Policing, Intelligence, and Counterterrorism in South Asia: Militarization Theory Revisited

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Abstract

How has militarization shaped policing and intelligence practices in the fight against terrorism in South Asia? This paper addresses the research question by revisiting Peter Kraska's theory of militarized policing. It employs the method of structured and focused comparison and relies on qualitative data. Findings suggest that state-controlled civilian police, paramilitary forces, as well as conventional and special operations forces have maintained overlapping responsibilities in countering homegrown and transnational terrorism. Kraska's theory is extended by exploring how military-controlled intelligence agencies enjoy dual mandates in internal and external security, seek lead counterterrorism roles, and take part in coordination committees for intelligence, counterterrorism, and national security matters. The paper concludes with a need to study the changing nature of terrorist threats and state responses in postcolonial South Asia.

Introduction

South Asia has a long history of intelligence. Chanakya Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a classical treatise written in the third century BC, offers a lucid account of intelligence in statecraft and military strategy. As the chief strategist of Chandragupta, Kautilya describes how a combination of espionage and military tactics helped Chandragupta and his successors consolidate their power in a vast empire for about 150 years (Shamasastry, 1967). Writing about the Sultans and Mughals, Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* provides the history of a network of spies who shared timely information about the administrators to the Mughal emperors (Fazl, 1891). Another comprehensive history of intelligence-led policing is found in Richard Popplewell's seminal work *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* which shows the evolution of a surveillance-security state under the British Raj (Popplewell, 1995). Popplewell's work is noteworthy for understanding how the Criminal Investigation Department and the Special Branch of Police emerged to deal with the threats of criminal thugs and political dissidents. Durba Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists* complements Popplewell by showing how the British colonial rulers relied on intelligence and a robust criminal justice system for suppressing the anti-colonial terrorists in Bengal (Ghosh, 2017).

A rich body of literature on postcolonial South Asia also sheds light on the world of secret services. In *Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI, and the Illusion of Peace*, A.S. Dulat, Asad Durrani, and Aditya Sinha (2018) narrate the shadow wars between India and Pakistan and the challenge of sustainable peace in the region. Country-specific accounts of intelligence history can also be found in anthologies. Two such anthologies are noteworthy: Bob de Graaff's (2020) *Intelligence Communities and Cultures in Asia & the Middle East* and Ryan Shaffer's (2023) *Handbook of Asian Intelligence Cultures*. These anthologies explore how a combination of colonial past, domestic factors, and external pressures

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have shaped the cultures of policing and intelligence in South Asia. Another anthology, *Intelligence, National Security and Foreign Policy: A South Asian Narrative*, explores the evolution of intelligence agencies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan and their role in dealing with human security and national security (Ashraf, 2016).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan have created sustained interest among academics and practitioners on the evolving dynamics of threat (Zegart, 2007; IEP, 2023, US DOS, 2023). A vibrant debate emerged between terrorism analysts Bruce Hoffman (2008) and Marc Sageman (2008a; 2008b) on whether the transnational terrorist network or the self-radicalized militants deserve more attention from counterterrorist forces. Despite their differences, they stress the need for actionable intelligence in the fight against terrorism. Writing in the context of India, Prem Mahadevan (2012) calls for both actionable intelligence and effective government responses. In his view, the Indian government has often failed to act on intelligence. More recent works have focused on mapping the threats of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group and their South Asian local affiliate ISIS Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP) (ICG, 2018; Solanki, 2019).

A lacuna in the existing literature concerns how policing, intelligence, and counterterrorism (CT) practices in South Asia are adapting to the complex and evolving threats of terrorism. Three such threats merit discussion: Islamist extremism, ultra-left movement, and ethno-separatist movements. First, the transnational networks of al Qaeda, ISIS, and their local Taliban affiliates have had a strong presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The influence of such groups on homegrown militants in Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka has created concerns among the security forces. On the other hand, the Kashmir-focused militancy in India has expanded its operational theater to include high-profile civilian and military targets in urban centers such as Delhi and Mumbai. The other two states, Bhutan and Nepal, are yet to register any serious threats from Islamist militants. Second, left-wing insurgency has drawn considerable attention: The Maoist guerillas fought a decade-long people's war in Nepal, which ended in 2006; but the Maoists in India and Bhutan continue to pose serious threats to the internal security of both states. Third, ethnic-secessionist groups pose a grave threat to the territorial integrity of India and Pakistan, whereas Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have managed such conflicts using both soft and hard powers.

