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The Strategic Effects of Counterinsurgency Operations at Religious Sites: Lessons from India, Thailand, and Israel

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The Strategic Effects of Counterinsurgency Operations at Religious Sites:
Lessons from India, Thailand, and Israel

by

Timothy L. Christopher

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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ABSTRACT

With the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center buildings, the intersection of religious ideals in war has been at the forefront of the American discussion on war and conflict. The New York attacks were followed by the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in October of 2001 in an attempt to destroy the religious government of the Taliban and capture the Islamic terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, and then followed by the 2003 invasion of Iraq, both in an attempt to fight terrorism and religious extremism. In both instances, American forces became embroiled in counterinsurgency operations against insurgent fighters who identified themselves in terms of religion and ethnicity. More recently, all of the regional and nuclear powers are engaged in conflicts against insurgents identified as religious in some form.

The purpose of this research is to present tactical and strategic policies that can be implemented when ethno-religious violence occurs in and around religious sites, ensuring that operations at these sites will contribute to successful mitigation of violence in the wider conflict. Based on concepts from classical and contemporary counterinsurgency thought, a set of variables that contributes to successful counterinsurgency operations at religious sites was selected in order to understand successes and failures at previous operations. The results from these comparative studies were then used to develop a theoretical framework that contributes to successful counterinsurgency operations at religious sites.

The comparative studies chosen for this research includes four cases from India, with the finding then applied to case studies from Thailand, and Israel. Like India,

Thailand and Israel are facing insurgent movements that identify themselves along various ethnic, religious, and national constructs. The findings clearly show that there is a set of operational variables that apply to counterinsurgency operations at religious sites and contribute to tactical and strategic success.

Conclusions are drawn that success or failure of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites is not solely tied to a military versus law enforcement approach to the conflict. Contrary to this theory, it is how the operation is carried out, rather than how the counterinsurgents are formed, that contributes to a successful operation.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The investigation into how the tactical success of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites relates to strategic success in the broader conflict begs the question; to what end will this research serve? Why is the study of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites important enough to warrant its own research, or is it to simply be viewed as an aspect of the larger counterinsurgency picture? While there are few instances of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites historically, these instances of conflict in sacred space have enormous implications on the larger strategic outcomes and their respective campaigns. In these cases, conflict in sacred space becomes a triggering event, mitigating or exacerbating conflict, shifting the momentum of the conflict to either the insurgent or counterinsurgency forces.

This phenomenon is extremely important for the United States' military forces and policy makers, who are engaged in conflicts or have supporting roles in countries from Iraq to Djibouti, to Yemen to Ethiopia, and from Mali to the Philippines. The populations of these states and their respective insurgent forces identify heavily along ethno-religious lines, and an affront to the religious sites of the particular ethno-religious groups can be and is seen as tantamount to ethnic warfare in the eyes of the insurgents and the community they claim to represent. But the operation is not inherently directed toward that specific ethno-religious group. Insurgents not affiliated regionally religiously, or culturally with the communal ethno-religious groups may attempt to utilize these sites for various political reasons. In this regard, research will not be directed at the

ethno-religious group, but will specifically be concerned with counterinsurgency operations in and around the site.

But this is in no way limited to the United States. Russian forces have engaged in conflicts with Muslim Chechens, the Chinese military and police have had to deal with ethnic Uighur separatists of western China, Kurds in Turkey and Iran, and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan all have various ethno-religious separatist and terrorist groups it has confronted in recent years. Some of the most populous and powerful states on the globe are engaged in counterinsurgency operations against ethno-religious groups, and when Pakistan and India are added to this list, at least five of these states are nuclear powers. India also has the other characteristics of being both very heterogeneous in its population as well as being the world's largest democracy, sharing many similarities with the U.S. and other western nations. Because of this, India is used as a petri dish of sorts, where insurgents test out attacks prior to engaging western targets. The importance of examining this phenomenon is self-evident.

In order to explain how tactical and strategic successes interact, a definition for both concepts is needed. The Department of Defense's Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms put forth by the Joint Chiefs of Staff refers to tactical success as a victory that results in the completion of a tactical objective.¹ A tactical objective is the lowest level of operational planning, occurring at a specific site or locale, which aims to complete the goals of the assigned mission or task, so that tactical success would be the

¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff. 2010. *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02*: 280.

completion of that mission. Success at the tactical level therefore contributes to the success or failure of the whole operation, i.e. strategic success or failure.

Forces operating against insurgent groups in or around religious sites may garner success at the tactical level by using whatever means it deems necessary, but this tactical success does not necessarily translate into strategic success. The means which counterinsurgency forces implement in order to achieve tactical success at a religious site may actually inflame the conflict and contribute to strategic failure. The tactical and strategic success of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites is the culmination of proactive media involvement, intelligent operational implementation, and the ability to limit or negate external interference.

But as the case studies will show, it is not difficult to imagine a situation where a tactical failure has the potential to still contribute to strategic success, such as a noble loss. Strategic success is simply not a culmination of tactical victories. This is the lesson learned from dealing with the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War, where American armed forces won the battles but lost the war. Strategic success for counterinsurgents rests in the how victory is achieved, not simply compiling victories. Suffering a tactical loss while abiding by intelligent counterinsurgency protocols and civil and humanitarian laws has a legitimizing potential for counterinsurgents.

In terms of social science inquiry, this research aims to explain the variations of strategic success and their relation to differing tactical results. There are specific variables associated with these divergent outcomes, including operational implementation, force composition, media involvement, religious leadership cooperation,

and external interference. All of these variables are associated with various outcomes of tactical and strategic success, either by their presence or in their glaring absence.

India offers a unique perspective when analyzing counterinsurgency operations at religious sites. Having had experience with numerous insurgent groups operating in the country, including Assam militants, Maoists, Kashmiri and Sikh separatists, India has conducted four separate counterinsurgency operations at religious sites that provide a number of cases to study. These operations include Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder conducted at the Golden Temple of Amritsar in the Indian Punjab against Sikh militants², and the operations in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir against the Kashmiri separatists at the Hazratbal Mosque and the Charar-e-Sharief Shrine.³

In 1984, the Indian government successfully executed Operation Blue Star in an attempt to expel Sikh separatists from the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Within a few months after the operation, the insurgency expanded, Hindu led riots led to massive Sikh casualties, Sikh Army officers mutinied, and the Prime Minister of India was executed by her own bodyguards.⁴ At the same site four years later, with the same opposing forces, a successful Operation Black Thunder was implemented. This operation heralded the end of the Sikh insurgency, and the Khalistan movement was effectively over in five years.⁵

² C. Christine Fair, "The Golden Temple: A Tale of Two Sieges," in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, edited by C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37-65.

³ Sumit Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, edited by C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 66-87.

⁴ Fair, "The Golden Temple," 40.

⁵ For an exhaustive study, see K.P.S. Gill, "Endgame In Punjab: 1988-1993." *Faultlines: Institute for Conflict Management*. 1:29, (1996): 16-17; Cynthia K. Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1996).

Similar circumstances and divergent results can be seen in India's operations in Jammu and Kashmir as well. What accounts for these differing outcomes?

India's divergent levels of success are not from lack of trying, but from a misunderstanding of the intricacies and sensitive nature of the rules surrounding the religious sites and how military or police action interacts with them on a communal level. Instead, the varying degrees of success and failure are a result of an operational doctrine that does not always take both a proactive stance and the sensitive nature of the site into account.

A concern in examining a series of case studies that has such a high level of internal validity is that the findings may not explain violent conflict or any other phenomena outside of the studied region. In short, it will explain the Indian cases, but nothing else. A level of external validity needs to be built so that the research can be useful in both academic as well as a policy setting. In order to set an appropriate level of external validity, the counterinsurgency operations at the Krue Se Mosque in Thailand and the Church of the Nativity in Israel will be examined as well. These cases bring other factors into the research, which are not present in the Indian case studies. The Krue Se Mosque operation takes place in a state that is much more ethnically homogenous than that of the Indian state. The government and military structures differ from India, as well as both the level of external interference and the external actors involved. In the Church of the Nativity Siege, the Israel case offers an interesting departure from India in that while Israel is democratic like India, it identifies itself along ethno-religious lines and sees itself in a more homogenous light like that of Thailand, although on the ground there are large religious and ethnic populations within the state. But the most interesting aspect

of the Israeli case is its tripartite composition. While the direct conflict is between the state of Israel and Palestinian militants, the counterinsurgency operations takes place in one of the most revered sites for Christianity, not Judaism or Islam. Finally, the Palestinian militants and the larger Palestinian Liberation Organization, is nominally a nationalist movement, not one defined along ethno-religious lines. To what end this affects tactical and strategic outcomes is a factor the previous case studies cannot account for.

TABLE 1.

Case Studies: Outcomes, and Variables

	Operation Blue Star	Operation Black Thunder	Hazratbal Shrine	Charar-e-Sharief Mosque	Krue Se Mosque	Church of the Nativity
Tactical Success	Med.	High	Med.	Low	High	High
Strategic Success	Low	High	Med.	Low	Low	Indet.
Operational Implementation	Assault	Siege	Siege	Siege	Full	Siege
COIN Forces	Military	Police	Police	Military	Military	Military
Insurgent Force	Indig.	Indig.	Indig.	Transnat.	Indig.	Indig.
Media Involvement	None	High	High	None	None	High
Religious Co-Op	None	Yes	Yes	None	None	Yes
External Interference	Medium	Low	Low	High	Indet.	Medium

This research will be broken into thematic chapters. Chapter II will be a literature review surveying pertinent theory and research. The topic of counterinsurgency

operations at religious sites is not a well-developed field, so relevant ideas from traditional counterinsurgency literature will be borrowed for the sake of theoretical constructs. Chapter III will be a qualitative analysis of the counterinsurgency operations of India. These cases, with their research controls and internal validity, will comprise the bulk of the qualitative analysis. Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder in Amritsar, as well as the operations at Hazratbal and Charar-e-Sharief shrines will be examined, investigating the relationship between tactical success of the immediate operation and strategic success of the larger conflict.

The findings in Chapter III will then be tested for external validity in Chapter IV by examining other counterinsurgency operations outside of the Indian sub-continent. Counterinsurgency operations at Thailand's Krue Se Mosque against ethnic Malay separatists and the Church of the Nativity Siege between Israel's IDF and Palestinian militants will be examined in order to test the robustness of the Indian case study findings. Chapter V will be the conclusion and final examination of the findings that hold across the various case studies.

CHAPTER II: TERMINOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To believers, religious sites have specific functions. These sites aid in the access to the sacred and divine, where it is believed that the ethereal comes into the temporal world. It is at these sites that worshippers believe that three essential needs are fulfilled. These needs are communication with the divine through prayer and ritual, the receiving of blessings, healings, or salvation, and provide religious, social, and cosmological structure and meaning for the believers. All of these concepts and provisions are based on the idea that there is a divine presence that permanently resides within the sacred space.

But not all religious sites are created equal. To understand the role that conflict at sacred sites play in mitigating or exacerbating insurgencies, the hierarchical nature of various religious sites needs to be understood. There are essentially three hierarchical levels concerning religious sites, primary, or sacred, secondary, also known as consecrated, and tertiary, or a surrogate site. This hierarchical ranking is a result of the sites ability to fulfill the functions stated earlier, namely communication, gifts, and insights of and from the divine, relative to the other sites involved in the religion. These levels are not static, but can become fluid with an increase of perceived importance from their associated communities.

Sites considered of primary importance in their respective religions are built on locations considered sacred, either through some type of divine revelation or the founding of the religion having taken place at the respective locale. In this regard, the site and the religion are intimately linked and considered indivisible. The religion and the site are essentially one and the same. Secondary sites are built on ground that is considered

consecrated, chosen by religious agents, not a god or gods. The importance of a secondary site is tied to the presence of a relic or other divine gift that helps to confer unto the faithful miracles, healings, or intercessions. Many secondary sites attract pilgrims, either on a regional or global scale, who hope that being in proximity to the relic will offer a closer experience to the related Deity and increase the effectiveness of prayers.

Tertiary sites make up the vast majority of religious sites. These sites usually mimic the primary site in construction and act as a surrogate for those who cannot travel to or access a primary or secondary site, with continual prayer and ritual reinforcing this connection. Since there are no relic or miracles associated with these locales and the grounds themselves are not considered sacred, rules governing behavior around these sites can be manipulated more easily. Tertiary sites can take on more importance over time when the community uses ritual celebration, introduces its own relics, and becomes a substitution for the primary site. Even local loyalties and emotional and political attachments to the shrine can elevate the location.⁶ As Hassner states, “local political events, such as discriminatory policies toward a community and its sacred site or-at the extreme-government-sanctioned violation of the site during counterinsurgency operations, can all increase the significance of a sacred place, thus complicating the calculation significantly.”⁷

There are few instances of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites, so the choice of case studies is limited but extremely important if the research is going to be

⁶ Ron E. Hassner, “Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space,” in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, edited by C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15-29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

viable. The Indian case studies were chosen specifically because they allow for high levels of controls while testing differing variables and their effects on the tactical successes of the counterinsurgency operations at these sites, and the accompanying strategic effects on the larger conflict. This enables this research to hold as many conditions constant as possible and then attempt to explain the various outcomes.

For this research, inductive reasoning will be utilized for the analysis of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites. Because of the lack of any comprehensive or overarching theory concerning this topic, analytical movement from specific to more generalized case comparisons allow for logical arguments and conclusions. This bottom-up reasoning will construct, and then test for validity, the propositions derived from the case studies and research.

The first two cases in this model are Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder. Both of these cases occur in the Indian state of Punjab, and both occur at the same religious site of Hamandir Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple and the primary religious site for all Sikhs, located in the town of Amritsar, and are only four year apart. Both cases involve the same indigenous, ethno-religious separatist groups, and in some instances, the same individual insurgents. These two cases studies also have the same counterinsurgent forces, domestic government, geographic locale, and external actors supporting the insurgents. With these factors controlled for, dependent variables can be examined for their effects on levels of tactical and strategic success.

From the Golden Temple operations, two more Indian counterinsurgency operations are added. These case studies are the operation at the Hazratbal shrine and the Charar-e-Sharief mosque, with variations on both tactical and strategic success. As in the

previous cases, the counterinsurgency forces are the same, with both cases occurring in the Indian state of Kashmir rather than the Punjab. While the sites are different locales, they are only separated by roughly 20 miles, are both considered secondary sites to Islam, and the operations take place only two years apart. In addition, while both are considered secondary sites, they have taken on additional religious and political importance. These cases have the added factors of an increased level of external interference and the addition of transnational fighters. The Charar-e-Sharief case is also the only case that is considered both a tactical and strategic failure. While these cases hold some constants with the previous cases, the expansion that includes the Kashmir operations offers a more complex terrain under which variables can be tested for robustness.

The final set of case studies include the Thailand's Krue Se Mosque incident and the Church of the Nativity Siege in Bethlehem. The expansion of the study to include these cases introduces variations on existing variables as well as introducing some that did not exist in prior case studies. The sites are of tertiary and primary importance respectively, and the Church of the Nativity case offers a case where the religious site in question is not a party to either side of the conflict. The geographic expansion changes the insurgents, counterinsurgents, states in which the conflict takes place, differing external actors and locales. The Church of the Nativity offers the additional factor of an insurgent group that identifies itself along nationalistic rather than ethno-religious lines. Expanding the research to include these case studies allows continued testing of dependent variables while examining the differences in tactical and strategic successes that they provide.

The dependent variable is the level of strategic success of counterinsurgency operations of counterinsurgency operations at the religious sites. Simply speaking, this research is focused on what accounts for the success or failure of a large-scale counterinsurgency and how the counterinsurgency operations at the respective religious site affects the level of success or failure. What accounts for the widely varying strategic outcomes across cases that are related to operations where there is tactical success? What are the independent variables that help to explain these various outcomes?

Operational implementation, or how the operation is carried out, is the first independent variable used to help explain the divergent outcomes of this study. Operational implementation includes such variables as the level of force used, as well as other key variables such as consideration of the site's religious nature, level of intelligence applied to the operation, cordoning off or isolating the site from the civilian population or additional insurgents, and whether a siege approach used in conjunction with psychological warfare and negotiation, or a conventional use of force was used.

Operational implementation is important in that a lack of understanding, both concerning the site and the level of insurgent strength, can mitigate tactical successes and lead to strategic failure. The rules of behavior concerning religious sites many times have rules that govern both who can enter the site's various structures as well as forbidding violence within the structures. A tactical operation that disregards these concerns, either through lack of proper intelligence or simple disregard, runs the risk of strategic failure in the greater conflict. Associated with this is the possibility of alienating the populations related to the insurgency through an overreliance on the use of

force, or a miscalculation in insurgent strength, which threatens to draw out confrontation and conflict in the sacred space.

Force composition is seen as an important variable in counterinsurgency operations. Many argue that in order to achieve widespread and lasting success in counterinsurgencies, i.e. strategic success, operational control should fall into the realm of law enforcement, not the conventional military. Police forces are seen as communally based, with connections to the local populations that military forces cannot hope to have. Traditionally, on the other hand, professional militaries are highly integrated organizations that pull populations from across their respective states, and are many times seen as representative agents of a government that is oppressive or corrupt in one fashion or another. The military's use-of-force doctrine may also be incompatible with operations in and around sacred spaces.

Force composition also applies to the insurgent group or groups involved in the conflict. Indigenous insurgents tend to have a blood-soil connection to the region, community, and the sacred space. In this regard, they may be more willing to compromise in order to protect either the religious structures or the populations of the surrounding communities. As such, a counterinsurgency approach that emphasizes negotiation and restraint may help to lower tensions, end the immediate conflict, and help to legitimize the counterinsurgents. Transnational insurgents are a different matter entirely. Foreign fighters have no blood-soil connection as indigenous actors do, so they are less likely to be concerned with the safety of local populations or the integrity of the religious sites. In addition to these concerns, trans-national fighters are known to be much more violent than their indigenous counterparts. In these regards, trans-national

fighters represent a problem for counterinsurgents operation in sacred spaces, and the foreign dynamic must be recognized early on in the conflict or operation if tactical success is to translate into strategic success.

Media involvement is extremely important for counterinsurgent forces. Support of the community cannot be overemphasized in a counterinsurgency, to the point that COIN forces must be aware of how their operations are perceived by the populace. Operating in sacred spaces increases both the costs for the counterinsurgents and the attention of the public, locally and worldwide. The perceptions of what occurs at these religious sites have the potential to strengthen or weaken either the insurgents or counterinsurgent forces.

