

Treading on Hallowed  
Ground

*Counterinsurgency Operations in  
Sacred Spaces*

Edited by  
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26. Alan Cowell and Joel Greenberg, "In Church of Nativity, the Refuse of a Siege," *New York Times*, May 11, 2002, p. A1; Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem*, pp. 209 and 212.
27. Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem*, p. 195.
28. Joel Greenberg, "Palestinians Prepare Exit from Church," *New York Times*, May 9, 2002, p. A22; Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem*, pp. 251-60.
29. Hammer, *A Season in Bethlehem*, pp. 249-50.

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## 2

# *The Golden Temple*

## A Tale of Two Sieges

C. Christine Fair

This chapter examines two important operations waged by Indian security forces to counter Sikh insurgents operating in India's northern state of Punjab, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. In the early years of the movement, various Sikh militant groups waged an ethno-religious campaign to establish an independent Sikh state (Khalistan). By 1988 the ideological commitment of the various militant groups dissolved and their ranks became increasingly swollen with criminal elements and militants seeking to establish their own spheres of influence. Equally problematic for the Khalistan movement was the pervasive internecine fighting that developed in the same period as militant groups splintered, formed alliances, and developed deeply hostile rivalries. Consequently, while the various militant groups claimed to be fighting the Indian state on behalf of Indian Sikhs, Sikh villagers overwhelmingly comprised the victims of these proliferating and murderous groups.

In the course of India's sustained counterinsurgency campaign in the Punjab, Indian security forces conducted two important operations on the most significant temple in Sikh sacred cartography, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The first, Operation Blue Star, was led by the Indian Army in June 1984 and was an unequivocal disaster that inflamed Sikh sentiment throughout India and the world

a police operation with support from the antiterrorist National Security Guards. Operation Black Thunder was a tactical success in that it was concluded within a week and resulted in the arrest of 12 hardcore militants and 160 other supporters. While the operation was in many ways minor, its impacts were critical and in some important measure contributed to the eventual defeat of the insurgency by 1992.

This chapter exposts the main factors that accounted for the dramatically different outcomes of these two operations. It poses several clusters of empirical questions, including the following: What were the circumstances by which security forces were drawn into operations on such sacred space? What security forces were used and with what motivations and with what outcomes? How did the forces' rules of engagement account for the sacredness of the battle space? How did the security forces manage public opinion about their operations through use of the media, community leaders, and religious authorities to mitigate the negative consequences of the operations or to generate support for their actions?

Before approaching the two case studies, the first two sections of the chapter provide a basic history of the insurgency. This is not meant to be exhaustive; rather it will provide only a cursory narrative of the conflict and its key protagonists. Because of the focus here upon counterinsurgency operations on sacred space, the third section of the chapter details the ways in which the Sikh insurgents manipulated Sikh religious symbols, institutions, history, and shrines to endow their movement with religious authority and legitimacy. The next two sections detail the two cases of Operations Blue Star and Black Thunder, addressing each of the above empirical questions. The final section presents a discussion of the factors that likely account for the very different outcomes of these two operations. As that discussion will illuminate, the outcomes are in good measure related to the operations' planning and execution, but their longer-range impacts are equally linked to larger issues such as state policies toward counterterrorism, police resources and training, interagency coordination, the changing nature of the militant groups themselves, and the evolution of public support away from the militants.

### *The Khalistan Movement*

The Punjab insurgency was exceptionally brutal and claimed the

sively defeated by 1992. The insurgency claimed more lives than the combined wars with Pakistan, in which 2,700 army personnel perished, yet this conflict has not drawn the attention of scholars and analysts.<sup>1</sup> It merits further study not only because of the scope and lethality of the movement, but because it was one of the few insurgencies that has been systematically defeated. Indian counterinsurgency efforts routinely struggled with the challenge of engaging militants in Sikh religious space, because the insurgents were very adept at appropriating these spaces as well as intimidating and co-opting major Sikh religio-political institutions and personages, as will be discussed below.

Although the concept of a separate Sikh state emerged in the early twentieth century, it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that proponents of an independent Sikh state took up arms for the cause.<sup>2</sup> The timing was due in part to the Indian government's systematic mismanagement of Sikh political and ethnic concerns over successive decades.<sup>3</sup> Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, as his followers refer to him, was the charismatic leader who initially led the call for Khalistan. He began his career as the head of the Dandami Takal, a teaching and exegetical institution that claims direct connection to the tenth and last living Sikh guru, Gobind Singh. This purported—but perhaps not entirely legitimate—connection to Gobind Singh is important, because this guru is strongly associated with Sikh martial history and consolidation of Sikh political power.<sup>4</sup> Bhindranwale's affiliation with this respected institution gave him a substantial degree of credibility as a pious Sikh religious and political authority.

Bhindranwale emerged as a high-profile leader of the Sikh militancy in the early 1980s and cultivated many allies in the quest for Khalistan, including the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), important Sikh religious and political leaders, and also personalities within the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which is the management body that oversees the vast majority Sikh gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship) throughout India.<sup>5</sup> However, Bhindranwale did not rise to prominence solely by his own efforts. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi chose to buttress his political following in an effort to split the Akali Dal (the most prominent Sikh political party in the Punjab), which was the most viable opposition to her Congress Party. In hindsight, this support was a tremendous miscalculation, as Bhindranwale, with his developing separatist political objectives, gained popularity within segments of the Sikh community.

and militant position illuminated the comparatively moderate position (at least initially) taken by the Akali Dal.<sup>6</sup>

On December 15, 1983, Bhindranwale and several like-minded militants (e.g., members of the Babbar Khalsa) entered the Akal Takht, one of the most significant structures in Amritsar's Golden Temple complex, in order to avoid being arrested. Bhindranwale believed that the sacredness of the shrine would afford him some immunity and anticipated that the state would be hesitant to extract him forcefully from the complex. With the military assistance of a battle-hardened former major general of the Indian Army, Shahbeg Singh, he prepared an elaborate network of fortifications inside the complex, including stockpiles of arms, ammunition, and rations. Bhindranwale took over and subsequently occupied the Akal Takht, the apex structure that signified Sikh spiritual and political authority. In June 1984 Prime Minister Gandhi ordered the army into the temple complex to wrest it from the militants in an operation that was named "Operation Blue Star."<sup>7</sup> This action was followed by Operation Woodrose, the army's "mopping up" exercise that took place throughout the Punjab in effort to capture Bhindranwale's activists and to clear all gurdwaras in the state of militants.

