



Evolution of India's Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Kashmir: From the Kashmiri Pandit Exodus to Post-Article 370

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ABSTRACT

The Kashmir conflict has remained one of India's most persistent national security challenges since 1947, but the mass displacement of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990 marked a critical turning point in insurgency dynamics. This episode underscored the limitations of India's counterinsurgency (COIN) framework, raising urgent questions about minority protection, governance, and military strategy. Over the subsequent three decades, India's COIN doctrine evolved through successive phases shaped by the Kargil War (1999), recurrent cycles of militancy, civil unrest (2008–2016), and the intensification of cross-border terrorism. The abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 constituted a constitutional and doctrinal watershed, fundamentally reconfiguring the security architecture of Jammu and Kashmir. This study critically traces the trajectory of India's COIN doctrine across these phases, situating it within the broader geopolitical contest involving India, Pakistan, Kashmiri separatists, and foreign fighters. The roots of the conflict lie in the 1947 partition, when competing claims over Jammu and Kashmir emerged: Pakistan asserted its case on religious and cultural grounds, while India's claim rested on the accession decision of the princely ruler under conditions of external aggression. By examining these historical foundations alongside doctrinal shifts, the research highlights how India's counterinsurgency strategies have oscillated between militarization, developmental interventions, and constitutional integration, reflecting the complex interplay of security imperatives and democratic governance.

Keywords

Kashmiri Pandit, Exodus, Article-370, insurgency, Counterinsurgency, Doctrine, Human Rights,

Introduction

The Kashmir conflict has remained one of India's most enduring national security challenges since independence in 1947. A decisive turning point came with the mass displacement of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, which exposed the limitations of India's counterinsurgency (COIN) framework and raised urgent questions about minority protection, governance, and military strategy. Over the following three decades, India's COIN doctrine evolved significantly, shaped by the Kargil War of 1999, recurring cycles of

militancy, civil unrest between 2008 and 2016, and persistent cross-border terrorism. The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 marked a constitutional and doctrinal watershed, fundamentally altering the security architecture of Jammu and Kashmir. This study critically examines the trajectory of India's COIN doctrine across these phases (Gupta, 2021, pp.374-375). The Jammu and Kashmir dispute, involving India, Pakistan, Kashmiri separatists, and foreign fighters, represents a complex insurgency with deep historical roots. Its origins can be traced to the 1947 partition, when both India and Pakistan laid claim to the region. Pakistan justified its position on the basis of Kashmir's Muslim majority and cultural ties, while India's claim rested on Maharaja Hari Singh's decision to accede to India after Pakistani tribal forces invaded in October 1947 (Wagenen, 2004, p.5).

Jammu and Kashmir is a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and religiously diverse region comprising the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh. The insurgency has largely been concentrated in the Valley, where Sunni Muslim discontent has driven agitation against the Indian state. In contrast, Muslim communities in Ladakh, Kargil, and Jammu have not mobilized in the same way, and marginalized groups such as the Gujjars and Bakerwals have historically remained outside sustained anti-India movements. The insurgency remained localized until 1989–1990, when Pakistan strategically infiltrated thousands of externally trained, funded, and ideologically radicalized militants across the Line of Control, transforming unrest into a full-scale armed conflict (Ganaie, 2026, pp. 6–7).

Research Problem

For more than three decades, India's counterinsurgency strategy in Kashmir has shifted back and forth between heavy military control and attempts at political dialogue. The central research problem is to determine whether these changes from the Kashmiri Pandit exodus in 1990 to the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 reflect a genuine transformation in India's counterinsurgency doctrine, or whether they are only short-term tactical adjustments that continue to rely mainly on coercive force.

Research Questions

- How did India's counterinsurgency doctrine evolve from the Kashmiri Pandit exodus (1990s) to the post-Article 370 era?
- How did the abrogation of Article 370 reshape the doctrinal and operational framework of counterinsurgency in Kashmir?

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the historical trajectory of India's counterinsurgency doctrine in Kashmir from the 1990s to the present.
- To examine doctrinal and operational changes after the abrogation of Article 370.