Despite variations in the regional threat environment, South Asian states show striking similarities in the use of militarized policing and intelligence practices in combating terrorism. This puzzling trend in militarization deserves scrutiny for two compelling reasons. In the first place, we need to explore the extent to which militarized CT trends in the region are purely a local phenomenon or associated with the U.S.-led global war on terrorism. Second, although South Asia is home to more than one-fourth of the world's eight billion people, there is a dearth of systematic analysis on the military-police-intelligence nexus in the region. This paper seeks to address this knowledge gap by asking a central question: How has militarization shaped policing and intelligence practices in the fight against terrorism in South Asia?

This paper first outlines the contours of the militarization theory developed by policing scholar Peter Kraska (2001, 2007), and extends Kraska's theory in the domain of the intelligence community. Next, it tests the relevance of militarization theory in the South Asian context. The concluding part summarizes key lessons and sheds light on future implications. A brief note on data and method is in order. The paper relies on secondary data collected from government websites and open-source analyses. It employs the method of structured and focused comparison to analyze CT responses in eight South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This comparative case study method is useful for qualitative research and theory building in social science (George and Bennet, 2004).

The Theory of Militarization

This section begins with Kraska's militarization theory and then develops the argument that militarization not only affects law enforcement practices but also shapes the intelligence community.

Militarized Policing

Kraska's theoretical framework makes a distinction between militarism and militarization. Militarism refers to "a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that stress the use of force and threat of violence as the most appropriate and efficacious means to solve problems" (Kraska, 2007, p. 503). States adopting a militaristic approach to a security threat employ military weapons, technologies, and tactics. Kraska (2007, p. 503) defines militarization as "the process of arming, organizing, planning, and training for, threatening, and sometimes implementing violent conflict." The growing reliance on paramilitary police units (PPUs) across the world provides a testimony to Kraska's militarization theory (Friesendorf, 2016; Bolduc, 2016).

Militarized policing can come in four distinct ways: material, cultural, organizational, and operational (Kraska 2007, p. 503). First, material militarization involves the introduction of military weapons, equipments, and technologies in police services. Second, cultural militarization takes the form of adopting martial language and appearance, beliefs and values by civilian law enforcement agencies. Third, organizational militarization can evolve through the implementation of a military-style command and control system among the general-duty police. Fourth, operational militarization can take place in a range of activities such as intelligence, surveillance, and the handling of high-risk situations.

Police-ized Military

The military-police nexus is also evident in the form of police-izing the military. Police-ization occurs when state-controlled armed forces are tasked with policing responsibilities such as patrolling an area, searching private houses, and arresting criminal suspects (Kraska 2007: 510). In the post-9/11 era, modern militaries have shown an increasing tendency to deploy in internal security operations (Kraska, 2001; Hill & Beger, 2009). The U.S. military forces undertaking internal security role in Afghanistan and Iraq provide evidence of such police-ized role of military (Kraska 2007, Perito, 2011).

Hill and Beger (2009, p. 26) identify two types of PPUs: some work directly under the authority of the armed forces or the Ministry of Defense while others operate under the national police and the Ministry of Home Affairs. In Europe, the French Gendarmerie, the Italian Carabinieri, and the Spanish Guardia Civil represent the first group, while the Victoria Special Operations Group in Australia, the Armed Response Units in the United Kingdom, and the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team in the United States, constitutes the second group. The first group of PPUs is essentially part of the national armed forces playing police responsibilities and thus fits with the notion of police-ized military.

Militarization of Intelligence Community

Although Kraska's theory offers a useful starting point, it does not touch on the issue of militarization of intelligence apparatus, and its effect on civilian police services. I overcome this lacuna by proposing two testable propositions: first, like the law enforcement apparatus, the

intelligence community of a state may also experience varying levels of militarization.[2] Second, if intelligence agencies and their coordination structure in a state are militarized, this may constrain the operational space for the civilian police.

My theory of militarized intelligence apparatus draws insights from two streams of the security studies literature: civil-military relations (CMR), and intelligence studies. Among the CMR scholars, optimists predict that a declining role of the military will facilitate the process of democratization (Alagappa, 2002), whereas pessimists stress the continuing role of armed forces in counterinsurgency and state-building operations (Ali, 1993). I argue that militarization of the intelligence community can take several pathways such as dual mandates, leadership roles, and representation in national coordination bodies (Born & Caparini, 2013; Born, Johnson & Leigh, 2005). First, military-controlled secret services may enjoy dual mandates for internal and external security leading to an overlapping responsibility with civilian police in combating violent extremism (Abbas, 2011; Bayley & Weisburd, 2007, p. 6). Second, military officials or defense ministries may oversee civilian intelligence agencies and align the roles and responsibilities of such agencies with the armed forces (Grare, 2009). Third, armed forces may have varying levels of representation in national committees for intelligence, counterterrorism, and national security affairs (Katzenstein, 1998). These three pathways are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist.