Bhindranwale perished in this operation, but the militancy was not crushed. Mrs. Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards assassinated her in revenge, after which thousands of Sikhs perished in Hindu-led attacks upon them and their communities throughout India. Operation Blue Star and the ensuing massacres of Sikhs fostered a wider-spread militancy among the Sikhs in the Punjab by legitimizing the separatists' claims that India could not and would not protect Sikh interests. Operation Blue Star and its sanguinary sequelae also moved sections of the Sikh diaspora to espouse this cause.<sup>8</sup> Underscoring how divisive the operation was, numerous Sikh officers deserted the Indian Army in the wake of Operation Blue Star.<sup>9</sup> Doyen of Indian counterinsurgencies, K. P. S. Gill, declared this constellation of events to be the most "significant victories for the cause of 'Khalistan'... not won by the militants, but inflicted by its own Government."<sup>10</sup> In the absence of the operation and the ensuing massacres, Gill believed the movement could have easily been contained in 1984.<sup>11</sup>

### *Khalistani Groups: An Overview*

While one may frequently hear the term "a Punjab insurgency," by 1988 there were actually several movements in Punjab:

Khalistan. Few of these groups maintained their ideological coherence, and most began to criminalize as early as 1988, if not earlier. Furthermore, many of these groups were not actually working for a Khalistani state per se. For example, the Akhand Kirrani Jatha came into being in the late nineteenth century as an anticolonial revivalist movement. The organization came under the leadership of Bibi Amajrit Kaur when her husband was killed in 1978 in clashes between the Nirankaris, a Sikh sect considered by some Sikhs to be heretical, and Akalis. After his death, she directed the organization to focus upon isolating and even killing the Nirankaris. Other groups, such as the Babbar Khalsa, were less motivated by notions of Khalistan but rather sought to enforce a rigid code of behavior similar to Shari'a and used excessive violence (including murder) to achieve compliance.

All the major groups quickly factionalized and indulged in a wide array of criminal activities and internecine conflict, and many individual militants left their parent groups to work as mercenaries who moved between groups. This entrepreneurial status left these mercenaries without protection either from predation of other militants or from the state and therefore vulnerable to co-optation by the authorities. The tendency toward intergroup conflict also permitted the state to infiltrate groups more easily, thereby obtaining better actionable intelligence. As a consequence of these various factors, the Sikh population increasingly bore the brunt of the violence. By the early 1990s militants enjoyed little support in the Punjab, at least in part because they lost their patina of being ethno-religious warriors and increasingly were regarded as criminal outfits.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the key insurgent cum criminal groups included the following:

- **Babbar Khalsa.** This organization came into prominence in 1981 and emerged as an offshoot of the Akhand Kirrani Jatha with the support of Bibi Amajrit Kaur. Its members maintained a low level of activity until 1983. It drew its membership from ex-servicemen, policemen, and particular Sikh religious organizations. While the organization fell into disarray after Operation Blue Star, it remained active.<sup>13</sup> Curiously, this group was opposed to Bhindranwale and was less committed to Khalistan than they were sectarian violence and enforcing Sikh personal law.<sup>14</sup>
- **Khalistan Commando Force (KCF).** The KCF was founded in

of the organization, while smaller splinters joined other militant alliances. The KCF targeted principally the Indian security forces such as the Border Security Force (BSF), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and other police forces. It targeted Hindus as well as Sikhs who opposed the Khalistan movement. The KCF funded itself through looting, bank robberies, and extortion.<sup>15</sup> It also engaged in large-scale smuggling of weaponry from Pakistan. It was well organized, equipped, and trained and operated in coordination with other Sikh militant groups to enlarge the scope of its operations. The organization's ability to conduct operations was seriously degraded during Operation Black Thunder (to be described below).<sup>16</sup>

- **Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF):** Aror Singh formed the KLF in 1986. It used small arms in its operations, which it obtained principally through theft. It operated in the Punjab city of Amritsar as well as other localities. The KLF, like the other Khalistani militant organizations, financed itself through criminal activities. By 1990 its stature was significantly degraded because of loss of important leadership.<sup>17</sup>

### *Insurgents' Appropriation of Sikh Religions and Political Authority*

The sacredness of the Golden Temple is universally acknowledged. It is located in the city of Amritsar in the northern Indian state of Punjab. Amritsar was the site of important events throughout the history of the Indian independence movement (e.g., the Jallianwala Bagh massacre) and was, along with Lahore (now in Pakistan), considered to be an important center for Sikh political activity long before independence. Amritsar persists as the focal point for Sikh politics in India. For these and other reasons, Amritsar was a prized theater to dominate for insurgents and counterinsurgency forces alike.

The Golden Temple is a rectangular complex organized around a sacred reservoir and surrounded by a fortified wall with eighteen gates, the main entrance being on its north side. The temple's inner sanctum is the Harimandir Sahib, located in the middle of the reservoir and accessed by a bridge that links the Harimandir with the rest of the temple. This three-story structure houses the Sikh sacred text, the Guru Granth Sahab, during the day when it is venerated by worshippers. [This text is considered to be the "eleventh and ultimate Guru," since Guru Gobind Singh declared that after him

that maps out a rectangular path around the reservoir. The Akal Takht (timeless throne), located across from the Harimandir Sahib on the Parikrama, is the second most important structure in the complex and represents Sikh political and religious authority. At night the Granth Sahab "rests" within this structure. The sixth guru, Hargobind, built the Akal Takht to symbolize Sikh political and military resistance to the Mughal Empire. Hargobind is important to those who value Sikhism's martial aspect, because he is responsible for initiating it. In response to the capital punishment of his predecessor Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind donned two swords (*miri* and *piri*), representing temporal and spiritual authority respectively.<sup>18</sup> These two swords are important symbols within Sikhism and emblaze the saffron Sikh flag (Nishan Sahab), which marks all gurdwaras.

Several other multistory buildings and passageways are located off of the Parikrama, including numerous rooms and offices which were taken over by the militants. Outside of the main temple area but well within the temple complex houses, there are several serai (residential buildings for pilgrims and temple staff, a kind of rest house) and a communal kitchen (*langar*). The *langar* is important in Sikh religious practice because Sikhism eschews communalism (rules that govern who can eat with whom) and caste. The *langar* requires all persons, regardless of caste, to eat together and is a reminder that all are equal before God. Before or after revering the Guru Granth Sahab and venerating the various shrines in the temple complex, many Sikhs go to the *langar* to partake of a communal meal, which is considered to be an important element of their religious observance. Service (*seva*) in the *langar* is considered to be of utmost importance, and this *seva* includes purchasing foodstuffs for the *langar*, preparing and distributing the food, and cleaning the *langar* dishes and facilities.

The massive Golden Temple complex houses several important Sikh political and religious organizations, including: the headquarters of the Shiromani Akali Dal (a.k.a. the "Akali Dal," which is the most prominent and organized political party representing Sikh corporate interests), the afore-noted SGPC, which oversees the vast majority of the thousands of Sikh gurdwaras and shrines throughout India and the lucrative donations that they receive from worshippers, and the All India Sikh Students Federation, among other groups.<sup>19</sup>

Outside of the temple complex are several other important Sikh sites.

with the temple. Throughout the surrounding countryside and urban environs there are numerous other important Sikh historical gurdwaras, many of which were used by the militants. Finally, Amritsar is located very near the Pakistan border, which allowed Pakistan to provide the militants with small arms and even training in Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

The ability of insurgents to base themselves within the precincts of the golden temple was facilitated by the fact that key Sikh religious institutions and leaders such as the SGPC, AISSF, and the Jathedar (leader) of the Akal Takht, in whole or in part, supported them. Sometimes this support was given voluntarily by key leaders, and in other cases it was coerced through the use of violence or threat of violence. The willingness to resort to violence became apparent after Operation Black Thunder, when security forces found the bodies of hundreds of slain and tortured opponents and competitors that were buried beneath the Akal Takht and other places.<sup>21</sup>