Governments engaged in counterinsurgency operations need to be able to demonstrate that it is the insurgents, and not the government backed forces, that are responsible for endangering the religious sites and the surrounding communities. This has the effect of stripping the religious legitimacy from the insurgents and bolstering the counterinsurgent forces. An effective informational campaign in a counterinsurgency can decrease popular support for the insurgents and encourage restraint on the part of the government, both of which contribute to tactical and strategic success.

The cooperation of religious leadership, while it has its limits, is extremely important for counterinsurgent operations at religious sites. Not all religious sites are of equal importance, and not all the structures within a religious complex are of equal value as well. There is a hierarchical structure among religious sites, and within the site itself. Religious leaders can help to differentiate between these structures and aiding in the protection of the site, as well as helping to avoid operations on holy days or acting in a

way that flouts the rules of behavior, contributing to strategic success by limiting undo damage and conflict on the part of the counterinsurgents. In this aspect, the cooperation of religious leadership is an aspect of intelligence.

Religious leadership also has the potential to bend or even suspend the rules that govern behavior at religious sites. This is one of the crucial aspects of leadership cooperation for counterinsurgency forces. Every sacred space has rules that limit or forbid the use of violence within the confines of the structure or location, whether specific buildings or on the ground itself. Cooperation of this sort allows for more freedom of movement during the counterinsurgency operation, provides legitimacy from a religious source, and strips away the religiosity of the insurgents. In the immediate post-operational period, this cooperation and legitimacy allow for tactical success to be consolidated and built upon on the strategic level.

External interference from another sovereign state is important for insurgents, in that these states can provide sanctuary, logistics, weapons, intelligence, or can use the transnational fighters as agents for foreign policy objectives. The counterinsurgent's ability to seal borders and close off the religious site from these external influences extremely important for tactical and strategic success.

External interference is a factor in classical counterinsurgency doctrine, applies to conflict at sacred space as well and influences tactical and strategic success. Diaspora groups that are associated with the insurgents are a main source of non-state funding, allowing these insurgent groups to purchase weapons and ammunition, increasing the intensity of conflict and putting pressure on the counterinsurgents to increase operations. This in turn runs the risk of alienating related populations and increasing the insurgency

and sacrificing strategic success. The influence of third party states also need to be mitigated. Money and ammunition flows freely across open borders, and as such said borders need to be sealed. This limits the influence of third parties, either states with foreign policy objectives tied to the insurgents, or non-state actors that receive safe haven and support from bordering states.

The first set of case studies are from the Indian counterinsurgency against Sikh separatists, and includes the Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder counterinsurgency operations at the Golden Temple in Amritsar in the Indian Punjab. In Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder, the same ethno-religious insurgents and Indian counterinsurgent groups are engaged with one another, as well as operations taking place at the same locale, with the Golden Temple representing a primary site in Sikhism. From the standpoint of researching the topic of counterinsurgency at religious sites, this is fortuitous in the realm of academic inquiry. With the same insurgent and counterinsurgent forces fighting one another within the same temple complex, a high level of control is allowed for actors, government, religion, culture, and geography.

At the same time, there is an extreme divergence in the levels of strategic success related to the tactical operations at the sites. After initially facing unexpectedly high level of resistance during Operation Blue Star, the Indian military routed the insurgents after pitched battle in the Golden Temple of Amritsar, killing the insurgent leader. This tactical success translated to a high level of strategic failure on the part of the Indian government. The Prime Minister was assassinated by bodyguards sympathetic to the insurgency, external interference from Pakistani and the mobilization of the diaspora of

Sikh populations associated with the temple surges, and an increased level of violence on the part of the insurgency.

Operation Black Thunder was another operation at the same site a few years later, with the same actors involved. In this case, Operation Black Thunder was also considered a tactical success, although the mission objectives differed somewhat from Operation Blue Star. But was the most drastic divergence from the previous Operation Blue Star was the strategic implications. Operation Black Thunder was widely considered the beginning of the end for the ethno-religious insurgency of Sikhs seeking an independent Khalistan, with public opinion, domestically and globally, turning against them.

These two cases are compared for specific reasons. Besides the similarities between the cases, there are some specific differences in independent variables that have explanatory power. As stated earlier, region, government, actors, culture, and religion all remain constant, but force composition on the side of the counterinsurgents shifted from a conventional military force to a combined police and paramilitary force, operational implementation took a less confrontational stance, media use shifted from non-existent to full usage, external interference was highly limited in the second operation, and religious leadership cooperated in the immediate post operational period after Black Thunder, something completely absent in Blue Star.⁸

The second set of case studies originates in Indian Jammu & Kashmir, and is represented by operations at the Hazratbal Mosque and Charar-e-Sharief shrine, both of

⁸ This information is drawn from Lt. Gen. K.S. Brar, *Operation Blue Star: The True Story* (New Delhi: UBSPD 1993); Sarab Jit Singh, *Operation Black Thunder: An Eyewitness Account of Terrorism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002).

which are considered secondary sites.⁹ A similar dynamic to the Punjab cases occurs in the Hazratbal and Charar-e-Sharief cases, but with some important variations that gives a natural progression in case analysis. The Hazratbal operation again occurred in India, with the state of Jammu & Kashmir bordering the Punjab. Again, the insurgents were ethno-religious in their identity, and the Indian government was engaging in counterinsurgency operations against them. While the insurgents in Kashmir were Muslim and not Sikh, they remained an indigenous movement. The operational implementation and force composition were almost identical to the Black Thunder operation, aside from the previously mentioned religious variation. Media use was high, although indirect when compared to Black Thunder, and religious leadership cooperation was involved during most of the operation and post operational period, with low level of external interference. The Hazratbal case had similar outcomes to Black Thunder in the tactical and strategic outcomes and was widely considered to be a turning point in the conflict. The insurgency began to turn to a more political force and entering into dialogue with the Indian state. Tactically and strategically, it is considered successful.

The Charar-e-Sharief operation represents an interesting case in that many of the independent variables that were present in Operation Blue Star in the Punjab are also present, as the region, religion, and counterinsurgents were identical to Hazratbal. With this in mind, there are some very important differences in independent variables as well. The operational implementation was similar to Black Thunder and Hazratbal, although there were some slight variations that affected tactical success. Force composition was very different from the previous cases, in that the COIN forces returned to conventional

⁹ Hassner, "Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space," 18-21.

military and the insurgents, while still Muslim, were no longer indigenous in origin but transnational fighters. There was little or no cooperation from religious leadership, media was non-existent, and external interference from Pakistan was increasingly pervasive. The operation was considered both a tactical and strategic failure for counterinsurgency operational forces in Jammu & Kashmir, with the shrine involved being burned to the ground, the insurgents escaping, and an escalation of violence as well as continued external interference.¹⁰

As a follow up for the Indian cases, counterinsurgency operations in Thailand and Israel will be examined for testing the external validity of the Indian case study findings. If the findings that occur from the Indian cases don't hold outside of the subcontinent, then it is little more than a description of Indian policies. Thailand's Krue Se Mosque incident and Israel's Church of the Nativity Siege are important cases for this research in that the actors and other variables involved in these operations are similar to those that occurred in India, with similar tactical and strategic outcomes.

Thailand's Krue Se Mosque is outside of the geographic region representative of the previous cases. While the insurgents are again Muslim, this time the site in question is considered tertiary. Operational implementation was similar to that of India's Operation Blue Star, and there was no religious cooperation or media involvement. Force composition on the Thai side mimicked India's during Blue Star, but the Malay insurgents of Krue Se were unique. The insurgent composition was a mixture of the indigenous and the transnational, with Middle Eastern extremist thought and almost cultish magic permeating local beliefs. In this way, the insurgents were like the foreign

¹⁰ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 66-87.

fighters at Charar-e-Sharief. The level of external interference is indeterminate in that little is known about whom exactly the insurgents are and where aide is coming from. While the operation was a tactical success, it was a strategic failure.¹¹

Israel's Church of the nativity Siege is the last case study and the most unique of this research. The church itself is a primary place of worship, but not for any of the parties directly engaged in insurgency or counterinsurgency. While the insurgents are Muslim their insurgency is not religious but nationalist, and the counterinsurgents are Jewish Israelis, neither of which subscribe to the religion associated with the sacred space in question. This case provides an opportunity to analyze the effects of third party involvement. Force composition and operational implementation add an additional twist to the independent variables, in that the counterinsurgents are comprised of conventional military forces as in the Blue Star, Charar-e-Sharief, and Krue Se cases, but implement a plan similar to the law enforcement approaches taken in the Black Thunder and Hazratbal cases. This allows for testing of the validity of these variables.

The Church of the Nativity Siege had high levels of media involvement. But unlike Black Thunder, the Israelis did not directly use the media to engage in informational warfare. The role of media involvement was indirect, and more like the dynamic present in the Hazratbal case. The cooperation of religious leadership was also an interesting variable, in that the leadership was not a party to either aspect of the conflict, but the rules of behavior at the site that they enforced did affect the tactical outcome of the operation. Isolation of the site mitigated external interference, but

¹¹ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Iron Fists without Velvet Gloves: The Krue Se Mosque Incident and Lessons in Counterinsurgency for the Southern Thai Conflict," in *Treading on Hallowed Ground: Counterinsurgency Operations in Sacred Spaces*, ed. C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 177-199.

continues to affect Israeli security. Tactically the operation was a success, but strategically remains indeterminate.¹²

There is a logical progression in the research design between cases that allows for the discernment of independent variables and their validity on the question of tactical and strategic success at religious sites. Moving from case to case will allow the research to discern which independent variables are truly impacting tactical and strategic success from those that seem to impact the dependent variable, but are actually variations of another input. The first two Indian cases provide operations with very similar settings and actors, but with the opportunity to study vastly different outcomes. Both cases garnered tactical success, but the strategic outcomes were in opposition to one another, with Operation Blue Star a complete failure, and Black Thunder a success. With the previously stated similarities, the differences in independent variables should be able to explain the divergent outcomes between operations.

From the Punjab cases to the Kashmiri cases, there is an added dynamic in operational outcomes. The Hazratbal case mimics the Black Thunder Operation in both tactical and strategic outcomes, allowing for direct comparison of variables. The Charar-e-Sharief case has the added academic benefit of being both a tactical and strategic failure and allows for variable comparison, especially the heightened level of external interference and the transnational nature of the insurgents.

Finally, the Krue Se Mosque and Church of the Nativity operations are examined against the findings of the previously studied cases to ensure external validity. Like the Blue Star case, Krue Se is a tactical success yet strategic failure. In addition, the Krue Se

¹² Hassner, "Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space," 29-34.

case shares many of the same variables with the Blue Star and the Charar-e-Sharief cases, all of which were strategic failures. Finally, the Church of the Nativity siege is examined because of the tripartite dynamic of actors involved and the fact that it is the only case where the insurgents were not ethno-religious, but nationalist. Many of the same variables that are involved in the other cases are present in the Israeli case, allowing for the progression of the case studies to culminate on this operation.

Moving from case to case in this fashion allows this research to hold as many variables constant while allowing for variations in tactical and strategic outcomes, permitting an analysis into the variables that affect the strategic outcomes of counterinsurgency operations at religious sites. By keeping as many factors constant as possible, this research will show the effects of operational implementation, force composition, media involvement, religious leadership cooperation, and external interference on counterinsurgency operations where there is variation of tactical and strategic outcomes.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

The amount of literature concerning counterinsurgency operations at religious sites is sparse. Much of the important material that does exist focuses on aspects of either “classical” counterinsurgency or insurgent operations, i.e. David Galula, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, or contemporary or “modern” counterinsurgency, as promoted by David Kilcullen or the U.S. Counterinsurgency Manual. These fields of thought offer almost nothing specific to religious sites. This research will attempt to fill the gap in the counterinsurgency literature by focusing on operations at religious sites. As such, the structure of insurgencies and the corresponding counterinsurgency operations needs to be borrowed from the existing literature.

Religious sites create dangerous complexities for counterinsurgent forces. Separatist insurgent groups who identify themselves along ethnic or religious lines use religious sites as political launch pads and create legitimacy for themselves. Tactical operations at religious sites have the potential to either mitigate or exacerbate conflict and affect the larger counterinsurgency’s strategic goals due to their religio-political importance. These operations can delegitimize COIN forces, showing them as heavy handed, authoritarian, and imperialist, or strip the veneer of religiosity away from insurgent groups who use these sites as sanctuaries and legitimization.

Hassner’s work is particularly useful in understanding the dangers and complexities surrounding conflict and the dynamic between state and non-state actors. For various political *and* religious reasons, these sites are both extremely important for the communities they represent, locally, regionally, and internationally. Allowing these sites and symbols to be used by forces hostile to their respective governments is

problematic, but also is entering the site, let alone putting them under siege. With this in mind, counterinsurgency forces can ill afford to alienate more of a population that identifies with insurgents, and so must therefore be doubly cautious while engaging insurgents at a religious site.

The intentional use of sacred space can have two logical reasons why the insurgents would use a religious site. First, many religious sites have the both a religious and a political facet to them. Many times the sacred site contains explanatory power of how the community came to exist, locations of miracles or relics, or liberation stories that accompany the site that are not of divine origin, but are political and include past independence movements. By taking control of these sites, the insurgent can then draw comparison between themselves and the independence leaders of the past, claiming to have a level of religious and political legitimacy. This religious stature allows the insurgent group to garner support through recruits, supplies, and logistics.¹³

Insurgents can also intentionally take control of a site in an attempt to use the rules of behavior that govern the space to their advantage and force a confrontation, delegitimizing the counterinsurgency forces. Insurgents understand that the religious community views failure to abide by the rules of behavior governing religious sites as sacrilege increasing public backlash against counterinsurgency. If there is a perception that counterinsurgency forces have violated the religious tenets of behavior and have been seen as acting in a sacrilegious way, both the indigenous insurgency and respective

¹³ Concepts of site importance are borrowed from both political science and religious scholarship. See James Harpur, *The Atlas of Sacred Spaces* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994); Colin Wilson, *The Atlas of Holy Places and Sacred Sites* (Toronto: Penguin Studio 1996); Ron E. Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," *The Washington Quarterly, Spring, 29:2*, (2006): 149-166; Hassner, "Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space," 29-34.

international diaspora communities can mobilize, leading to financial support, recruits, sanctuary, and an influx of international attention that may inhibit operational freedom.¹⁴ The Thailand case, as well as certain aspects of the Charar-e-Sharief siege, belongs in this framework. What is interesting is that the Church of the Nativity Siege does not neatly fall within either of these categories, in that the PLO militants seized the church as a target of opportunity rather than a conscious aspect of their insurgency. They simply hoped to avoid be killed, and so fled inside the church.

Operational Implementation

There is a dynamic that seems to suggest some overlap between operational implementation and force composition. Because of this, this research needs to examine both to ensure that dynamics in counterinsurgency that seem to indicate a factor related to the composition of insurgent or counterinsurgent force makeup isn't actually measuring an operational implementation variable. The question is one of whether there is something inherently different between counterinsurgent forces, i.e. law enforcement or military force, or whether there is an operational doctrine that contributes to the differences of tactical and strategic success.

How the counterinsurgency operation at a sacred space is carried out is of paramount importance. One tenet that Sepp develops is what he terms law enforcement, defined as including robust intelligence operations, honest and highly trained police, and with the military as a support system for police and paramilitary services. Understanding the conflict the counterinsurgency forces are engaged in is paramount, and how to

¹⁴ Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," 149-166.

understand the insurgents, the communities, and what to avoid if a siege of the sacred space turns to force.¹⁵ Steven Metz echoes this same tenet when he quotes Clausewitz as saying “The first, the supreme, and the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make” is to understand “the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”¹⁶ Understanding who the insurgents are exactly dictates what kind of operational implementation is necessary for tactical as well as strategic success. A lack of intelligence handicaps the operational implementation. Counterinsurgent forces would be unable to ascertain who the insurgents are, how many they number, why they are at the site, and what it is they are after. Without these basic levels of information, the possibility of tactical missteps handicapping strategic outcomes grows exponentially. The cases of Blue Star, Charar-e-Sharief, and Krue Se provide ample examples of why an understanding of who the insurgents are, what their ultimate goals are, and how religion informs them is paramount, which in turn helps to legitimize the counterinsurgent forces while helping to negate the religious aspects of the insurgent groups.

A presence in the community is an aspect that counterinsurgents need to focus their energies on. In Sepp’s article, population control is one aspect of his best practices that deal with the interaction with the populace. Population control, and thereby site control, is seen as important in that it limits the insurgents’ access to the populace. Through this control, insurgents are denied the support, sanctuary, and recruits they need in order to sustain themselves. At the same time, counterinsurgents are free to interact

¹⁵ Kalev I. Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review*, May-June (2005): 8-12.

¹⁶ Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century: Reconceptualizing Threat and Response*. (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004), accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/>.

with the population, legitimizing themselves through the daily contact that the insurgents themselves once had. A cohesive operational implementation is necessary in order to take full advantage of the relationship between the general populace and the counterinsurgency forces.¹⁷

But what is interesting about this is that two academics are arguing that counterinsurgency operations are seen as essentially in the realm of either law enforcement or the military. Metz states that, “President John Kennedy directed the U.S. military to augment its counterinsurgency capabilities. By emphasizing the military dimension, Kennedy institutionalized the notion that insurgency is a form of war [and] counterinsurgency thus became the primary responsibility of the military.”¹⁸ Metz also argues in that there is a need for improved force protection, a dynamic seemingly inherent to conventional military force and not law enforcement.¹⁹ Force protection is the process under which the military deploys specific techniques or forces in order to ensure the lowest possible casualties for the counterinsurgents. As we shall see, this contributes to strategic failure in some of the case studies, particularly in Operation Blue Star, Charar-e-Sharief and Krue Se.

Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson argue against increased force protection. During the Iraq War, mechanized units did not suffer the casualties that infantry units did, but they in turn did not obtain the results necessary to conduct a successful long-term counterinsurgency. Their research shows found that, even when accounting for other

¹⁷ Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” 8-12.

¹⁸ Steven Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency*. (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/>.

¹⁹ Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict In the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare*. (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000), accessed April 11, 2012, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/>.

variables, force protection through mechanization reduces the likelihood of incumbent victory. The 101st Airborne was not mechanized, covered a greater area, and received better intelligence through the face-to-face interactions, which had built trust over time.²⁰ This aspect of counterinsurgency fits perfectly with the analysis of Operation Blue Star, as well as Charar-e-Sharief and the Krue Se Mosque incident failures, and helps to explain some of the strategic successes of the other cases. Heavily fortified military deployments in sacred space delegitimize the counterinsurgents and work at odds with their strategic objectives, while unintentionally aiding the insurgent cause.