Militarization may influence the intelligence community at two levels: unit and structure. At the unit level, military-controlled intelligence agencies may establish dedicated units for combating terrorism and insurgency (Ashraf, 2014, 2021, 2022). At the structural level, military agencies may enjoy better representation than civilian police services in national committees for intelligence and security coordination (Mohsin, 2003; Sirrs, 2017). The institutional influence of the armed forces—at both the unit and structural levels—may co-exist and does not have to be mutually exclusive.

Militarized Policing and Police-ized Military in South Asia

This section first traces the evolution of paramilitary police units in South Asia. It then examines the police-ization trend among the border forces and special operations forces (SOFs).

Normalization of Paramilitary Police Units

The term normalization of PPUs refers to the process through which military cultures and values are transmitted among law enforcement agencies. South Asia has seen a sharp growth in the formation of PPUs in the post-9/11 era. Of the total 51 PPUs, mapped by the author, more than 41 (80%) started their journey after the U.S.-led global war on terrorism began. Among these 41 new PPUs, 26 (63%) are in India, and the rest are in Afghanistan (4), Bangladesh (3), Bhutan (2), Maldives (1), and Pakistan (5). Nepal and Sri Lanka did not establish any PPU in the past three decades, although their armed forces have adopted a heavy-handed counterterrorism approach. The nine Afghan and Pakistani PPUs had a direct role in fighting al Qaeda and Taliban militants and were closely associated with the U.S.-led war on terrorism. This constitutes roughly 22% of 41 PPUs established after 9/11. As discussed later in this paper, the rest of the new PPUs came mostly in response to either homegrown terrorists or their connections with transnational terrorists.

[2] For the purpose of this study, law enforcement apparatus refers to police services responsible for maintaining law and order, while intelligence community constitutes various secret services working within a sovereign state for the purpose of surveillance, analysis, and covert actions.

In analyzing the normalization of PPUs, we need to look at their context of origin and major responsibilities in national security. The list of PPUs in the region includes the Afghan General Directorate for Police Special Unit (GDPSU), Bhutan's Counter Terrorism Force (CTF), Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) Unit. The list would also include more than two dozen Anti Terror Squads (ATS) and Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs) established by various Indian provincial states, Maldives' Special Operations Department (SOD), and Pakistan's elite police forces in four provinces. In terms of size, the anti-terrorist police units in South Asia fall into three categories: large (1000 + personnel), medium (501-1000 personnel), and small (below 500 personnel).

Paramilitaries are an integral part of the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF). Although they were raised as part of the American strategy to indigenize the CT operations against al Qaeda and Taliban, after the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2014 they assumed a major role in combating both local and foreign militias including ISIS affiliates. The Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) is the largest PPU in the country with 16,000 personnel (Jalali, 2016, p. 15). The GDPSU brought three pre-existing elite PPUs under its command in 2009 (NATO, 2013). Among them, the Commando Unit 333 was created in 2003, the Commando Unit 444 in 2006, and the Crisis Response Unit in 2007. Each GDPSU team has an average of 350 personnel trained by the foreign SOFs and deployed in high-risk operations (Long et al, 2015).

The fight against al Qaeda, ISIS, and their local affiliates has also driven the growth of Pakistani PPUs. In 2010, Sindh formed the 1450-man strong Special Security Unit (SSU Website, nd); in 2014 Punjab established Counter Terrorism Force (CTF) with 1500 personnel (*Dawn,* 21 Feb. 2015), and in the same year, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province created a small Special Combatant Unit (SCU) with 150 personnel (*Dawn*, 2 Nov. 2014). As violent extremism perpetrated by homegrown and transnational militant groups increased in Pakistan, these newly formed paramilitary police units act as "specialized counterterrorism forces in parallel to the existing police services" (Perito & Pervez, 2014, p. 9).

