

Countering Khalistan: Understanding India's Counter-Rebellion Strategies during the Punjab Crisis

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The government of India oversaw the near secession of a vitally important State during the Punjab Crisis. Like most countries facing an armed rebellion, it struggled to defeat the militants, despite numerous military advantages. The government also failed to end the conflict through settlement, despite strong incentives to do so. For their part, the opposition and armed rebellion failed to achieve any significant concessions to remedy Sikh or Punjabi grievances and were eventually defeated. This article integrates previous research on counterinsurgency and civil war settlements to understand why settlements so often fail and why states are so rarely able to defeat insurgent movements. The article outlines the conditions under which either a settlement or military approach is likely to be successful, emphasizing the interplay between the veto players in the government, the capacity of the security forces, and the level of cohesion between the political and armed opposition. Applying this analysis to the Punjab Crisis highlights the role of veto players in neighboring States and ruling coalitions that prevented a negotiated settlement and the counterproductive role of collective violence by security forces. It also identifies relatively rare conditions under which a hardline security-centric approach is likely to be successful - in this case, unified Centre and State governments, increased capacity of security forces, and fragmenting, criminalized rebels.

Introduction

Punjab is one of the most strategically important States in India. It borders rival Pakistan, the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and is one of the buffer States between Pakistan and the capital, Delhi. The success of the green revolution solidified Punjab's strategic importance to the whole of India as it allowed India to feed its population and become a net food exporter. Yet in the 1980s and early 1990s, the movement for an independent Khalistan threatened to sever this vital region from the nation - by 1991, it seemed all but determined the separatists would win. Still, at different stages of the conflict, the Centre repeatedly balked at getting a working settlement or implementing the ones that were agreed upon. After a decade and a half of escalating violence, taking around 20,000¹ lives, and alternating approaches to dealing with it, an intense security-centric offensive was able to dismantle the leadership of rebels and declare victory.

The Punjab crisis presents a puzzle for political scientists. If states prioritize national security and territorial integrity above all else, why was it so difficult to end the conflict in Punjab? Why did the Centre renege on its agreements to

save this vital region from catastrophe? If the security forces were able to defeat the rebels, why not have them do it sooner? Why did state violence prove ultimately successful in 1992-1993, but backfire earlier?

This article attempts to answer these questions and provide a general understanding of the varied government responses to the Punjab crisis that evolved into a full-fledged movement for an independent Sikh homeland to be called Khalistan. First, I identify - in the broad sense - the available options for managing a rebel movement by distinguishing between schemes that attempt to reduce the political demand for the rebel movement and those military solutions that target the actual fighters (or supply of the movement). Using this framework, I discuss the conditions under which each approach is likely to be successful by unifying three common, but usually distinct, theoretical approaches. First, I examine the political constraints on the government, looking at whether the political survival of the ruling party allows a settlement to be reached and/or implemented. Second, I examine the cohesion of the rebel movement, building on patterns of political leadership approach (Chima, 2010) and the organizational cohesion approach (Staniland, 2014). Last, I look at the capabilities of the security forces to show how effective supply side counterinsurgency is not only difficult and rare, but how attempts at supply side counterinsurgency without adequate intelligence capabilities can backfire.

Using this framework, it is clear why so many attempts at settlement were unlikely to be successful and why effective supply side counterinsurgency was illusive for much of the conflict. In early and middle stages of the conflict, the Punjab Police were largely incapable of mounting a sufficient supply side counter-rebellion so the government alternated between a negotiated settlement strategy to manage the entire political movement for redress of Sikh grievances and excessive supply side tactics, such as Operations Blue Star and Woodrose. The former strategy was destined to fail because the Indian government was constrained by its political position *vis a vis* State politics in Haryana and Rajasthan from credibly committing to concessions. The rebels were incapable of credibly committing as well, because the Akali Dal leadership had no control over the emerging armed movement - i.e., did not speak for the militants - and thus could not discipline them into any abiding by any agreement. The latter strategy - via excessive collective violence - not only failed but had the counterproductive effect of strengthening the rebellion. Finally, the government switched to a hardline supply side approach of selective targeting by the Punjab Police, who had spent the intervening years developing their intelligence and operational capacities. In the face of this Police violence and Army control of the countryside, the rebels fragmented, began in-fighting, increased violence against civilians (especially against Sikhs) and essentially became non-political, armed criminal organizations. This continued through 1993 when the movement was declared defeated.

The supply of and demand for rebellion²

Broadly speaking, any rebel movement - indeed, any political movement - is made up of a demand and supply - respectively, those that want the political outcome and those that take action to see it achieved (Leites and Wolf, 1970). The supply side of a rebellion refers to, not only the supply of individual rebels willing to take up arms, but also the weapons they employ, their financing, and perhaps the territory that they control or exploit (e.g., safe haven) (Leites and Wolf, 1970, pp. 32-33). The demand side refers to the support for the political goals of the rebellion - secession, revolution, or decentralization - either from the local population (Leites and Wolf, 1970) or in the resolve of the elites in the political opposition or rebel leadership.

Both the supply and demand sides are each necessary, but not sufficient conditions for a politically meaningful rebel movement (from the rebel perspective) and therefore create political disorder (from the government perspective) (see Table 1). In the absence of a political demand and the people willing to rebel for it (southeast corner of Table 1), we have a stable equilibrium of political order. This box represents the pre-conflict status quo, but can also represent a new post-conflict status quo if resolved satisfactorily. With only one - supply or demand - the state does have a problem, but not a rebel movement to face.

As political demand increases, but no one yet taking up arms for its cause, you have unstable order (northeast corner of Table 1). The situation is not yet characterized by violence and may not be easily detectable to outside observers. But this situation is unstable because it represents an opportunity for a political entrepreneur to take advantage of the situation and pursue an armed strategy. If (or when) this happens, the situation becomes a rebel movement (northwest corner of Table 1).

An armed group without a population that shares its demands or acts in ways that do not represent those demands is not a political rebel movement, but a criminal armed group. This situation can still be very dangerous as the armed group uses violence for profit or other private motives. Groups with these characteristics may try to build popular support, politically for their cause and/or materially for their operation, to move or return to the northwest corner of Table 1. Che Guevara referred to them as "bandit bands." In their case, not having the support of the people, like guerrilla bands do, made them susceptible to denunciation, capture, and disintegration (Guevara, 1997[1961], 52).

It is important to note that the supply and demand of rebellion are not independent of each other and clearly interact to some degree. Most importantly, political support may provide resources that otherwise make up the supply, increase the supply, or allow the supply to function, such as: safe havens, other shelter, food, or money for weapons. Conversely, when rebel supply is sufficient to have the upper hand to threaten civilians locally, rebels may attempt to create (or increase) popular support - thus appearing to increase the political demand. As we will see below, supply and demand side counter-rebellion approaches are not always mutually exclusive and in some case one method may be considered

on both sides. Therefore, I present this theoretical framework, not as descriptively accurate, but in what I hope will be analytically useful.

Table 1: Supply and demand as necessary, but not sufficient conditions

		SUPPLY	
		Present	Absent
DEMAND	Present	<i>Rebel movement</i> (political disorder)	<i>Opportunity for rebellion</i> (unstable political order)
	Absent	<i>Criminal armed challenger</i> (apolitical disorder)	<i>Status quo</i> (stable political order)

Countering rebellion

Once a state is faced with a meaningful rebel movement, it can counter it through strategies that focus on the supply side of the rebellion, the demand side, or some combination thereof.

Demand side counterinsurgency focuses on reducing the popular support for the goals for which the rebellion purports to fight or by getting opposition/rebel elites to accept a settlement. This is attempted in a variety of ways. States can undercut support by delegitimizing the insurgent group, branding them as extremists or criminals. States can try to affect the preferences of the population by providing public goods in an effort to build their own legitimacy. This often occurs through development assistance, health care clinics, or providing security. Last, states may choose a negotiated settlement strategy with the armed group or its political wing. They may pursue a compromise where they give in to some demands in exchange for the end of the armed rebellion.