Lorenzo Zambarnardi makes the observation that there are three goals of the counterinsurgent, distinguishing combatants from noncombatants, force protection, and physical destruction of the insurgents. The impossible Trilemma is counterinsurgents can only focus on two of the goals when engaged in COIN, with the third goal becoming a secondary concern. He creates his entire theoretical structure that these are not just three goals, but also the *only* three goals.²¹ Zambarnardi concedes that, “Given that acquiring civilian support is a political rather than a military task, counterinsurgency is the most political type of armed conflict [and] in order to win, insurgents and counterinsurgents need to gain the passive loyalty (at least) of a significant portion of the civilian population.”²²

In reality a fourth goal can be identified, ideological or political destruction of the insurgents. This is an aspect of counterinsurgency thought that is suspicious in its

²⁰ Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63, Winter (2009): 67-106.

²¹ Lorenzo Zambarnardi, “Counterinsurgency’s Impossible Trilemma,” *The Washington Quarterly*, July, 33:3: (2010): 21-34.

²² *Ibid.*, 26.

absence, being that counterinsurgency is seen as a battle for public opinion as well as a conflict for space or resources. Taken with the sensitivity of the religious site and its potential as a triggering event, an ideological defeat at a religious site has the potential to devastate an insurgent movement, or lead counterinsurgents to strategic failure.

Michael Shafer states that, “The government cannot attack guerillas...unless [the people] feel some measure of sympathy ...toward [it]. This attitude must be brought through the economic, political, and social actions that make the people’s lives better.”²³

Force protection, while efficient for military operations on a tactical level and allows governments to sustain political momentum for a counterinsurgency, does not yield the results needed for success on a strategic level. The effects of force protection mitigate building the sympathy and relationships that the counterinsurgents need for victory.²⁴

Distinguishing combatants from non-combatants is doubly important at a religious site, where the counterinsurgency forces run the risk of alienating the population from which they are attempting to gain support from, allowing the conflict to become defined as a war against a religious and ethnic group, or being seen as violating religious rules or international law.²⁵ Discrimination of civilians at a religious site provides a source of legitimacy, and can be either boon or bust for insurgents or counterinsurgents.

Missteps in action at sacred sites can delegitimize insurgent or counterinsurgent forces. This is important because of great potential for conflict at religious sites to trigger a wider conflict. This is what David Kilcullen describes when he details the fact that

²³ Michael D. Shafer, “The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency.” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No. 1 (1988): 57-80.

²⁴ Zambarnardi, “Counterinsurgency’s Impossible Trilemma,” 21-34; Lyall and Wilson, “Rage Against the Machines,” 67-106; Hassner, “Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground,” 149-166.

²⁵ Hassner, “Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground,” 152; Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” 9.

many individuals that turn to the insurgency and either directly engage in conflict or provide support would not have done so until they felt that they and their community had been perceived as coming under attack from the counterinsurgency forces.²⁶ These recruits or supports can be locals from the surrounding communities, diaspora abroad that sends financial support from overseas or neighboring states, other states themselves, or transnational actors who become involved in the struggle. This is exactly what occurred in the Blue Star and Charar-e-Sharief operations. The operations at these sites alienated the associated populations to the point that other aspects of the communities, including diaspora, became mobilized, and exacerbated the conflicts.

There is an assumption that government, through the improvement in political processes, is what is best for communities and that these introductions of change will mitigate the potential for conflict. But as Tanham and Duncanson explain one of the dilemmas is that the state may engage in activities that it sees as important to the success of a counterinsurgency, but are extremely unpopular to the communities they are targeted at.²⁷ These communities can feel threatened by what it sees as policies running counter to the traditions and social and religious beliefs that are being instituted by the state in attempt to mitigate ethno-religious insurgent power. If egregious enough, the insurgency could evolve into an international conflict.

Now that the Cold War has passed, the dominant paradigm in political thought is the western, liberal model of government, entailing a nominally secular state, rule of law,

²⁶ Information gathered from David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009); Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground", 149-166; Apurba Kundu, "The Indian Armed Forces' Sikh and Non-Sikh Officers' Opinions of Operation Blue Star," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 67, No. 1, Spring (1994): 46-69.

²⁷ George K Tanham and Dennis J. Duncanson, "Some Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (1969): 113-122.

and gender and minority equality, the properties that Sepp argues are part of a successful counterinsurgency campaign. If these ideals, equality among genders, freedom of worship, and democratic standards, run counter to the religious ideals of both the insurgents and the communities that they operate in, the political process that counterinsurgency force and the state embark on could easily exacerbate the conflict rather than helping to mitigate hostilities. Bargaining and the promise of economics opportunity and political reform may not be the underlying reasons for the insurgency.

Both Kalev I. Sepp²⁸ and Michael Shafer²⁹ examine how operational implementation influences the strategic effects on the larger conflict during counterinsurgency and conflict at religious sites. The aspect of sacred sites illustrates the importance of the hearts and minds concept of counterinsurgency, and that the insurgents simply offer more in the way of social benefits than the government is able to or willing to. Second, support for the insurgents is not that the insurgents have captured public support, but that abuse by the government, real or perceived, has driven them to the insurgents, illustrating the importance of adherence to international laws and norms concerning civilians and religious structures and notions. Ethnic Sikhs, Malays, Kashmiris, or Arabs may simply feel that policies that the state takes run counter to their social understandings and structures, and are therefore a threat.

Variations on operational implementation run throughout the cases studies. In the Indian cases, tactical and strategic success is correlated with an operational implementation that focuses on isolation, siege and negotiation, high levels of

²⁸ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 8-12.

²⁹ Shafer, "The Unlearned Lessons of Counterinsurgency," 57-80.

intelligence, a limited level of force of arms, and that take the sacredness of the site into account. Operation Blue Star's operation was almost in complete opposition to the Black Star and Hazratbal operations, which had similar operational implementation and similar tactical and strategic outcomes. The same applies outside of the Indian operations, where Israel adopted similar protocols.

The Charar-e-Sharief cases would seem to negate the importance of operational implementation in that an apparently similar approach was taken, but resulted in tactical and strategic failure. There important differences between these seemingly comparable cases. The Charar-e-Sharief counterinsurgents did not maximize intelligence, and did not know that the insurgents were in fact transnational fighters.³⁰ In addition, while talks were attempted, the site was not isolated to the point of forcing negotiations or cutting off support for the insurgents. The military forces involved in the operation did not engage with the surrounding population, raising tension and limiting public relations with the community, increasing the probability that they would identify with the insurgents rather than the Indian forces.³¹ The Krue Se Mosque case is comparable to the Blue Star and Charar-e-Sharief cases in many ways when examining operational implementation. All of these cases share a lack of good intelligence, site isolation, reliance on military force, limited or absent negotiations, and a perceived absence in understanding the importance of the site, which in turn alienated the surrounding populations. While tactical success varies across these cases, the level strategic success can only considered a failure.

³⁰ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 66-87.

³¹ Wajahat Habibullah, "Siege: Hazratbal, Kashmir, 1993." *India Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 73-98 (2002): 73-98.

Force Composition

Miscalculations in counterinsurgency operations can result in foreign elements becoming involved in the conflict, and keeping these foreign elements out of the insurgency is paramount if the counterinsurgents hope to be tactically and strategically successful. Returning to Kalev Sepp, securing borders is an aspect of successful counterinsurgency operations that must be addressed³², and is related to David Malet's concerns surrounding transnational fighters.³³ Transnational fighters have been involved in fighting back to the American War of Independence and the Spanish Civil War. But any counterinsurgency that hopes to be strategically successful must seal the borders of the state in order to mitigate the influence of external support and actors.

Counterinsurgency forces need to take interest into who these transnational fighters are, where they originate, and how they are recruited. These fighters comprise more and more numbers in insurgencies and tend to be more violent and dangerous than their domestic counterparts. Indigenous insurgencies that make use of religious sites have a personal connection to the site, both through their cultural ties as well as by proximity. Transnational insurgents have no such connection³⁴. Besides being inherently more violent, they have little regard for the sacred spaces involved in the conflict. Thereby the site itself is in more danger than had the insurgents all been of indigenous origin. This becomes of concern for counterinsurgents because of the importance placed

³² Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 11.

³³ David Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions," *Orbis, Winter* (2010): 97-114.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of communal connection to a particular site, see Ron E. Hassner, *War On Sacred Ground* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

on the site, and the possibility of elevated violence resulting from damage to or destruction of the site.

Many of the transnational elements in insurgencies are recruited because of perceived grievances, real or imagined, many of which emanate from occurrences at the religious sites in question. A counterinsurgency force that is restrained, honors the laws and institutions it has created, and helps to protect the sacred space while the insurgents have fortified it can use the situation to their advantage, and can delegitimize the insurgency by showing that the insurgents are sacrilegious and do not follow the rules that govern behavior at the site, whereas the counterinsurgents do.³⁵ This limits both the domestic actors, but more importantly foreign fighters, and the problems that come with these transnational actors. The Indian case studies bear this out. In the Blue Star and Charar-e-Sharief cases, foreign elements played a large part in the insurgency, either in the form of a third party state actor such as Pakistan, or transnational elements in Kashmir, and are associated with strategic failures and increasing levels of violence.

Aside from the Israeli case, those operations where the counterinsurgent forces are comprised of conventional military are all considered strategic failures. As stated earlier, it may be a doctrine of force that is applied to military thinking or the counterinsurgency Trilemma that is the influencing factor. Operations where police and paramilitary forces are deployed are both tactically and strategically successful. The outlier is Israel, where military forces were tactically successful.

Force composition on the side of the insurgents has a dramatic effect.

Transnational fighters are associated with the only case that is considered both a tactical

³⁵ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 8-12.11; Hassner, *War On Sacred Ground*, 157-163.

and strategic failure, Charar-e-Sharief. To a lesser extent, there is a transnational element in the Krue Se operation. While it seems to be an indigenous group, there is a transnational factor that influences the way the insurgents operate.

Media Involvement

Insurgents attempt to frame their conflict in terms that people in distant communities understand, painting a picture that the counterinsurgency operation is not just a conflict against a militant group, but is part of a larger conflict that is directed towards a transnational identity. To accomplish this, insurgent groups use the media to aid in recruitment, raise funds or material, and import numbers of foreigner fighters to help and become involved in the conflict.³⁶ Effective media use during counterinsurgency actions is then extremely important at religious sites. Malet explains that it is the logic of the connection that matters rather than actual cultural similarities. Many transnational fighters believe that it is necessary to travel abroad and fight a perceived enemy rather than wait to fight on their home territory, eerily echoing U.S. policy towards the War of Terror³⁷.

The media also provides access to the international stage, where individual citizens, external states, diaspora groups, and transnational actors can either become supportive or actively engaged in the insurgency. One of the aspects of contemporary media, television, new media, and to a lesser extent print, is its ability to almost instantly reach large segments of the population, both domestically and globally. Besides being an

³⁶ Malet, "Why Foreign Fighters?" 99-101.

³⁷ David Kilcullen, "Counterinsurgency Redux," *Survival*, vol. 48 no. 4, Winter (2006-07): 111-130.

effective medium for recruiting, there is a secondary danger of transnational actors or foreign fighters becoming involved in conflict in and around sacred spaces. As stated earlier, this presents a unique and extremely dangerous situation for counterinsurgency forces.

The media is crucial for of a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign. This allows the counterinsurgents to level the playing field and overcome the discrepancy that allows the insurgents to operate freely in and around sacred space.³⁸ The media, whether radio broadcasts, leaflets, fliers, or tapes, has been assumed as being a benefit for the insurgents as compared to the counterinsurgent forces. It is usually assumed that the insurgents have an inherent advantage in the media, especially in a democratic state where there is rule of law, as well as free speech and press protections.

There is debate on the idea that media inherently benefits the insurgent force. What the media can provide is the initial framing of a triggering event or conflict, allowing either the insurgent or counterinsurgent forces to tell the story they want, putting the other side on the defensive. It is this initially framing of events that usually has a lasting effect compared to responses in the media. Whichever side, insurgent or counterinsurgent, that effectively uses the media from the initial onset of hostilities has an advantage in the competition for public perception. The sensitive nature of conflict and military operations are religious sites makes media coverage that much more important.

The media can be a powerful recruiting tool, attracting new members, allowing the insurgency to spread, and offering the potential to turn people who identify with and support the insurgency to become active participants in conflict. While this aspect of the

³⁸ Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency*, 37-41; Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," 154-155.

media has always been an influence on insurgencies, the pervasive nature of both mass media makes this variable of counterinsurgency operations a powerful factor. The peer pressure exerted in media now introduces another aspect of insurgency and counterinsurgency operations.

With this in mind, a pro-active media approach is important in dealing with external actors.³⁹ The media is one of the most useful tools in defining a conflict, allowing either the insurgent or counterinsurgent to frame the struggle in the direction that is most advantageous for their set of goals. The initial defining of the story is one of the most important aspects of media use in a counterinsurgency, and particularly important because of the sensitive nature of conflict around religious sites. More often than not, the initial framing of the occurrence in question is the story that holds up over time. It is imperative that the counterinsurgent forces initiate the public relations campaign, in that insurgents usually hold an advantageous position in communication because of their presence in the community. Comparing the two operations at the Golden Temple, the contrast of media usage couldn't be more drastic.

All of the cases where strategic success was low or a complete failure are associated with a lack of media involvement on the part of the counterinsurgency forces. Counterinsurgency forces during Blue Star intentionally shut down media, while the absence of media involvement in the Charar case was due to stated logistical difficulties. Only after the Krue Se Mosque operation did the Thai government attempt to use media as a damage control tool in the wake of the operation, which did nothing but fan tensions and allow the insurgency to continue.

³⁹ Sean Kennedy, "New Media: A Boon for Insurgents or Counterinsurgents?" *Small Wars Journal*, September (2011), accessed April 24, 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/recent>.

Cases that are considered tactical success and strategically successful are associated with media involvement. Black Thunder had proactive media coverage running constantly and eventually became a primary factor in delegitimizing the Sikh insurgents. The Hazratbal media coverage was an unintended outcome in that it did not delegitimize the insurgents, but legitimated the stance of India that the government in New Delhi would act responsibly towards Kashmiris. This led to negotiations that would end the siege non-violently and end the indigenous insurgency in the region. Israel's Church of the Nativity operation was a tactical success, in that operational implementation was influenced by the presence of international media, not Israeli. While the operation was a tactical success, strategically it is indeterminate and the conflict is ongoing for a variety of reasons not linked to the operation.

Religious Leadership

Religious leaders have the ability to help counterinsurgency forces differentiate between the different rules that govern the sacred sites, having the potential to help reset the rules governing behavior at a religious site. As Hassner states, "Religious leaders' power lies in their ability to span both religious knowledge and religious action [and] cooperative religious leaders are therefore even potentially capable of redefining the rules that govern behavior and access to sacred places in a manner conducive to counterinsurgency efforts."⁴⁰ Religiosity and controlling the sacred space gives the insurgents legitimacy in the eyes of the surrounding community, even if many times they are the victims of the insurgents' predatory behaviors. The insurgent's veneer of

⁴⁰ Hassner, "Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground," 159.

religiosity may be thin, with groups acting like criminal organizations and preying on the populations they profess to aid in liberation. The level of cooperation with religious leadership is an aspect of counterinsurgency that bestows a level of legitimacy on the counterinsurgent forces, as well as supplying valuable information concerning the insurgents, their demands, and the religious site. This cooperation restricts insurgents' options for recruiting and delegitimizes religious claims of authority, limiting their ability to sustain an effective insurgent movement.

Hassner argues that there will always be a double standard concerning the use of violence in and around sacred sites, something the religious class can help to mitigate through their shared religious and cultural ties. Religious leaders can act as an intermediary and help to facilitate negotiations, helping counterinsurgency forces act in a manner that does not exacerbate tensions and increase violence and trying to avoid undo damage to the structures. The information that the religious class can provide can be invaluable, acting in many ways as supplemental intelligence. The Indian case studies provide excellent examples of effect of religious cooperation during times of conflict. The Israel case supplies some unexpected information concerning religious rules governing behavior at religious sites and the level of operational success.⁴¹

Religious leaders can be consulted, providing counterinsurgency forces with knowledge that can be used to implement political processes and limit the tensions that can come from the central state executing changes. The insurgents may themselves not be willing to compromise, and the promise of political reforms may not mitigate the possibility of violence. Knowing who the insurgents are and what their main objectives

⁴¹ Ibid., 159-162.

are just as important, if not more, than the political reform process. Implementation of political reforms may help to limit the amount of support that the insurgents receive from their respective communities, and can help to expose the contradictory nature of their criminality while professing to be engaged in a liberation struggle.

Direct cooperation with religious leadership on the side of the counterinsurgency forces is highly associated with tactical and strategic success. Black Thunder and Hazratbal are the two cases where success is achieved along both tactical and strategic measures, and there is direct cooperation with religious figures in either the immediate post operational period or during the operation. In the cases where there is no cooperation with religious leadership, all are associated with strategic failure, including Blue Star, Charar-e-Sharief, and Krue Se. There was an influencing factor of religious leadership during the Church of the Nativity, but this was through a third- party religion and was not directly involved as either insurgent or counterinsurgent.

External Interference

Forces outside the state may need to be either engaged in a fashion that is constructive for the counterinsurgents, or dealt with in a way that either limits or eliminates the threat these external forces pose. As Kilcullen explains, the insurgents can use ethnic and diaspora groups, refugees, neighboring states' media, financial transfers, as well as outside governments themselves. This necessitates that the counterinsurgent forces deal with these actors in a manner that is effective enough that their goals are met yet with enough tact that the insurgency does not garner support from being overtly heavy handed in their approach.

Securing borders allows counterinsurgency forces to cut off the weapon and logistical support that insurgents receive from their safe havens in neighboring countries or territories. David Kilcullen defines two geographical areas where counterinsurgents might focus, “area of influence” and “area of interest”.⁴² An area of influence may include any bordering state or region considered important to the conflict, and an area of interest may be extended regionally or even globally, as the U.S. War on Terror has been defined. While the single-state view of counterinsurgent operations may have given way to a regional dynamic, military and political realities may simply not allow state governments and military forces to cross borders and pursue insurgents, their safe havens, or the states that allow the use of their territory, either passively or actively.

