The country with the most continuous and diverse involvement in waging counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns is India. From the first years after its independence until today, India has been engaged almost continuously against insurgencies fuelled by tribal, ethnic, religious, ideological and external political forces. Certainly, no other democracy since the Second World War has had as much involvement with COIN as India. Yet, India’s experiences with COIN have been largely ignored by the United States and other countries (Gill and Lamm 2009) and treated with political neglect and military ambivalence within India (Goswami 2009). The reasons for this lack of external and internal interest in India’s COIN experiences are complex, but understanding India’s efforts at waging COIN is important for grasping the political and military difficulties democracies face in confronting insurgencies at home and abroad. This chapter describes India’s COIN campaigns and identifies themes that emerge from looking across the many and diverse COIN efforts India has mounted. It then proceeds to analyse the key features of the Indian experience of COIN ranging from overarching strategic principles to tactical military adaptations. We also explore persistent problems and future challenges facing India’s relationship with COIN theory, doctrine and practice.

India’s counterinsurgency campaigns

Overview of the campaigns

Starting in the mid 1950s, India has waged COIN in multiple northeastern provinces (Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura), Punjab, Sri Lanka, Jammu and Kashmir (Kashmir), and multiple Indian states (e.g. Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Maharashtra) against the Naxalites. These campaigns are outlined in Table 24.1. Although the beginning and end dates of these COIN campaigns are only approximate because of the difficulty of assigning definitive time periods, the dates reveal that Indian federal and state governments have been engaged in fighting insurgencies in every decade since India’s independence in 1947. The violence perpetrated has not been identical in scope and intensity or in the danger posed to the integrity of the Union of India, which has been provoked into using a range of different labels to describe these threats including terrorism, low-intensity conflict and insurgency.
Table 24.1 Summary of India’s counterinsurgency campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COIN campaign (approximate dates)</th>
<th>Brief description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kashmir (1988–2002)</td>
<td>Frustration among Muslims in Kashmir with Indian rule turned violent after fraudulent state elections in 1987. Pakistan began to support the insurgency, eventually turning the conflict into a proxy war between Pakistan and India. By the elections of 2002, India had stabilized Kashmir and effectively defeated the insurgency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur (1978–present)</td>
<td>Despite granting statehood to Manipur in 1972, militant groups, with training provided in China, sought independence. Efforts to end the violence, including elections and ceasefire offers, have not, to date, succeeded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram (1966–86)</td>
<td>Led by the charismatic Laldenga, the Mizo peoples launched an insurgency in the mid 1960s. Twenty years later, the insurgency ended with an agreement that had Laldenga becoming Chief Minister of the new Indian state of Mizoram.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland (1955–97)</td>
<td>India’s first and longest COIN campaign came in response to the Naga insurgency’s drive for an independent Nagaland. Through trial and error, the Indian government and military wore down the insurgency until the 1997 ceasefire agreement, which is still in force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naxalites (1967–73; 2000–present)</td>
<td>Naxalites are adherents of Maoist ideology who use violence to achieve a socialist revolution. The first Naxalite insurgency started in the late 1960s but lasted only a few years. The second Naxalite insurgency arose in the past decade, becoming a threat to India’s national security that is not yet contained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab (1978–93)</td>
<td>The Punjab insurgency involved Sikh nationalists wanting an independent Khalistan. Indian efforts to defeat the Sikh insurgency in the mid 1980s worsened the violence. Improved COIN tactics led to the defeat of Sikh militancy by the early 1990s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka (1987–90)</td>
<td>India intervened in the civil war in Sri Lanka in order to bring the government and the Tamil Tigers into negotiations for a peaceful settlement. The peacekeeping mission morphed into COIN when the Tamil Tigers refused to negotiate. India withdrew after the Sri Lankan government ordered Indian forces to leave the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura (1978–present)</td>
<td>Frustrated by the failure to achieve autonomy through political means, Tripuran militants resorted to violence to secure Tripura’s freedom from Indian rule. A peace agreement in 1988 did not end the violence because new secessionist groups formed that have continued fighting until the present day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Chadha 2005; Fair 2009; Marwah 2009; Mehta 2009; Patankar 2009; Shekatkar 2009.
Counterinsurgency in India

