implementers can gain the most from *Policing Insurgencies* as it provides clear accounts of how officers entrusted with COIN went about adapting basic, but effective, rules of good policing to their exigent circumstances: building faith among locals, person-to-person contact between beat-level officers and locals, showing restraint, and so on; what the Americans called 'winning hearts and minds'. Examples include the setting up of the operational service (a well-executed police-public relations exercise where the police attempted to shed a 'bogeyman' image and participated in voluntary service) by the Malayan police to reconnect with the rural Chinese; and, closer home, the Greyhounds of the Andhra Pradesh Police (Chapter 10 on India and Maoism) employing the medium of plays and folk songs to establish familiarity with locals to earn their trust and for fighting Naxal propaganda.

It must be pointed out that the countries whose case studies are

featured in this book are all democracies, in a broad understanding of the term. It would have enlarged the scope of the book to include studies of the effectiveness of the police in a monarchy or a communist state. It can be assumed that the intuitive response would be 'very effective', given the degree of control of the state over its population and the lack of accountability on the means of enforcing it. But a similar study of cases like the ongoing Uighur insurgency in China and the Dhofar rebellion in Oman in the 1960s might prove otherwise.

Finally, keeping in mind how expensive COIN ends up becoming, there is not much of an economic analysis in any of the case studies. Perhaps a stronger case can be made for cops as counter-insurgents if it was verified that instead of using soldiers as soldiers plus social workers (building schools, etc.), it would be cheaper to let the police take over that role, something that it is poised well to do given its experience with community-oriented policing. Given the situation in Afghanistan and Kashmir where the military operates without proper civilian control, and where laws allow incredible degree of discretion, the enormous amount of funds being channelled into such theatres end up being handled by military commanders for non-military purposes, such as purchasing and running diesel generators to power Kabul city, when these funds should really be managed by a competent civilian authority. Filling in a governance vacuum with a quasi-civilian, quasi-military organization like a police force seems a better option in the long run.