Methodology

This study will employ a combined empirical and descriptive research design to trace the evolution of India's counterinsurgency doctrine in Kashmir from the Kashmiri Pandit exodus (1990) to the post-Article 370 period (2019 onwards). This study examines the evolution of India's counterinsurgency doctrine in Jammu and Kashmir from the Kashmiri Pandit exodus of 1990 to the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. It adopts a qualitative, multidisciplinary approach, combining historical and political analysis with insights from security studies. The research relies mainly on secondary sources, including government reports, parliamentary debates, human rights documentation, books, journal articles, and media coverage. These materials are critically analyzed to trace doctrinal shifts across four phases: early insurgency and displacement, militarization and political outreach, renewed insurgency in the 2010s, and post-370

integration strategies. The study uses thematic and chronological analysis to identify continuities and changes in India's COIN doctrine.

Emergence of Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir

The late 1980s marked the onset of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, a period defined by mounting political unrest, growing dissatisfaction with governance, and the erosion of local autonomy under Article 370. The insurgency was rooted in widespread perceptions among Kashmiris that the Indian state had failed to honor their political aspirations, particularly after the controversial 1987 elections, which were widely regarded as rigged. In response, many citizens sought greater political control and resisted Indian authority through youth collectives and political organizations advocating self-rule (Behera, 2006, p.3). This climate of disillusionment was accompanied by economic decline, human rights abuses, and systemic political discrimination, all of which intensified public demands. Armed groups soon emerged, targeting government officials, police, and military installations. Several organizations drew upon Islamic ideology to press for Kashmir's annexation to Pakistan, arguing that India had disregarded their political, cultural, and religious concerns. By the mid-1980s, militancy escalated from sporadic guerrilla tactics into a full-scale insurgency (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2007).

Initially, militant activity was driven by Kashmiri nationalist objectives, but the growing strength of insurgent groups led them to seek external support, including training and resources from Pakistan. The early 1990s witnessed widespread armed resistance, intensifying clashes between militants and Indian security forces and resulting in significant casualties. This turbulent era also created an atmosphere of acute insecurity for the Kashmiri Pandit community, which faced targeted killings, threats, and intimidation (Ganaie, 2026, p.6). In 1984, the political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir shifted dramatically when Farooq Abdullah's government was overthrown by his brother-in-law, Ghulam Mohammad Shah, popularly known as Gul Shah. He assumed the role of Chief Minister and soon faced criticism for running what was perceived as a divisive administration. His tenure was marked by allegations of aggressive Islamisation, and under his leadership, the Valley witnessed its first Hindu-Muslim riots in 1986. The Hindu minority, already feeling marginalized, grew increasingly dissatisfied, believing they were denied equal treatment. Tensions escalated further when a mosque was constructed within the Secretariat premises, sparking protests from Hindus. In retaliation, several temples, including those in Anantnag, were destroyed, deepening communal discord. The discontent of the Hindu community coincided with the controversial 1987 elections, which were widely believed to have been manipulated by the Congress Party in alliance with Farooq Abdullah. The alleged rigging intensified separatist sentiment, uniting anti-India factions under the banner of the United Muslim Front (Widmalm, 1997).

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) gained prominence during this period, and religious conflict began to intertwine with political mobilization. By 1989, the authority of the Central Government had eroded significantly in the region. Communal hostility was further inflamed by Pakistan, where authorities and religious leaders delivered incendiary speeches encouraging Kashmiris to seek "freedom" from India. Reports suggest that militant groups received financial and logistical support from across the border, with the aim of driving out minorities and pressing for Kashmir's secession. Some factions, however, advocated independence from both India and Pakistan. Anti-Hindu campaigns intensified, with posters, slogans, and armed processions creating an atmosphere of fear. The Kashmiri Pandit community, in particular, faced widespread intimidation and panic (Aslam and Sudan, 2021 p.145). Following Farooq Abdullah's resignation in 1990 and the imposition of President's Rule, the political turmoil deepened. The anti-Hindu movement accelerated, culminating in the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, who were increasingly perceived as symbols of Indian presence in the Valley. While one perspective attributes their

displacement to militant targeting, another interpretation suggests that the Indian state deliberately facilitated their removal to gain greater freedom in confronting Islamist insurgents (Thakar & Mishra, 2020, pp. 1026–1027).