Mitigating the influences of external interference is also important for dealing with third party states. Transnational actors are inherently more dangerous than indigenous fighters, and competing regional powers can and do use these actors as proxies for their foreign policy objectives in regional competitions. In this case, force composition becomes a concern of external interference. External actors, i.e. states, manipulate the composition of insurgent forces in order to limit or inhibit strategic success and destabilize the domestic government of the counterinsurgent state. The failure of the Charar-e-Sharief operation on both a tactical and strategic level is a prime example of this dynamic.

Protecting the site has already been determined as being of the utmost importance, and should be considered a primary concern of any counterinsurgency operation at a sacred site. The importance of good intelligence and law enforcement is paramount.

⁴² Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency Redux,” 119-121.

Who the insurgents are, whether they are the more violent trans-nationals, and what they want is important so that counterinsurgency forces can adapt their strategy accordingly.⁴³ These higher risks place the counterinsurgency forces in a situation where the potential for violent escalation of the insurgency is greater than had the insurgents been indigenous. Counterinsurgent forces must therefore deal with transnational concerns, discrediting them with intelligent use of the media, exposing them as outsiders, and removing them from the conflict as soon as possible in order to undercut insurgent support, legitimize their policies, and limit violence.

Tactical and strategic successes occur in cases where the operation was effective in limiting the effects of external interference. In both Black Thunder and Hazratbal, the Indian government was successful in closing its borders and limiting the influence of the external actor, in this case, the state of Pakistan. Borders were sealed, and little or no support of any kind made its way into these regions during counterinsurgency operations. Operations that were strategically unsuccessful were unable or unwilling to take the steps to limit external interference. This is especially true in Charar-e-Sharief where the operation was a tactical failure as well, and to a lesser extent in the Blue Star and Krue Se cases. The fact that the conflict is ongoing in Israel shows that external interference on behalf of the PLO continues.

⁴³ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 9-11.

CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDIES, INDIAN PUNJAB

Historical Background

The Sikh separatist insurgency in northwestern India claimed 21,000-40,000 lives, from the late 1970s, when the insurgency officially began, until its final defeat in 1992. By comparison, the Punjab insurgency cost more lives than the wars between India and Pakistan combined. While the notion of a separate Sikh state existed in the early 20th century, the continued Indian mismanagement of Sikh political, social, and religious concerns is what finally gave impetus to the raising of arms against the Indian government.⁴⁴

The leader of the contemporary Khalistani movement was Sant Jarnail Singh Bhrindranwale. Bhrindranwale generated religious and political legitimacy in the eyes of the Sikh community when he was appointed as head of the Damdami Taksal, a Sikh teaching institution with a long history of Sikh martial history and political power.⁴⁵ As an institution, the Damdami Taksal retains importance through its claim of connection to the tenth and last living guru, Gobind Singh. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also cultivated support for Bhrindranwale in an attempt to marginalize and split the most prominent Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, and buttress her own Congress Party. Coupled with support from the All India Students Federation and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee which manages all Sikh places of worship in India,

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive account of Sikh separatism, see Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*.

⁴⁵ Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*. (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1995).

Bhrindranwale's message of Sikh separatism and the notion of Khalistan was catapulted his into segments of Sikh political and religious thought.⁴⁶

The Golden Temple, located in Amritsar in the India state of Punjab near the Pakistan border, is highly revered and recognized worldwide as the primary religious and political center of Sikhism. The temple complex is oriented around a sacred rectangular pool and surrounded by a fortified wall. In the middle of the pool is a three-story structure, the Harimandir Sahib, considered the Holy-of-Holies for Sikhs, which during the day houses the Guru Granth Sahab, the religious text of Sikhism. At night, the text rests in the Akal Takht, considered to represent the political and religious authority of Sikh leadership. The Harimandir Sahib and Guru Granth Sahab are connected to the rest of the complex by a narrow walkway which defines the sacred pool called the Parikrama, which extends into the pool, connecting the Harimandir Sahib to the Akal Takht (timeless throne), the second most important structure in the Golden Temple complex.

The complex also houses many other structures and organizations, both temporal and ethereal. The Langar, or communal kitchen, is especially important in that caste is negated within its walls, and after praying at various shrines within the complex, individuals gather together in equal stature. There are numerous Sikh religious and political organizations within and surrounding the complex as well, including the Shiromani Akali Dal, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, and the All India Sikh Students Federation. Outside the temple are various bazaars, hotels, restaurants, and historical locations, including gurdwaras.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hamish Telford, "The Political Economy of Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, No. 11 (1992): 969-987.

⁴⁷ Fair, "The Golden Temple," 42-46.

Many of the structures inside and outside of the temple complex became insurgent fortifications. Support from religious leaders and Sikh organizations permitted the insurgents to base themselves throughout the complex, allowing insurgents access to new recruits, improved logistics with a centralized locale, and increased access to food, water, and communications. Residing within the temple imbued the insurgents with a level of religious freedom that allowed them to act how they saw fit. In addition to Sikh religious institutions, Sikh imagery and traditions were manipulated for the insurgents benefit. The torture and martyrdom of past Gurus and Singhs under Mughal rule were traditionally painted on the walls within Sikh shrines and gurdwaras, which the insurgents adeptly manipulated and connected to their own dead fighters, connecting themselves to the religious and political power of their past.⁴⁸

Sikhs have a long history of launching political and religious resistance from the Golden Temple. The 17th century Guru Hargobind led military the resistance against the Mughal Empire from Amritsar, emblazing the two crossed swords of the Sikh flag that would become the symbol all gurdwaras are now marked by. The modern-day event that cemented the location as the political, military, and religious center for Sikhs was the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, where British forces of the military open fired on a crowd of unarmed civilians during the Indian independence movement, including women and children and resulted in at least 379 officially confirmed deaths and over one thousand injured.

In an overt political and religious move, Bhindranwale took up residence in the Akal Takht, believing that it would provide sanctuary for himself and his followers from

⁴⁸ See Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*; K. P. S. Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*. (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997).

the government in New Delhi. Bhrindranwale and members of his Babbar Khalsa militant entered the Golden Temple on December 15, 1983. A series of fortifications were constructed throughout, with weapons and munitions being smuggled into the religious complex with aid of former Indian Army major general Shahbeg Singh.

Public opinion at the time showed that many considered that Bhrindranwale's actions violated numerous religious tenets. There was evidence of Bhrindranwale murdering member of the opposition, burying their bodies under the temple, and destroying portions of the temple to create fortifications. He also turned the Akal Takht into his personal quarters and occupied the space immediately above the Guru Granth Sahab, all actions considered heretical. Amazingly, the Indian government did not attempt to delegitimize the insurgents, even though Sikh and Hindu public opinion presented that potential. No cohesive information campaign was developed to counter the insurgency's claims or actions, and no agents were sent into the temple complex, which was still occupied with visitors throughout the entire militarization of the temple complex.⁴⁹

The immunity that the Golden Temple would provide his insurgency was a miscalculation on Bhrindranwale's part. Six months after Bhrindranwale began the fortification process, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered that the Indian military to enter the Golden Temple complex and extract Bhrindranwale and the other militants of the Babbar Khalsa by whatever means deemed necessary. While Bhrindranwale was killed in the operation, the long term outcomes were not expected. Prime Minister Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, resulting in Hindu led riots against Sikh

⁴⁹ Fair, "The Golden Temple" 37-46.

communities throughout India, numerous desertions and mutinies by Sikh members of the Indian Armed forces, mobilization of the Sikh diaspora, and widespread support for Sikh separatism and legitimization of the insurgency. K.P.S. Gill, former Director General of Police in Punjab, called the events of Operation Blue Star the most “significant victories for the cause of Khalistan...not won by the militants, but inflicted by its own government.” Gill believed that insurgency could have easily been contained and defeated if it were not for the operation and the murderous riots it spurred.⁵⁰

Operation Blue Star

Bhrindranwale had assumed that the Prime Minister Gandhi would not send the army after himself and his followers. He believed that the political and religious importance of the site offered him refuge, and that it would be a police or paramilitary force sent to negotiate a settlement that he would be facing. Bhrindranwale then began a campaign for support, disseminating audio tapes throughout the Punjab, stating that a direct assault against himself and the temple was forthcoming, that such an assault was a direct attack on Sikhism, and warned the Sikh community that they must be prepared to act in the event of such an attack. Bhrindranwale believed that a small contingent of police or paramilitary forces would be unable to quell the mass of Sikh supporters he envisioned. The government in New Delhi had other ideas concerning the Golden Temple and Bhrindranwale's forces.

Whether accurate or not, the police forces were seen as an unsuitable option for Operation Blue Star. The government considered them as under equipped, unprepared,

⁵⁰ Gill, *Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood*, 95-97.

and had been either unable or unwilling to deal with the growth of militarization of the temple complex. Contradictory policies emanating out of New Delhi had crippled the police forces, and police that did act against the insurgents had their families threatened, while the central government continued to support Bhrindranwale in hopes of eroding political competition. By the time the threat Bhrindranwale posed was recognized, the police force and containment was seen as a case of too little, too late.

With the government's failure to deal with the growing militarization and fortification of the Golden Temple, the insurgents had occupied multiple buildings in and around the temple, fortifying them with an array of light weaponry, with good fields of fire and monitoring posts which allowed them to observe the perimeter and temple complex for several hundred yards. To add to this dilemma, the temple complex was still open to the public, with visitors coming and going continually. Although people came and went out of the complex, no government or military personnel were sent into the complex to gather intelligence for fear of being captured and either tortured or executed, and little observation from surrounding buildings were used to gather intelligence concerning the number of worshippers, insurgents, fortifications, or weaponry.⁵¹

The Indian Government assigned command of Operation Blue Star to Lieutenant General K. S. Brar. The assumption was made that the insurgents' forces were comprised of upwards of 1,500 militants, and that approximately 500 of these fighters were highly motivated. This estimate would later be proven a mistake. The Indian military decided that four infantry units and an equal size of Special Forces would be required. In addition, a unit of Vijayanta tanks would be deployed both as force

⁵¹ Gill, "Endgame In Punjab: 1988-1993," *Faultlines: Institute for Conflict Management*. 1:29. (1999): 14-16.

protection and as a psychological weapon, hoping their deployment would intimidate the insurgents into surrendering. In addition to these forces, commando divers and armored personnel carriers were to be used. Analysis of Lieutenant General Brar's account of the operation shows that the sacredness of the site plays no part in the planning and operational build up, except for the hope that damage to the Harimandir Sahib could be avoided.⁵²

Operation Blue Star was to be launched at 10 p.m. on June 5th, 1984, with the secondary phase of mop up operations complete by 4 A.M., and clearing of the surrounding complex four hours later, lasting less than ten hours. The initial phase of the operation was to eliminate the observation posts of the insurgents, with the Central Reserve Police Force and other paramilitary groups seizing control of the Akal Takht and Harimandir Sahib. The Indian forces grossly underestimated the resistance, and their forces were continually repelled by machine gun fire from insurgent fortifications.⁵³

In the face of such unyielding resistance, armored vehicles and tanks were brought in, with an APC crippled by a rocket-propelled grenade. By 5 A.M., permission was given for three tanks to use machine gun fire on insurgent positions on the Akal Takht, but Indian forces were again driven back. When Special Forces attempted to take the structure, they were mowed down by machine gun fire. At 7:30, high explosive shells were finally used to subdue insurgents at the Akal Takht, with the entire operation taking an additional 3 days to complete, nearly seven times as long as expected.

⁵² Brar, *Operation Blue Star*, 28-42

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49-58.

Post operation, the lack of intelligence was startling. Indian military forces had been unable to ascertain the level of fortification throughout the temple, could not distinguish civilian worshipers from insurgents, and were caught completely unaware of underground passages insurgents had created, allowing them to resurface in buildings and rooms thought clear by Indian forces. In addition to these failings, there was massive damage to the temple complex. The temple's library was burned, including Sikh manuscripts. The Akal Takht had been destroyed in the attempt to clear the insurgents, and the Harimandir Sahib had been marred with bullet holes. The sacred pool was full of blood and mutilated bodies, and numerous building and structures that had lined the Parikrama were damaged or destroyed.⁵⁴

In hindsight, one of the biggest mistakes that the Indian government and military made was the complete media blackout. As Brar explains that the media, both in India and abroad, chose to give wide and undue publicity to Bhindranwale's actions propagating fear and terror throughout the State. At the high of his popularity, journalists converged from all corners of the country to interview him and succeeded in building up a prophet-like aura around him. The potential for massive Sikh uprisings was considered imminent enough that, a complete blackout of independent news coverage before, during and immediately after the military action was ordered.⁵⁵

Unfortunately for the Indian government, their intentions of a media blackout were one sided, and insurgent supporters outside the temple framed the operation to their advantage. The military or civilian leadership did not attempt to try and use the media to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 45-128.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68-99.

delegitimize Bhindranwale or the Khalistani separatists. Once the insurgents had framed the operation in terms they could define and control, the military had no mechanism to gain back the initiative on the public relations front. The insurgents had won the information war. Once both the domestic and international media became involved, the images of the dead bodies and damaged temple structures was almost completely seen as the fault of the Indian military and the government in New Delhi. In an attempt to retroactively save its image, the Indian Army released a multitude of photos of weapons and other evidence of Bhindranwale's heretical behavior at the temple.⁵⁶

Operation Black Thunder

In an attempt to avoid repeating the debacle of Operation Blue Star and the violent fallout that had followed it, the Indian government began to engage the militants in hopes of finding a political solution. At the time, New Delhi retained direct control over law and order issues in the Punjab, and had implemented what K. P. S. Gill describes as two-faced tactics. In this approach, the government would use the military and police force to put pressure on the insurgents while concurrently attempting to negotiate surrender. Some militants were also granted selective immunity; even those captured during Operation Blue Star and were known associates Bhindranwale.⁵⁷

While the central government in New Delhi searched for a political solution, violence throughout the Punjab continued to rise. Insurgents would abandon their parent group to become free agents, working for competing factions as guns-for-hire. The

⁵⁶ Ibid., 49-58.

⁵⁷ Gill, "Endgame In Punjab," 14-16.

Babbar Khalsa, whose members were captured or killed with Bhrindranwale during Operation Blue Star, lost interest in the formation of a Khalistani state and instead focused on enforcing their brand of Sikh behavioral laws, usually by violence. The Khalistan Commando Force engaged in combat against Indian police and paramilitary units and terrorized the population, targeting Hindu civilians, as well as any Sikh who opposed them, and financed itself through smuggling arms out of Pakistan, looting, robbing banks, and extortion. These insurgent groups were seen less and less as ethno-religious warriors fighting a despotic central government, but rather criminal organizations.

Confronted with this violence and the confusing policies emanating from New Delhi, a willing police force found it difficult to implement a cohesive approach to policing and counterinsurgency operations in Punjab. The government continued its search for a non-military option to end the conflict. In March 1988, 40 high-profile prisoners were released. These 40 proceeded to walk directly to the Golden Temple, one even becoming head priest, and initiated the fortification process again. The insurgents received support from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, although support was mixed, with some members actively supporting the militants and others passively giving support out of fear of reprisal.

The same month New Delhi released prisoners, violence escalated dramatically, with over five hundred people killed in the following two months, 50 of which were police. At this, the government had realized that the escalating violence, sectarian conflict, and the fractionalized and criminal aspects of the insurgents made political reconciliation impossible. New Delhi reversed its policy of engagement, ended its hopes

of a political solution, decided that a law enforcement policy was necessary to end the violence and that the insurgents must be expelled from the temple.⁵⁸

Operation Black Thunder was simply to expel the insurgents from the Golden Temple. But the simplicity of the operation does not illustrate the larger tactical and strategic shifts that occurred between its implementation and Operation Blue Star. In an attempt to avoid the fallout resulting from Operation Blue Star, Operation Black Thunder was to be a police action commanded by K. P. S. Gill, using reinforcements from the National Security Guards and other paramilitary units. The religious nature of the site was considered paramount, with the police considering the nature of each aspect of the temple complex and the possibility of offense in the minds of the Sikh community. The serai, which was comprised of residential buildings, was considered to have a low potential for risk. The Langar was considered to be of more importance to Sikhs, and operations in this area should be adjusted accordingly. The temple, and especially the Harimandir Sahib, would have the most potential for risking the operation and exacerbating the insurgency. It was decided that the serai and Langar, which exist outside the main portion of the temple complex, would be the least inflammatory targets, leaving the Harimandir Sahib untouched if possible. Gill was also adamant that the entire operation would take place within full view of the press and media, in direct opposition to media policy during Operation Blue Star.⁵⁹

Once the surrounding areas were under control, the operation moved into a siege like phase, maintaining control of the areas surrounding the temple without taking the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁹ Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*, 72-118.

insurgents by force of arms. Intermittent cease-fires were ordered, during which insurgents would be able to surrender to the authorities. In the process of offering one of these cease-fires, a group of insurgents fled down the narrow portion of the Parikrama and into the Harimandir Sahib, where the insurgents felt they could easily defend themselves from attack. Many believe that the fleeing insurgents were allowed to enter the shrine, maintaining that the Indian forces wanted to be perceived as honoring the cease fire and protecting the shrine from any undo damage as occurred in Operation Blue Star.⁶⁰

Once the prolonged siege of the Harimandir Sahib began, the Indian forces used various psychological tactics to attempt to break the insurgents and encourage surrender. While these tactics were being used, the Indian forces would allow the insurgents to go to the sacred pool to gather drinking water, using the information to estimate the number of insurgents holed up in the temple. Once the number of insurgents was estimated, Indian forces then adjust their tactics accordingly, and attempted to simply starve them out.

Once the insurgents finally surrendered, they did so in front of full media coverage. Starving and dehydrated, they were seen laughing and acting in ways that were seen as cowardly and disrespectful, with their offensive behavior stripping the religious veneer from them. Local religious leaders were co-opted, and oversaw the ritual cleansing of the temple, returning the Guru Granth Sahab to its shrine, and aided in raising the funds to replace items stolen by the militants.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78-91.

Explaining Divergent Outcomes: Punjab

The divergent outcomes of the Indian Punjab cases are concerned with the variations and interaction between tactical and strategic success. Tactical success is considered whether or not the direct goals of the counterinsurgents were achieved, such as destruction of the insurgent forces, effective negotiations, surrender, or whatever other aspects of the operation deemed important, in respect to direct action at the religious site in question. A successful counterinsurgency operation at a sacred site does not inherently extend its success into the strategic level.