Supply side counterinsurgency focuses on neutralizing the insurgency by eliminating actual insurgents, severing their capacity to act, and deterring would-be recruits from joining (i.e., those who are ideologically motivated, but deterred by calculated risk). To do these things, the state is necessarily choosing a coercive strategy. Much of the counterinsurgency literature focuses on how to do these things proficiently, which types of state violence can achieve them, or which state security forces are tasked with carrying them out.

Clearly, many approaches to counterinsurgency attempt to combine these aspects, but often favor one side or the other. Any specific approach may be conceived as falling on some part of a continuum between the two. Classical counterinsurgency doctrine that focuses on the “hearts and minds” of the population may appear to favor the demand side, but a central purpose of winning the hearts and minds is to gather sufficient intelligence to target the actual insurgents (i.e., remove the supply) (Galula, 1968; Kalyvas, 2006; Petraeus and Amos, 2006).

Choosing between supply and demand side approaches

Where a counter-rebellion policy falls on the continuum between supply and demand is both a matter of state choice and a matter of circumstance. Like most of the rationalist literature, I expect states to choose strategies that maximize their chances of 1) successfully ending the conflict and 2) maintaining the political survival of the governments that decide state policy. However, states often confront situations without options that have a clearly high probability of success, but are nonetheless required to act for their political survival. Armed rebellions are one such situation. State choices in this regard must be understood in the context of the movement they face and the constraints on the state. The next two subsections seek to understand state choices by delineating the conditions under which different approaches are likely to be successful. Subsequently, I discuss what states might do if the conditions are such that no option exists with much likelihood of success.

Demand side counter-rebellion

Under what conditions will demand side approaches be successful? Efforts to affect legitimacy of the state or the rebels will likely only make a difference on the margins. When the state is outright hated, no amount of efforts will be sufficient. But if the state is viewed as at least somewhat legitimate, some efforts may be useful. Likewise, the success of efforts to de-legitimize the rebels will depend on their character and how the population already views them. Furthermore, popular preferences are likely the result of military conditions rather than the other way around (Leites and Wolf, 1970; Kalyvas, 2006). Since efforts for legitimation are costly and the results likely to be marginal, it may be more useful to consider the conditions under which a compromise approach may work.

To achieve a negotiated settlement that successfully ends the conflict by reducing the demand for rebellion, we need a state and a rebellion that are both willing and able to concede at least some demands. A state is capable of compromise when the demands it can concede are not against the vital interests of the state or against the vital interests of the parties negotiating the agreement. In some cases, conceding to certain demands would threaten the survival of the ruling party and make them worse off than continuing the counterinsurgency. For instance, if the government relies on the support of a coalition (formally or informally), members of that coalition may hold veto power over the terms of a settlement (if they are necessary members of the ruling coalition). The government cannot concede to rebel demands to which these members do not agree.³

Rebels that are capable of settlement are those who are a single cohesive unit. In Staniland's (2014, pp. 5-10) typology, cohesive rebel organizations are those that are "integrated," meaning that leadership is united, capable of controlling local commanders, and those commanders are capable of controlling the rank-and-file rebels. When there are multiple rebel organizations, it will be

much harder to achieve a meaningful settlement simply because there are more veto players (Cunningham, 2006; 2011). But if those organizations are united under a political wing, ending violence through settlement is possible. Even when there is one rebel organization, that organization must be a cohesive unit. The political wing must speak for the armed wing and the armed wing must be able to rein in potential spoilers. The main issue: If the rebels' political leadership signs an agreement, can it stop dissenters from reverting to war?

Supply side counter-rebellion

Under what conditions will supply side approaches be successful? The success of the supply side is based on military or tactical superiority. First, states must be able to deny a rebels' use of territory, a population to support them, or a safe haven. Usually, this is done by the military controlling or recapturing territory from rebels. But state control does not mean an end to the insurgency because rebels are not territorially bound (Butler and Gates, 2009). They can become clandestine and carry out attacks on the government and the population using terror tactics or guerrilla warfare.

Defeating guerrillas or clandestine rebels through the supply side approach is dependent on whether the state can provide meaningful deterrence to potential rebels and capably neutralize existing rebels. Potential rebels are deterred when the state uses selective violence (i.e., against individual rebels).⁴ When the state uses collective violence and targets civilians alongside rebels, they risk a backlash effect that actually makes the rebellion stronger (Francisco, 2005; Goodwin, 2001; Hultquist, 2015; Peceny and Stanley, 2010).⁵ Selective violence deters potential rebels because they can rationally calculate that joining the rebellion increases their likelihood of death or arrest while not joining the rebels increases their likelihood of survival (Kalyvas, 2006; Machain, Morgan, & Regan, 2011).

The fundamental problem of supply side counterinsurgency is that selective violence is extremely difficult for most states to achieve. It requires individual-level intelligence. The state cannot rely on characteristics or indicators that someone is a rebel, because then they are pursuing collective violence, leading more civilians to join the rebels. Individual-level intelligence is difficult to obtain and utilize. Typically, states try to obtain individual intelligence by getting the population to denounce the individual rebels (i.e., name names). They may try to win their affection by winning their "hearts and minds" or by providing a protection racket. Both of these scenarios require massive armies to occupy the areas where rebels are hiding, which itself can de-legitimize the state and make winning the hearts and minds more difficult.

The success of supply side counterinsurgency is also dependent on the nature of the rebels. Selective targeting may provide some level of deterrence but it may not be sufficient in the face of an integrated rebellion - where a strong and cohesive organization is able to withstand individual members, including the leadership, being targeted and neutralized, even in large numbers (Staniland, 2014). However, when the rebellion is a "vanguard" organization, with strong

central control, but weak local control, the rebellion is susceptible to leadership decapitation (Staniland, 2014 p. 29). Selective violence is even more likely to effectively disintegrate a rebel group when the character of the rebel group is “parochial”- weak central control and strong local control - or fragmented - with weak central and weak local control (Staniland, 2014). Fragmented or incoherent rebel organizations are prone to splintering and in-fighting in the face of selective violence. Eventually, these organizations become a multitude of small, opportunistic, criminal groups incapable of mounting an effective challenge to the state and achieving any popular support that is not coerced. With selective state violence, potential rebels are deterred both because the groups cannot claim any legitimacy through ideology and because they are likely to die from or be captured through state violence.

Summary

The theoretical discussion above represents a way of thinking through and understanding the choices that states and rebels make to achieve their political goals. When the conditions exist for successful supply side counterinsurgency, the state is likely to choose this option since it does not require concessions through the compromise approach. These conditions are: 1) security forces capable of denying rebels territorial control or safe haven, 2) security forces capable of selective targeting, and 3) rebel organization that is not so cohesive and integrated that it could withstand selective targeting.

If these conditions are not met, the government may choose between the demand side approach of negotiation/settlement or take the risk of strengthening the rebellion by using the often counterproductive supply side method of collective targeting. We should expect the government to choose the negotiation approach (and not risk potentially counterproductive repression) so long as 1) the concessions necessary for settlement do not threaten the states’ vital interests or the political survival of the party running the government and 2) that the rebel leadership can credibly commit to settlement.

However, when none of the conditions for either successful approach are present, all options have low probabilities of success. In these cases, we should expect states to oscillate between low probability approaches, because not acting when faced with an armed rebellion would be sacrificing state sovereignty.