Evolution of India's Counterinsurgency Doctrine

Phase I: Kashmiri Pandit Exodus and Early Counterinsurgency (Late 1980s–1990s)

The Kashmiri Pandits, a community of Kashmiri-speaking Brahmin Hindus, represent one of the oldest and most culturally significant groups in the Indian subcontinent. Their presence in the Valley predates the advent of Islam, and their contributions to Sanskrit scholarship, Shaivite philosophy, and the administrative systems of successive dynasties are well documented. By the mid-twentieth century, despite being a demographic minority, Pandits held a disproportionately influential position in education, administration, and professional life in Kashmir (European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), 2017).

Over centuries, the religious composition of the Valley shifted, particularly after the arrival of Sufi missionaries such as Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani in the fourteenth century, which led to widespread conversions. By 1990, Muslims comprised between 67 and 85 percent of the Valley's population of roughly 12.5 million, while the Pandit population was estimated at 100,000 to 300,000 — though census figures remain contested. The immediate backdrop to the Pandit exodus was the armed insurgency that erupted in late 1989, driven by cross-border support from Pakistan and the mobilization of Islamist militant groups such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and Hizbul Mujahideen. This insurgency was rooted in longstanding political grievances, including allegations of electoral manipulation during the 1987 state elections, and was accompanied by targeted violence against prominent Pandits. Assassinations of figures like Pandit Tika Lal Taploo, a senior BJP leader (September 1989), and retired judge Neelkanth Ganjoo (November 1989) created a pervasive climate of fear. Reports indicate that mosques broadcast threats over loudspeakers, urging Pandits to leave or face violence. The slogan “Raliv, Chaliv, ya Galiv” (Convert, Leave, or Die) became emblematic of the intimidation campaign (Biswal, 2026, p.2). Consequently, Kashmir became a geopolitical flashpoint, contested by India, Pakistan, and Kashmiri separatists. The insurgency escalated into a full-scale armed conflict, resulting in the displacement of an estimated 400,000 Kashmiri Hindu refugees, the deployment of approximately 600,000 Indian troops, the rise of nearly thirty active insurgent organizations, and at least 40,000 deaths across all sides since 1989 (Medhurst, 2002, pp. 285–289).

Human Rights Crisis and the Exodus of Kashmiri Hindus

The mass displacement of Kashmiri Hindus in the late 1980s and early 1990s constitutes a grave violation of fundamental human rights. Core protections guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including the rights to life, security, freedom from torture, religious liberty, property, and movement were systematically denied (UDHR, Articles 3, 5, 13, 17, 18). Targeted assassinations of community leaders such as Tika Lal Taploo (Bose, 2017), alongside attacks on ordinary citizens, generated widespread fear and insecurity (Human Rights Watch, 1993; Baru, 2016).

Religious identity became a justification for violence and expulsion, undermining the right to freedom of belief (Bose, 2017). Families were compelled to abandon their homes and possessions, resulting in the loss of property and freedom of mobility. Estimates suggest that between 90,000 and 100,000 Hindus fled the Valley by 1990, with numerous casualties recorded during this period (Human Rights Watch, 1993; Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2016). The atmosphere of terror was further intensified by hate speeches broadcast from mosques and the brutal killings of figures such as Neelkanth Ganjoo and Satish Tickoo, which reinforced the impossibility of return for displaced families. This period thus represents one

of the most severe human rights crises in modern Indian history, marked by targeted violence, forced migration, and the systematic denial of basic freedoms (Baru, 2016).

Government Response and Failures

The Indian government's handling of the Kashmiri Hindu exodus during the late 1980s and early 1990s has been widely criticized for its limited security measures and delayed relief initiatives. Although security forces were deployed to the Valley, their primary focus remained on counter-insurgency operations, leaving Hindu neighborhoods vulnerable to targeted attacks (Human Rights Watch, 1993; Kashmiri Samiti Delhi, 1993). Relief camps were established only after large-scale displacement had already taken place, underscoring the reactive nature of state intervention (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016). Observers point to missed warnings, inadequate protection, and slow responses despite the rise of hate speech and anti-Hindu rhetoric (Government of India, 2019). Allegations persist that pleas for enhanced security were ignored, and that deeper socio-economic grievances fueling unrest were left unaddressed. These shortcomings suggest that the government's measures were reactive rather than preventive, ultimately leaving Kashmiri Hindus exposed to violence, intimidation, and forced migration (Baru, 2016).