In Bangladesh, concerns over the influence of al Qaeda and ISIS on local militants have shaped the formation and mandates of PPUs (Hasnat, 2016; Khan, 2017). RAB was formed in 2004 to deal with criminal thugs but soon found a CT role against Islamist militant groups such as the Harkat ul Jihad al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Both groups were established by the returnee Bangladeshi Mujahideens from Afghanistan in the 19990s. Although a mix of brute force and criminal justice strategy suppressed the HUJI-B and JMB militias, since 2013, the rise of al Qaeda's local affiliate, Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), and ISIS-sympathizer Neo-JMB has unleashed a new wave of terror targeting online activists, alleged non-believers, and foreigners (ICG, 2018; Khan, 2017, pp. 200-218). The SWAT team was formed in 2009 as an operational arm of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and was later brought under the command of the DMP's CTTC unit. Although CTTC and RAB maintain overlapping CT responsibilities, they differ sharply in strength and composition. RAB has about 9,000 personnel, half of whom come from civilian police and the rest from three defense services. By contrast, the CTTC has 600 personnel including a small SWAT team of less than 100 personnel, all of whom come from the civilian police. Since its founding in 2016, CTTC has carried out more than two dozen high-risk operations, which captured or killed high-value targets (Ashraf & Islam, 2023, p. 1693).

For India, Maoist insurgency and ethnic separatist movements have largely shaped the growth of PPUs (MHA-India, 2017, pp. 5, 15). As a result, almost all of India's 28 provincial states, 8 union

territories, and the national capital territory Delhi have formed Anti Terror Squad (ATS).[3] These ATS teams and other elite police units vary in size and operate as PPUs under the authority of provincial police. Only Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chattisgarh, Manipur, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, and West Bengal Police are known to have large commando units (1000+ personnel), whereas Tamil Nadu and Kerala have medium-sized (500-1000 personnel), and the rest have smaller militarized police units (Below 500 personnel). Among the provincial states with large PPUs, Maharashtra has a long history of being a target of organized crime and Islamist militant groups such as the Lashkare Tayyeba (LeT), the main perpetrator of the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

In the rest of South Asia, PPUs operate in various contexts not directly related to the U.S.-led global war on terrorism. Sri Lanka's Special Task Force (6,000 personnel) was established in 1983 to fight LTTE; Maldives formed the SOD police unit (250 personnel) in 2006 for internal stability; and Bhutan's Special Reserve Police Force (180 personnel) was formed in 2011 to fight Maoists. The Nepal Police Flying Squad has maintained a small PPU with about a dozen operatives used for various internal security purposes.

Attributes of Paramilitary Police Units

Kraska's theory on the four attributes of PPUs is tested here. First, the PPUs in the region use a wide variety of offensive weapons. The Delhi SWAT team is a case in point. It is "equipped with AK-47 rifles, MP 3 machine guns, Glock 17 or 26 pistols, and comer shot devices for night vision" (Singh, 2016). It is trained in more specialized weapons than general-duty police services and is authorized to use "heavy body armor, entry tools, and bulletproof vehicles" for enhanced protection in handling high-risk terrorist incidents (Sharma, 2009). Second, some of these special police units wear commando uniforms, bulletproof jackets, and helmets, and leverage the use of force to combat terrorism. For instance, the Afghan Commando Unit 333 wears a khaki shirt, trousers, and helmet, resembling their British mentors in the SOFs (Nelson, 2010). Third, some of the PPUs follow military-style SWAT teams or platoons, companies, and battalions, which sharply differ from the organization of traditional police stations (Routray, 2013).

Fourth, the South Asian PPUs act as multi-tasking striking forces. In Afghanistan, Unit 333 and Unit 444 were responsible for counter-narcotics, CT, and COIN operations in high-risk environments (Wardak, 2014, pp. 17-26). While the Indian PPUs are also deployed to deal with Islamist militants and Maoist insurgents, some of the elite police units such as the Kerala ATS are also tasked with dealing with marijuana growers and organized crime groups (MHA 2017; Anand, 2013). In Pakistan, the PPUs are responsible for providing VIP protection and support for other police units in addition to maintaining a role in fighting homegrown and transnational terrorism (Javed, 2016). The PPUs in Bangladesh are also deployed for conducting high-risk operations targeting terrorist dens and disposal of bombs and explosive devices (*The Daily Star*, 9 Oct. 2016). By engaging the PPUs in a wide range of operations, such as proactive patrolling or dealing with drug offenses, the South Asian police departments have essentially followed the models of European gendarmeries and the American SWAT cultures (Kraska & Kappeler, 1997; Hill and Beger, 2009).