The ability of the militants to base themselves in the Golden Temple afforded them the façade of fighting a “holy war.” It provided them with easy access to potential recruits whom they could impress with their presence in the most sacred of Sikh spaces. Operating in the Golden Temple also offered logistical advantages in that it consolidated their cadres and provided easy access to food, water, and communication lines. From within the Golden Temple complex, militants were able to control their operations from a central location.<sup>22</sup> While their ability to reside in the temple lent them religious sanction, it also conferred some protection from the security forces. Indian security forces were and indeed are loath to operate on sacred space, and militants exploited this fact. Ironically, as will be discussed, even though the Golden Temple was open and frequented by hundreds or even thousands of visitors each day, security forces chose not to send operatives into the complex to collect information for fear that they would be tortured and killed.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to appropriating Sikh institutions and religious structures, the militants also manipulated the corpus of Sikh hagiography and the Sikh martyr tradition. The latter Sikh gurus and their followers were hunted down and subjected to various forms of torture under various Mughal rulers, and tales of these form the basis of the Sikh martyr tradition and hagiography of Sikh heroic fighters known as “Singhs.” The torments inflicted upon the gurus and their followers are graphically depicted in mass-produced paintings that figure in most gurdwaras, are enshrined in stories that are recounted to children, and are retold in countless Sikh songs and

causes and their dead into this rich martyr tradition and augmented the hagiographic traditions with their own “heroes.” Notably, Sikh militants called themselves “mujahadeen” and their slain martyrs “shaheds.”<sup>24</sup> These efforts to appropriate Sikh history were very successful: pro-Khalistan gurdwaras featured photos of slain and often disfigured militants alongside the portraits of slain Sikh leaders from the past. Khalistani songs and folk dances performed to Khalistani lyrics became popular in this period.<sup>25</sup>

There is equally little doubt that the behavior of the militants who episodically seized the temple defiled it. They committed brutal acts of murder in the temple, disposed of the dead in and around the complex (e.g., in the gutters outside of the complex, underground in the temple, etc.), and destroyed parts of the temple to build fortifications. Amassing arms and using the temple as a center for waging war can be justified in some sense through the fact that most historical gurdwaras display massive weapons caches used by the gurus, depicting the centrality of Sikh sites to their struggles. Interestingly, while such historical arguments could be made for the temple’s being used as a garrison, this author has found no evidence that such arguments were marshaled. Indeed, the prevailing opinion seems to be that Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike considered these actions to be defiling the temple, which is held in esteem by Hindus as well as Sikhs. Bhindranwale himself violated a number of important Sikh tenets, acts that came to represent his own spiritual and temporal hubris. Within the precincts of the temple, no one is to be higher than the Guru Granth Sahab, but during Bhindranwale’s occupation of the Akal Takht, he slept in the upper floors of the structure above the floor where the holy book was kept. Needless to say, his very occupation of the Akal Takht—the site of Sikh political and spiritual authority—for these purposes underscores his temerity.

Despite actions that clearly would undermine support from pious elements of the Sikh community, in the early years of the violence the Indian counterinsurgency forces (police, army, paramilitary) failed to develop a systematic information offensive to publicize these misdeeds and to counter the militants’ claims to religious sanction. Worse yet, the images of the destruction they wrought upon the temple during Operation Bluestar outraged Sikhs within India and beyond and did much to foster support for the militants in the aftermath of the operation. In the end, it was the militants’ own behavior that persuaded Sikhs that these militants were not the “Singhs” of Guru Gobind Singh.

In contrast to the disastrous Operation Blue Star, the media management strategy of Operation Black Thunder facilitated the development of this perception by televising in real time the operation and the various offensive actions taken by the militants.

### *Operation Blue Star*

Bhindranwale did not believe that Prime Minister Gandhi would employ the army to dislodge him. He did anticipate that she would employ the police or, at worst, the paramilitary forces (e.g., BSF and Central Reserve Police Force) into the temple and expected that the central government would mobilize the police to lay siege to the temple complex. In anticipation of this event, Bindhranwale tried to marshal support from Sikhs in and around Amritsar by distributing throughout the Punjab cassettes that had a threefold message. First, they explained that an operation against him and the temple was imminent. Second, they pointed out that such an operation constitutes a direct assault on the Sikh community. Third, they directed those committed to his cause to remain alert and prepared to act in the event of action against him in the temple. Bindhranwale believed that thousands of supporters would flood into Amritsar to swarm the police in the event of such an attack.<sup>26</sup>

Blue Star's primary objective was to wrest the temple complex from the various militants ensconced there with Bindhranwale.<sup>27</sup> In Lieutenant General K. S. Brar's authoritative account of the operation, there is no evidence that the operation took any particular account of the sacredness of the shrine, with the one notable exception that they wanted to avoid damage to the inner sanctum (Harminder Sahab) if at all possible. There were numerous problems that both necessitated Operation Blue Star and compromised its execution. First, the police forces (e.g., Central Reserve Police Force, the Punjab police) and paramilitary organizations (e.g., the BSF) had been unable—or unwilling—to control the growing militarization at the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar.

The reasons for this failure are numerous and include the insurgents' successful infiltration of these institutions (especially the police) and effective use of threats to dissuade the local security forces from acting against them. In hindsight it is clear that few within the security establishment and even fewer within the Punjab police understood the nature of the threat. Prior to 1984 the Punjab police kept no records on militant activities, did not carry out inves-

they took. K. P. S. Gill opined that while the Punjab police force was "no doubt stupefied by the sheer unfamiliarity of the challenge, it not permitted to act, nor did it dare to act on its own against the manifest intent and stratagems of the political powers."<sup>28</sup> While the police were woefully ill prepared, they also were underresourced and lacked training for counterterrorism operations. In 1980 there were 28,853 sanctioned billets for the civil police in the state. (By 1990 billets had increased to 53,325.)<sup>29</sup>

While having few human resources, they also lacked modern munitions, communications equipment, and even vehicles in adequate quantity and quality. The police were badly organized, with no clear chain of command, and they interacted ineffectively with other security agencies. In addition to these pervasive and debilitating problems, the police were poorly utilized: at any given time between 40 and 50 percent of the force were involved in static and unproductive duties (e.g., manning barricades that had little counterterrorism value). The police were also infiltrated by militant sympathizers, and there were communal rifts both within and between the police and paramilitary organizations. The police—given their various problems—were hesitant to act against militants because of the swift and often lethal punishment that the militants delivered to them and their families.<sup>30</sup> All of these problems were compounded by the policies of the central government, which patronized and protected Bindhranwale and his militants in order to erode the Congress Party competitor Akali Dal. By the time Bindhranwale turned on the state, it was too late for containment efforts. Moreover, the center's policy had alienated and even radicalized the mainstream Sikh political party.<sup>31</sup>

As a consequence of the systematic failure of several civil and military institutions to deal with the emergent situation, militants had forcibly occupied up to 17 three- and four-story buildings within the built-up area around the temple (within a 500- to 800-yard radius of the temple complex). These buildings were generally well fortified, had good fields of observation and fire, incorporated early warning posts, and were manned by militants equipped with light machine guns and other automatic weapons. Militants were able to monitor activities in and around the temple from these locations. Astonishingly, the police had not ordered the destruction of these posts and the army subsequently paid heavily for this lack of action. The failures of this operation underscored the necessity for effective coordination of civil and military institutions in counterinsurgency

Despite the fact that the temple complex was completely open to visitors and could be observed from buildings on the perimeter, security forces and intelligence organizations failed to determine how many militants were in the complex, the extent of their fortifications, the number of worshippers in the temple, the number and types of weapons in the complex, or the pattern of defenses established by those in the compound.<sup>33</sup>