Strategic level success refers to such variables as the containment of the insurgency, limiting of external interference, financial and logistical support, mitigating violent conflict, and interaction between the insurgents' base community and the counterinsurgent forces, i.e., the military, police, and state. Insurgent violence from may initially increase due to the loss of religious legitimacy, necessitating the insurgents to resort to conflict whereas prior to this they could count on support from the community. While some factors may seem like a strategic level failure, they are in fact pointing to factors that lead to successful strategic measurements, and therefore a longer term of analysis must be taken.

The tactical and strategic outcomes of Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder stand in stark contrast to one another. On a tactical level, both Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder can be considered successes. In both cases, counterinsurgency forces wanted to wrest control of the Golden Temple complex from the Sikh separatists, and attempt to end the insurgency. Although the stated objectives were achieved, the Operation Blue Star did not go as smoothly as New Delhi had planned. Insurgent

fortifications and armament was much stronger than expected, and intelligence did not estimate the insurgents' numbers or capabilities accurately. As a result, in the process of eliminating the insurgents the Indian military suffered much more in the way of casualties. In the face of such heightened resistance, the increased firepower applied by the counterinsurgency forces caused massive damage to the shrine, but the military succeeded in killing Bhrindranwale during the operation, achieving its tactical objectives.

Operation Black Thunder was also a tactical success. The goal of the counterinsurgency operation was startling in its simplicity; clear the temple complex of militants. This goal was ultimately achieved in an almost bloodless realization. The entire operation lasted less than a week, with a dozen diehard fighters arrested and 160 further followers.

On the strategic level, Operation Blue Star is an abject failure, accomplishing nothing that contributed to a successful counterinsurgency campaign outside of the death of Bhrindranwale. Four months after the operation, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards while walking through the garden of the Prime Minister's Residence. As a result, Hindus massacred 2,700 Sikhs throughout northern India, with another 20-50,000 Sikhs fleeing the affected areas. Many suspected that the New Delhi police, Gandhi's son Rajiv, and central government orchestrated the massacre. The supposed collusion of political officials in the massacres and the Judiciary's failure to penalize the killers alienated normal Sikhs and increased support for the Khalistan movement.⁶¹

⁶¹ Fair, "The Golden Temple," 39-40.

In addition, some 2000 Sikh Indian Army personnel, including officers, deserted or mutinied when they learned of Operation Blue Star and the accompanying destruction at Amritsar. Between June 7th and June 9th, just two days after Operation Blue Star, six hundred soldiers from the Sikh Regiment's 9th Battalion and 1500 of the soldiers at Ramgarh, Bihar mutinied. Soldiers broke into armories, stole armaments and vehicles, and killed policemen and military officers, including the commandant of the Sikh Regimental Center, Brigadier S.C. Puri and General Vaidya, 13th Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army and the senior officer who designed and supervised Operation Blue Star.

The Indian government used state funds in the attempt to rebuild the temple and make repairs to the Akal Takht and Harimandir Sahib and clean the bloodied pool the complex was built around. The Sikh community and the temple administrators rejected the aid from the state that had allowed or even ordered such levels of violence against the temple. Repairs that had been completed were destroyed, state aid refused, and Sikh community organizations raised the funds to do the repairs themselves. All of this occurred while the Sikh insurgency continued.

From a strategic standpoint, it initially seemed that Operation Black Thunder would be a failure as well. Yet by 1993, the insurgency had essentially ceased to mount any credible threat and was finished. Measured against military targets, Hindus, and against other Sikhs, the Khalistan insurgency was becoming more violent in the immediate post-Black Thunder period. In fact, violence continued to escalate through 1991 and 1992. But this was indicative of a lack of any communal legitimacy or support, with the insurgents resorting to predatory behavior in order to survive. No longer able to rely on the support of the Sikh communities that they had for so long, they were reduced

to preying upon them and resorting to organized crime. This allowed the Indian military to take a more active role against the insurgents outside of the Golden Temple. From 1992 -1995, the insurgents made up the majority of the casualties in the conflict. By 1995, the insurgency had essentially disappeared and ceased to exist as a viable threat to the Indian state.⁶² What accounts for the tactical similarities but the vast differences in strategic outcomes?

Operational Implementation: Operational implementation refers to variables such as consideration of the site's religious nature, level of intelligence, cordoning off or isolating the site from the civilian population or additional insurgents, and whether a siege approach used in conjunction with psychological warfare and negotiation, or a conventional use of force was used.

The operational implementation between these two cases was almost completely opposite to one another. In Operation Blue Star, the religious and political nature of the site was not taken into account when the operation was conceived or implemented. A lack of site isolation in the pre-operational build allowed civilian worshippers to go in and out of the temple, with the Army refusing to send in their own agents in with the worshippers for fear they would be captured, tortured, and killed. As a result, intelligence was extremely lacking. Instead, the counterinsurgency forces chose to guess about the strength and numbers of the insurgents.

The Indian military attempted to cordon off the site for the actual operation, but the temple and surrounding environs were already filled with civilians, many possibly hostages. This underestimation of the militants and lack of site control led to brutal and

⁶² For a detailed account, see Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*.

drawn out battle where hundreds of civilians, mostly worshippers, were killed in the process of the operation. The destruction at the temple and the deaths of so many civilians simply exacerbated the insurgency.

Indian counterinsurgency forces then fall into Zambardi's Trilemma. Faced with unexpected resistance and an increasing death toll, tanks and armored personnel carriers were ordered into the temple complex, signaling that the counterinsurgency forces have prioritized insurgent destruction and force protection. As a result, civilian casualties increased. Eventually, high explosive shells were used against insurgent positions at the Akal Takht, destroying it. The Indian forces chose between protection of the civilians within the temple complex at the time of the siege, destroying the insurgents, and the protection of the Indian military personnel involved in the counterinsurgency operation. With the deployment of armored personnel carriers and tanks into the temple complex, force protection was elevated to a position of supremacy over civilian discrimination, causing unnecessary casualties and damage.

The first effect of the counterinsurgents' over reliance on firepower is what David Kilcullen describes as turning a "mouse into an elephant", making the insurgents seem more important and indirectly increasing their claims of legitimacy. The massive amounts of manpower in comparison to the insurgents creates an almost "David and Goliath" narrative which would eventually favor the insurgent cause after the operation.⁶³

The operational implementation during Operation Black Thunder was inherently a different experience for everyone involved, including the Sikh populations that vested so much importance in the site. While the destruction of the insurgents was considered

⁶³ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 263-289.

important, it was not paramount. This allowed for civilian safety and the protection of the Golden Temple to take precedence. The Trilemma was highly mitigated, as the police and paramilitary border forces laid siege to the temple rather than take it by force. In this way, negotiations could ensue at regular intervals, as well as psychological operations that persuaded some of the insurgents to surrender. With the negotiations and occasional cease-fires, the counterinsurgency forces could ascertain intelligence, including the insurgents' numbers. This allowed them to adapt to the situation, to wait out the militants rather than forcibly extricate them, and kept the civilian population safe and temple complex intact.

The temple was cordoned off, and a siege of the complex ensued. Snipers did in fact shoot and kill some of the militants, but never when they entered the Harimandir Sahib, and damage to the rebuilt Akal Takht was avoided. The damage to the Temple complex and the civilian deaths that were so horrific during Operation Blue Star that contributed to strategic failure were not present during Operation Black Thunder.

Force Composition: There is a potential relationship between force composition and strategic failure. In Operation Blue Star, the military was the main overseer of the application of the use of force in the attempt to purge the insurgents from the temple. In Operation Black Thunder, the police and paramilitary Border Security Force was the prime driver behind the operation. This aspect is interesting in that the operation where the military was in the drivers seat was a tactical success, yet a strategic failure. Where law enforcement personnel handled the operation was a tactical success that led to strategic success. While the counterinsurgency forces differed between the two operations, the insurgent forces were both ethno-religious Sikh separatist militants, of

which some individuals actually participated in both insurgent actions at the Golden Temple.

Across Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder, the insurgent groups remain constant. Many of the same insurgents that survived Operation Blue Star were present during Operation Black Thunder. With this in mind, the divergent outcomes in strategic success need to examine the differences in force composition as it pertains to the counterinsurgents. Strategic failure in Operation Blue Star is associated with conventional military as counterinsurgent force composition, whereas law enforcement personnel resulted in Operation Black Thunder's strategic success.

As discussed in Sepp's best practices theory, law enforcement is seen as producing better results on a majority of counterinsurgencies rather than outright military action.⁶⁴ The local and communal dynamic inherent in police as compared to military personnel facilitates a level of intelligence and familiarity with the people in the townships that is conducive for counterinsurgent work. This is especially important at sacred sites, where police forces are connected communally as well as not having the reliance on firepower, facilitating siege and negotiation.

Zambernardi's Trilemma is an additional factor that may explain the perceived advantage of law enforcement over military forces between these two cases. In Blue Star, the military forces made a choice between force protection, insurgent destruction, and civilian discrimination, of which civilian protection became a secondary concern. Whether the police and paramilitary forces involved in Black Thunder could have chose force protection over civilian discernment is unknown, but there is no reason to believe

⁶⁴ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 8-12.

that the force protection option does not exist for police. What is important for this case is that the police forces did not choose to opt for force protection.⁶⁵

Some state that the composition of the counterinsurgent force may be a secondary factor in explaining the divergent outcomes of these two operations, associating the level of insurgent threat to the choice between military or police involvement. Outside of religiously important locales, where the full force of the military's technological superiority and increased manpower can simply overwhelm insurgent forces, this may explain tactical success. But the sensitive nature of sacred sites, i.e. the Golden Temple, mitigates this advantage. The military's reliance on the superiority of firepower continues to give a tactical advantage, but the cost of sacrificing strategic success. The destruction of holy buildings associated with the ethno-religious imagery of the insurgents simply drives recruits and support to the conflict that the counterinsurgent forces aim to terminate. Whether this is an inherent difference between conventional military and police forces as it pertains to counterinsurgency operations remains to be seen.

Media Involvement: High levels of media involvement are correlated to strategic success when comparing Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder. During Operation Blue Star, the media was completely shut out. According to New Delhi, Bhindranwale had been able to effectively manipulate the domestic and international media. He had become the charismatic face of the Khalistan movement that the Indian government did not have an answer. The insurgents were very adept at using the media, both domestic and international, to further their political and social goals. The Indian government

⁶⁵ Zambarnardi, "Counterinsurgency's Impossible Trilemma," 21-34.

ordered a complete media blackout in and around the temple complex, as it was deemed too sensitive and too much of an opportunity for the Bhrindranwale to spread the message of Khalistan and Sikh separatism. This would prove to be a huge mistake for the Indian government on a strategic level.⁶⁶

The media was finally allowed into the temple complex when the operation was complete, but the level of destruction was unexpected. Once the pictures of the dead bodies and destroyed portions of the temple were made public, they simply reinforced the insurgents claims that Operation Blue Star was directed towards Sikhism as a whole, not just limited to the insurgent movements. The Indian government attempted to engage in damage control, but the initial framing of the story remained and gained traction and legitimized the insurgents' claims.

During Operation Black Thunder, media coverage was constant. This allowed the counterinsurgent forces to accomplish two different strategic goals simultaneously. First, it allowed the Sikh community to see that the Indian counterinsurgency forces had no aim of intentionally harming or desecrating the Golden Temple. The Indian forces attempted to abide by all the religious norms and rules governing behavior at the temple, limiting their presence in sensitive areas, and allowing periodic cease-fires so militants who wished to could surrender. This succeeded in showing the Sikh community and their large international presence that the present conflict was not part of a larger war against Sikhism, but a targeted operation against militants.

While the media coverage helped to legitimize the counterinsurgency forces, at the same time it aided in delegitimizing the insurgents. The counterinsurgency forces

⁶⁶ Fair, "The Golden Temple," 50-51.

finally overcame the seemingly contradictory rules of behavior that govern religious sites with savvy use of the media. Once the insurgents had surrendered, they were seen smiling and acting in ways that were considered disrespectful and sacrilegious when leaving their sanctuary. Once the temple was cleared and the media allowed to enter, the abuse of the site became apparent to the public. The extent to which the insurgents had damaged the site they were supposedly there to protect was so offensive that they were instantly delegitimized in the eyes of a majority of their community. Effective use of the media helped the counterinsurgents strip the religious veneer that had given the insurgents their ability to garner support and contributed to the strategic success resulting from Operation Black Thunder.⁶⁷

Religious Leadership Cooperation: Religious leadership is an important factor in tactical and strategic success for counterinsurgency operations at religious sites. In both Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder, the level of cooperation with religious leadership is correlated with strategic success. The levels of post-operational cooperation by the religious leadership stand in stark contrast to one another when comparing these operations. In the aftermath of Operation Blue Star, the Indian government attempted to clean and repair the temple complex, and religious leadership refused and set about gathering funds from domestic and external sources. Rather than aiding the Indian government in reconstruction and helping to end the insurgency, Sikh religious leaders actively and passively legitimized the insurgent movements.

In comparison, religious leadership with the counterinsurgency forces for Operation Black Thunder was much more involved. The religious leadership aided the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 54.

state and helped to supervise the repairs to the temple that the insurgents had wrought during their control of portions of the temple complex.⁶⁸ This cooperation allowed the counterinsurgency forces to be seen not as the genocidal wave they had been portrayed as, but helped to legitimize their stance as a force of stability in the region. The insurgents no longer had the religious legitimization and the political prowess that accompanied it. The cooperation of the religious leadership with the Indian forces removed the ability of the insurgents to frame their conflict in religious terms, and they were soon finished as a credible fighting force.

External Interference: Strategic success is correlated with the ability of the counterinsurgents to mitigate external interference. Support from another sovereign state is important for insurgents, providing sanctuary, logistics, weapons, and intelligence. The counterinsurgent's ability to seal borders and close off the religious site from these external influences is extremely important for tactical and strategic success. Operation Blue Star was interpreted as such a threat to Sikhism that the diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the U.S. mobilized and began to send support to the Sikh insurgents. Unfortunately for India, this strategic failure was not limited solely to the diaspora.

Besides external diaspora groups, Pakistan realized quickly that it could assume the role of coordinator for all those wishing to support the insurgents against the Indian state, seeing it as an opportunity to offset its regional rival and duplicating its role as facilitator in the U.S. war against the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁶⁹ Soon all financial, logistical, and material support was being channeled through Pakistan. As the insurgency

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

continued in the wake of Operation Blue Star, the levels of violence increased, much of which was a direct result of Pakistani efforts. In contrast to the porous borders and high levels of external interference, India's borders were effectively sealed during the strategically successful Operation Black Thunder. The insurgents were isolated and cut off from diaspora support and Pakistan.⁷⁰

Cutting off external interference aided in the tactical and strategic success of Operation Black Thunder, but the strategic failures of Operation Blue Star created unexpected and long-term consequences. Up until the time of Operation Blue Star, India and Pakistan had fought at least three major wars, with Pakistan being defeated in all of them. One such war led to Pakistan losing the eastern portion of its territory to the newly independent state of Bangladesh. Since these occurrences, Pakistan's foreign policy has become obsessed with India, leading to questionable policies concerning Afghanistan, the military's concept of strategic depth, and incredibly high birth rates, all in an attempt to foil any Indian plans of regional hegemony. Pakistan would learn to use proxies to achieve their foreign policy goals with Indian hegemony. Operation Blue Star's mistakes would come back to haunt India's security.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 54-57.

CHAPTER V: CASE STUDIES, INDIAN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Historical Background

The roots of the conflict in Kashmir can be traced back to as early as the 1930s, with competition and manipulation between New Delhi and Islamabad combining to create an atmosphere where tensions boiled to the surface. The nominally secular and nationalistic JKLF was the arm and mouthpiece of the insurgency in the early stages of the conflict, and while the Indian government moved against them to quell the possibility of an uprising, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence attempted to marginalize them in anticipation of replacing the insurgents with a more religiously oriented insurgent group that Pakistan could use as a tool for its foreign policy aspirations.⁷¹

Pakistani involvement in Jammu and Kashmir is not new to the conflict. In the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1947, 1965, and 1971 were either directly over the territory or had border clashes. In the post-war diplomacy, the Shimla Agreement was signed, defining lines of control and ensuring that forces on either side would resolve the conflict with a political rather than a military option. Aside from some minor confrontations and United Nations grandstanding, Pakistan's military was simply no match for India's conventional military.

India and Pakistan's Cold Peace came to an end with the advent of Kashmiri violence that was spurred when a significant indigenous ethno-religious insurgency erupted. India's own domestic policies are partially to blame. In an attempt to quell discontent and subvert separatists, New Delhi had sent massive amounts of development

⁷¹ For a historical accounting, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of war, hopes of peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

funds to Jammu and Kashmir in the hope that development would limit the potential for any more conflict. But fear of separatists winning at the ballot box led the Indian government to passively approve of political manipulation during and after elections. The additional funds had produced a politically aware populace, and the mixture of alienated young men and political corruption created the conditions for an indigenous uprising.⁷²

The current manifestation of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir can be traced to events beginning in 1989. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was originally a secular and nationalistic independence group, reacting to Indian corruption and heavy handedness in Kashmiri politics. Tensions hit a high when, among other actions, members of the JKLF kidnapped the daughter of India's Home Minister. New Delhi succumbed to the demands of the insurgents, releasing a number of Kashmiris that had been arrested, which was greeted with widespread applause across the providence.⁷³

Surprised by the public reaction of the prisoner release, the government in New Delhi set in motion a series of events, culminating with the forced resignation of the Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and the appointment of puppet governor Jagmohan sent to rule over Kashmir. The change in local government, which was perceived to be essentially the overthrow of elected officials by leaders in New Delhi, opened the population of Jammu and Kashmir to the ideas of the insurgents, who were largely viewed as liberators.⁷⁴

⁷² Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 66-72.

⁷³ Habibullah, "Siege," 76-77.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

India's politically sloppy responses were seen as an opportunity. The insurgents were garnering more support because of India's interference and dictatorial policies, and Pakistan saw the potential to exploit a weakness in their giant neighbor's armor. If Pakistan could not defeat their enemy on the battlefield, they would cultivate pro-Pakistani insurgent groups while undermining other groups that did not fit with their foreign policy aspirations. Groups such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and the Harkat-ul-Ansar received arms, supplies, logistical support, and safe haven in Pakistani territory, becoming more violent and deadly in the process.⁷⁵ Indigenous, secular groups such as the JKLF were slowly sidelined, and the insurgent groups fought amongst themselves as much as they did the Indian military. In reaction to the increased violence, the government in New Delhi embarked on a process of restoring order and legitimate elections. The insurgency and counterinsurgency operations must be viewed through this religio-political lens.⁷⁶

Hazratbal Mosque

The Hazratbal Mosque, in located in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar, is important for political as well as religious reasons. It is believed that in the year 1635, a devout Muslim, Syed Abdullah, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, brought a lock of hair of the Prophet to India, known as the Moh-i-Muqaddas. The relic took on political importance as a symbol of the resistance of Kashmiris against the rule of the Mughal

⁷⁵ For an account of Pakistani involvement, see Praveen Swami, *India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad: The covert war in Kashmir, 1947-2004*. (London: Routledge, 2007); Manoj Joshi, *The Lost Rebellion* (New Delhi: Penguin Classics India, 1999).