Phase II (2000s): Militarization, political negotiations, human rights debates.

India's approach to the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir has been defined by extensive militarization. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) granted sweeping authority to the armed forces, a framework that has been repeatedly criticized for enabling alleged human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence. Estimates suggest that more than half a million troops have been stationed in the Valley at different points, creating an overwhelming military presence that profoundly shaped the daily lives of ordinary Kashmiris. Independent human rights organizations have documented numerous abuses, though the Indian state has often dismissed these reports, attributing violence to Pakistan-backed militancy and insurgent groups. Yet, framing grievances solely through the lens of "national security" has failed to address deeper political and social concerns, thereby intensifying resentment among the local population (Saab, 2024).

The early 2000s marked a turning point in India's counterinsurgency doctrine. Military consolidation was accompanied by attempts to revive political processes. The state expanded its security footprint through the Army, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies, employing area domination strategies and surveillance technologies to deny militants safe havens. Counter-terror operations remained central, underscoring the continued reliance on militarization as the primary instrument of state power. Parallel to this, efforts were made to restore democratic legitimacy. The 2002 Assembly elections reopened political space, followed by initiatives such as the Round Table Conferences and dialogue with Kashmiri political groups. Confidence-building measures with Pakistan, including the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control, reflected recognition that counterinsurgency required more than coercion. These overtures sought to balance force with negotiation, though their outcomes were uneven (Ministry of Home Affairs, Annual Report 2006–07). Human rights concerns became a defining dimension of this phase. AFSPA continued to draw widespread criticism, with reports of custodial deaths, disappearances, and civilian casualties fueling alienation. Civil society organizations and international observers documented these abuses, challenging the legitimacy of India's practices. The tension between security imperatives and human rights obligations thus became central to debates on Kashmir (Human Rights Watch, 1993).

Doctrinally, Phase II signaled recognition that counterinsurgency required a "hearts and minds" approach, integrating political dialogue, development programs, and human rights safeguards. However, militarization remained dominant, limiting the effectiveness of softer measures. The contradictions between coercion and

conciliation, security and democracy, set the stage for later debates on whether India's doctrine could reconcile force with legitimacy in Kashmir.

Phase III (2010–2019): Intensification of insurgency, pre-Article 370 strategies.

The decade leading up to the abrogation of Article 370 witnessed a renewed surge in insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, marked by heightened militancy and evolving state responses. Local militancy re-emerged after 2010, driven by disillusionment among Kashmiri youth, the growing influence of social media, and the symbolic appeal of figures such as Burhan Wani. This period highlighted the increasing challenge of radicalization and the limitations of conventional military approaches in countering insurgency (Padgaonkar, & Kumar, 2011).

Although violence levels declined briefly around 2012, experts such as former Intelligence Bureau Director A. S. Dulat cautioned that the apparent calm was deceptive. By 2013, New Delhi's narrative of "normalcy" began to unravel, culminating in the mass uprisings of 2016 following Wani's killing. These protests reflected not only a resurgence of violence but also the emergence of quasi-violent, mass participatory tactics, a localized militant profile, and the weakening of state political and counterterrorism strategies. While insurgent violence remained lower than its early-2000s peak, the anti-state mobilization appeared more formidable and politically destabilizing (Lalwani & Gayner, 2020, pp. 10–12).

India's counterinsurgency doctrine during this phase combined aggressive militarization with selective political outreach. Security forces intensified operations, employing surveillance technologies, targeted killings, and cordon-and-search tactics to dismantle militant networks. Simultaneously, the government attempted dialogue initiatives, though these were short-lived and undermined by escalating violence. Persistent cross-border tensions with Pakistan, including frequent ceasefire violations along the Line of Control, further complicated the security environment. Human rights concerns became increasingly prominent. Civilian casualties, restrictions on movement, and repeated internet shutdowns drew criticism from domestic and international observers. The use of pellet guns during protests epitomized the tension between maintaining order and respecting human rights, deepening alienation and reinforcing perceptions of state repression (Ahmed et al., 2021, p.20). Between 2013 and 2019, quasi-violent resistance, eroding state legitimacy, and anti-institutional alternatives to democratic politics posed significant challenges to India's counterinsurgency strategy. Analysts note that mass uprisings can thrive even without high levels of insurgent violence, and that the absence of large-scale militancy may have lulled the state into complacency until the 2016 crisis (Lalwani and Gayner, 2020, p.4).