Mentoring by foreign and local forces plays an important role in militarizing police units. The Afghan police special units had the highest level of dependence on foreign forces for training and mentoring (Long et al, 2015; Friesendorf, 2016). This was evident in the UK Special Forces training Afghan Commando Units 333 and 444, while U.S., Australian, New Zealand, and Norwegian forces mentoring the Crisis Response Unit (Wardak 2014: 17, 21, 24). In contrast to these smaller elite

[3] With the exception of Sikkim provincial state, which has less than 1 million population, and where the Indian military has a strong role in providing security (*Times of India*, 2 June 2006).

Afghan forces, European paramilitary forces trained the large-sized ANCOP. In India's Maharashtra, Force One received training from Israeli and German specialists (*Times of India*, 15 Nov. 2009) and in Pakistan, the Army and Turkish Police Special Force trained the Punjab CTF (*Dawn*, 21 Feb. 2015). Local forces also train and act as role models for the PPUs. Most of the Indian ATS teams receive training from the National Security Guard (NSG) (Demchak & Werner, 2007: 82-83). The Pakistan Army, Navy, and Special Service Group trained the SCU in KP province (*The News*, 15 April 2015).

Police-ization of Paramilitary Forces

South Asia has also seen the practice of police-izing the paramilitary forces (Chowdhury, 2011; Rajagopalan, 2004; Rosenau, 2012). As the U.S.-led war on terrorism evolved, the military and paramilitary forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan acquired extensive policing powers to counter al Qaeda's foreign fighters and various local Taliban militia groups. Since their re-organization in 2001, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) have played a mostly subsidiary role in combating al Qaeda and Taliban militias. After the U.S. and NATO forces started leaving Afghanistan in 2010 and largely withdrew from the country in 2014, the ANA and ANP took over major security responsibilities, and police-ization of the Afghan paramilitary forces became a growing reality. For instance, commanded by an Afghan military official, the Afghan Border Police has patrolled the border and acted as a counter-narcotics force (NATO, 2008. Perito, 2009).

Pakistan has complemented the U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan by deploying its military and paramilitary forces in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which shares borders with eastern and southern Afghanistan (Fair & Jones, 2011; Parvez & Rani, 2015; Parvez & Mehwish, 2015). Pakistan also provided a logistics supply route for the U.S. and NATO coalition forces in Afghanistan. These CT supports provided by Pakistan have made it a target of the extremist group Tehrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Pakistani government has tasked the paramilitary forces—Frontier Corps and Rangers—to combat the TTP and other Islamist extremist groups (Abbas, 2011; Roggio, 2009).

The United States has offered financial incentives and diplomatic pressures to keep the Afghan and Pakistani paramilitary forces deployed for CT operations in the border areas. The American influence, coupled with the two countries' experience as a victim of violent extremism, can explain the paramilitary border forces' CT roles in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Bangladesh and India, such role of paramilitary border forces has evolved in sharply different contexts. For instance, the paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), previously Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), has a longstanding role in supporting the military-led counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region (IWGIA, 2012; Rashiduzzaman, 1998). In India, the Border Security Force (BSF) has also had an enduring role in CT operations in Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, and Northeast India (*Times of India*, 22 Oct. 2015). Recent years have seen the BSF fighting against ultra-leftist militancy in the Chhattisgarh state.

Despite maintaining a long-standing role in policing terrorism and insurgency, the paramilitary forces in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan hold sharply different command structures. In India, the BSF is under the strict command of the civilian police, which works under the jurisdiction of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. By contrast, the paramilitary forces in the other three countries are led by serving defense personnel, giving the armed forces, rather than civilian police, the ability to exercise their command and control over these forces.

Police-ization of Special Operations Forces

Nearly two dozen SOFs in South Asia also maintain a role in policing terrorism and insurgency. The Afghan National Army Commando Battalion (ANACB) began its journey in 2007, and since then it has recruited nearly 11,500 personnel, working under the command of ANA Special Operations Command (Snow, 2016). Initially, the Afghan police commandoes were responsible for carrying out operations targeting the Taliban militants in the eastern and southern provinces. With ISIS gaining a stronghold since 2013, the ANACB has responded to growing calls for combating the local and foreign militias of ISIS (Boghani, 2015; McLeary, 2016).

In Bangladesh, the military commandos led two major counterterrorism operations in 2016 and 2017 (Ahmed, 2017; Choudhury, 2016). The first operation in July 2016 was crucial when the 1st Para responded to a hostage-like situation that killed mostly foreign nationals by self-proclaimed ISIS militants of Bangladeshi origin (*BBC News*, 2 July 2016). In the second operation in March 2017, the military commandos evacuated civilian people from a housing complex, where neo-JMB terrorists planted huge explosives (*Dhaka Tribune*, 28 March 2017). In both cases, the militant suspects did not surrender but embraced an asymmetric war.