⁷⁶ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 71-72.

Empire, and finally came to rest and was housed in the Hazratbal Mosque around 1700, infusing religious and political struggle into the structure.

In the 1930s, a Kashmiri leader used the mosque as a platform to launch his political movement. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, known as the “Lion of Kashmir”, was the founder of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, the chief opponent of the maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, and fought against the monarchic rule of the Raj. Sheikh Abdullah then became the first Prime Minister of Kashmir, overseeing a vast array of improvements to the shrine.⁷⁷

In 1963, the hair of the Prophet was stolen from the mosque. Widespread upheaval and violence spread across the state, until the relic was found, authenticated, and returned to the religious authorities at the Mosque. Sensing an opportunity, Pakistan initiated Operation Gibraltar, a plan to infiltrate Jammu and Kashmir with aspects of the Pakistani Army's 50th airborne paratroopers, and start a rebellion against Indian rule. The guerrillas disguised themselves as locals and entered Jammu and Kashmir with the intent of fomenting an insurgency among Kashmiri Muslims. The strategy went awry from the outset and the infiltrators were soon found. India responded with a counterattack that resulted in the 1965 Second Kashmir War.⁷⁸

The Hazratbal Mosque is intertwined with Kashmir, both religiously and politically, and the relic of Mohammad adds a heightened significance to the location. Given the history of violence in the wake of the relic theft, the potential for widespread conflict and aggravation of the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir was a real possibility.

⁷⁷ Ganguly, “A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges,” 71-72.

⁷⁸ Habibullah, “Siege,” 76-78.

Therefore, when the Lieutenant-General Zaki received intelligence reports on October 15, 1993, that Kashmiri militants had entered the mosque, he moved with haste. By that evening, two battalions of Indian Army soldiers and the Army's 15th Corps had cordoned the site off.⁷⁹

On October 16th, reports reached Zaki and Divisional Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah that a fire had broken out at the mosque. Once they arrived at the scene and were able to investigate, they discovered that a temporary building that was meant for women's prayers had burnt to the ground, but the shrine itself had remained intact and was untouched by the fire. Tensions within the immediate community began to rise, as the local population believed that the Army had intentionally set the fire in an effort to discredit the insurgents. The managing body of the shrine, the J & K Muslim Auqaf Trust, had received word that the Indian forces had intentionally started the fire in the belief that insurgents were hiding in the building.

In an attempt to lower the rising tension in the surrounding community of the shrine, the regular Indian Army units that has surrounded and cordoned off the site were replaced with the Border Security Force, with strict orders not to take the mosque. At the same time, Kashmiris that were living in the vicinity of the shrine were evacuated to a safe location at the local college campus. Lieutenant-General Zaki feared that if hostilities did break out between the Indian forces and the insurgents, there would be widespread damage and loss of life since the areas around the mosque were densely populated. In all, there were approximately 3000 residents would be affected, most of

⁷⁹ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 72-73; Habibullah, "Siege," 78-80.

which were seen as either sympathetic to the insurgents or were related to them in one fashion or another.

The Border Security Force maintained the isolation on the shrine while the regular armed forces took a supporting role, dealing with the relocation of the population. Since the Indian Army is drawn from all over the sub-continent, a vast majority of the soldiers did not speak the Kashmir dialect, and so felt that that public opinion was hostile towards them. Once those in charge of the operation explained the situation to the soldiers, the populace was no longer perceived as threatening. As the course of the siege wore on, military personnel escorted residents who had by placed in temporary residences to check on the condition of their homes. By the end of the operation the college staff, police, military, and residents had developed a trusting relationship.

On October 17th, Maulvi Abbas Ansari contacted Divisional Commissioner Wajahat Habibullah about the possibility of permitting the insurgents to leave the shrine. Wajahat Habibullah conveyed the message to Lieutenant-General Zaki, who refused the offer. That same day, the insurgents within the shrine relayed their desire for a negotiated settlement, the only condition being that they would choose the spokesman. The two the insurgents desired were Chief Secretary Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, an ethnic Kashmiri, or Commissioner Habibullah.

It was decided that Wajahat Habibullah would conduct negotiations, being that flexibility would be limited by having the Chief Secretary involved directly in the process. Once Habibullah met with the insurgents, they stated that they had heard that the Indian Army was planning to desecrate the Moh-i-Muqaddas relic and the shrine. Once Habibullah convinced them that both sides wished to see the relic protected, they

informed him of their demands. The insurgents wished for a lifting of the siege, an ulema, or group of Islamic scholars, to inspect the relic, and safe passage from the shrine for the insurgents. Zaki refused the insurgent demands, but would not allow force to be used to dislodge them either.

The following morning, when Habibullah met with the insurgents to continue negotiations, they informed him that negotiations would no longer continue unless covered in full by the media. Habibullah refused, and negotiations stalled. But General Zaki was confident he could bring an end to the standoff without resorting to military force. After a short meeting Zaki allowed Habibullah to enlist the aid of two Muslim community leaders, Abdul Majid Wani and Maulvi Abbas Ansari, who had originally attempted to convince Zaki to allow the insurgents safe passage if they had surrendered.

Negotiations continued, when on October 21st, India's High Commissioner to the UK called to inform Habibullah that the British press was becoming more and more hostile towards the Indian government with regard to the Hazratbal crisis. At noon, Wani and Habibullah returned to the shrine, where they were greeted with open hostility, having discovered that persons had gone to the press with 'official' disclosures of the goings on.⁸⁰

Tensions rose across Kashmir as the negotiations dragged on. Then on October 22nd at 4:00pm, a large group in the town of Bijbehara marched in the streets of the city, protesting both the curfew that had been imposed on them as well as the siege of the shrine. The Border Security Force panicked in the face of the seemingly hostile crowd, and fired into the procession, killing at least 28 people and injuring another 60, all

⁸⁰ For a full account of the negotiations surrounding the siege, see Habibullah, "Siege," 73-98.

broadcast by the media. Wajahat Habibullah immediately went to Bijbehara to investigate, accompanied by Chief Secretary Sheik Ghulam Rasool and Advisor to the Governor Ashok Jaitly. They ascertained that there had been little threat from the crowd, and the BSF soldiers that had initiated the use of force against unarmed civilians were court-martialed. The international press had been present to cover both the massacre and the Indian response.

When the Indian officials returned to Srinagar, the atmosphere was decidedly more cooperative. The local populace began to feel that the Indian forces were not the enemy they had believed prior, felt that the insurgents' possibilities of achieving anything further was limited, and asked that they be permitted to approach the mosque and attempt to convince the insurgents to surrender. When Habibullah finally spoke to the militants, their attitudes were much more accommodating. As it turns out, the Indian Intelligence Bureau had connected an unlisted number in the shrine, through which the insurgents received information concerning the Indian response to the Bijbehara tragedy.⁸¹

In conjunction with Major-General Shankar Prashad from military intelligence, negotiations finally concluded on November 2nd. Those within the shrine that were not insurgents would be allowed medical treatment, the insurgents would drop their arms, surrender to authorities, and when taken into custody, debriefed and then released. As Prem Shankar Jha writes the operation had “gone a long way to reassure the ordinary Kashmiris that despite all that has happened [...] the Government is not an oppressor by choice.” Although some observers were critical of the Hazratbal operation, considering it too soft on the insurgents, the objectives of the operation were achieved and Kashmiris

⁸¹ Ibid., 84-86

continue to worship there. The success of the Hazratbal siege is considered a turning point in the insurgency. Indigenous insurgent groups realized that violence harmed the very communities they were attempting to help and the cost in lives was too great. In the end, all the insurgents surrendered, the shrine was safe, no lives were lost as a direct consequence of the operation, and public trust was on the rise.

Charar-e-Sharief Shrine

The Charar-e-Sharief Shrine was a large wooden shrine and accompanying complex located near Shopian, Budgan in the Indian controlled state of Jammu and Kashmir. Built in the 15th century, the shrine is dedicated to the Sufi saint Sheikh Nooruddin Walli, but is also known and venerated as Nanda Rishi by the Hindu population as well. The softer, mystical brand of Islam indigenous to the Kashmir region is directly related to Walli and those he mentored and instructed, known as the Rishi School. Among those that were his pupils was one Lalleswari, considered by Kashmiris to be Lal Ded, or Grandmother Lalla. Walli and his followers were one of the most important factors in merging Kashmir's mystical traditions with Sufi character. Walli and his Rishi School essentially recreated Islam in Kashmir, and the Charar-e-Sharief shrine was built to honor him. Charar-e-Sharief is similar to the Hazratbal shrine in that there is a political as well as religious identity to the structure and location.⁸²

In the months following the Hazratbal siege, the insurgency in Kashmir had experienced a fundamental shift in the dynamics. The insurgents themselves were no longer an ethno-religious uprising of indigenous origin. The Jammu and Kashmir

⁸² Ibid., 86-91.

Liberation Front had originated along the lines of a pro-independence, secular, and indigenous organization, but Pakistan had slowly sidelined the local insurgents while supplanting them with actors that they could use as a foreign policy tool, many of whom were terrorist groups with criminal networks. After the fall of the communist president Najibullah in Afghanistan, many of the mujahedeen focused their attentions on a new jihad in Kashmir. Pakistan and the ISI took a dual role in this regard, passively supporting them by not enforcing border security and allowing the insurgents to cross the border regions freely, and actively supporting them by allowing them sanctuary in Pakistan, arming them, and giving them training, intelligence, and logistical support.⁸³

Indian Armed Forces and intelligence had received word that foreign insurgents had infiltrated the town and surrounding areas in February of 1995. An ethnic Afghan and ex-mujahedeen, ‘Major’ Mast Gul, travelled across the border and into Kashmir with an estimated 60-100 of his soldiers, taking control of the shrine in the center of the small town.⁸⁴ Aspects of the 8th Mountain Division and the 56th Mountain Brigade, along with forces from the BSF, were dispatched to Shopian. It was a massive contingent, equivalent to a whole division of the Army, with accompanying division of BSF personnel. With the highly significant nature of the shrine and the potential for volatility from a population hostile towards the Indian forces and sympathetic to the insurgents, Lieutenant-General Zaki ordered that military forces keep clear of the shrine’s immediate

⁸³ Ganguly, “A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges,” 75; Seth G. Jones, “Pakistan’s Dangerous Game,” *Survival*, Vol. 49, No.1: (2007): 15-32.

⁸⁴ For further examination of contemporary Pakistani support for jihad in India, see Brahma Chellaney, “Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia: The Lessons of History”, *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2001): 94-116.

environment. The General concluded that the military could not rely on the population, and instead laid siege to the entire town.

Zaki then planned to isolate the insurgents and then pressure them to surrender, as he had done at Hazratbal. But because of the perceived hostility of the community and the sacredness of the site, the military and BSF were not deployed around the immediate vicinity of the shrine and its environs. Instead, forces were deployed on the outskirts of the town itself. Insurgents and their sympathizers throughout the town exploited the lack of security by providing the insurgent within the shrine provisions and information concerning the military and police forces.

Though negotiations continued to be pursued, the insurgents rebuffed them at every turn. The civilian leadership in New Delhi monitored the process closely, but never interfered or questioned the military's process during the siege. Although the military was keen to end the conflict through negotiations and not resort to military force, they did not make any kind of concerted effort to win support in the community and attempt to apply pressure on the militants through the public. There was an attempt to identify differing interest groups, but those that were identified were not engaged in any meaningful way. No local civil or religious leadership was approached on the possibility of mediation, and so public pressure on the militants was non-existent. It was felt that the geographical location of the shrine was too remote for a media presence, further limiting the possibility of additional actors bringing a swift end to the siege.⁸⁵

The Indian policies at the site actually negated many of their operational outcomes. The entire town was placed under siege, spurring a mass displacement of

⁸⁵ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 74-77.

many residents and alienating them from the military and police forces involved and swinging public sympathy towards the insurgents. Outside of the immediate area of conflict, those Kashmiris who had defended the Indian government and acted as a conduit for peace between Kashmiri insurgents and the Indian government previously did a complete about face. Mriwaiz Umar Farooq, who was associated with Hurriyat and had supported negotiations at Hazratbal, proclaimed that the siege at Charar-e-Sharief was part of a larger plan by the Indian government and military to move against religious sites in Kashmir.⁸⁶

The Indian military's representatives had offered safe passage to the insurgents for the entire negotiation process, offered again toward the end of April. It was declined, and the end of the siege came soon after. The details of the incident are still debated to this day, but what is known is that on May 10th, the Muslim holy day of Id, a fire broke out near the shrine. The firefighters the Army called in were summarily fired upon from inside the shrine and retreated. Counterinsurgency forces requested permission to enter the town and surround the shrine. On May 11th Indian forces surrounded the shrine, but it was too late. One of Kashmir's holiest sites had burned to the ground, taking with it rare literature and antiquities dating back to the 14th century, as well as a good portion of the town itself.⁸⁷

Afterwards, Lieutenant-General J. S. Dhillon declared in front of the press that the Army had no intention of storming the shrine or taking the insurgents by force while they resided there. But the cause of the blaze was still unknown. While the insurgents

⁸⁶ Habibullah, "Siege," 93.

⁸⁷ Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir*, 126.

themselves state that the military set the fire in an attempt to flush them out of the shrine, with their supporters echoing the same, eye witnesses at the operation support the claim that the insurgents themselves started the blaze intentionally as a diversionary tactic. Regardless of the reason for the blaze, the Indian COIN forces did not have the media coverage or the communal relationship to frame the events surrounding the destruction of the shrine in a way that was beneficial to their side.

Taking full advantage of the confusion that accompanied the blaze, Mast Gul and his band of militants escaped in the blaze, their exact numbers remaining unknown. They would eventually return to Pakistan to a hero's welcome, being paraded through town and cities and celebrated. The siege ended violently, with 23 people being killed, none of which were insurgents and were eventually identified as local residents. Only during a cordon and search operation in the surrounding town did the military and police find any insurgents, which included Abu Jindal, the leader of Harkat-ul-Ansar, a terrorist group with extensive connections to Pakistan and the ISI. The Indian military failed in its bid to protect the shrine, deal effectively with the insurgents, or sway or influence public opinion in a direction advantageous to their larger strategic goals.⁸⁸

Explaining Divergent Outcomes: Jammu and Kashmir

Like the Punjab cases, the Indian operations at the Hazratbal mosque and Charar-e Sharief shrine differ greatly in both their tactical and strategic outcomes. As discussed, the Hazratbal operation is considered both a tactical and strategic success. Tactically, the

⁸⁸ See Habibullah, "Siege," 93; Chellaney, "Fighting Terrorism in Southern Asia," 94-116; Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," 15-32; Bruce Riedel, "Pakistan and Terror: The Eye of the Storm," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 618 (2008): 31-45.

shrine was protected from damage, the insurgents surrendered in a negotiated surrender under which both parties kept their word, and religious leadership cooperated actively with the counterinsurgency effort in order to bring a swift end to the standoff.

Strategically, civic relations were built with the Kashmiri communities involved with the operation, such that the Hazratbal affair is considered the beginning of the end of the indigenous Kashmiri insurgency, much like Operation Black Thunder was for Sikh separatism.

Unfortunately for Indian counterinsurgency effort in the region, it was only the end of an *indigenous* Kashmiri insurgency. The Charar-e-Sharief shrine was a tactical as well as strategic failure, to the point that the lessons from Punjab and the previous Kashmir experiences were seemingly ignored. Tactically, the Charar-e-Sharief operation was a disaster, the militants escaped and the shrine, with a good portion of the town it was situated in burned to the ground. In the confusion of the flames and destruction, the insurgent leader Gul and a majority of his transnational fighters, escaped to Pakistan where he was celebrated as a liberation figure in front of the media much like Bhrindranwale had been.

Strategically, the operation at Charar-e-Sharief was just as extensive a failure as it had been tactically. The communal relations that had been built up as a result of the Hazratbal operation completely broke down, with Kashmiri trust in the government in New Delhi at an all time low. Violence in the region continued for years afterward, even to this day. The only reprieve the Indians received is after the Trade Center Bombings of 2001. By 2002, killings had dropped almost 75%, not from any change in strategic

thinking on the part of the Indian military, but mainly due to the insurgents travelling to fight in Afghanistan in a new jihad against the United States.⁸⁹

Operational Implementation: When the insurgents first took control of the Hazratbal mosque, the military was immediately dispatched, but was then replaced by police and a contingent of the BSF. The site was cordoned off, relocating civilians into safe areas. While initially a hostile environment, persons residing in the city began to interact with the military and police forces, developing a level of trust. With the site cordoned off, the counterinsurgency forces again laid siege to the shrine and began intense negotiations. They were under no circumstances to storm the mosque. The restraint showed and the taking into account the sacredness of the site helped to legitimize the counterinsurgent forces while at the same time limiting the effects of the Trilemma. In many ways, this operation shows similarities to Operation Black Thunder.

The Charar-e-Sharief operation was headed by the Indian military, not police forces. Although their stated claim was to lay siege to the shrine and commence with negotiations, operational implementation was opposite. The town was considered to be sympathetic, so the military surrounded the entire town rather than cordon off the site, allowing sympathizers and militants to move freely. It was thought that to be in the proximity of the shrine would put military personnel in danger and so did not interact with the civilian population. Reminiscent of the force protection implemented in Operation Blue Star, the military opted to keep its personnel protected, negating any

⁸⁹ For extensive statistics concerning ongoing casualties in Jammu and Kashmir, see Ajai Sahni, "India-Pakistan: Relentless Pressure." *South Asia Terrorism Portal* (2002): Accessed May 9, 2012, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/ajaisahni/Pink090502.htm>.

benefits to a siege and negotiation approach to the conflict. As such, tactical and strategic outcomes suffered.⁹⁰

Force Composition: As in the Punjab cases, tactical and strategic success at Hazratbal is associated with counterinsurgents comprised of law enforcement personnel. In the Hazratbal operation, the insurgents were indigenous ethno-religious fighters, just as they had been in the Black Thunder case. They were associated with the region in which they were fighting, and therefore associated with the religious site itself. This attachment blood-soil connection allowed for the counterinsurgents to engage with the militants and facilitate surrender through negotiation. The negotiations fostered tactical as well as strategic success.