Internal counterinsurgency campaigns

As Table 24.1 reveals, all India’s COIN campaigns have been within its territory except the one in Sri Lanka. The overwhelmingly internal nature of India’s COIN experiences provides one potential reason why US and other Western experts have overlooked India in analysing COIN. With the exception of the wars against Native Americans in the nineteenth century, the United States has engaged in COIN exclusively in foreign countries, with the campaigns in the Philippines, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan being the most prominent examples. These internal and external COIN contexts help explain differences between Indian and US doctrines developed to guide COIN operations (Indian Army 2006; US Army and Marine Corps 2007; Fidler 2009).

The insurgencies India has confronted within its territory have aimed at secession and/or the creation of independent states. In each case, India has prevented this outcome and has, in this respect, been successful in preventing the breakup of India. In this sense, the Indian democratic polity has been the graveyard of insurgencies. Although India has not ‘lost’ an internal COIN campaign, opinions vary markedly as to whether India’s COIN campaigns have been political and military successes. For critics, India’s defeat or containment of insurgencies has come at an unnecessarily high price in terms of lives lost, economic resources expended, political legitimacy damaged, human rights violated, and democratic principles compromised. Criticism of India’s COIN campaigns reveals that the internal context of these efforts creates higher expectations and standards for success within a democracy than might be the case for countries engaging in COIN in foreign nations (e.g. the gradually decreased expectations of what the United States hopes to accomplish through COIN in Afghanistan).

Reinventing the wheel in counterinsurgency

The frequent resort to COIN by the government and military within Indian territory might suggest that India has absorbed lessons from past campaigns and developed sophisticated and integrated capabilities for waging this peculiar type of warfare. However, one of the most striking conclusions that emerges from analyses of India’s COIN experiences is that Indian civilian and military personnel have been unprepared each time an insurgency has erupted, forcing the federal and state governments and the Indian Army to scramble to implement an effective COIN campaign. Such ad hoc reactions have led to serious mistakes, which strengthened the insurgencies and increased the costs of defeating the militants.

This painful and costly phenomenon of repeatedly ‘reinventing the wheel’ reveals that neither the Indian military nor federal and state civilian authorities have embraced the need to prepare and sustain their capabilities for COIN. Goswami has noted for instance that the India Army has continued, despite repeated and intensive use of COIN operations over decades, to treat counterinsurgency as ‘secondary to its primary duty of defending India from external threats. Consequently, little serious thought has been given to doctrinal innovations within the Army with regard to insurgent contingencies’ (Goswami 2009: 66). Civilian institutions have proven no more adept at becoming COIN competent despite the strategic imperative that resolving insurgencies is, ultimately, a political not a military task. The return and spread of Naxalite violence, for example, has been associated with failures of federal and state authorities in terms of governance, economic development and fielding adequate police forces (Chadha 2005; Oetken 2009).

The ‘reinventing the wheel’ pattern in India’s responses to insurgencies also reveals that India has not discovered any ‘silver bullet’ for the dangerous and difficult tasks of COIN. The
evolution of the Indian Army’s doctrine for such operations largely reflects the tenets other countries have developed for COIN. Even when India has turned the tables on insurgents, the Indian experience offers no shortcuts or undiscovered techniques that reduce significantly the burden governments and militaries bear in fighting insurgencies. This reality reinforces the warnings of COIN experts that engaging in COIN effectively is an expensive, long-term and risky business. India’s resilience over decades in combating insurgencies demonstrates the government’s ironclad determination not to permit secession from the Union. India’s experience highlights moreover that, with internal insurgencies seeking to break apart the state, there is no ‘exit strategy’.