In India, the NSG has a solid background in internal security operations (Demchak & Werner, 2007). Since the NSG was formed in 1984, after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, it has participated in nearly two dozen high-profile operations targeting the Punjab-based Shikh militants and the Kashmir-focused Lashkar-e-Tayyeba terrorists. The NSG's fight against terrorists in urban terrain has often required the deployment of police services to cordon off areas and conduct block raids and criminal investigations after high-risk operations.

The Pakistan Army's Special Service Group (SSG) is the oldest among the South Asian SOFs. Before 9/11, several SSG operations focused on dealing with aircraft hijacking and hostage rescue missions. Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the SSG received U.S. training and equipment to counter the al Qaeda and Taliban militias in Afghan-Pakistan border areas. The SSG contributed to militarizing the civilian police units in Pakistan by training thousands of police personnel in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Siddiqui, 2012).

The Sri Lankan Army Commando Regiment (CR) also has an extensive history in CT operations. Formed in the late 1970s, the CR prioritized countering the Tamil insurgents. In the 1987 Operation Liberation, the sea-born CR troops launched a successful attack against the Tamil Tigers on the northeastern Jaffna coast. The operation resulted in the killing of terrorists and the seizure of huge weapons and intelligence materials including the LTTE documents, pictures, and a list of militants (Katz, 2005, pp. 24-25). The CR and the Sri Lanka Army Special Forces also launched joint operations. The 2007 Operation Thoppigala which killed hundreds of LTTE guerillas is a case in point (Hashim, 2013: 141).

The foregoing discussion shows the growing role of South Asian SOFs in the fight against terrorism and insurgency. An important question is whether such operations led by SOFs deny or allow police participation. Evidence shows a mixed result. In cross-border covert operations, SOFs tend to monopolize the use of force. However, in urban theaters, SOF operations are supported by both civilian police and militarized police units.

Bringing Intelligence Back into Militarization Discourse

This section has three parts. The first part shows how armed forces maintain dual mandates in internal and external security. The second part analyzes how the search for a lead CT role creates

turf battles. The third part focuses on the representation of armed forces in national coordination bodies responsible for intelligence, counterterrorism, and national security.

Dual Mandates

Several intelligence agencies in South Asia maintain a single mandate either in the domain of internal security or external security. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in India, the Special Branch in Bangladesh, and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Pakistan are notable. In Bhutan, Nepal, and Maldives, the leading intelligence agencies are staffed by the civilian police and are primarily responsible for dealing with domestic threats. Due to a protracted ultra-leftist Maoist insurgency in the country, the Directorate of Military Intelligence in Nepal has expanded its writ in watching subversive political threats (Nepali & Subba, 2005). The Detective Unit of Bhutan and the Directorate of Intelligence in Maldives have also focused on internal threats to security (Royal Bhutan Police, 2014; Maldives Police Service, 2013).

In contrast, several military-controlled intelligence agencies in the region maintain dual roles in the domain of domestic and external security. The list includes the National Directorate of Security (NDS) in Afghanistan, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) and National Security Intelligence (NSI) in Bangladesh, and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate in Pakistan (Ashraf, 2022, p. 16; Jalali, 2016, p. 20; Sirrs, 2017, pp. 249-264; Sirrs, 2022, pp. 6-8). In Sri Lanka, the military-controlled State Intelligence Service (SIS) has separate directorates for internal and foreign intelligence (*The Sunday Leader*, 20 July 2010; Gunaratna & Perera, 2022, pp. 317-318). In their capacity as the premier intelligence services, these agencies are primarily responsible for assessing national security risks originating from a wide variety of threats including non-state armed groups, homegrown extremists, and their transnational networks.

Cross-country variations can be seen in the participation of defense establishments in internal security matters. If non-state armed groups challenge the authority of the national governments, the military-controlled intelligence agencies exercise sweeping powers in CT operations. For instance, the fight against the Taliban militias in Afghanistan, the Baloch insurgents in Pakistan, the Maoist guerillas in Nepal, and the Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka have legitimized the extensive involvement of defense intelligence agencies in these countries to complement, and often supplant the role of civilian intelligence agencies in internal security. Bangladesh's fight against the Shanti Bahini guerillas, Bhutan's battle against the Indian rebels and Nepal-based Maoists, and India's war against the Maoists in several impoverished states and rebels in Kashmir and northeastern states have also seen an increasing role of military intelligence services in combating insurgents and terrorists. Although the Maldives has never confronted the type of insurgency experienced by its South Asian neighbors, the Maldivian military has maintained a strong internal defense role.