In Charar-e-Sharief, strategic failure is again correlated with conventional military forces, as it had been in Operation Blue Star. But the Charar-e-Sharief case has the added factor of a tactical failure on the military's part as well. There is nothing that explains as to why the military was unsuccessful on both measurements, so whom the insurgents were and how they were comprised is immensely important for understanding why Charar-e-Sharief failed on both of these aspects.⁹¹

In Charar-e-Sharief, the insurgents involved were not the ethno-religious indigenous militants associated with prior conflicts that Indian counterinsurgency forces had been used to dealing with. The transnational fighters at Charar-e-Sharief had little connection to the region or shrine culturally, were more dangerous, violent, and less prone to negotiate than the indigenous forces had been, and as such were not willing to

⁹⁰ Habibullah, "Siege," 91-93.

⁹¹ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 72-79.

talk to end a conflict. India's failure to recognize this variable contributed to the strategic as well as tactical failure of the operation.

The self-titled "Major" mast Gul was an ethnic Afghan and ex-mujahedeen fighter whom the Pakistanis put on the payroll, and leader of the insurgents during this operation. Negotiations failed, although religious leaders did offer aid. But in reality, the insurgents were not there to negotiate, they were there as representatives of Pakistan's foreign policy objectives, which was to destabilize and weaken India. The transnational nature of the insurgents limited the ability to negotiate a settlement, regardless of the Indian forces hopes for a peaceful end to the siege.

The transnational nature of the insurgents complicated things greatly for the counterinsurgency forces tactically. The failure to recognize the foreign composition of the insurgents created a situation where the plans the Indian forces had embarked upon were destined to fail. They were interacting with the insurgents in ways that were similar to the indigenous militants that they had faced in earlier conflicts. This seems a logical step for the counterinsurgency forces considering past conflicts, but ultimately cost them the tactical and strategic success of the operation. An investigation into the number of foreign insurgents in Kashmir shows that the number of transnational fighters is increasing 5 fold, from 119 in 1995 to 541 in 2001, creating a strategic problem for India's counterinsurgency efforts in Kashmir.⁹²

Media Involvement: Media involvement is again present in operations that were tactically and strategically successful. The media involvement present in the Hazratbal mosque operation was similar in effect to Operation Black Thunder, but in a very

⁹² Ibid, 77-83; Habibullah, "Siege," 91-96.

unexpected way. There was no intentional use of the media during the Hazratbal operation, which is surprising in the light of its importance during Operation Black Thunder, only five years prior. But the role of the media did play an important aspect in prompting negotiations and the eventual surrender of the militants. The media was not present at the Hazratbal shrine, but it was at Bijbehara, the city where 28 people were accidentally killed by a panicking BSF contingent. When the Indian civil and military authorities arrived in Bijbehara to deal with the situation, they did so in a responsible and conscientious manner under the letter of the law, covered completely by the media. The actions taken by the Indian counterinsurgency forces to remedy the situation impressed the militants. This unintended use of the media granted a level of legitimacy to the Indian forces in the eyes of the insurgents. This unexpected media factor shifted public opinion and was one of the major factors in the tactical and strategic success of the operation.⁹³

Charar-e-Sharief was a media failure. Officially, the reason that no media presence was requested at the Charar-e-Sharief shrine was because of the geographic remoteness of the site, although the shrine is only less than 25 miles from the Hazratbal. The initial framing of the operation laid outside the counterinsurgent's sphere of influence because of the logistical difficulty in getting a media presence to the site. This meant that when the shrine was burnt down during the siege, the insurgents claimed that the Indian military intentionally lit the fire in order to flush out militants. Although eyewitnesses at the time corroborated the counterinsurgents version of occurrences, the initial story remained no matter what post-operation media action the Indian forces took

⁹³ Ibid., 81-86.

to remedy it. The lack of media was a direct factor in the strategic failure of the operation. A pronounced media presence may have been enough of a factor to limit the insurgents, saving the shrine and town and influencing tactical and strategic success for the counterinsurgents.⁹⁴

Religious Leadership Cooperation: Cooperation with religious leadership is again correlated with tactical and strategic success. In the Hazratbal case, cooperation of religious leadership was one of the factors that led to successful negotiations and the eventual peaceful surrender of the insurgents at the site. This surrender ensured that the site itself was secured and the surrounding community did not suffer undue casualties and was finally allowed to return to their homes, then contributing to strategic success. On a strategic level, religious cooperation again helped to legitimize the counterinsurgency forces as it did in the post-operational period following Operation Black Thunder. This allowed the counterinsurgency forces more freedom of action with the increased relative legitimacy.

Lack of cooperation with religious leaders is again correlated to strategic failure, as it was with Operation Blue Star. When negotiations initially failed, the counterinsurgency forces denied the religious leaders that attempted to help. The fact is the religious leadership approached the Indian military with offers to facilitate negotiations during the Charar-e-Sharief operation, and was rebuffed. This seems like an odd choice for the Indian counterinsurgency forces, since the religious cooperation during

⁹⁴ Ganguly, "A Mosque, a Shrine, and Two Sieges," 68-70.

the Hazratbal operation and in the post-Black Thunder clean up were so vital to tactical and strategic success.⁹⁵

Cooperation with religious leadership during operations coincides with counterinsurgents comprised by law enforcement rather than conventional military. Cooperation occurred with both operations Black Thunder and Hazratbal, which led by police and paramilitary forces, whereas Blue Star and Charar-e-Sharief were lead by military and did not have cooperation with religious leaders. Whether there is a relationship between force composition and the absence of religious cooperation is unknown. Regardless, this dynamic relationship holds important keys to tactical and strategic success.

External Interference: The differing levels of external interference between the two Kashmiri cases are substantial. On a tactical and strategic level, external support from Pakistan makes counterinsurgency operations in Kashmir extremely difficult for India. The indigenous insurgents were continually sidelined by Pakistan in an effort to find more malleable groups that Pakistan could use to their advantage. Mast Gul received training, funds, and support from Pakistan. Without the sanctuary and other logistical and financial support, it is doubtful that Gul could have accomplished what he did during the Charar-e-Sharief conflict.

On a strategic level, the debacle of Operation Blue Star provided an opportunity that Pakistan still takes advantage of, with Charar-e-Sharief a prime example. The increased level of transnational insurgents, and the accompanying increase in violence, is a direct result of Pakistani interference. Without dealing with the Pakistani state and the

⁹⁵ Ibid, 77-83; Habibullah, "Siege," 78-91, 92-93.

sanctuary that it provides, foreign fighters will continue to pour across the border into Indian Kashmir, destabilizing the region.

Sumit Ganguly catalogues at least 14 active insurgent groups in Kashmir that have foreign elements that make up a portion of their numbers, most of which either are trained in or receive support from Pakistan. Pakistan hopes to repeat their perceived success of the Afghan-Soviet war, funneling arms, money, and support to ex-mujahedeen in an attempt to weaken its regional rival. The paranoia with which the military and civilian government in Pakistan views India should not be underestimated.

CHAPTER VI: CASE STUDIES, THAILAND AND ISRAEL

What lessons can be learned from the India's counterinsurgency experiences? To test for external validity, findings from the Indian cases need to be compared to other operations outside of the sub-continent. There is a possibility that the assumptions about counterinsurgency operations derived from the Golden Temple and Kashmiri cases may not apply outside the region, limiting the findings to a narration of Indian-Pakistani relations, and would not contribute to the wider literature and theories concerning counterinsurgency at sacred sites. Thailand's Krue Se Mosque incident and Israel's Church of the Nativity siege present variations from the Indian cases on forms of government, insurgents and counterinsurgents, population dynamic, external actors, offering alternate case studies of operations at religious sites that can shed light on the validity of the Indian findings.

Historical Background: Pattani Province

The center of Muslim-Malay identity lays in the 400 year-old Krue Se Mosque. Legend has that a Chinese woman came to Southern Thailand searching for her lost brother, finding he had married the daughter of the governor of Pattani (the region bordering present day Thailand and Malaysia), converted to Islam and refused to return home. In reaction to hearing this, the woman cursed the mosque that was under construction, stating that it would never be completed, and then committed suicide. The mosque became a historical site in 1935, and eventually a tourist destination, with reproductions of the curse and daily tours. Through 1989 and 1990, ethnic Malay Muslims protested both the commercialization of their sacred space and the adjacent

shrine built to memorialize the Chinese woman of lore, hoping that the mosque that they identified with so strongly could finally be completed. The Mosque had become both a symbol of Muslim identity as well as a warning against external interference from foreigners.

Conflict in Thailand's southern regions is nothing new. The conflict can be traced as far back as 1786, when the southern states were incorporated into the Siamese Empire and were required to pay tribute known as Bunga Mas, or Flowers of Gold. Leaders of the Pattani region would refuse, resulting in several wars with Siam which created a culture and mythology of defining these tribute conflicts as wars of resistance, fostering a relationship of tension and distrust between Bangkok and the southern provinces. Ethnic Malay's felt threatened at every turn, with Thai civil law supplanting Sharia or Malay customary law. The Thai government's integration policies ignored linguistic, cultural, and religious differences in the south, exacerbating the conflict. Islam is so integrated into the Malay identity that Jawi, the traditional Malay language, and not Arabic is considered the language of Islam in the region.

The contemporary insurgency began with organized resistance to the government in Bangkok in the 1960s. Many nationalist insurgent groups operated in the area, but the two main insurgent groups were the National Revolutionary Front, and the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), both founded by Islamist scholars. Other groups would eventually splinter off and form their own insurgencies, namely the National Liberation Front of Pattani (BNPP) and the Mujahedeen Movement of Pattani (GMIP). Attempts to unite the disparate groups under an umbrella organization failed due to competition and infighting.

With this history of conflict, subjugation, and resistance, the Krue Se Mosque has developed into a symbol of the negativity of foreign powers and a stage for Islamic identity. The religio-political identity that the Krue Se offers the insurgents is clear and not accidental. The date that the insurgents chose to take control of the mosque and instigate statewide confrontations is noteworthy as well. The insurgents chose April 28th, the day registered in Malay-Muslim calendars as the beginning of the Dusun Nyor Rebellion of 1948. Every decision made by the insurgents was calculated to have the maximum affect on Islamic and Malay symbolism and identity while simultaneously delegitimizing the government in Bangkok.⁹⁶

Krue Se Mosque

In the early morning of April 28th 2004, a series of 12 overwhelming attacks and suicide bombings were directed at police and security stations across the southern Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Songkla. Over one hundred militants, many thought to be either students or teachers at Islamic schools, were involved in the coordinated attacks. Prior to this manifestation of Malay insurgency in southern Thailand, suicide bombing had never been recorded. The attacks would conclude at the Krue Se Mosque, with insurgents retreating into the mosque, and Thai security and military forces assaulting the insurgents in the shrine.

⁹⁶ For extensive historical background on ethnic Thai-Malay relations and conflict see Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of Malay-Muslims in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, 1985); Ibrahim Syurki, *History of the Malay Kingdom of Pattan*, trans. C. Bailey and J. Miksic (Athens: Center for International Studies, 1985); Wan K. C. Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990); Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *The Life of This World: Negotiated Muslim Lives in Thai Society* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2005)

The prior evening, men clad in the white of the Jemaat Tabligh movement entered the mosque, praying and preparing themselves for the following day. Similar scenes were witnessed all across the south. The following morning, the insurgents changed their clothes, called for a jihad against the Siamese invaders across loudspeakers, and then set out with knives, machetes, and handguns to attack police and security locations. Similar attacks occurring across the region, implying highly organized prior planning. After the attacks, rather than attempting to flee or hide in the surrounding towns or forests, the insurgents in the Pattani province made their way to the Krue Se Mosque. Information gathered indicates that they knew that the mosque would be surrounded and that they were prepared to become martyrs.⁹⁷

The Thai forces reacted immediately. Within two hours of the attacks, aspects of the Special Forces, Anti-Riot Division, the Pattani Special Task Force, and snipers had surrounded the mosque. During the initial intermittent gunfire, the first casualty was not an insurgent, but an innocent civilian completing their morning prayers. The Deputy Prime Minister and Director of the Internal Security Operations Command Chavalit Yongchaiyudh directed that force should not be used. At 10 A.M., Thai forces used tear gas attempting to overwhelm the insurgents, but proved due to the fruitless fact that the mosque had been barricaded. Yongchaiyudh reinforced the directive that negotiations were to be commenced immediately. Yongchaiyudh's second in command, Panlop Pinmanee did not share this sentiment and stated that the military option should be preferred.

⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, "Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad," *Asia Report N. 98*. (2005): 12-27.

By 2 o'clock Pinmanee decided to circumvent Yongchaiyudh and forego any more negotiations and to take the mosque by force. A large crowd of over one thousand people had converged around the mosque, and the security forces felt that the level of hostility was rising and they would not be in a position to deal with both an angry mob and the militants simultaneously. Five teams of Thai soldiers moved against the insurgents in the mosque, snipers eliminating any insurgents who attempted to fire back, with a total of eight grenades thrown into the mosque before negotiations could be enacted. The entire operation was complete in 6 minutes, ending with one civilian and all 32 insurgents dead. The level of force used against the insurgents in the mosque was so disparate and complete that the crowd that had gathered became angry to the point that military personnel shuttled the dead bodies of the insurgents away.⁹⁸

The entire conflict, from the insurgents' first call for the attacks to the end of the siege of the mosque lasted little more than 10 hours. Many considered the negotiation process a farce, with no evidence to show that talks had even been attempted, no consideration for the religious, nationalistic, and political aspects of the site, and absolutely no media coverage during the operation. Post-operation images of the mosque and holy books covered in the insurgents' blood stoked resentment. Religious leaders at the site that had offered to help end the siege peacefully and aide in negotiations were dismissed. The lack of intelligence was so complete that even at the time of the siege, Thai forces were unsure of exactly who they were even dealing with.

Investigations into the conflict post-operation revealed disturbing trends. Prior to the attacks, the insurgents engaged in ritualistic drinking of holy water and carried prayer

⁹⁸ Liow, "Iron Fists without Velvet Gloves," 182-184.

beads in the believe that they would be invisible, raising the specter of a separatist religious cult. Most of the insurgencies prior to this had been more nationalistic even with their religious flavor, but this incident was the first conflict defined along overtly religious terminology and symbolism. Secondly, in locations outside of Pattani, insurgents that had been killed in the operations died from single bullet wounds to the head and had what appeared to be rope burns on their wrists, insinuating executions by the Thai military or security forces. The investigative committee that the government had set up decided that even in the face of the insurgents, excessive force had been used according to UN protocols. Pinmanee was relieved of duty in a “planned rotation”, but no charges were lodged against him or any of the other counterinsurgency forces involved.⁹⁹

Immediately after the investigation, the government released its findings to the public and offered compensation to the families of those killed in the operation in an attempt to mitigate tensions. Then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra finally use the media by describing the insurgents as drug addicted criminals, prompting widespread reaction from the religious and community leaders. When a booklet entitled “The Waging of a Holy Struggle for Pattani” discovered was, the Thai government finally had to admit there was a religious insurgency in the southern provinces. The government then tried to justify the use of force the investigative committee had railed against, further inflaming the situation and fueling public anger. The largest strategic mistake was promoting Panlop Pinmanee, architect of the botched siege, to public relations advisor. In return, exiled leaders of the PULO used the Internet to post statements calling for all

⁹⁹ Ibid., 184.

Malay-Muslims to join the insurgency and attempted to mobilize the Malay diaspora. In the words of a former separatist, “The [the insurgents] had planned this for years. But they were pleasantly surprised by Thaksin’s policies which helped us create a pool of recruits.”

A prominent feature of the South Thailand insurgency is the obscurity of the people behind it and the absence of specific demands. Many of the other militants that have been killed or captured have received training in various countries across the Greater Middle East, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Gulf States, have possible connections to militant groups like the religious-nationalist Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines and the quasi-secular Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia, and may have sanctuaries in Malaysia. Army Chief Prayuth Chan Ocha stated that the insurgency is orchestrated from abroad and is funded via drug and oil smuggling. What is known is that intelligence has provided little into who the insurgents are and what they want.¹⁰⁰

Thailand held comparatively honest elections in February 2005, and no secessionist candidates contested the results in the south. However, requests of cultural and religious freedom and the right to use the Jawi language have been presented numerous times. Since the 2006 military coup, the Thai government has taken a more conciliatory approach to the insurgency, avoiding the excessive use of force associated with Thaksin's time as Prime Minister, and began negotiations with separatist organizations, of which few of whom have been satisfied by the government's change of strategy.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 186-192.

Historical Background: Bethlehem, West Bank

For nearly two thousand years, the Church of the Nativity has been seen as the founding location of the Christian religion. The grotto under the church is believed to be the birthplace of Jesus of Nazareth, marked by a silver star embedded in the grotto floor and engraved with the phrase *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est*, identifying his exact place of birth. In the church complex, it is believed that an angel appeared to Mary and Joseph and initiating the Biblical Flight to Egypt. Also on the church grounds is the Milk Grotto, where Mary is said to have nursed Jesus, the Shepard's Field, tomb of the biblical matriarch Rachel, and the Chapel of St. Jerome, where it is thought that the Bible is to have been translated into Latin.

The location is a destination point for pilgrims of the Christian faith, as well as one of the main sites visited throughout the Holy Land. Believers come with hopes of envisioning the historic occurrences of their faith. The birth of Christ is reenacted with Christmas Mass every year, prayers are thought to be more effective at the church, and barren, expectant, or nursing mothers visit the Milk Grotto and pray to the Virgin Mary for intervention on theirs and their children's behalf.¹⁰¹

The structure of the Church of the nativity is a reflection of both the period in which it was build as well as the function it served at the time. Inside the church there is a simple basilica, a small gothic church, and convents for Armenian, Greek, and Roman Catholic monks. The exterior of the church is fortress like, protected by surrounded by thick Byzantine walls, with the only entrance into the church from the outside being the "Door of Humility", a small opening labeled as such because visitors must bow in order

¹⁰¹ "MIDEAST TURMOIL: HOLY PLACES; A Church and a Site Revered by 3 Faiths," *New York Times*. April 4, 2002.

to gain entrance to the complex. The church's exterior kept the monks and pilgrims within the church safe from Muslim and Persian invaders, and did the same for the PLO insurgents when they fled into the church for sanctuary in March of 2002.¹⁰²

Church of the Nativity Siege

Operation Defensive Shield began in March of 2004 as a large-scale action by the Israeli Defense Forces to apprehend Palestinian Liberation Organization insurgents throughout the West Bank. When the IDF entered Bethlehem, a number of PLO militants fled and sought refuge in numerous sacred sites throughout the city. Among the religious sites the insurgents fled to were the Roman Catholic Convent of Santa Maria and an Assyrian Church. A large contingent of the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade fled to the Church of the Nativity. This insurgent group was comprised of 39 militants, with approximately a third of them on the IDF's most wanted list.