**External counterinsurgency contexts**

The general consensus on India’s COIN campaign in Sri Lanka is that India failed to achieve its political and military objectives (Mehta 2009; Rajagopalan 2008). What began as a peacekeeping mission to separate the military forces of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Tamil Tigers) became a peace enforcement/COIN operation when the Indian Peacekeeping Force began operations against the Tamil Tigers to bring them back to political negotiations. Political and military preparations for such a shift were inadequate, producing serious problems for India strategically and tactically that Indian civilian officials and military officers could not overcome despite efforts to adapt to the dramatically changed mission.

In addition to this has been India’s ongoing effort to support the government of Afghanistan in its struggle against the Taliban-led insurgency (Government of India 2005). To date, India’s involvement in Afghanistan has been civilian-only in the form of development-related projects, such as building roads and hospitals. India has deployed no military forces in Afghanistan for any purpose, including training Afghan security forces. Thus, India’s efforts in Afghanistan do not, at present, constitute a comprehensive civilian-military COIN campaign. However, India’s activities support and contribute to the COIN strategy implemented by the Afghan government and its allies, led by the United States. These activities – and the problems India encounters in Afghanistan – constitute a new aspect of India’s experiences with COIN.

India’s involvement in external COIN endeavours in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan share similar features but differ in critical respects. India’s intervention in Sri Lanka and its willingness to support nation-building in Afghanistan connect to Indian policy-makers’ perceptions of direct threats to India’s strategic interests and national security. New Delhi viewed the worsening conflict between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil Tigers as a threat because of Sri Lanka’s geostrategic importance in the Indian Ocean and the conflict’s potential to inflame Tamil passions in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Similarly, in Afghanistan, India’s core interests were perceived as being best served by achieving a secure, prosperous and pro-India Afghan government, economy and society. Creating this Afghanistan would improve India’s security, strengthen its influence in South Asia, improve access to economic and natural resource opportunities in Central Asia and also mitigate the impact of the rivalry with Pakistan on India’s ambitions as a great power.

The largest difference between the Indian COIN involvement in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan is the deployment of Indian military forces in the former but not, as yet, in the latter. Unlike in Sri Lanka, India’s participation in the Afghan COIN effort has been dependent for security on the Afghan government and its foreign allies. In the context of worsening security in Afghanistan, concerns about the dangers to India’s development assistance have increased, leaving India in a dilemma between accepting the deteriorating status quo or escalating Indian participation by involving the Indian military in training Afghan security forces and/or providing better
security for Indian development projects. Pakistan would consider such escalation a provocation to its interests in Afghanistan, and, with the United States and Afghanistan increasingly reliant on Pakistani cooperation, India appears to be in a weak position to increase its COIN role in Afghanistan. In other contexts, Pakistan has made India’s COIN endeavours more difficult by supporting insurgent groups within India (e.g. Pakistani assistance to Kashmiri insurgents). Pakistan’s ability to frustrate India’s support for COIN in Afghanistan adds a new twist to the problems Pakistan has in the past created for Indian COIN efforts.

**Features of India’s experiences with counterinsurgency**

Over the decades India has engaged in COIN; strategic principles, effective practices and persistent problems have emerged that characterize the Indian COIN experience. Boiling down India’s efforts across such diverse COIN operations shortchanges factors that make each insurgency and COIN response unique. However, given the published case studies of India’s COIN campaigns and specific operations (Chadha 2005; Rajagopalan 2008; Ganguly and Fidler 2009) this chapter focuses on characteristics repeatedly identified as important in the Indian government’s and military’s participation in COIN.