In these unfavorable circumstances, Brar launched Operation Blue Star, employing the Indian Army augmented by key police and paramilitary organizations such as the Central Reserve Police Force. All police and paramilitary forces were placed under the army's command. Additionally, a curfew was imposed throughout the state from the night of June 3, 1984, onward, and the army sought to ensure that the Punjab was effectively cut off from the rest of the nation by stopping all transportation into or out of the state, expelling all journalists, and denying all phone communications.<sup>34</sup>

Brar planned the operation on the (erroneous) assumption that there were 1,500 militants in the complex, of which 500 were assumed to be highly trained and motivated. Upon considering the strength, dispositions, fortifications, and fire power of the militants, it was assessed that that the mission would require four infantry battalions and specialist commandos of an equivalent strength of two companies. In addition, one squadron of Vijayanta tanks were allotted in order to minimize Indian Army casualties at the commencement of operations. Brar avers that these tanks initially were to be used only to serve as a protective shield for the leading infantry elements and to neutralize rooftop defenses in order to provide further immunity for the advancing troops. It was also hoped that the tanks would exert psychological influence on the militants in order to precipitate a hastened surrender.<sup>35</sup>

The operation was to be launched in three aggressive phases preceded by a preliminary operation that was to be launched late in the evening of June 5, 1984, in order to eliminate observation posts held by militants. These preliminary efforts were to employ the BSF and Central Reserve Police Force. It was anticipated that Phase 1 would be completed by 1:00 A.M. on June 6. The objectives of this first phase included, among other goals, securing the northern wing of the temple complex and lodgments within the Akal Takht and the Harimandir Sahib. Phase 2 was planned to conclude by 4 A.M. on June 6 and primarily aimed to complete "mop up" operations. Phase 3, which would extend operations to the remaining hostel

The operation called for the use of mechanized elements. Three tanks were grouped with the ten Guards in support of the approach to the main entrance. Upon reaching the entrance, they were to provide protection and support by eliminating militant fortifications with machine gun fire. Three tanks were also grouped with the 26 Madras, which entered the complex from the east, to neutralize militant fortifications and to provide close fire support to the assaulting infantry with machine gun fire. In addition, four BMPs (a Russian-produced infantry fighting vehicle capable of carrying a squad of soldiers) were assigned to the ten Guards to transport Para Commandos and divers. Four additional BMPs and three armored personnel carriers (APCs) were initially grouped with 26 Madras and would subsequently serve as a reserve.<sup>37</sup>

Only the preliminary operations were executed on schedule.<sup>38</sup> Phase 1 was launched at 10:30 P.M. However, by early morning of June 6 the Akal Takht had still not been taken. The eastern assault by the 26 Madras was seriously retarded by militant fire; the SFF and commandos were consistently beaten back by the militants. In light of the prevailing conditions, the decision was made to bring three tanks into the complex as well as an APC. A rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) immobilized the latter. (Indeed, the Indian Army did not know that the militants had antitank weapons, later discovering that they had two Chinese-made RPG-7s.) By 5:10 A.M. clearance was given to use the machine gun fire of three tanks to bring down Akal Takht defenses. Nevertheless, the fortifications and positions of the militants' automatic weapons enabled them to withstand the firepower of the tanks. The Indians launched a commando operation to take out the machine guns that were exacting a heavy price on their force. The operation failed and cost the security forces many additional casualties. At 7:30 A.M. the Akal Takht remained in the militants' control and the decision was undertaken to use the 105-mm squash head shells to neutralize the Akal Takht.<sup>39</sup> In total, it took some 12 hours to clear the Akal Takht of the militants and three more days to clear the remaining part of the complex of suicide squads and hidden militants.<sup>40</sup>

Both Brar and Dar suggest that there were some shortcomings of the night attack. Dar suggests that despite the Indians' overwhelming firepower and end strength, the night attack was unlikely to succeed in this heavily built-up area. First, the Indian forces were unable to assess the extent of fortifications of the Akal Takht. The peculiar nature of combat in built-up areas is a major factor



can be employed, domination of upper floors by the enemy) hindered the ability of Indian forces to make headway. Fighting in the rest of the complex took place under very stressful conditions, exacerbated by the cover of darkness as terrorist squads occupied rooms, halls, and balconies of the large multistoried buildings about the complex. Troops tasked with clearing these rooms often entered hand-to-hand combat in the darkness. Yet another problem that confronted those trying to clear the temple of militants was the difficulty of distinguishing the worshippers trapped in the temple complex from the militants, a task rendered even more difficult by the absence of light. One of the lessons that Dar extracts from this operation is that night attacks in built-up operations simply may not be effective.<sup>41</sup>

Brar and Dar are also critical of deficiencies in the Indian preparations for the operation, in particular the lack of intelligence about the militant's fortification. One of the numerous problems encountered by the Indian Army was the effective use of underground positions by the militants. Troops were trying to clear the rooms along the Parikrama while under heavy fire. Occasionally, militants would retake an area by exploiting concealed underground passageways that connected various rooms and even outside verandas. The Indian Army was not aware of this infrastructure.<sup>42</sup>

When the operation was complete, damage to the temple complex was extensive. The library, housing priceless and unique manuscripts, was burned. The Akal Takht was destroyed, and the Harmandir Sahab was detached with bullet holes. Dead bodies littered the sacred tank, and the structures along the Parikrama were destroyed during the course of hand-to-hand combat and the use of heavy vehicles.

In hindsight another deficiency of the operation was the media blackout—exacerbated by the fact that the operation was launched at night. Despite the state's efforts, media coverage continued to the extent possible, but the insurgents' supporters outside of the temple were in a better position to shape the media message. Because the army had no proactive media management campaign to shape the information offensive, the army had no capabilities to regain media dominance and thus ceded the information ground to Bhindranwale's supporters. When the international and domestic media finally entered the temple precincts, the massive damage to the temple was nearly universally depicted as the army's doing. By the time the army tried to describe the depravity of the militants who turned the temple into a fortress, it was too late. Despite the numerous photos of the recov-

and sacrilegious conduct of Bhindranwale and his supporters, it was the image of the army's excess that spread throughout India and the world and inflamed Sikh sentiments everywhere.

### *Operation Black Thunder*

In 1986 and 1987 the government was very keen to find a political solution to the crisis and began a process of engaging the militants. In 1986 law and order in Punjab was the direct responsibility of the government in New Delhi. The central government pursued what Gill called "two-faced tactics," whereby it would attempt to strike deals with some militant factions while simultaneously putting pressure on them with enhanced police action. The government granted "selective immunity" to some militants, including associates of Bhindranwale who were taken into custody during Operation Blue Star. These varied tracks of dealing with militants created confusion for the police regarding the type of action that they should pursue.<sup>43</sup>

Gill writes that the Punjab police, despite this political disarray, committed itself to what had become a drawn-out war with the militants. Between May 1987 and April 1988 the militants were killing on average 127 persons per month. The central government continued to search for political solutions despite the intensity of the violence and the extent of the lawlessness. As a part of this strategy they released 40 high-profile prisoners in March 1988. These prisoners walked into the Golden Temple without hindrance, and one of them even became the head priest of the temple. The militants once again began fortifying the temple with internal defensive structures. The Golden Temple's management committee (the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, or SGPC) was both passive and active in its support: some members were afraid of the terrorists and therefore did little to prevent their actions while others directly assisted them.<sup>44</sup>