The next sections apply this framework to the Khalistan insurgency. The Indian government pursued a variety of supply and demand side strategies. Each demand side approach that sought a negotiated settlement had a low-probability of success based on the veto players in the government and the divided political opposition and fragmented rebel movement. Each supply side approach failed, sometimes with minor consequences and at other with a major backlash, because the government security forces, like most, did not have the capacity to target insurgents selectively. These conditions shifted over the course of the conflict. Eventually, a unified government eventually pursued a hardline supply side offensive that was successful because the security forces invested in selective targeting capacity, controlled the countryside, and sealed the border, ending the

use of a safe haven. This offensive coincided with, and contributed to, the continued fragmentation of rebels into smaller, criminalized bands and the eventual disintegration of the rebel movement. The following sections analyze these occurrences chronologically, but Tables 2 and 3 provide summary lists of the major demand and supply side attempts, respectively.

Table 2: Selected List of Demand Side Attempts

<i>Demand failures</i>	<i>side</i>	<i>Conditions facilitating failure</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Pre-Bluestar negotiations (1981-1984)		Veto players in nearby States ^a Divided opposition: Longowal and militants ^b	Centre reneges repeatedly
Punjab Accord (1985)		Veto players in nearby States ^a Divided opposition: Longowal and militants ^b	Centre reneges on implementation Spoilers assassinate Longowal
Local democracy (1985-87)		Divided government b/n Punjab and Centre Divided opposition: ruling Akalis and militants ^b	Strengthened extremists over moderates President's Rule (1987)
Rode Initiative (1988)		Divided opposition: radicals and secessionists ^b	Derailed by violence at Golden Temple
Détente (~1990-91)		Veto players in National Front coalition Divided opposition: radicals and secessionists ^b	Strengthened/emboldened militant organizations Highest levels of Khalistani violence

^a State governments in Haryana and Rajasthan effectively veto settlements that favor Punjab in inter-State disputes

^b Government attempts at negotiation started with relative moderates who would settle for policy concessions (led by Longowal, then Barnala), then moved to

radicals who sought autonomy short of independence (Rode, then Mann). At each stage, a more extreme faction could threaten to spoil.

Table 3: Selected List of Supply Side Attempts

<i>Supply side failures</i>	<i>Facilitating Conditions</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Police targeting (approx.1981-1986)	Weak coercive and organizational capacity	Poor execution, escalation in violence
Operation Bluestar (1984)	Political demand that government act against rebels Lack of local capacity to deny safe haven in Golden Temple	Religious site destruction Collective violence against Sikhs Increased demand
Operation Woodrose (1984)	Lack of individual-level intelligence	Collective targeting of <i>Amritdhari</i> Sikhs Increased demand
<i>Supply side mixed results</i>		
Bullet for Bullet (1987-89)	Increasingly capable, but brutal, police force National Front coalition elected, required a softer strategy	Mixed results— slowed extremist violence, but brutality unsustainable Approach switched to détente
<i>Supply side success</i>		
Operation Black Thunder (1988)	Increasingly capable police force	Ended urban safe haven
Army/Police offensive (~1992- 1993)	Unified Centre/Punjab government Capable security forces (with successful division of labor) Fragmenting, criminalized rebels	End of high intensity violence (1993)

Emerging violence and an unserious response, 1981-early 1984

I begin my analysis in 1981 with the emergence of ethnonationalist violence that prompted a response from the government, allowing more qualified experts to explain the emergence of the demand for Khalistan. For now, it will suffice to say that the original demands as stated and symbolized in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) were threefold: 1) recognition of Sikh religious symbols, 2) political decentralization to Punjab, especially as it pertained to the farming community (e.g., increased share of water rights), and 3) transferring neighboring Punjabi-speaking districts and the shared capital of Chandigarh to Punjab solely.

When rebellions begin slowly, especially in unexpected areas, as was the case of Punjab, the government can choose to ignore them when they are small and sporadic, since they do not yet have the capacity to challenge the vital interests of the state. Governments are unlikely to negotiate with them for fear of legitimizing a small movement (Bapat, 2005). In 1980-1982, when Sikh ethnonationalists began using violence against the state and moved beyond the Narankari-Sikh clashes, the government chose not to respond seriously. Instead, the central government was “playing politics” in Punjab rather than attempt to end the early use of violence. Indeed, actors from both the Centre and State, both led by Congress (I) (hereafter Congress), played loosely with the radicalization of Sikh politics by supporting and protecting the more extreme elements, including the radical preacher Sant Jarnail Bhindranwale, in an effort to splinter support for the Akali Dal (Chima, 2010 pp. 58-61; Nayer and Singh, 1984 pp. 30-34; Tully and Jacob, 1985 pp. 57-61).

It is important to understand that Sikh demands had manifested themselves in two processes, a protest movement led by the Akali Dal, and increasingly, extremist violence led by Bhindranwale and other non-aligned groups. This violence tended to be communal in nature, targeting Hindus or Nirankaris, and assassinations of Punjabi politicians, police, or journalists.

When the government began to address the escalating violence, it did so through two avenues - increased police action and a negotiated settlement approach - neither had much chance of succeeding. First responders to law and order issues in India's federal system are States and their local institutions. Therefore, first efforts to deal with the issue were the default responsibility of the Punjab Police, which were not capable of selective targeting of militants, or willing to take them on directly at the time. Many others were believed to have sympathies with the militants (Tully and Jacob, 1985 pp. 108-109).

Those in the Punjab Police that did attempt to counter the political violence did so, not by targeting the actual militants, but by targeting *Amritdhari* Sikhs in early to middle 1982 (Chima, 2010 pp. 68-69). Since the virtue of being baptized (hence, *Amritdhari*) has nothing to do with being militant, these were correctly interpreted as communal killings. As discussed above, this type of

collective violence - targeting people that have similar characteristics as militants, but otherwise are not guilty - is counterproductive and actually increases demand for the rebellion, which is exactly what happened in Punjab.

On the other hand, the government had already begun the demand side approach by participating in talks, sometimes in secret, starting in October of 1981. The talks took place in the context of a growing protest movement, led by Sikh political institutions that had mobilized a large number of people and agitated for demands mostly for the Sikh community. Based on several years of both policy grievances and police abuses, the Akalis had a large list of demands, some plausible and others highly unlikely. Their demands included religious status and symbolic issues, such as: the recently rescinded right to send pilgrims to *gurdwaras* in Pakistan, the right for Sikhs to bring ceremonial daggers on flights, designation of Amritsar as a holy city, and designation of a train to be named after the Golden Temple. The more difficult issues were political ones, especially those that dealt with bordering Indian states. In general, the demands were for more autonomy to the truncated Punjab and allow them more control of water rights. The Akalis demanded that the shared capital of Chandigarh be transferred exclusively to Punjab, as well as Punjabi-speaking areas in bordering States. It also demanded that States bordering Punjab - each with significant numbers of Punjabi speakers - recognize Punjabi with second language status. The water-rights issues were particularly difficult to resolve. The Akalis demanded exclusive Punjab control of the Bhakra dam - a large multi-purpose dam transmitting power and irrigation water to several north Indian States and the capital territory of Delhi. They also demanded redistribution of river waters in a way that more stayed in Punjab, particularly for irrigation. (Chima, 2010, p. 66).

Three rounds of talks occurred between October 1981 and April 1982. Each failed because no agreement could be reached on inter-state issues. The central government would not budge on these issues for a couple reasons. First, India's federal system requires those affected states would have to agree to these issues and they were vastly against it. Perhaps the central government could pressure or strong-arm those states into an agreement for national security reasons, but the Congress Party could not do so without losing support of Hindus, both in Punjab and in the Hindu-majority bordering states of Haryana and Rajasthan. Chima (2010, pp. 66-68) argues that the resolution of these issues, as well as other potential compromises, may have resolved the crisis, but each party was unwilling to jeopardize their political support.