**Strategic principles**

The Indian approach to COIN reflects a commitment to strategic principles rooted in the idea that COIN is ultimately a political and not a military endeavour. As mentioned above, India has refused to countenance secession from the Union sought by internal insurgency movements. India’s behaviour over decades demonstrates that it will bear the costs of defeating an insurgency that remains uncompromising in its demands for secession. This commitment is, of course, connected with India’s interest in not setting any precedent that would weaken its territorial integrity, power and influence, especially as a multi-ethnic, religiously pluralistic country located in the dangerous South Asian neighbourhood. The commitment also acts as a deterrent because any group seeking secession knows that it will have to overcome the full force of the Indian state – a daunting task that promises an unequal war of attrition the Indian state believes it will win over time, every time. The tendency of insurgent groups within India to fragment, become divided, and turn to crime and thuggery for survival, reveals the unlikelihood of an insurgent group prevailing through uncompromising zeal for its cause.

The second principle is civilian control of the military, a bedrock tenet of the Indian constitutional order that takes on additional significance in COIN operations within India. The criticism that the Indian Army has played too big a role in responding to insurgencies does not reflect a weakening of this principle but rather highlights inadequate capabilities of civilian authorities, such as state and local police, for security and governance in the face of insurgent violence. The emergence of insurgency in India has often occurred in conjunction with persistent, overlapping and cascading governmental failures at local, state and national levels – a problem exacerbated by India’s struggles as a large developing country with enormous governmental, economic and social challenges.

Third, India has emphasized the importance of fighting insurgencies in ways that uphold and respect the rule of law. Civilian control of the military serves this principle, but upholding and advancing the rule of law in the complex civil-military operations required in COIN are difficult challenges. Criticisms about violations of the rule of law, especially concerning the protection of individual rights, have dogged every COIN campaign within Indian territory, which calls into question the commitment and capabilities of Indian COIN operations to respect the
rule of law. Nevertheless, the rule of law remains a central strategic principle in Indian COIN because it undergirds the value of the Indian political system being defended against militant violence.

A fourth overarching principle enshrined by Nehru in the early years of India’s struggle with insurgencies is that COIN campaigns are about bringing disaffected citizens back into constitutionally ordained political processes. The measure of the success of a COIN effort is not the number of militants killed or captured or the amount of territory cleared of insurgent influence. The overriding objective is political reconciliation and reconstitution, which requires addressing political and economic grievances of disaffected populations and reintegrating insurgents and their supporters back into society and democratic processes. Thus, Indian COIN efforts have repeatedly involved the Indian government applying pressure through military, paramilitary and other security forces while simultaneously offering compromises and actions to produce political reconciliation with and reintegration of insurgents and their sympathizers.

**Doctrine and effective counterinsurgency practices**

Over time, the Indian government and military developed doctrine and effective practices to employ in COIN. Although many of these practices had to be re-learned in successive COIN operations, India accumulated field-tested ‘best practices’ for COIN campaigns. For a good deal of the time India has been fighting insurgencies, this body of knowledge was passed along rather informally as the cumulative wisdom of civilian and military practitioners. However, the process of communicating these practices through education and training was haphazard and ineffective. Commenting on the historical development of COIN doctrine in the Indian Army, Banerjee (2009: 191) has argued that ‘training and doctrinal literature in the Indian Army lacks quality and is not standardized. What is available does not fully reflect the wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that the Indian Army possesses’. The first military-generated formal doctrine for COIN operations only appeared in December 2006 (Indian Army 2006). An equivalent doctrinal document for civilian authorities has not, to date, been developed, even though ‘there is a pressing need to craft a comprehensive doctrine at the national level that involves all relevant actors, and not just the Indian Army’ (Banerjee 2009: 206).