Leadership Role

The armed forces in South Asia compete with the civilian police services to act as the lead force in counterterrorism. Pakistan is a glaring example where turf battles between the ISI and the civilian police are an age-old phenomenon. The FIA wanted to secure its turf by creating the Special Investigation Group (SIG) in 2002. The SIG would detect terrorism-related offenses including terrorist financing and bank fraud (Abbas, 2011). In 2007, the ISI established a full-fledged CT Wing, which evolved from a small CT cell dedicated to cooperation with the United States during the global war on terrorism (Shah 2014, p. 274; Sirrs, 2017). Next year, the Pakistani Army effectively resisted an attempt by the civilian government to put the ISI under the civilian command of the interior ministry (Nawaz, 2011).

Indian secret services have also engaged in turf battles (Demchak & Werner 2007, pp. 74-75). In fact, after the Mumbai attacks in 2008, the Home Minister of India, P. Chidambaram, expressed his dissatisfaction at the inter-agency competition among IB, RAW, and other secret services and proposed the formation of several central bodies to overcome the challenges of coordination (*Times of India*, 24 December 2009). Following the Mumbai debacles, the Indian Government established two federal security entities—Natgrid and NIA—to synchronize existing databases and to promote coordination and avoid turf battles among the federal and provincial state-level agencies (Dinda, 30 Oct. 2014; *Hindustan Times*, 1 April 2016).

In other countries, the search for a lead role in CT operations has resulted in the creation of new intelligence agencies or the opening of dedicated CT wings within existing secret services. In Afghanistan, the Counterterrorism General Directorate (CTGD) came into being as part of the Afghan police reform initiative (Afghanistan Ministry of Interior, nd). In Bangladesh, the military-run DGFI has established the Counter Terrorism Intelligence Bureau. The NSI, which is headed by a two-star military general, also has a Counter Terrorism Wing to develop an in-house capacity for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence on various types of threats (Ashraf, 2022). In Sri Lanka, as the government decided to take military action against the Tamil guerillas, the military gained an upper hand in internal security. In such a context, the Special Branch of Sri Lanka Police lost its preeminence in 1984 when the Sri Lankan Government established the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) by integrating army, navy, and air force intelligence units (Ross and Savada, 1990; Gunaratna & Perera, 2022, p. 316). Although a civilian police inspector general would command the NIB, it would eventually report to the Ministry of Defense (Tassie, 2001). The Sri Lankan defense ministry retained its control of counterterrorism when in 2006 the government established the State Intelligence Service by renaming the NIB.

Representation in Coordination Committees

The armed forces in South Asia are also well represented in coordinating bodies for intelligence, national security, and counterterrorism. Four categories of CT and security coordinating bodies can be identified:

- Category I: States with only national intelligence or counterterrorism committees
- Category II: States with only a National Security Council (NSC)
- Category III: States with both CT committees and NSC
- Category IV: States lacking any formal coordination committees

Bangladesh fits into Category I. After a mutiny in the border force BDR, in 2009 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina established the National Committee for Intelligence Coordination (NCIC). It is an intelligence fusion structure, where the Prime Minister and her defense adviser play a lead role in synthesizing intelligence from various domestic and external agencies including the DGFI, NSI, and the Special Branch of Police (Cabinet Division, 2019a). In 1982, the military regime of H.M. Ershad formed the NSC, which has long remained dysfunctional (Islam, 2008; Saber, 2015). The National Committee on Security Affairs was established in 2019 but little is known about its functions (Cabinet Division, 2019b). A rather more vibrant entity is the Armed Forces Division, which reports to the Prime Minister and coordinates issues related to military operations and plans, intelligence, logistics, training, civil-military relations, and UN peace operations (AFD, 2023).

Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka represent Category II. They have formed NSCs but lack any separate counterterrorism committees. Among the three states, the Sri Lankan NSC was formed in 1999, the Afghan NSC after the U.S. invasion in 2001, and the Nepal NSC in 2016 (Sedra, 2006;

Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka 2017; *Himalayan Times*, 5 July 2016). In the absence of a national counterterrorism body, the NSCs in these countries play an important role in serving as an apex body for authorizing the use of military force in CT operations.