The other reason the negotiated settlement approach failed was that the Akalis, led by relative moderates, organized and spoke for the protest movement, but did not speak for the militants or extremists. They, therefore, could not have made them stick to a negotiated agreement even if they had signed one. The extremists had started calling for full implementation of the ASR, without any compromise, and were unlikely to accept a deal. In many ways, the extremists, led by Bhindranwale, were popular and felt they should be leading the Sikh institutions. Agreeing to a settlement negotiated by the Akalis

would strengthen the existing Akali leadership and hurt their own attempts at gaining power in Sikh political institutions.

Consequently, the negotiated settlement approach under these conditions ended up further radicalizing Sikhs in Punjab and escalating violence by the extremists. At each failed negotiation, the Akalis could not claim victory and call off their protest movement. Plus, since the Sikh leadership was divided and the extremists had some popular support, otherwise moderate Sikh leaders began competitive *ethnic outbidding* (Chima, 2010). This further radicalized the population and legitimized the extremists and militants. Each time, the Akalis had to call for a renewed protest and either increase their demands or solidify their position on an implausible one.

The final negotiation before Operation Bluestar is especially telling. The Akali leadership, led by moderate Harchand Singh Longowal, realized they could not get a deal that fully implemented the ASR and that further contestation would strengthen the militants and come with greater violence. The Congress party did agree to the Chandigarh issue (Chima, 2010 p. 92), which was as serious of a compromise as the politics of neighboring States would allow. PM Gandhi was also under increasing pressure from Hindu populations across the country to act against growing violence by Sikh militants. The Akalis did their best to get Bhindranwale and the militants to agree to settlement and call off the *morcha*. Bhindranwale continued with his absolutist position that only the full implementation of the ASR was acceptable. The negotiated settlement was nearly impossible to end violence under these conditions - a politically constrained government and factionalized opposition.

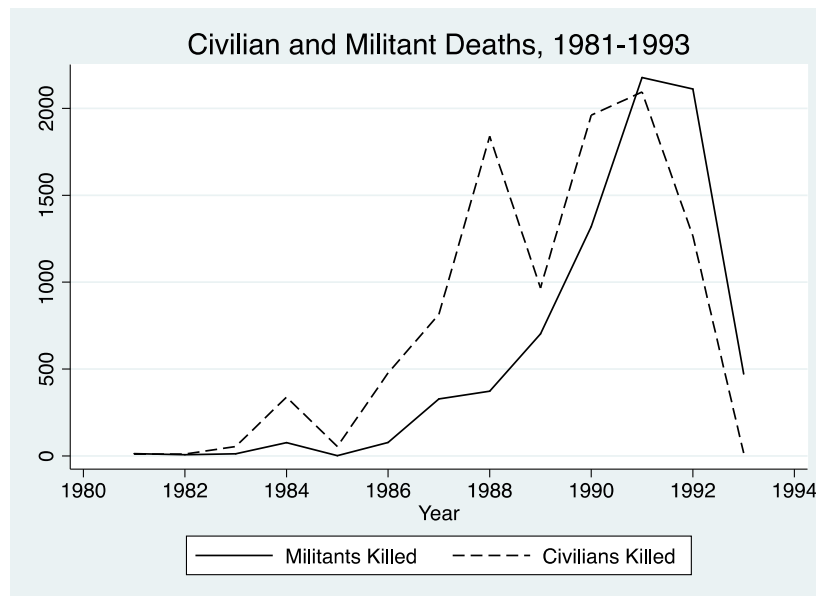
Under these conditions, several more rounds of negotiations continued, as did the escalation of violence. In fall of 1983, the central government began taking the problem seriously. Sikh militants hijacked a bus, separated the Hindus from Sikhs, and killed 6 Hindus. PM Gandhi quickly dismissed the Congress-led Punjab government and imposed President's Rule (which means rule by central government) in Punjab.⁶

In sum, the early years of the militancy reflected a comparatively small, but growing level of violence. This violence reflected the increased power of militants as well as the incompetence of the state response (politically, strategically, and tactically). The radicals were growing powerful within the Sikh political system by crowding out the moderates. They also began a shift in their use of violence from selective assassinations and ethnic clashes to arming themselves to challenge the state more directly. They were beginning to develop more material power. The ranks and sympathizers of militants grew after each round of failed negotiations and they began amassing supporters with military backgrounds and serious weapons capabilities, including AK-47s and a grenade factory in the Golden Temple. The militants not only increased their use of violence but it became more serious at each turn.

Growing rebellion and the excessive supply side approach, 1984

As the militants fortified the Golden Temple Complex and the negotiated settlement approach continued to fail, the Centre switched toward a supply side approach to remove the militants and deny them a safe haven. The switch to President's Rule, even sacking a Congress government in Punjab, signaled the Centre was taking the Punjab Problem more seriously, but not so much as to implement an agreement that would hurt Congress politically. It was clear that President's Rule had failed. Bhindranwale had escalated his militancy; he exploited the Golden Temple Complex as a safe haven, and fortified the Akal Takht - the holiest of Sikh shrines and seat of power for Sikh religious institutions. The militants continued to gain in strength and in their use of violence. The year 1983 saw the total number of deaths at 88 (55 of which were civilians) (See Figure 1). This number rose threefold in the first five months of 1984 alone. It was this quick escalation after the imposition of President's Rule that really alarmed the central government into action. Still, they did not have the tools to be successful at a supply side approach. Instead, the government replaced its under-reaction with an over-reaction; what Paul Wallace calls sending an elephant to catch a mouse (Wallace, 1995, 2007).

Figure 1. Trends of civilian and militant deaths, 1981-1993 (Source: Wallace, 2007)



For the supply side approach to be effective, the state's security forces must be able to target rebels at the individual level and avoid collective targeting that

risks a counterproductive backlash and strengthens the rebel position. Usually, the difficulty in selective targeting is achieving individual-level intelligence of rebels and having the operational capacity to neutralize them. In this case, individual intelligence was not an issue - Bhindranwale and other militants were known to the security forces as was their location in the Golden Temple Complex. The problem was avoiding collective violence that kills Sikh civilians. The summer of 1984 saw two major counter-rebellion operations that both intensified and changed the shape of the rebellion for years to come, Operations Bluestar and Woodrose.

Operation Bluestar

Operation Bluestar is so infamous it needs little coverage. The military siege and later assault on the Golden Temple took place in early June 1984. The Army sealed off Punjab while PM Gandhi hoped for a last minute negotiation before the assault. The Akalis sent in Tohra, a senior leader with close ties to Bhindranwale to get him to surrender before the assault. It was not successful and the Army assault began shortly after (Chima, 2010, pp.93-94). What was expected to be a short siege took several days and ended up taking the lives of many soldiers. It was ultimately successful at killing Bhindranwale and most of the militant leadership. It also resulted in the deaths of a contested, but definitely large, number of Sikh civilians and attack of the Akal Takht with heavy artillery, damaging it almost beyond repair.⁷

Operation Bluestar has been seen in many lights, with critics claiming it was a deliberate attack on the Sikh collective and supporters claiming it was necessary, thus the extensive collateral damage must be excused. Both of these views are unjustified. Indeed, given the failure of the negotiated settlement approach, some action against militants in the Golden Temple was required. No government would allow militants who use terrorist violence and assassinations of government officials to have a safe haven in their territory. This, or at least some action, was the natural consequence of the inability of the government to concede more and the unwillingness of Bhindranwale to concede anything.