As a general matter, Indian military doctrine contains many similarities with the US COIN doctrine which was also finalized in 2006 in response to the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan (Fidler 2009: 215–17). Interestingly, India and the United States developed their doctrines independently and without cross-fertilization of experiences. The commonalities shared by the two COIN doctrines point to a more universal set of COIN practices that address the challenges COIN operations face. These practices counsel, among other things, that counterinsurgents should:

- use all elements of national power in defeating insurgencies;
- focus on the population as the ‘centre of gravity’;
- understand the society, culture and languages of the populations affected by the insurgency;
- integrate and coordinate civilian and military efforts;
- accept that military forces have multiple roles in COIN, including provision of military assistance to civilian authorities;
- attempt to cut off external support for insurgencies;
- minimize the use of force and carefully craft and enforce rules of engagement to reduce loss of life in the civilian population;
Indian experiences with COIN reveal the Indian Army and government applying these best practices through various policies, techniques and mechanisms, many of which revealed adaptation and innovation in the face of insurgent challenges. For example, the Indian Army has developed new tactical approaches, capabilities and training for COIN operations. In terms of military tactics, the Indian Army adopted and refined the use of the ‘counterinsurgency grid’ to protect the population, put pressure on the insurgents, maximize the utility of small unit patrols, create space for political and economic development projects, and collect more effective intelligence. Apart from one early episode in the Nagaland insurgency and the selective use of helicopter gunships in Sri Lanka, India has not used air power against insurgents in order to minimize the use of force against militants and reduce civilian casualties from military operations.

In terms of capabilities, the Indian Army has tried many approaches to bolster its COIN capabilities. These approaches include creating special military units specifically trained in COIN (e.g. the Rashtriya Rifles) or drawn from the regions affected by insurgency violence (e.g. the Assam Rifles). The Indian military has experimented with strengthening its COIN performance by (1) using former militants in identifying and apprehending insurgents and collecting intelligence, and (2) forming village defence committees to improve security against insurgent violence and intimidation. India has developed different kinds of security forces with capabilities relevant to COIN operations, including the National Security Guards and Central Reserve Police Force. India’s COIN experiences have also taught it the importance of strong police forces at the state and local levels as critical capabilities for effective COIN campaigns. As Marwah (2009: 104) argued in reflecting on the COIN campaign in the Punjab, ‘[t]he police are the most appropriate security force in COIN operations, and COIN campaigns should make every effort to strengthen police capabilities’.

The Indian Army has also attempted to improve COIN training for its forces by establishing training centres in Vairangte, Mizoram and Khrew, Kashmir. These facilities are designed to heighten the awareness and skills of troops concerning the challenges of COIN operations, including identifying improvised explosive devices, conducting search operations, respecting human rights, coordinating with civilian authorities, supporting and participating in development projects, and developing an understanding of the cultures, mores, politics and languages of the region of deployment.

In terms of political practices, India has adopted many practices to resolve grievances of disaffected populations. In the northeast, it created new states within the Union (e.g. Nagaland, Mizoram) to provide the peoples of these areas with more of a direct stake in the Indian constitutional order. India has made extensive efforts to encourage insurgents to renounce violence and return to the established political processes, perhaps most famously exemplified by a former insurgent leader Laldenga becoming the chief minister of the newly created Indian state of Mizoram. The Indian central government has also made efforts to improve governance and security capabilities in state and local governments, especially with respect to building up governmental administrative capacities and strengthening police forces in insurgency-affected regions.
In addition, Indian political strategies during COIN have emphasized the importance of holding state and federal elections under the shadow of insurgent intimidation and violence. Elections have frequently played critical roles in efforts to defeat insurgencies within India, as happened with the 1992 restoration of an elected government in Punjab (Marwah 2009). These elections have not always gone well for various reasons, including fears of militant attacks and retaliation against people who vote. For example, elections in 1996 in Kashmir produced only 40 per cent voter turnout because of militant threats (Ganguly 2009). The Indian government has, however, usually sought to maintain democratic governance as part of the political strategy of defeating insurgencies.