The government's strategy of negotiation with the militants did not mitigate the bloodshed. In March 1988 an unprecedented 288 people were slain, including 25 police personnel. In April 259 persons were killed, 25 of them policemen. The central government finally reversed its policy of political accommodation and again returned to a law enforcement approach.<sup>45</sup> The authorities once more concluded that some sort of action had to be taken to oust the militants from the temple. The government did not employ the

from the National Security Guards (an antiterrorist force) and other paramilitary forces.<sup>46</sup> It was hoped that this police action could be accomplished without the inflammatory consequences of the army-led debacle Operation Blue Star. The optimism regarding the use of police derived in part from the fact that Punjab police personnel tend to be local and connected to the community. The Punjab police are overwhelmingly Punjabi and the majority are themselves Sikh. (Senior police leadership may not be from the area, however.) In contrast, army and paramilitary forces come from all over India. While the army and paramilitary personnel all speak Hindi, their mother tongues vary and their confessional identities are diverse. It was hoped that the Punjab police, with their local ethnic and religious ties, could be an effective counterinsurgency force without rekindling the belief that the central government was using non-Sikh forces to occupy an important Sikh shrine. This was an important lesson learned from Operation Blue Star.

There were other reasons for optimism as well. Since the debacle of Blue Star, a number of changes had been initiated within the police. While the police arguably lacked an ideological commitment to fighting the insurgency, this attitude began to change in 1986 with the appointment of police chief Julio Ribeiro, who served in that capacity until 1988. He implemented a "bullet for bullet" policy to counter militant violence with full force. K. P. S. Gill replaced him in 1988 and continued and indeed strengthened this policy until the central government became uncomfortable with this approach and again sought a political solution. However, by 1988 a political solution was no longer feasible, because the militant groups had become factionalized, criminalized, ensnared in internecine conflict, and unable to engage in any sort of dialogue, and the primary political party, the Akali Dal, had long become ineffective.<sup>47</sup>

Operation Black Thunder's objective was simple: to clear the temple of militant forces. The operation succeeded on many fronts: It was economical, nearly bloodless in execution, and conducted with full media attention. Unlike Operation Blue Star, Black Thunder focused upon controlling peripheral sections of the temple for reasons outlined below. It also sought to prevent food and water from reaching the militants and to deny them essential services such as electricity. The entire operation was completed within a week.<sup>48</sup>

K. P. S. Gill explained to this author some of the features of this successful operation. Unlike in Operation Blue Star, which made little effort to contend with the sacredness of the shrine once the

environs and considered how operating in particular parts of the complex would resonate among the Sikh community. The Golden Temple compound could be divided into three rectangular areas: the serai (residential buildings for pilgrims and temple staff, a kind of rest house), the langar (a communal kitchen), and the temple (which included the inner sanctum, the Harmandir Sahab). The police judged that they could enter the serai with very little protest. The langar is considered to be a very important institution in the Sikh religion, and action there was assessed to be more inflammatory than action within the rest house. Entering the temple, particularly the Harmandir Sahab, would be the most provocative act. It is important to note that both the serai and the langar are outside the main temple structure. Taking into consideration these sensitivities, Gill proposed to take over the serai and the langar. The police would then conduct short and very limited attacks within the temple if needed. In the end, this contingency was not executed for reasons described below.<sup>49</sup> Gill also ensured that the entire operation would take place with full media coverage, in contrast to Operation Blue Star, which was conducted in a media blackout.

The police offered periodic cease-fires during which militants could give themselves up without fear of being fired upon. This technique was generally successful and several militants took advantage of these offers. However during one such cease-fire a small number of militants escaped and took refuge in the temple's inner sanctum, the Harmandir Sahab. Because this pathway can be easily defended, the militants in the inner sanctum had an advantageous position. Reportedly, no one shot at them as they made their way into the Harmandir Sahab, perhaps in hopes of avoiding damage to the temple as had occurred during the 1984 Operation Blue Star and to honor the cease-fire that was offered. In Sarabjit Singh's account, they were conscious of the ever-present media. It was important that the police both honor its commitments and be seen to do so.<sup>50</sup>

The police conducted a prolonged siege against the temple to oust the militants. Gill recounts some of the methods used:

We used various tactics to break their morale.... Sometimes we enforced total silence followed by ammo and other loud noises. Chances for ceasefire were given during which one chap would go down to the pool to get water from the tank. We wanted to see if they had a container [for storing water]. We timed the water fetching during the ceasefire and assessed that there were some 8 or 9 militants in there as they were

This information allowed the police to ascertain the length of time the militants could stay there without food and water and could calibrate the siege accordingly. This strategy culminated in their defeat.<sup>51</sup>

However, unlike the situation that prevailed in Operation Blue Star, the militants who made their way to the Harmander Sahab had inadequate provisions and very little ammunition. This fact made it very unlikely that they had intended this showdown. When the militants, dehydrated and hungry, finally surrendered with full media coverage, Sarabjit Singh noted that their behavior was both cowardly and disrespectful. Some laughed as they surrendered. The behavior of the surrendered militants along with the televising of the operation and revelations of militants' miscreant conduct secured public support for the operation, which was widely seen as restoring the sanctity of the temple after the militants defiled it. Restoring the sanctity of the temple required co-optation of local religious leaders, who oversaw the ritual cleansing of the inner sanctum, reinstatement of the sacred text, resumption of recitation of the text, and all the other religious activities associated with the temple. It also involved in great measure restoring the funds and other costly donations to the temple which were looted by the militants.

The successful efforts to restore the temple and its functions following Operation Black Thunder stands in stark contrast to similarly motivated efforts in the wake of Operation Blue Star. In 1984 the central government tried to restore the sanctity of the temple following Operation Blue Star by using central government funds to inter alia rebuild the Akal Takht, clean the bloodied reservoir, and repair the Harmander Sahab. However, many Sikhs were unwilling to accept these repairs from the central government, which had visited such havoc upon the sacred complex. Temple administrators and Sikh devotees destroyed the government-sponsored reparations and various Sikh organizations raised funds from within the Sikh community to make the needed repairs. In contrast, the government's efforts after Black Thunder were not repudiated and indeed largely seen as legitimate, perhaps because the efforts were understood to be local and the central government did not appear to be involved directly in the effort.<sup>52</sup>

As a police action, Operation Black Thunder was relatively minor and resulted in the capture of only a few militants. Shootouts in Amritsar still continued and violence actually escalated. For much of the insurgency's duration (1987–1992), the Punjab was under the

Indian parlance. In the years following Operation Black Thunder, the militancy actually threatened to overwhelm the security forces and brutally sidelined moderates in the Punjab.<sup>53</sup> The militants began planting explosives in scooters, bicycles, and other vehicles, intending to kill randomly and to encourage people to leave the city. This situation persisted for three to four years after the conclusion of Operation Black Thunder.<sup>54</sup>

When one views Operation Black Thunder in the context of continued terrorist activity, it may be tempting to dismiss it as a failure of sorts; however, Operation Black Thunder contributed to the demise of the militancy. The operation, conducted under the watchful eyes of all media, revealed to the public aspects of the militancy that may not have been observed with such clarity before. Through the visibility of this operation, the Sikh public witnessed the depravity that went on within the walls of the Golden Temple. The Khalistan movement would never recover the veneer of religiosity that it had prior to the operation. The operation had denied the militants use of the Golden Temple and gurdwaras for sanctuaries and operational basing.<sup>55</sup>