But the way Operation Bluestar played out was not necessary; it was an extreme overreaction that came with numerous counterproductive results. An army operation on a religious site must be taken with the utmost care to only target militants - at least minimize civilian casualties - and avoid destruction of items of religious and cultural importance. It would not have been easy to flush out Bhindranwale and the other militants had holed up inside the Akal Takht. But the Army could have allowed civilians to leave, and seal off the area to ensure the militants could not leave and resume violence. No state will allow rebels to use a safe haven that allows them to continue to operate, but if the rebels could not leave, waiting them out - however long - is preferable to large-scale destruction of holy sites and mass killing of civilians. This was possible, albeit difficult. The fact that Operation Black Thunder succeeded four years later under largely similar conditions is a testament to that argument, although those

security forces did have the advantage of knowing how not to do it (Fair, 2008; Marwah, 1995).

Operation Woodrose

The government continued the supply side approach with military force through the summer of 1984 through Operation Woodrose, during which the army went through the countryside and *gurdwaras* to neutralize suspected extremists. However, the army, like any outside force, did not have identifying intelligence at the individual-level regarding who the actual rebels are and it, therefore, cannot target selectively to provide adequate deterrence. Instead, the army did what many outside forces (as well as many politicians, civilians, and even academics) do, which was to view extremists in the collective - i.e., believe a shared identity with extremists is close enough to guilt. When dealing with religious identity, it is tempting - though inaccurate and dangerous - to believe that the more religious a person is the more likely they support violent religious extremism. Since Bhindranwale and the other militants were claiming to represent an ethnoreligious group, the army saw religiosity as an indicator of support. Operation Woodrose, then, specifically targeted *Amritdhari* Sikhs on the suspicion that being more religious, and therefore, baptized meant they were likely to support the rebellion. This policy was even published in the July issue of an army magazine. Perhaps it was a matter of convenience, since *Amritdhari* Sikhs appear easy to identify because of the religious requirements. They have beards, unshorn hair kept in a turban, etc. The matter is complicated further because it is not as easy as seems to just target *Amritdhari* Sikhs, since *kesdhari* Sikhs, estimated between one-third and two-thirds of the Sikh population, also keep unshorn hair in turbans (Chima, 2010 pp. 23-24; Singh, 2000).

Targeting at either of these levels of collective aggregation is highly problematic. First, it is not selective at the individual level, and therefore, targets innocents alongside combatants. In many cases, this type of targeting actually gets more civilians than combatants, because those in an armed group usually have escape plans or are given some type of protection. Second, targeting by identity is often seen by counterinsurgents to be the “next best thing” to individual targeting, since they assume – wrongly - that those who share the identity share the cause, may be supporters, or may be actual insurgents. But by targeting by identity that the rebels claim to fight for, the counterinsurgent 1) targets the exact potential rebel pool and 2) plays into rebel rhetoric that the state is against “them” as a group. Both of these can strengthen the rebellion through supply and demand mechanisms. On the demand side, if you are targeted for your ethnicity, it will increase your grievances with the state. Or, you will believe - perhaps rightly - that the state is out to get your group. On the supply side, those targeted in the potential rebel pool will find themselves with few choices but to flee or join the rebels for survival. Collective targeting, therefore, is counterproductive for the state because it simultaneously increases demand for rebellion and helps mobilize the supply of rebels. In the case of Operation Woodrose, after most organized militants died in Operation Bluestar, collective

targeting sent potential, but not yet realized, rebels across the Pakistani border to arm themselves for protection (Gill, 2001 p. 30).

Both Operations Bluestar and Woodrose clearly contributed to the increased demand for the rebellion for an independent Khalistan. Bluestar, in particular, saw the large-scale mutiny of Sikh army soldiers and outraged a large diaspora in the West. But two other watershed events of 1984 made matters significantly worse. In direct response to the assault on the Golden Temple, PM Indira Gandhi's two Sikh bodyguards assassinated her on the 31 October 1984. This was followed by the anti-Sikh riots, itself a form of collective targeting, that lasted four days in many parts of North India. While many leaders, including the High Priests of the SGPC, condemned both acts and called for calm, it was clear the Sikhs were feeling not only humiliated, but more concerned that their ability to maintain their distinct culture and identity in a Hindu-dominated India was as precarious as ever.

Increased demand for rebellion and the negotiated settlement approach, 1985-1986

The increased demand for rebellion after the many unfortunate events of 1984 revealed itself in early March 1985 at an Akali Dal conference in Anandpur Sahib. The Akalis were in a precarious position. They had not yet achieved any demands to call off their original *morcha*, and they had suffered the humiliation of Bluestar, and thus could not back off from their demands. At the conference, the Akali junior leadership added new demands created by the events of 1984 - to remove the military presence from Punjab, end the declaration of Punjab as a "disturbed area," to allow the return of deserted Sikh army soldiers to their ranks, to release senior Akali leadership from jail, and to carry out an independent investigation of the anti-Sikh riots (Chima, 2010, p. 110). While these additional demands were relatively moderate, more hardline elements soon used the conference to demand an explicitly secessionist agenda for Khalistan. "For the next several hours, the huge gathering listened to poets and *dhadis* (ballad singers) extolling the heroic deeds of Sant Bhindranwale and Mrs Gandhi's assassins..." (Chima, pp. 110-111).

It was amidst this radicalization and growing demand for secession that the government re-instated the demand side approach. Rajiv Gandhi became the new Prime Minister with a decisive Congress majority in the Lok Sabha. After campaigning against the threat of Sikh extremists he began a more conciliatory approach in office. He quickly set up a cabinet panel to re-examine Akali demands. In March, he released some of the senior Akali leadership from jail, who each quickly competed by ethnic outbidding the others to gain the support of an angry Sikh community. He eventually agreed to some moderated pre-conditions for negotiations, including: a judicial inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots, the release of other senior Akali leaders, and the removal of the ban on the AISSF (Chima, pp. 110-112).

Like the period before 1984, the government did not have the capability for a successful supply side approach. The Punjab Police remained inept at selective

targeting, the army and paramilitaries had proved an overreaction and counterproductive. The army had lost legitimacy in Punjab, which is very problematic, since the army must have the Punjabi population on its side in any future potential war with Pakistan. But the government had to do something to keep further radicalization at bay. Violence continued, at first sporadic and communal, carried out by small groups of militants without any coherent leadership - they had mostly been killed in Operation Blue Star. Soon, though, some groups were regrouping with sufficient capacity. Babbar Khalsa, for instance, killed nearly 100 people in May 1985 by detonating a handful of bombs (Gupta and Thukral, 1985).

The most significant aspect of the negotiated approach occurred through the Punjab Accord, or the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, signed late July 1985. As its name suggests, the accord was the outcome of direct talks between PM Rajiv Gandhi and leader of moderate Akali party, Longowal. It took only two days of negotiations and appeared to give in to many Akali demands, including politically difficult inter-state issues, such as the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab (solely). Still, the Punjab Accord had many detractors in Punjab. It fell short of the full ASR, remained vague in many areas, and actually passed off many important issues to governmental commissions or tribunals.⁸ In effect, this was a “sellable” accord with serious concessions from the government, but was certainly going to encounter resistance from more extreme or radical views, who continued to call for the full implementation of the ASR.

While it appeared more likely that this attempt at the demand side approach had a chance at resolving the Punjab crisis,⁹ there were several conditions that made it unlikely to be successful. After Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, PM Rajiv Gandhi did have a stronger incentive to take the crisis seriously and to repair Centre-Sikh, as well as Hindu-Sikh, relations. However, the Akali political leadership was divided between moderates and radicals and neither could control the (mostly) unorganized militants. Although the Centre had more incentives to resolve the crisis, it would still run into political obstacles that constrained its ability to implement the Punjab Accord.

I will begin with the Akali leadership. As mentioned above, in the aftermath of 1984, there existed a competitive ethnic outbidding among the Akalis to claim the angry and humiliated Sikh support. In an effort to consolidate this support for his more radical (but not secessionist) faction, Baba Joginder Singh, the father of the martyred Bhindranwale, attempted to create a United Akali Dal by dismissing the existing variants and establishing a new, but unified, party. However, district leadership of the more moderate Akali Dal, led by Longowal, rejected this effort. In effect, this created two parties, each with significant support, reflecting a split between moderates (willing to negotiate) and radicals (unwilling for any concession short of ASR implementation).