India has also attempted to address problems of economic and social development in regions afflicted by insurgency violence. COIN campaigns have included various economic development projects (e.g. infrastructure building) and social programmes (e.g. education and health services) funded by central government revenues. For example, Ladwig (2009: 49) noted how, in northeastern areas affected by insurgencies, ‘roads and bridges were built in inaccessible areas, schools and hospitals were opened, and many villages received electricity and piped water for the first time’. Such efforts not only address immediate needs of the population but also demonstrate the benefits of the population remaining within the Indian political and economic system. Often, because of the security situation, the Indian Army has played an important role in such projects and programmes until civilian authorities could shoulder more of the stabilization and reconstruction burdens.

**Persistent problems in India’s counterinsurgency experience**

Just as India has developed strategic principles, doctrine and effective practices for engaging in COIN campaigns, it has suffered persistent problems that have undermined the effectiveness of its COIN efforts. One of the largest persistent problems has already been highlighted – the phenomenon of the Indian government and military having to re-learn the lessons of COIN in addressing each new insurgent threat. This tendency has produced a costly COIN dynamic observable in most Indian COIN operations that makes the tasks of the government and military unnecessarily harder.

Insurgencies have arisen through breakdowns of governance and security in various regions, producing the need for the induction of the Indian Army to provide security. Unprepared for COIN operations and hampered by the lack of adequate civilian capabilities (e.g. police forces), the military response starts too heavy-handed, which further alienates the disaffected population and fuels the narrative of the insurgent group. Foreign powers interested in harming India become involved in assisting the growing insurgency by providing arms, training and sanctuary. Civilian–military coordination proves poor in the early stages of a COIN operation, meaning that all elements of Indian national power are not being applied as effectively as possible. Through painful and time-consuming trial and error, the civilian authorities and military personnel re-calibrate and coordinate their offensive, defensive and stability operations to put the insurgency under increasing political and security pressure. Very often the insurgency fragments under such escalating pressure, increasing the prospects for the COIN campaign to bring insurgents back into the political process. Remaining elements of the insurgency become more extreme and turn to terrorism and organized crime to survive, which alienates the population from what’s left of the insurgency.

Within this common dynamic other persistent problems with India’s COIN campaigns appear. One such problem is structural. Under the Indian Constitution, law and order governance functions are responsibilities of state and local governments. The central government’s power to intervene arises only in emergency contexts, which usually has meant that an insurgency
has established a foothold because of state and local government incompetence, corruption and/or lack of adequate capabilities. The powers available to the central government, such as emergency rule and induction of the Army, have consistently proved blunt instruments that take time to be refined for effective COIN operations to unfold. The ‘reinventing the wheel’ problem illustrates that India has not yet found a more efficient way to bring central government resources and capabilities to bear more swiftly and effectively when insurgency threats overwhelm state and local authorities. This dynamic and this structural problem are again apparent with the difficulties India is having with the resurgence of Naxalite violence.

India has struggled with cutting off external support to insurgencies it is battling within its territory. In the COIN campaigns in the northeast, the rugged terrain in border areas (such as those with Burma) have contributed to the difficulty of working with foreign governments in stopping militants from using geography as an ally in hiding, training and launching operations. In other cases, foreign countries, namely China and Pakistan, have supported insurgents in India as part of their geostrategic competition for power and influence with India. Pakistan has been the biggest thorn in India’s side in this respect, especially in the northeast (until the independence of Bangladesh eliminated East Pakistan as a source of insurgency succour) and Kashmir. More transnationally, India’s early blunders in handling the Sikh insurgency produced Sikh diaspora support for the insurgency that complicated India’s efforts to bring this threat under control.

Another persistent problem seen across India’s COIN campaigns are concerns over the excessive application of force by military and other security forces. Despite the long-acknowledged importance of minimizing the use of force in COIN, the Indian state’s responses to insurgencies have repeatedly involved large-scale, intensive uses of military force, which have backfired each time. Prominent examples include the disastrous Operation Blue Star in 1984 to flush Sikh militants from the Golden Temple in Amritsar (Marwah 2009), the resort to conventional warfare tactics against the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (Banerjee 2009) and the initial ‘mailed fist’ approach used against the insurgency in Kashmir in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ganguly 2009). Much of this problem connects to the Indian Army’s continued ambivalence about preparing for and participating in COIN operations as opposed to focusing on training for conventional warfare. The Indian Army is, for example, reluctant to address the worsening Naxalite insurgency (Gokhale 2010a).