India, Pakistan, and Maldives are in Category III. They are unique states as they have established both NSC and the national-level CT authorities. Pakistan set up the first NSC in 1969 but its fate was hung at the wish of the incumbent governments (Rizvi, 2012). After coming to power in 2013 for a second term, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif set up an NSC that extended membership to his national security advisor, key ministers, and the ISI chief. Pakistan also formed the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) in 2009 but clarified its mandate and gave it a legal footing in 2013 (Khan, 2013; Government of Pakistan, 2013). The governing body of Pakistan's NACTA includes provincial chief ministers as well as the heads of major intelligence agencies such as ISI, IB, and FIA, and the police chiefs of four provinces and Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan (Govt. of Pakistan, 2013).

India established its NSC in 1998 as a three-tiered organization (*Indian Express*, 9 Oct. 2016). The first two tiers, known as the Strategic Policy Group and the Joint Intelligence Committee, include delegates from both the IB and the RAW along with the heads of other intelligence agencies, as well as civilian and military bureaucrats. The third tier—the National Security Advisory Board—is represented by only eminent civil society delegates. Although the central government of India planned for the establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in 2012, several provincial states resisted the plan to undermine the influence of the federal government (Patil & Vishwanathan, 2022, p. 89). An attempt to rejuvenate the NCTC focuses on bringing it under the authority of IB with strong operational powers (*The Hindu*, 15 Oct. 2016).

Maldives revived its defunct NSC in 2009 and formed the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in 2016 to enhance the country's intelligence efforts in the fight against terrorism (*Maldives Independent*, 27 Feb. 2016). The Maldivian Ministry of Defense and National Security, rather than the Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for overseeing the NCTC, indicating the military's influence in CT matters (Phairoosch, 2022, p. 189).

Bhutan, dubbed as one of the world's happiest nations, is the only state in Category IV. It lacks either an NSC or an NCTC. This is largely due to its dependence on India for coordination of its national security affairs. Such dependence was evident in Bhutan's counter-terrorism operations in 2003 that flushed out the Indian ULFA rebels (Choden 2004, pp. 123-124; Penjore 2004, pp. 119-124).

In summary, there are several distinct trends in the militarization of intelligence apparatus in South Asia. The acquisition of dual mandates and the search for a lead CT role by the armed forces have created a highly competitive operational space for civilian police services. As the turf battles between civilian and military agencies continue, civilian police have shown enormous resilience in creating new entities for combating terrorism and insurgency. Yet, at the national security and intelligence coordination bodies, civilian police services are slightly under-represented than the armed forces indicating a balance that tilts toward the latter.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the threat landscape and state responses to terrorism in postcolonial South Asia. It revisited Kraska's theory and presented evidence of how militarization can shape the security and intelligence community by documenting three pathways: dual mandates, leadership, and representation. It shows that the transnational network of al Qaeda and ISIS, and their

influence on homegrown militants have considerably determined the growth of a highly militarized counterterrorism culture in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition to these transnational threats, radical left and ethno-nationalist rebel groups have driven the growth of a militarized law enforcement and intelligence apparatus in Bangladesh, India, and Maldives. Since the Maoist insurgency in Bhutan and Nepal, and the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka constitute sharply different threats, the rise of militarized counterterrorism and counterinsurgency practices in these three states are unrelated to the U.S.-led global war on terrorism.

What does the future look like? As the colonial past and the postcolonial realities suggest, the changing nature of domestic politics, threat landscape, and external influence will act as crucial determinants of policing practices in South Asia. In Afghanistan, the U.S. withdrawal, the Taliban takeover, and the operations of ISIS-KP spoilers and anti-Taliban resistance fighters will profoundly transform the composition and mandate of the security and intelligence services (ICG, 2022). In India, the search for a negotiated peace in the Northeastern states may alter the deployment of military and paramilitary forces in the region (George KG & Jha, 2022). In Sri Lanka, the 2019 Easter Bombing added a new dimension of faith-based extremism (Shaffer, 2023). Pakistan's crucial civil-military relations and its foreign policy priorities in Afghanistan and Kashmir will shape its CT operations (IISS, 2022, pp. 326, 338, 362). In Bangladesh, while faith-based and ethno-nationalist militants have long maintained sharply different agendas, evidence of their strategic alliance in the hilly and border areas has added more concerns (*The Business Standard*, 21 October 2022). As the threat of terrorism and violent extremism evolves in South Asia, the trend in militarization is likely to influence law enforcement and intelligence practices in the foreseeable future. Hence, further studies are needed to understand the trends and effects of militarized policing and intelligence practices.

Author's Bio

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