The Centre, of course, would negotiate with Longowal of the moderate Akali Dal - in part because they were willing to compromise and in part to strengthen their position *vis a vis* the radicals. While Longowal would declare a victory for the *morcha* with the concessions of the Punjab Accord, the radicals rejected it outright and claimed Longowal had sold out the Sikhs for political gain. The

Accord was ratified through a meeting of Sikhs across the Sikh political system, validating Longowal's leadership, despite the objections of the sizable minority, the Akali Dal (United), the AISSF, and some influential leaders in the moderate Akali Dal (Weisman, 1985).

If it had just been the more radical aspects of the political leadership that saw the Accord as a betrayal, its flaws may have been overcome and it may have been able to end the crisis. However, the violent extremists and the militants rejected the Accord as well. The militants were largely non-organized gangs, except for the Babbar Khalsa, which would make it difficult to get them to abide by any agreement. Far from getting them to accept the agreement, the worry of violent spoilers was much more pertinent. Indeed, Sant Longowal was assassinated in August ahead of the Punjab State Assembly elections.

The Centre was re-establishing local democracy in Punjab in the hopes of signaling return to normalcy after the signing of the Accord, another demand side approach. Although the Punjab elections did take place in September, Punjab was several years away from the return to anything resembling normalcy. The Akali Dal (United) boycotted the elections and Longowal's moderate version of the Akalis, now headed by Surjit Singh Barnala, won a clear majority amid high turnout (66.5%).

Implementing the Punjab Accord was top priority for both Chief Minister Barnala's Punjab government and PM Rajiv Gandhi's central government. But the political context made it nearly impossible, leading to the end of the demand side, negotiated approach. As per the agreement, the Matthew Commission would determine which Hindi-speaking areas would be transferred to Haryana in exchange for Chandigarh. Its report came out right before the Accord's deadline for the transfer of Chandigarh in late January 1986, but since some identified villages and towns were not contiguous with Haryana, it sent the entire process back to political negotiations between the Centre, Punjab, and Haryana. Chief Minister Barnala could not allow a Punjabi-speaking island to be subsumed into Haryana - he was having enough trouble selling the Accord as it is. While the Centre pushed for an agreement, Haryana's leaders did not have the same incentives for the negotiated settlement that the Centre did and stood firm against an agreement. Haryana's leaders had already been pressured into allowing the transfer of Chandigarh in the first place and were not going to budge again (Mitra, Chawla, and Thukral, 1986).

The demand side approach failed for all the reasons stated above - divided Sikh political leadership, no control of armed groups by any political leadership, and a central government that cannot (or would not) force an agreement on a State actor with different interests.¹⁰ And failing has consequences. The failure of the Accord strengthened the extremist political leaders and organization *vis a vis* the moderates of the ruling Akali Dal. This was reflected in the coming violence - 1986 saw the next major escalation to nearly 600 deaths, mostly civilian. This followed 1985, with around 65 people killed, down from 436 in 1984 (excluding Bluestar and anti-Sikh riots figures) (see Figure 1).

Mixing Approaches: “Bullet for Bullet,” the Rode Initiative, and Operation Black Thunder, 1986-1989

The events of 1984 had created an increased demand for rebellion and the unfavorable conditions for a settlement meant missing the chance of ending the conflict before the militants re-organized and mounted a much more serious rebellion. The militants and secessionist political organizations were re-organizing during the failed negotiated settlement approach of 1985 and early 1986. Without the ability to capture Sikh political institutions from the Akali Dal (Longowal), they began creating alternative ones, most notably the Panthic Committee, a five-member secessionist committee claiming to speak for the entire Sikh community (Chima, 2010, p. 128). This reflected a widening split in the Sikh political system between moderates and those openly favoring militancy. It also legitimized and empowered militants in their use of violence, which was escalating at an alarming rate (see Figure 1). More sizable groups were emerging - including the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), and Khalistan Liberation Force (KLF). Their ranks were swelling but they were not unified, each either independent or loyal to different factions of political leadership among extremists or secessionists (Chima, 2010, p. 139).

It was under these conditions that the government reverted to an approach that favored the supply side, though the government would occasionally hold talks with extremists or even militants, reflecting an admission that negotiating with the moderates would be fruitless. Having learned the lessons of 1984, the supply side approach would seek to avoid religious desecration, increase selective targeting, and avoid collective targeting.

The first signal toward the supply side approach came in 1986 under Akali Dal (L) government. CM Barnala, under increasing pressure (and inability) to control the escalating violence, brought in Julio Ribeiro as the Punjab Police Chief who began a much more hardline approach to the militancy - dubbed “Bullet for Bullet” (Ribeiro, 1998). Meanwhile, the Centre appointed Siddhartha Ray as Governor, earlier credited for suppressing the Naxalite insurgency in West Bengal.

However, the Akali government could not commit to the supply side approach and had difficulty governing on the fine line between representing Sikh interests (so the militants would not) and upholding security measures necessary for governing. Police Chief Ribeiro would complain that his police duties were being interfered with by the Akalis for political reasons and he could not engage effectively (Chima, 2010, p. 146). After extremists and militants began using the Golden Temple as a safe haven again, CM Barnala had to be pressured from the Centre to allow the police to arrest them.¹¹ As expected, he was called a traitor by not only the extremists, but also some of the more radical members of his party. With the defections of some Akalis, CM Barnala was able to retain a majority only through a coalition with Congress and BJP support (Chima, 2010, pp. 134-135).

The Centre was actually engaged in a mixed strategy, hoping that pressure on the militants could lead to a settlement to resolve the crisis. Between mid-

1986 and spring 1988, the Centre engaged in limited talks. First, the Centre knew the ruling Akali could not control the militants and began secret talks in with the extremist political leaders, those outside the Akalis but only pushing for full implementation of the ASR, not secession. The militant secessionists massacred 15 Hindus while they were travelling on bus to derail negotiations. By the spring of 1987, there appeared to be an alliance among extremists and secessionists who had the loyalty of top militant organizations. The government began talks with the militants, through an intermediary, so long as they were short of independence. However, they were disrupted by a marked switch in strategy. The Centre dismissed Barnala's Akali government and re-instated President's Rule, which facilitated the engagement of a much more aggressive supply side approach. As Barnala was discredited, and the police began arresting and killing large numbers of extremists and militants, the militants gained near complete control of Sikh religious and political institutions.

In spring 1988, Congress tried a new initiative to achieve a settlement. Since others were thwarted by factionalized extremists, they released Jasbir Singh Rode (Bhindranwale's nephew) from jail to unite them and act as negotiator. Rode believed he could get semi-autonomous status for Punjab. Though he did shore up support from some militants, others - notably the Panthic Committee and the KCF - were steadfastly against any settlement short of independence. The initiative was derailed by fighting at the Golden Temple Complex between militants and security forces, possibly - but not certainly - with the intention of thwarting the Rode initiative.¹²

The fighting at the Golden Temple led to the third, and final, military operation (Black Thunder)¹³ to remove militants from the complex and deny them an urban safe haven. Operation Black Thunder laid siege to the Golden Temple Complex to wait them out without entering it and used snipers to kill escapees or those seeking water from the holy pool. It took 10 days but "over 200 militants, including 50 hardcore terrorists, surrendered" (Marwah, 2009 p. 101). No damage was done to the Temple and there were no civilian casualties (Marway, 2009). The Operation was a major victory for the Punjab Police and the newly formed National Security Guards. It not only demonstrated the capability of the police force, but it discredited the militants who had sworn to die "defending" the Golden Temple. Because the Operation was conducted with the media present, it exposed 1) how Khalistanis were abusing religious symbols in the Temple, 2) the extent of the graves of their victims, and 3) the sex slaves held in the Temple (Mahadevan, 2012, p. 158). The militancy would splinter further into two Panthic Committees and the Golden Temple would not be used as a Khalistani safe haven again.