The operation was also immediately followed by the promulgation of the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, which went into law on May 26. This act made it illegal to use religious institutions for a broad array of political purposes or for the conduct of any activity that promotes disharmony, that is subversive, or that challenges India's sovereignty. It also criminalized the use of such institutions as safe havens for accused and convicted offenders alike, and it forbade any kind of fortifications within the structure.<sup>56</sup>

The operation, conducted nearly simultaneously with this law, demonstrated resoundingly that the security forces were willing and capable of executing force and demonstrated that insurgent use of religious institutions would no longer be tolerated. The legislation provided the necessary legal mandate to carry out such operations as needed. Black Thunder, along with this legislation, was an important step in denying the militants access to Punjab's massive infrastructure of gurdwaras. The net effect was to negate some of the advantages of militant utilization of these gurdwaras. The same high walls that once provided security became an easily policed perimeter with controlled exit points that facilitated easy capture of insurgents. For the most part, after 1988, denying insurgents the use of gurdwaras adversely affected their ability to recruit, accumulate, and store munitions, enjoy safe havens for operational activities,

centers with complete amenities such as phones, electricity, food, and water. As a consequence, militants and their leadership were dispersed into their villages, where they were more susceptible to detection, arrest, and elimination.<sup>57</sup>

The successes of Operation Black Thunder were facilitated by the ongoing process of police reform and augmentation which gathered momentum in the years following the operation. In 1991 the Congress Party returned to power with Narasimha Rao as prime minister. Rao was convinced that dalliances with political solutions had failed. His reasons are debatable (e.g., Delhi did not honor commitments made to Sikh politicians who in turn were unable to curb the violence). For Rao, pacifying the Punjab was a priority, and he empowered the Punjab state government to discharge its duties without interference. In 1991 K. P. S. Gill was reinstated as chief of police and he oversaw the draconian measures that eventually crushed the insurgency. As was noted, Gill inherited a police structure that lacked an effective chain of command. He created a pyramidal structure in which he was the apex. He purged those who were deemed unreliable or uncommitted and replaced them with loyalists. Their effectiveness was judged by their ability to neutralize terrorists, which included a bounty killing program through which police were compensated and even promoted for killing terrorists.<sup>58</sup>

Gill also delineated the contributions of other agencies, with the police figuring as the primary counterterrorism agency. The army was used in a supplementary role and tended to be confined to urban areas, where they guarded infrastructure and manned check posts. These static activities were previously in the purview of the police, who were now freed for more mobile counterterrorism activities. Paramilitary groups assisted the police more directly in the rural areas as well as areas with a high prevalence of terrorism. The Border Security Force was used to seal the border with Pakistan, where training, sanctuary, and weaponry had been provided to the insurgents.<sup>59</sup> With these changes, Gill was able to create an integrated command structure.

There were also great increases in police end strength, with a large recruitment drive beginning in 1989. As a consequence, that year there were 51,833 authorized police billets compared with 32,855 in 1984.<sup>60</sup> Another expansion occurred in 1993 when there were 65,658 such billets, and in 1994 this number increased again to 70,228.<sup>61</sup> [These figures have since been reduced, in 2005 police end strength was 57,142.<sup>62</sup>] With this expansion in manpower, Gill

was able to promulgate a more effective counterterrorism posture by increasing the number of patrols and raids and even assigning specific persons to identify and capture particular terrorists.<sup>63</sup>

Not only were there improvements in the quantity of police, there were also improvements in the quality of their training. To address their lack of sufficient counterterrorism training, during the police transformation in the early 1990s the Indian Army provided police with four to ten weeks of training in specific operational tactics to enhance their counterterrorism capabilities. The NSG also trained the Punjab police in counterterrorism operations in the early 1990s.<sup>64</sup> The police equipment was also substantially improved. Their World War II vintage .303 rifles and bolt action 7.62s were replaced with light machine guns and automatic weapons, which finally allowed the police to engage directly the militants who were routinely armed with AK 47s, resulting in high militant casualties and restrictions in their movement. The police also received modern radio communications and additional vehicles, which allowed more frequent patrols over larger areas of coverage and diminished the police response time. In all, these changes transformed the police from a largely unproductive and passive force into a more aggressive and mobile force that was willing and able to engage the militants directly.<sup>65</sup> The net impact of these innovations was a dramatic suppression of violence accompanied by increased apprehension of militants, arms, and explosives.

Over time these innovations—along with the predations of the militant groups—gradually affected a change in public opinion. In the early years militants undoubtedly enjoyed popular support, which was catalyzed by Operations Blue Star and Woodrose and included the provision of logistical, material, financial, and human resources to the militants and their organizations. (Admittedly, sometimes this public assistance was inadvertent or given indirectly to gurdwaras whose management was sympathetic to the militancy.) However, by the early 1990s public opinion had shifted as the militant groups criminalized, targeted Sikh civilians, became enmeshed in local feuds, and engaged in hateful violence as they sought to enrich themselves and eliminate their rivals. By the early 1990s the militants were increasingly vulnerable to the security forces, which had become more effective. At the same time, their public support diminished and increasingly the populace assisted the government's counterterrorism efforts by providing information about the militants and their supporters.<sup>66</sup>

In summary, whereas Operation Blue Star was a bloody mess that spawned a wider insurgency that had widespread support among Punjab's jats and the globally dispersed Sikh diaspora, Operation Black Thunder has been described as a very successful counterterrorism operation that had important long-term impacts upon the militants and their ability to operate in the Punjab. There are several factors that explain the differing outcomes between these two operations, though not all of them can be attributed to the different ways in which the operations were conducted.

#### *Different Policy Environments*

Scholars and analysts broadly concur that in the early years of the insurgency the government lacked both a coherent counterterrorism policy and a commitment to bring to fruition either a political solution or an effective security strategy. For much of the insurgency, policy toward the insurgents was shaped by political considerations at the center. Moreover, security agencies were slow to understand the nature of the challenge they were confronting and were poorly resourced by all measures to do so. By the late 1980s and certainly during Prime Minister Rao's tenure, this attitude changed. The government was increasingly convinced that there could be no political solution. In that period there was a transformation of the police and promulgation of new force concepts which enabled the police to work more effectively. While it is not the subject of this paper, the government of India has sustained enduring criticism that it put down the Sikh insurgency at great cost—a view vigorously rejected by the proponents of this policy.<sup>67</sup>

#### *The Standing of the Movement*

In the early days of the movement there was considerable ideological coherence that captured and aggregated the accumulating Sikh grievance. The charismatic and religiously pedigreed leader Bhindranwale also contributed to this situation. By 1988 the assorted groups criminalized and engaged in various violent acts that over time increasingly targeted Punjab's civilians. By the late 1980s and early 1990s the tide of public support was turning, with the public increasingly

Star was launched, security forces faced a very different population terrain than when Black Thunder was launched.

#### *Adversaries' Commitment and Preparations*

The Indian Army confronted different adversaries in Operation Blue Star than did the police in Black Thunder. Under Bhindranwale, the insurgents were committed and prepared to hold their position for as long as possible. In contrast, accounts of Black Thunder reveal that the militants were not well prepared for the siege of the Harmandir Sahab, lacking adequate food, water, and ammunition. The sustained siege of the temple coupled with periodic cease-fires secured the exodus of most of the militants who had seized the temple, a fact suggesting that they were less committed than the militants ensconced in the temple in 1984.