India’s COIN experience is also marred by rule of law problems. As noted above, India strives to conduct COIN operations within the rule of law, but critics have, in every COIN campaign, accused the Indian government and military of engaging in widespread violations of human rights. These accusations include allegations of excessive and indiscriminate use of force, abusive behaviour towards civilian populations, extrajudicial killings of suspected militants and torture of detained persons by security forces. In the eyes of critics, India compounds these human rights problems by providing military forces with effective immunity from acts committed in ‘disturbed areas’ under the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). According to Human Rights Watch (2008: 5):

The AFSPA gives the armed forces wide powers to shoot to kill, arrest on flimsy pretext, conduct warrantless searches, and demolish structures in the name of ‘aiding civil power.’ Equipped with these special powers, soldiers have raped, tortured, ‘disappeared,’ and killed Indian citizens for five decades without fear of being held accountable.

Despite these criticisms, the Indian Army remains committed to defending the protections the AFSPA provides its troops. In June 2010, an Indian Army general in Kashmir stated that the AFSPA is critical to the military’s COIN operations (NDTV.com 2010). In July 2010, the
Indian Army Chief of Staff argued that 98 per cent of investigated accusations of Indian Army abuse under the AFPSA have been found to be false (1,473 of 1,511 cases (NDTV.com 2010)) and that the AFPSA remains important to Indian Army operations within India (Gokhale 2010b).

Another persistent problem seen in India’s COIN campaigns has been an inability to finish off threats from recalcitrant militants and address grievances of disaffected populations. As Shekatkar (2009: 25) observes in connection with the Nagaland saga, after the 1997 ceasefire agreement, negotiations between the Indian government and the remaining insurgent factions have failed to achieve a breakthrough, while allowing the factions to continue to remain armed and to participate in criminal activities that erode the potential for good governance and economic development in Nagaland and the Northeast.

The failure of local, state, and central governments on governance, economic and social development in many Indian states helps fuel the violent return of the Naxalites. Serious disturbances in 2010 in Kashmir reveal that India has still not adequately addressed what ails this restive province, and, although these disturbances have not sparked a new insurgency, such a development might happen if India’s responses to the crisis do not significantly improve its authority in Kashmir.

Conclusion

Looking into the future, India faces immediate challenges and longer-term tasks in terms of insurgency threats and its COIN acumen and capabilities. In terms of immediate challenges, India confronts the growing Naxalite threat, the discontent boiling over again in Kashmir, the mounting drag on governance and development caused by ‘rump insurgencies’ in the northeast, and the increasing vulnerability of its nation-building support to COIN efforts in Afghanistan. In each case, India has hard COIN-related choices that it needs to make. In the longer term, India has to grapple with how it better prepares civilian and military policies and capabilities to address more effectively insurgency threats within its borders. These tasks include improved planning between central and state government authorities to prevent population grievances from morphing into insurgency violence, preparations by civilian authorities and agencies for insurgency contingencies, and less ambivalent attitudes in the Indian military about its role in battling insurgency threats.

India’s history with COIN has not garnered the attention one might expect from a country with such extensive experience in this difficult political-military task. With India emerging as a new great power, it will come under more scrutiny across all policy areas, including how it tries to prevent discontent from becoming militant (e.g. Kashmir), responds to internal insurgency threats (e.g. Naxalites) and participates in COIN campaigns outside its borders (e.g. Afghanistan). The next phase of India’s relationship with COIN theory, doctrine and practice will not unfold in the obscurity that has characterized this relationship in the past.

Recommended readings

References