Operation Black Thunder and the installation of KPS Gill as DGP of the Punjab Police also signaled the intensification of the supply side approach with the security forces going on the offensive. The estimated number of suspected rebels killed in 1989 nearly doubled to 703 reflecting the results of the offensive (Figure 1). This occurred while the number of arrests was cut by more than a third (from 3,882 in 1988 to 2,466 in 1989), reflecting the change to an elimination strategy (Wallace, 2007, p. 432). Without the Golden Temple as a

safe haven, the Khalistanis relied more on the harbor of civilians (Marwah, 1995, pp. 200-201) and were not able to keep up the same level of violence. In 1989, Khalistani violence against civilians was reduced to 1987 levels (to 967 civilian deaths) after the spike that occurred during 1988 (to 1839 civilian deaths). The character of the militancy shifted as well, with 1988 and 1989 seeing more Sikhs killed by Khalistani violence than Hindus (Wallace, 2007).

Détente, 1990-1991

The police offensive of targeting Khalistanis reduced Khalistani violence against civilians (see Figure 1), but was becoming problematic for political leaders because of its brutality. The selective targeting campaign included extra-judicial killing in high numbers and detaining of suspects without trial. In December 1989, Congress lost the general election and for the second time in post-independence history a non-Congress government was formed at the national level. The new National Front government was a loose coalition of opposition parties (from both the right and left of Congress) and wanted to distance itself from the ugly reputation the Punjab Police had acquired (Mahavedan, 2012, p.82).

The National Front sought a negotiated solution with the more extreme version of the Akali Dal (Mann), who was recently empowered by winning the most Punjab seats in the Indian Parliamentary elections. Its leader, Simranjeet Singh Mann, was released from jail to be the negotiating partner. Though both the Centre and Mann wanted an agreement to end the crisis, they were unsuccessful. The Centre signaled its intent by releasing militants from jail, relieving the controversial K.P.S. Gill from the post of DGP of Punjab Police, and ordering the police to ease up on the offensive (Mahavedan, 2012, p.82). The Centre came short of meeting Mann's demand of calling for new Punjab elections, since doing so when the extremists were popular might lead the extreme Akalis to win who could use this position of power to announce secession from India (Chima, 2010, pp. 187-188). Mann had publically attempted to get the militants to join the talks, but was roundly rebuked by the separatists for believing that the solution to the problem could be found within the bounds of the Indian Constitution.

This round of the demand side approach failed for similar reasons as earlier ones - that the Centre could not concede enough demands for its own political survival and the political wing of the rebellion could not speak for the militants, nor discipline them into accepting any deal. In Chima's words, more specifically, "Mann lacked the sufficient influence with or authority over 'the militants' to convince them to compromise short of Khalistan, and VP Singh had to rely on the BJP and Communist parties for the survival of his government" (Chima, 2010, p. 132). The BJP was ideologically opposed to decentralization. Both the BJP and the Communist party were against granting demands to ethnically based parties (Chima, 2010, p. 185).

By the fall of 1990, the National Front had lost the support of the BJP and a new government was formed under PM Chandra Shekhar. The new government

tried again for negotiation with at least a little more chance of success. The three versions of the Akali Dal (Longowal, Badal, and Mann) agreed to unite under Mann's leadership and, at least, one of the militant factions - the Second Panthic Committee agreed to allow Mann to meet with PM Shekhar. Still, the militant groups themselves were numerous and split and the Centre would not agree to the preconditions for talks before Shekhar's government dissolved and the President called for new elections.

The *détente* period was more than just unsuccessful at achieving a settlement. Instead of drawing the Khalistanis to the negotiating table, the *détente* period saw an increase in violence. The Khalistanis were too factionalized for meaningful negotiation. Instead, they used the political *détente* to regroup, rearm, and increase their violence against both police and civilian targets. Figure 1 shows that the number of civilians killed in 1990 and 1991 were the greatest of the entire conflict at 1,961 and 2,094, respectively. They also increased the spatial dimension of their violence beyond the border districts to include urban areas in previously little-affected districts.

Beyond increasing their levels of violence, Khalistanis appeared emboldened politically as well. Some leaders called for the U.N. to hold a referendum on secession (Gill, 2001, p.57). Likewise, others claimed that the only matters to negotiate were the borders between Khalistan and India (ibid, p.63). Given their strengthened position, Khalistani organizations, especially the more zealous ones like the Babbar Khalsa, began issuing and enforcing strict religious edicts. Joshi recalls the killing of a school headmistress for not enforcing their strict dress code and the killing of 7 doctors "allegedly for promoting family planning among Sikhs" (Joshi, 1993, p.5).

Unified leadership, fragmenting rebels, and a supply side approach, 1992-1993

While the rebels seemed more in charge than ever in early 1992, they were only about a year away from defeat. After oscillating between supply and demand side approaches for over a decade, the final approach was launched that eventually ended the rebellion in 1992, though some aspects of this approach had begun or were in development earlier. This approach was largely a supply side approach, denying a safe haven and selectively targeting rebels, but it did address local demand side issues. Three main elements contributed to the end of the militancy - political unity in the government, increased capacity of security forces, and the increasingly fragmented nature of the rebels.

First, political unity of two Congress governments at the Centre and in Punjab who were non-sympathizers of Khalistan allowed the government forces to act decisively in favor of a strong supply side offensive.¹⁴ Narasimha Rao's Congress had narrowly won the 1991 elections but solidified its majority after the 1992 Punjab elections. The 1992 Punjab elections, postponed from June 1991 when the extremist wings of the Akalis had united, added Congress seats to the Lok Sabha and brought Beant Singh of Congress to power in Punjab. The extremist Akali factions had boycotted the election¹⁵ while the militants

(successfully) threatened violence against voters. Congress won 87 of 117 seats (74%) in Punjab, but voter turnout was under 24%. The politically unified central and state governments pushed a heavily targeted strategy of eliminating militants, while providing legal protection for security forces who used extra-judicial killings as part of their strategy (Fair, 2009, pp. 119-120).

Second, both learning from past mistakes and internal capacity building gave security forces the ability to pursue an aggressive and ultimately successful supply side strategy. This period saw the army, paramilitaries, and the Punjab Police coordinate their behavior to end the use of safe havens, particularly in Pakistan, avoid collective violence, and target Khalistanis selectively in high volume. Operations Rakshak I⁶ and II brought in the army to help the Border Security Force (BSF) seal the Pakistani border, ending cross-border safe havens and catching many militants in the act (Sandhu, 1991). It also used the army to carry out static checkpoints, freeing the police for mobile operations. This time, the army avoided collective violence and did its best to avoid antagonizing the population. Instead, they attempted to build goodwill (a demand side strategy) by providing healthcare and building infrastructure projects (Sandhu, 1991).