#### *Different Appraisal of the Sacred Battle Space*

Planners of Operation Blue Star made few efforts to treat the Golden Temple differently from other battle spaces on which they would operate. This approach is in clear contrast to that of Black Thunder, where planners were cognizant of the degrees of sacredness embodied in different parts of the temple complex. Moreover, Black Thunder was devised to calibrate a minimum use of force, which could be more intense in some parts of the temple complex than in others. Black Thunder had the benefit of hindsight of Operation Blue Star, which everyone wanted to avoid reproducing. Black Thunder's appraisal of the sacred space can be lauded after the fact because it was successful. Had it failed, then this approach could have been criticized for being "soft on the insurgents." However, in Black Thunder it was kept in mind that in fighting this kind of enemy, the views of the population matter. This was a hard lesson learned from Operation Blue Star.

#### *The Media Utilization*

Black Thunder also succeeded in part because everything was televised in real time. Doing so provided the police with ample incentives to honor their commitments, to treat those who surrendered humanely and in accordance with law, and to communicate their actions and their rationale to the public.

the police with that of the militants. The media attention continued throughout the cleanup of the temple and the restoration of religious service, which had been suspended. Arguably, the adept use of the media in this operation contributed to further erosion of public support for the militants—such as it was.

#### *Different Views of the Police and the Army*

In Operation Blue Star the army led the operation. This decision was undertaken because the police, who are local, were seen to have been co-opted by the militants. They were seen either as being ideological supporters of the insurgents or as having been coerced into inaction against them. Thus the army believed that the police had become part of the problem and not part of the solution. For reasons elaborated earlier, by the late 1980s many steps were taken to augment the capacities of the police to wage more effective counterinsurgency operations. Thus by the time Operation Black Thunder took place, the police were increasingly being seen as a viable force with which to conduct operations.

In conclusion, the success or failure of these two missions has been judged through the lens of more than two decades. Blue Star brought about a disastrous loss of life and massive destruction of the temple and precipitated a further crisis in the Punjab and beyond. In contrast, Black Thunder wrought little bloodshed, resulted in minimal damage to the temple, and, despite continued spikes of violence, contributed to the eventual demise of the insurgency. However, at this point it is far from clear that the outcomes of these two operations hinged decisively on the conduct of the operations and the composition of the force employed or upon the appraisal of the sacredness of the space upon which the counterinsurgent forces operated. While all of these factors were important, the varied outcomes of the two operations were greatly conditioned by the larger contexts in which they were conducted, including the political environment in which they were embedded, the different nature of the insurgents, and the changing public opinion of the militants.

#### *Notes*

This chapter was drafted while I was a senior research associate at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). I am currently a senior political scientist

not those of USIP or RAND. I am thankful to Sumit Ganguly and Praveen Swami for their corrective guidance and feedback on this chapter. The chapter draws in some part from fieldwork done in India in 2003. For this I thank Ajai Sahni and K. P. S. Gill at the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi. Special thanks also to Praveen Swami, who reviewed an earlier draft of this essay.

1. K. P. S. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab: 1988–1993," *Painlines* 1 (1993). [www.sarp.org/sarporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume1/Fault1-1kpstext.htm](http://www.sarp.org/sarporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume1/Fault1-1kpstext.htm). Gill suggests that 21,469 died before the insurgency was decisively defeated in 1993. Human Rights Watch suggests a much higher figure of 40,000 due in part to the brutality of the security forces. Human Rights Watch, *Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India* (Oct. 2007). [hrw.org/reports/2007/india1007/india1007web.pdf](http://hrw.org/reports/2007/india1007/india1007web.pdf).

2. The story of Sikh nationalism must be seen in the context of the concurrent Hindu nationalist project, which attempted to absorb Sikhs into the fold of Hinduism. Sikh nationalists rejected the Hindu nationalist claim that Sikhs are Hindus and sought to establish clear boundaries of identity through, inter alia, the development of new Sikh rituals (e.g., for birth, marriage, death, etc.) and the mobilization of the legal system to attain legitimacy for these new rituals (e.g., the Sikh Marriage Act). A thorough discussion of this phenomenon is well beyond the scope of this work. The salient point is that as a result of myriad religio-political identity movements in the subcontinent, a number of Sikh political entrepreneurs began formalizing the demand for Sikh sovereignty well before the 1980s. For comprehensive accounts of this complex and highly contested process, the reader should consult Rajiv Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986); Harjot S. Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); N. Gerald Barrier, "Sikh Politics in British Punjab Prior to the Gurdwara Reform Movement," in Joseph T. O'Connell, ed., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Artar Singh, "The Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Politicization of the Sikhs," in O'Connell, ed., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*; Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

3. Mark Tully and Satish Jacobsh, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle* (Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1991); Hamish Telford, "The Political Economy of Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy," *Asian Survey* 32, no. 11 (1992), 969–87; Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*; Joyce Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence* (London: Zed Books, 1995); Yogendra K. Malik, "The Akali Party and Sikh Militancy: Move for Greater Autonomy or Separatism in Punjab?" *Asian Survey* 32, no. 9 (1992),

4. Harjot Oberoi questions these actual connections, noting that before the early 1970s few Sikhs knew of the Dandami Taksal and no major volume on Sikh society, history, or religion mentions the institution. The obscenity of the Dandami Taksal likely aided the insurgents in developing their genealogy. Oberoi suggests that while the claims to the tenth guru are plausible, there is no real firm evidence to support it either. Harjot S. Oberoi, "Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 266.
5. See Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*; Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*; Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*.
6. In particular, many analysts within India and without contend that Giani Zail Singh (who eventually became president of India in 1982) developed Bhindranwale as a foil to the Akali government in order to diminish the ability of the Akalis to challenge the electoral authority of the Congress party in Punjab. See Kuldeep Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1984). For a more detailed account of this miscalculated strategy of Indira Gandhi's Congress Party, see Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*; Telford, "The Political Economy of Punjab"; Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*; Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*; and Malik, "The Akali Party and Sikh Militancy."
7. For a comprehensive account of Operation Blue Star, see Lt. General K. S. Brar, *Operation Blue Star: the True Story* (New Delhi: UBSPD, 1993).
8. D. P. Sharma, *The Punjab Story: Decade of Turmoil* (New Delhi: Aph Publishing, 1996); and Giorgio Shani, "Beyond Khalistan? The Sikh Diaspora and the International Order," paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, March 27, 2002, New Orleans, [isinet.cci.azizona.edu/noarchive/shani.html](http://isinet.cci.azizona.edu/noarchive/shani.html).
9. See Apurba Kundu, *Militarism in India: The Army and Civil Society in Consensus* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1998).
10. K. P. S. Gill, Punjab: The Knights of Falsehood (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1997), pp. 95-97.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; Gill, *Knights of Falsehood*.
13. Ranjitt K. Pachanda, *Terrorism and Response to Terrorist Threat* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 2002), pp. 98-99. Also see *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism 17*, "Sikh Separatists," March 7, 2003. [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com).
14. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of Punjab*, pp. 71-75.
15. One crore equals 10 million. This calculation uses the approximate exchange rate of Rs. 33 to 1 U.S. dollar for 1987.
16. Pachanda, *Terrorism and Response to Terrorist Threat*, pp. 100-103; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism 17*, "Sikh Separatists", Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.
17. Pachanda, *Terrorism and Response to Terrorist Threat*, pp. 103-19,