Once inside the church, the request for sanctuary was completely observed. When asked after the siege about their cooperation with the militants, the monk who interacted with the insurgents stated that they "felt obligated by [their] Christian vows to offer the gunmen sanctuary now that they had entered the church."¹⁰³ The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem stated that, "The basilica, a church, is a place of refuge for everybody, even fighters as long as they lay down their arms [and] a basilica cannot give up people to be killed or made prisoners." Christian doctrine seemed to hamper the IDF's ability to operate effectively.

¹⁰² Steven Erlanger, "Under Siege, Fiercely Longing for Peace," *New York Times*, May 8, 2002

¹⁰³ "MIDEAST TURMOIL: HOLY PLACES; A Church and a Site Revered by 3 Faiths." *New York Times*. April 4, 2002.

To make matters even more complicated, the Palestinian governor of Bethlehem was trapped inside the church with approximately 150 unarmed civilians.¹⁰⁴ With the heightened level of international media scrutinizing every aspect of the IDF and its strategies, Israel believed that a military option under such scrutiny would be a public relations nightmare for them. While there were those within Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's administration that favored a military option, he steadfastly refused to defile one of Christianity's most sacred sites and turn it into a bloodbath. A direct military action against the insurgents in the church under such media pressure was a complete non-starter.¹⁰⁵

The Israeli military then engaged in siege warfare, isolating the church from the surrounding portions of the city and cutting off the electricity, food, and water. The Israeli forces then commenced to use psychological tactics such as loud noises and stun grenades to pressure the insurgents to surrender. Israeli snipers picked at the insurgents through open windows, killing 7 and wounding another 7 without civilian casualties or any damage to the structures of the church. Since the militants were not Christian, they were not allowed into certain areas of the church or accompanying structures, restricting them to the main church and thereby exposing them to Israeli sniper fire, albeit unknowingly. The priests were indirectly aiding the IDF by restricting the insurgent's movements. The priests also made repeated attempts to persuade the insurgents to surrender and end the stand off.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed narration of the siege, see Joshua Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem: Unholy War in a Sacred Place* (New York, Free Press, 2003), 194-250.

¹⁰⁵ David Rhode, "Church of the Nativity Damaged and a Monastery Is Scorched," *New York Times*, April 9, 2002.

¹⁰⁶ Hassner, "Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space," 29-32.

After 40 days, the siege ended through negotiations. Under a deal brokered by the American embassy, the insurgents surrendered their weapons and were transported via American vehicles to a British military transport plane to Cyprus, from where they were sent into exile in various countries throughout Europe. The negotiations involved aspects of the Israeli government, the Vatican, the Greek Orthodox Church, the European Union, and the United States.¹⁰⁷ When the militants finally surrendered, the restraint from the Israeli forces yielded unsuspected results. The Arab Christian population of Bethlehem and the West Bank, although naturally inclined to sympathize with the insurgents, instead criticized the militants for using their Holy site for what amounted in their minds to a publicity stunt.¹⁰⁸ Intelligent tactical and strategic maneuvering by the Israeli government ensured that much of the domestic and international criticism was directed at the insurgents and not themselves.

Comparisons to Indian Cases

The Krue Se Mosque operation and the Church of the Nativity siege provide us with interesting comparisons when it comes to the tactical and strategic levels of success when viewed through the findings of the Punjab and Kashmir cases. On the tactical level, both can be considered successes. The Krue Se Mosque is considered especially successful, as all the insurgents were casualties of an operation that was measured in minutes. Viewed as a military operation, it was almost flawless. The level of strategic success could be considered almost zero. The ethnic-Malay population of southern

¹⁰⁷ Joel Greenberg, "Palestinians Prepare Exit from Church," *New York Times*, May 9, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem*, 249-250.

Thailand became so alienated from the government in Bangkok that support and recruits inundated the insurgents. In the wake of such a lop-sided tactical victory, the insurgency grew in both scope and level of violence, and little is still known about whom the insurgents are and what their ultimate goals are.

The Church of the Nativity siege was tactically successful, but not on the same level as the Krue Se Mosque operation. The Israeli operation resulted in a number of insurgent casualties, with the remaining militants being exiled to various countries across Europe. But the operation presented an interesting strategic success, the Arab Christian population's disenfranchisement of the P.L.O. militants because of their use of one of Christianity's most sacred sites for what they considered to be little more than a public relations stunt. But for various reasons Israel was unable to capitalize on the resulting advantageous political position for various domestic political reasons not related to the Church of the Nativity Siege.

Operational Implementation: There are some interesting comparisons between the Indian cases and the cases represented by Israel and Thailand. The Krue Se Mosque incident resembles Operation Blue Star in operational implementation, although it was more successful in that the Thai forces did not suffer the casualties that the Indian counterinsurgency forces did. Their tactical objectives of eliminating the insurgents and regaining control of the mosque were realized. But in the same manner as Blue Star, the level of force used at their holy site simply inflamed resentment of the Muslim Malay community due to what they saw as sacrilege. The fact was that the heavy handed level of firepower used in the operation was almost a 10 to 1 ratio in favor of the Thai military,

creating a David and Goliath situation which bestowed legitimacy on the smaller, weaker force, which was perceived as martyrdom.¹⁰⁹

What is interesting about this case is that military force was originally ordered to be a last resort and that negotiations were to be completely exhausted prior to any use of force on the part of the Thai counterinsurgency forces. Those in charge at the site ignored this, fearing the crowd that had built up would assault the military forces. This aspect of the Krue Se mosque incident is similar to the Charar-e-Sharief case, in that the community surrounding the site was considered so hostile that no counterinsurgency forces engaged the community in any kind of dialogue. The fear of the hostile community, retraction of forces, and preemptive action became a variation of the counterinsurgency Trilemma manifesting. Force protection became paramount, so the negotiations were preempted by military action.¹¹⁰

In the Church of the nativity siege, the Israeli operation almost mimics that of Operation Black Thunder in terms of operational implementation. The IDF laid siege to the church, cordoned off the site, engaged in psychological warfare, and used snipers to eliminate insurgent targets while continually attempting negotiations. While not all the insurgents were eliminated, they were ultimately removed from the site, hostages saved, and the church relatively undamaged. While tactically successful, the level of strategic success is indeterminate, although this is related to other domestic factors at play in Israeli politics and not directly related to the Nativity operation.

¹⁰⁹ Liow, "Iron Fists without Velvet Gloves," 186-194.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 183, 186-189.

Force Composition: The relatively overtly religious nature of the Krue Se insurgents and the current manifestation of the southern Thailand insurgency are new to the region. Little is known of the insurgents, except for the fact that many of them have received training in the Middle East. While they are an indigenous ethno-religious insurgency, the influence of the Middle East can be seen in their apparent use of their ritual preparations and use of the Krue Se Mosque in an apparent attempt to bait the Thai forces into engaging them and turning themselves into martyrs. This martyrdom concept is alien to Thai or Malay culture, and represents an external influence changing the nature of the actors, and therefore the nature of the insurgency. Like the Charar-e-Sharief case, the transnational influence on the insurgents complicates COIN operations and adversely affects Thai-Malay stability and strategic success of the operation.¹¹¹

The insurgents at the Church of the nativity siege were members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. What is important is that while the PLO is indigenous, it is *not* an ethno-religious movement. It is an ostensibly a Muslim organization, but that is simply because a majority of Palestinians are Muslim. The organization defines itself along nationalistic lines. This could be one factor that explains why the Israelis were unable to build on the tactical successes that the Nativity siege afforded them.

In both cases, the military is the primary counterinsurgency force. The level of tactical success is similar in both cases, albeit more successful in the Thai case. But the inability of the counterinsurgents to build upon their successes occurs for very different reasons. The Thai failure is a direct result of their operational implementation, whereas

¹¹¹ Ibid., 190-195.

other factors in the Israeli case, such as insurgent identity and platform, contribute to this. But what is the most unique factor is that the Church of Nativity operation is the only case where a counterinsurgency force comprised of conventional military was not associated with strategic failure.

Media Involvement: There was essentially no use of the media to frame the conflict on the part of the Thai counterinsurgency forces. Only after the fact was the media used to justify counterinsurgent actions taken at the Krue Se Mosque and define the insurgents as drug addicted criminals. In a final media blunder, the individual responsible for the military action at the site was relieved, and then assigned a role that amounted to public relations director. The Krue Se Mosque operation is a lesson in how not to use the media in a strategic sense for counterinsurgency operations.¹¹²

The IDF benefited from the media during the Church of the Nativity siege, but in an unexpected way. The Israelis did not use the media as an intentional manifestation of strategy. The media presence at the church was of an international composition, not a domestic tool tie to counterinsurgency efforts. Israeli leadership even admitted to having its operational freedom limited by the presence of the media, and had it not been there would have stormed the church.¹¹³ But by the media being present and limiting Israeli operational options, it inadvertently aided the counterinsurgents by forcing them to embark on a siege and negotiation operation rather than on military force. This unexpected media influence aided in both the tactical success and the strategic

¹¹² “112 Killed in Gun Battles,” *The Associated Press*, April 28, 2004; Liow, “Iron Fists without Velvet Gloves,” 187.

¹¹³ Alan Philips, “Survivor’s Tale of the Siege of Bethlehem,” *Daily Telegraph London*, April 20, 2002.

opportunity to engage the Christian Arab population in Bethlehem. Unfortunately, other aspects of Israeli policy negated this potential.

Religious Leadership Cooperation: Strategic failure is again correlated with the absence of cooperation with religious leadership. Thai forces dismissed offers of help from the religious leadership in negotiating a surrender of the insurgents in the Krue Se Mosque. Like the Charar-e-Sharief operation, no religious leadership was involved in operation, although in both cases leaders offered assistance. The tactical success of Krue Se may or may not have been affected, as the operation was highly successful on that level already. But the complete failure of the operation at the strategic level can be tied to this lack of religious leadership involvement. With the Thai forces rejecting the cooperation of religious leadership, their ability to delegitimize the insurgents by stripping away their religious veneer is severely hampered. This was a massive failure of strategic thinking.

In the Israel case, the religious cooperation was indirect and unintentional, yet was responsible for a good part of the tactical success at the Church of the Nativity siege. The church leaders trapped inside with the insurgents did not actively cooperate with the Israeli counterinsurgency forces, but their enforcing of the rules of behavior in the church limited the insurgents movements, allowing for the IDF to gather intelligence on the insurgents and placing more pressure on them to negotiate because of more effective sniper fire.¹¹⁴

It is unknown if religious cooperation at the Church of the Nativity in the post-operational period would have produced more in the way of strategic success. What

¹¹⁴ Hassner, "Counterinsurgency and the Problem of Sacred Space," 32.

religious cooperation does on the strategic level is aids the counterinsurgency forces in delegitimizing the religious and political clout of the insurgency. There are two conditions that limit this influencing factor. First is the fact that the insurgency, while indigenous, is not defined in religious terms. This limits or negates the religious leaders ability to effect outcomes. Second the fact that the religious leadership of the Church of the Nativity is not of a religion affiliated directly with either the insurgents or counterinsurgents. The Christian leaders were of Catholic and Orthodox association, with no discernible theological way to influence either a secular-Muslim Arab organization or the IDF. These two factors help to explain the limited influence of the Arab Christian population in terms of strategic success. The PLO is defined in political liberation terms, not as ethno-religious.

External Interference: The dynamic of external interference is unknown in the Krue Se Mosque case, showing again the lack of intelligence on the part of the Thai military. It is suspected that there are safe havens across the border in Malaysia, but to what extent the Malay government is involved is unknown. What is known is that Gulf States do provide schooling and funds for the militants, and so indicates a needed change in long-term strategic thinking of a more comprehensive approach like the one Kilcullen espouses. This shortfall on the part of Thailand and the accompanying strategic failure contributed to the escalation of insurgent violence and alienation of ethnic Malays.¹¹⁵

The external support for the PLO is well known. Many of the surrounding states provide sanctuary, logistics, and finances for the PLO as an extension of their foreign policies, which is influenced by domestic pressures concerning perceived human rights

¹¹⁵ Liow, "Iron Fists without Velvet Gloves," 188-192.

violations on the part of Israel against Muslim refugees. Whether this perception is an accurate assessment is irrelevant, the logic of the connection is what matters. This effect of external influences on Israel strategic successes will continue until Israel endeavors to implement some of Sepp's "political process" aspects of his best practices theory.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," 8-12.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

The counterinsurgency forces that failed to produce strategic success from tactical victory is due to the faulty assumption that their operations at religious sites could be treated like any other operation. Counterinsurgency operations in sacred space must prioritize several factors in order to ensure that the tactical successes achieved are translated into strategic successes, creating beneficial results in the larger framework of the conflict. Among these, level of media exposure, religious cooperation, external interference, and operational implementation are the most important.

Even today, there is a misconception that achieving success at the tactical level necessarily translates into strategic success. This is simply not the case, and is especially so in regard to operations at religious sites. Winning the battle does not ensure winning the war. The sensitive nature of the site itself is a problem, with its rules of governing behavior and the seemingly contradictory stances that appears to favor insurgent forces of an ethno-religious character. But the distinctive nature of the sacred site also provides a unique opportunity for counterinsurgency forces. If carried out correctly, operations at these sites can shift the strategic landscape in a conflict to the advantage of the counterinsurgents in a very profound way.

The ability to delegitimize the claims of religious authority of an ethno-religious insurgent group is paramount. This research suggests that this can be accomplished in one of two ways. First, counterinsurgents can delegitimize counterinsurgents in absolute terms by exposing them as not abiding by the rules that govern the religious sites they have claimed. This effectively strips any religious claims the insurgents have made concerning the religiosity of their actions. Operation Black Thunder, and to a lesser

extent the Church of the Nativity Siege, are examples of this. The other is to delegitimize the insurgents in relative terms. This is accomplished not by directly affecting public opinion of insurgents, but by affecting public opinion of the counterinsurgent forces, mitigating many of the insurgents' claims and portraying the counterinsurgents as honoring the sanctity of the religious site in question and abiding by the rule of law. This dynamic is represented in Operation Black Thunder and the Siege of the Hazratbal Mosque, contributing to the strategic success of these operations. These dynamics are not mutually exclusive, and may simultaneously occur in an operation.

In this regard, one can imagine a set of circumstances under which counterinsurgent forces fail on a tactical level, but succeed strategically. If the Indian military had implemented proactive media, engaged the religious leadership, and rallied the community, strategic success might have been pulled from the ashes of the destroyed shrine during the Charar-e-Sharief operation. Exposing the insurgents as foreign agents of Pakistan and showing restraint in an attempt to abide by religious rules of behavior could have shifted the strategic landscape even when the operation led to tactical failure. This type of noble failure has the potential to swing public opinion, legitimating the counterinsurgents while stripping legitimacy ways from the militants.

The support of public opinion is crucial in a counterinsurgency, and the claims of legitimacy are paramount and directly relate to public perception. This research suggests that the pro-active use of the media on the part of the counterinsurgency forces allows for the initial framing the conflict, helping to define the insurgents and thereby the counterinsurgents, in a manner that is tactically and strategically advantageous. High

levels of proactive media use are associated with strategic success at religious sites, and its absence contributes to strategic failure.

To effectively legitimize themselves while conducting operations at religious sites, counterinsurgents that adapted their operational implementation to take into account the sacredness of the site ensured tactical and strategic success. The Indian cases of Black Thunder and Hazratbal show that when the operation moves from an operational use of conventional military force to one of siege, negotiation, and psychological operations, tactical success manifests strategic success. Both of these cases are considered the first steps to ending their respective conflicts. Operation Blue Star, Charar-e-Sharief, and the Krue Se Mosque relied heavily on conventional military and force of arms. This led to situations where tactical success did not lead to strategic victory, but deteriorating security and a worsening of the conflict. For the counterinsurgents who adapted their operational implementation policies, their legitimacy increased relative to the insurgents, contributing to strategic success.

The force composition of counterinsurgents seemingly has an effect on tactical and strategic success, favoring law enforcement over military. But upon further investigation, it is the operational implementation that has the effect, not the force composition. It is not that the military is necessarily effective or not at counterinsurgency operations, but that the doctrine of force the military uses at religious sites is not conducive to strategic success. When conventional military forces implement operations consisting of siege and negotiation, as it did in the Church of the Nativity case, its level of success is equal to those implemented by law enforcement.

Cooperation of religious leadership provides multiple factors that positively contribute to strategic success. Religious leadership cooperation provides a level of intelligence, which in turn positively effects operational implementation at the religious sites. They can discern importance of structures, specific days, suspend certain rules of behavior, aid in negotiations, and most importantly identify who the insurgents are. The only case where transnational fighters were present resulted in tactical and strategic failure, with the site being destroyed. Religious leadership can help to identify whether the insurgents are indigenous or not, allowing the counterinsurgents to adapt their tactics to the new actors. This allows the counterinsurgents to delegitimize the outside fighters and their external sponsors, using the highly active media to focus on the “foreign-ness” of the insurgents. Success or failure in limiting the influences of external actors and transnational fighters is closely correlated with tactical and strategic success.

There is no evidence that the significance or the hierarchical position the site occupies influences any of these factors outright. If this were the case, there would have been no divergence in the strategic outcomes between Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder. Operational implementation, media involvement, the cooperation of religious leaders, and mitigating outside influences all influence operations and the corresponding strategic outcomes. But these sites are extremely important for the populations that are associated with them, and the rules that govern them and their perceived importance must be acknowledged. When Clausewitz warns us of recognizing the type of conflict we are engaged in and not to turn it into something “alien to its nature”, he is reminding us of the danger of an overreliance on force and not addressing the key concepts of

counterinsurgency operations at religious sites. Insurgencies at religious sites simply cannot be fought as they can in the jungles or mountains.

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