Denying safe haven is an important part of effective supply side counterinsurgency, because it allows a selective targeting offensive to work. The Punjab Police, who were largely inept at the beginning stages, had spent the intervening years building intelligence and operational capacity and were now able to identify individual militants and find innovative ways of neutralizing them. The police already had some intelligence advantages for selective targeting due to co-ethnicity with the militants, but it was further exploited through innovations like an intelligence management system (Mahadevan, 2007), an evolving rewards system to target high-level militants (Jaijee, 1995), and increasing capacity to pursue targets. They did so through “spotter” and “Cat” operations where those with individual knowledge of militants or turned-Khalistanis would identify targets for the police to engage in a firefight they knew they could win (Fair, 2009; Marwah, 2009; Hultquis, 2013).¹⁷

Third, the fractured nature of rebels could not withstand the high intensity selective targeting campaign. In Staniland’s (2014) terms, the Khalistanis went from a “parochial” movement, with fragile central control but strong local control, to numerous fragmented rebel groups, with little control from commanders to rank-and-file. Though they never achieved a great deal of cohesion, by the end, they were as fractured as ever. The militants had four divided political wings - First, Second, and Third Panthic Committee, and the Akali Dal (Babbar) - each of which was created in a failed effort to unify the movement. These organizations theoretically coordinated at least seven of the major militant outfits, though many smaller ones existed as well. This is to say nothing of the various extremist political organizations (i.e., six Panthic organizations) claiming to “lead” the militants.

The militants not only represented a fractured political movement, but one that was increasingly apolitical. Despite continued calls for an independent Khalistan, the militants spent a lot of time targeting each other, using violence

against those they hoped to govern, including killing mostly Sikhs by the end, and engaging in criminal, rather than political, behavior.

A cohesive, integrated rebel movement may have been able to survive the intense targeting campaign by the Punjab Police, but a fragmented and largely criminal movement has little chance, especially without the use of a safe haven. In fact, it was the sustained and intense selective targeting offensive that fragmented the group. Staniland's description of how this happens is on the nose for the Khalistan case. "States can push parochial [rebel] organizations toward fragmentation when they successfully create locally rooted security forces, sponsor 'flipped' former militants and recruit informers, and establish pervasive social control on the ground" (Staniland 2014, p. 51). In the summer of 1992 through early 1993, the police targeted the leadership of various rebel organizations, as well as the rank-and-file, using information from exactly these types of sources. The various militant organizations had difficulty replacing leaders to command their outfits and, once it was clear they were losing, had difficulty recruiting new soldiers. They were declared defeated in March of 1993.

Conclusion

Starting in the southeast corner of Table 1 and moving counterclockwise, the rebel movement for Khalistan began after decades of peace in Punjab which masked growing grievances, manifested in the ASR. Increasing radicalization provided the opportunity for Bhindranwale and other political entrepreneurs to exploit such demand for rebellion (northeast corner). After the events of 1984 created increased demand for rebellion, the conflict reflected the genuine political disorder of a meaningful rebel movement calling for the creation of Khalistan (northwest corner). After oscillating between failed supply and demand strategies for over a decade, a unified political leadership emerged and the police had built capacity to target rebels selectively. The resulting intense supply side offensive led to the further fragmentation and criminalization of the rebels, reflecting their apolitical nature (southwest corner). This eventually led to the disintegration of the rebels and the return to something resembling normalcy (southeast corner).

The state response to the Khalistan conflict reveals several insights. First, it shows that a government more concerned with politics than security can oversee the near dissolution of its own state and the unthinkable instability of one of its most strategically important regions. But we would be wrong to just chalk up the government mismanagement to cynical conclusions. This analysis shows that we must take into account the political constraints under which governments make their decisions. Without shaky coalitions and regional political disagreements, the Centre may have been able to commit to a negotiated settlement, rather than repeatedly renege on implementation. Second, it shows how important the cohesiveness of the rebel movement is to getting an agreement that has a chance at lasting. The fractured relationship between and among the various political and military wings claiming to represent Sikh

grievances made securing a workable settlement nearly impossible. Third, the conflict shows that violence that is insensitive to religious sites and collective in scope can be extremely destructive and counterproductive in the fight against the rebellion. Likewise, it shows that individual level targeting can be a deterrent and that investing in the capability to do so is preferable to using collective violence in the short run.

However, the conflict also shows some of the limitations of supply side approach, even if successful in ending the rebellion. The counterinsurgency campaign is often lauded for defeating the rebel movement without conceding a single demand. But sporadic violence in the intervening years and recent events in Punjab, such as the convening of a *Sarbat Khalsa* - a direct democracy assembly to vote as the entire Sikh nation - in November 2015, call into question whether the consequent demand for Khalistan is as low as the victors claim. The *Sarbat Khalsa* was certainly a radical exercise - it passed resolutions calling for extremists to take over Sikh institutions (notably, for the assassin of Beant Singh to become the *jathedar* of the Akal Takht). Perhaps it was simply a power play, called by the more radical Akali parties, against the ruling Akali (Badal) party. But the large numbers of those in support of it should caution us from believing the demand for Khalistan has ceased completely. We may not be in a stable equilibrium of political order, but in an unstable order - with a nascent demand waiting for the supply to re-emerge.

Notes

¹ Estimates vary. Below I will use data from Wallace (2007), gathered from government sources and the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi. Using these numbers, which includes security forces killed that are not reported below, the total adds up to 19,359.

² I use the terms “rebel” and “militant” to avoid the loaded terms of “terrorist” and “insurgent,” which respectively often get used to either vilify or legitimize the rebels. I take no side, *per se*, and attempt to present a neutral academic analysis, but will not refrain from discussing illegitimate acts of violence by either side as they have been reported. Later, I will refer to Khalistanis as a catch-all for those using violence for the separatist cause. I use “counterinsurgency” to refer to the broad range of attempts to quell any type rebellion, not only those specific to the tactic of insurgency.

³ Though Cunningham (2006; 2011) emphasizes the number of rebel combatants and outside actors, this view is consistent with his veto players approach.

⁴ Violence in this sense is coercion. It includes, but is not limited to, killing and detention.

⁵ Collective violence usually targets physical locations (e.g., villages) where rebels are thought to be supported or co-ethnics (e.g., people that share ethnic characteristics as the rebels). Both are counterproductive because when civilians (i.e., potential rebels or potential supporters) are targeted, they rationally calculate that they may be more likely to survive if they join the rebels. At the

very least, collective violence hurts the legitimacy of the state and increases the relative legitimacy of the rebels.

⁶ The federal structure of India allows the central government to dismiss state governments and appoint a governor. While this is called President's Rule, it is more like prime minister's rule, since the President does not make this decision and the Prime Minister's administration will appoint the governor. President's Rule is allowed for several reasons, including the break down in law and order, but is often used for political purposes. That PM Gandhi would dismiss a Congress government in Punjab is a serious step, since it implies that Congress cannot handle the problem.

⁷ For more details, see Tully and Jacob 1984.

⁸ In particular, these aspects included commissions or tribunals to determine: 1) which Hindi-speaking districts would go to Haryana in exchange for Chandigarh, 2) which or whether devolution of power issues to Punjab from the ASR were implemented, and 3) how to settle the Punjab-Haryana water rights dispute.

⁹ For a view of hope, but also a detailing of the political issues - including leadership disputes - surrounding the Punjab Accord, see: "Punjab: Breakthrough" India Today 15 Aug 1985.

¹⁰ Since the CM of Haryana was a Congress politician, PM Gandhi should have a lot of leverage over his junior colleague, but he would be risking political support of Hindus in Haryana and across North India.

¹¹ This operation is sometimes called Black Thunder I.

¹² See Chima (2010, pp. 163-164) for other plausible explanations.

¹³ Sometimes called Black Thunder II.

¹⁴ Before committing to the elimination strategy, the Beant Singh government did attempt to concede some demands, such as the water rights and Chandigarh issues, but was thwarted, once again, by regional politics. Haryana's Bhajan Lal refused (Chima, 2010 p. 219).

¹⁵ Their likely boycott was part of the reason the elections were called by Rao's central government.

¹⁶ This operation actually began in 1990 before the explicit offensive of 1992.

¹⁷ This process was corroborated through anonymous interviews between the author and two police officers active during the later stages of the conflict. For more information, see: Chima (2014, p. 280).

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