18. J. S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 64.
19. See Sarabjit Singh, *Operation Black Thunder: An Eye Witness Account of Terrorism in Punjab* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002); Gill, *Knights of Falsehood*; Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*; Telford, "The Political Economy of Punjab"; Kapur, *Sikh Separatism*; Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; and Malik, "The Akali Party and Sikh Militancy."
20. For an authoritative discussion of the Golden Temple and the environs, see the official webpage maintained by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhik Committee at [www.sggpc.net/golden-temple/around.asp](http://www.sggpc.net/golden-temple/around.asp).
21. Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*; Gill, *Knights of Falsehood*.
22. Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*.
23. Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*; Gill, *Knights of Falsehood*.
24. There is not necessarily a religious basis for their use of these terms, which are frequently used in Islamist militant struggles. Rather, Punjabi (the language spoke by the insurgents) draws heavily from the Perso-Arabic vocabulary elements that also occur in Urdu and other northern South Asian languages.
25. For an account of these methods, see Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.
26. Brar, *Operation Blue Star*, pp. 30-31.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
28. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."
29. Punjab Government, "Statistical Abstract," Section XXXI "Police, Crime and Sudharghar." [www.punjab.gov.in](http://www.punjab.gov.in).
30. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."
31. Brar, *Operation Blue Star*, pp. 28, 36, 41-42.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42, 59.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 28, 33, 39.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-58.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 63. For tactical details see pp. 45-73 and 73-128. Note that this claim does not accord well with the account of the operation given by Dar (see note 41).
36. Brar, *Operation Blue Star*, pp. 77-80.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-80.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-103.
40. Major General E. H Dar (Retired), "Battle for the Akal Takht: A Military Analysis," *Pakistan Army Journal* 25, no. 3 (Sept. 1984), 18-19.
41. Dar, "Battle for the Akal Takht," p. 19.
42. Brar, *Operation Blue Star*, p. 85.
43. See Gill, "Endgame in Punjab," pp. 14-16. While some of Gill's personal insights cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed in the secondary

see Man Singh Deora, ed., *Aftermath of Operation Blue Star* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1992); Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*. For more general accounts of the insurgency and police actions there, see Ram Narayan Kumar, *A Complex Denial: Disappearances, Secret Cremations, and the Issue of Truth & Justice in Punjab* (Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 2001); Julio Ribeiro, *Bullet for Bullets: My Life as a Police Officer* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998); B. S. Danewalia, *Police and Politics in Twentieth Century Punjab* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1997); and Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*.

44. This information draws both from my June 2003 interview with Mr. Gill and from his article, "Endgame in Punjab: 1988-1993," pp. 14-16. Other accounts of SGPC complicity include inter alia Brar, *Operation Blue Star*; Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*; and Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*.

45. This information draws both from my June 2003 interview with Mr. Gill and from his article, "Endgame in Punjab: 1988-1993," pp. 14-16. Other accounts of SGPC complicity include inter alia Brar, *Operation Blue Star*; Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*; and Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*.

46. Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*; Gill, *The Knights of Falsehood*.

47. See Gurharpal Singh, "Punjab Since 1984: Disorder, Order and Legitimacy," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 4 (1996), 413-14; Gill, "Endgame in Punjab"; Sharma, *The Punjab Story*; Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, pp. 55-81, 103-34.

48. This information draws both from my June 2003 interview with Mr. Gill and from his article, "Endgame in Punjab: 1988-1993," pp. 14-16. See also Brar, *Operation Blue Star*; Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*; Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*.

49. Interview with K. P. S. Gill in June 2003.

50. Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*; Gill, *The Knights of Falsehood*; interview with K. P. S. Gill in June 2003.

51. Gill's account is generally corroborated here by that of S. J. Singh. 52. S. J. Singh insinuates the possibility that someone from the central government (e.g., the Home Ministry) sought to undermine their efforts to resume religious ceremony (*maryada*) within the Golden Temple in an effort to "claim credit." According to him, they arranged for the chief priest of the Harmandir Sahib (Bhai Mohan Singh) to be released from jail such that he could restore the *maryada* with the blessing of the SRSG. Singh strongly suggests that someone, perhaps the Home Minister, coerced the SRSG to withdraw support. In the end, Singh and K. P. S. Gill were able to persuade the SRSG to oversee the restoration of the *maryada*, and the restoration otherwise went largely according to plan. See Singh, *Operation Black Thunder*, pp. 158-62.

53. G. Singh, "Punjab Since 1984," pp. 411-12; Gill, "Endgame in

54. Interview with K. P. S. Gill in June 2003.

55. This information draws both from my June 2003 interview with Mr. Gill and from his article, "Endgame in Punjab," pp. 16-17. See Brar, *Operation Blue Star*; Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*; Tully and Jacobsh, *Amritsar*; C. Christine Fair, "Military Operations in Urban Areas: The Indian Experience," *India Review* 2, no. 1 (2003).

56. Gazette of India, "The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1988, September 1, 1988. [www.mha.nic.in](http://www.mha.nic.in). Does not apply to J & K.

57. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab"; Charanjit Singh Kang, "Counterterrorism: Punjab a Case Study," Spring 2005. [ir.lib.stu.ca/reviuew/726/etd1604.pdf](http://lib.stu.ca/reviuew/726/etd1604.pdf).

58. Human Rights Watch, *Dead Silence: The Legacy of Human Rights Abuses in Punjab* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994), pp. 24-25; Gill, "Endgame in Punjab"; Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.

59. Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; Gill, "Endgame in the Punjab"; G. Singh, "Punjab Since 1984."

60. Economics and Statistical Organization. *Statistical Abstract of Punjab* (Chandigarh: Government of Punjab, 1984); Economics and Statistical Organization. *Statistical Abstract of Punjab* (Chandigarh: Government of Punjab, 1990). Both of these are cited in Kang, "Counterterrorism."

61. Figures from the Economics and Statistical Organization. *Statistical Abstract of Punjab* cited in Kang, "Counterterrorism," p. 106.

62. Punjab Government, "Statistical Abstract," Section XXXI "Police, Crime and Sudharghar." [www.punjab.gov.in](http://www.punjab.gov.in).

63. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab"; Kang, "Counterterrorism."

64. Manoj Joshi, "Combating Terrorism in Punjab," *Strategic Digest* 23, no. 8 (August 1993), 1261-66; Bharat Rakshak, "National Security Guards." [www.bharat-rakshak.com](http://www.bharat-rakshak.com).

65. Gill, "Endgame in the Punjab"; Sharma, *The Punjab Story*; Joshi, "Combating Terrorism in Punjab"; Kang, "Counterterrorism."

66. C. Christine Fair, *Urban Battle Fields of South Asia: Lessons Learned from Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan* (Santa Monica, Cal.: RAND, 2004), pp. 69-101; Sharma, *The Punjab Story*; Shinder S. Thandi, "Counterinsurgency and Political Violence in Punjab 1980-1994," in Gurharpal Singh and Ian Talbot, eds., *Punjabi Identity: Continuity and Change*. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995).

67. For a critical view, see Human Rights Watch, *Protecting the Killers*. For a view defending the policy, see Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."