Doctrinally, Phase III exposed the limits of India's hybrid approach. Military operations disrupted militant networks but failed to address underlying grievances. Political initiatives lacked consistency, while human rights controversies eroded legitimacy. The persistence of violence and the inability to reconcile security with democratic engagement set the stage for the government's decisive shift in August 2019 with the abrogation of Article 370, marking the transition to a new doctrinal phase.

Phase IV (Post-2019): Abrogation of Article 370 and doctrinal shifts.

Abrogation of Article 370

In August 2019, the Government of India enacted three major legal measures that fundamentally altered the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir. First, the President issued an order withdrawing the special status that had existed since 1954. Second, Article 370 itself was abrogated through another presidential order. Third, Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, which divided the state into two Union Territories Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh (Nandha, 2023, p.1). Historically, Jammu and

Kashmir had been granted autonomy under Article 370, allowing the state to legislate independently on all matters except defense, foreign affairs, and communications. Though framed as temporary, the provision shaped the region's political identity for decades. Rising militancy in the 1990s, including the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits, underscored the fragility of this arrangement. On 5 August 2019, the government revoked Article 370, and by 31 October 2019, the state was reorganized into Union Territories to facilitate economic development and improve governance (Aslam & Sudan, 2021).

The abrogation brought sweeping administrative changes. The separate state constitution and flag ceased to exist, and non-residents were permitted to acquire immovable property in the region. Jammu & Kashmir retained a legislative assembly with 107 seats, while Ladakh was governed directly by a Lieutenant Governor without an assembly. Law and order remained under central control, but local governance and land issues were delegated to the Union Territories. With the passage of the Reorganization Act, 106 central laws became applicable, including the Prevention of Corruption Act, the Right to Education Act, and protections for minorities, whistle-blowers, and senior citizens (Kumar, 2020).

Doctrinal Shifts

The abrogation of Article 370 marked a decisive change in India's counterinsurgency doctrine. By revoking special status and reorganizing the state, the government signaled a move from accommodation to integration, framing the change as essential for national sovereignty, curbing separatism, and enabling uniform governance (Lalwani & Gayner, 2020, pp.13–14). Security measures intensified immediately, with troop deployments, curfews, and communication blackouts reflecting a doctrine of pre-emptive control. While effective in suppressing unrest, these measures drew criticism for restricting civil liberties and political participation. The post-370 era also emphasized development as a counterinsurgency tool. Infrastructure projects, investment drives, and new political formations were promoted to integrate Kashmir economically and socially with the rest of India. This approach combined hard security with developmental legitimacy. Yet, human rights debates intensified globally, with reports of prolonged detentions, restrictions on media, and internet shutdowns raising concerns about democratic credibility (Press Information Bureau, 2023).

Phase IV thus reflects a doctrine of comprehensive state control, blending militarization, political restructuring, and development. Unlike earlier phases that oscillated between coercion and dialogue, the post-370 strategy prioritizes centralized authority and integration. While insurgent mobilization has been curtailed in the short term, its long-term sustainability depends on whether developmental and political initiatives can replace coercion as the foundation of stability.

Externally, the reorganization altered narratives for Pakistan and separatist groups. While Pakistan condemned the move, India argued that it had no external ramifications, as the Line of Control and Line of Actual Control remained unchanged. Analysts note that Pakistan itself altered the region's status by occupying PoJK and Gilgit-Baltistan and ceding the Shaksgam Valley to China. Domestically, concerns about land alienation and colonization were raised by separatists and local politicians. Kumar (2020) emphasizes the need for legal safeguards to reassure the people of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh that their interests will not be compromised.

Conclusion

The evolution of India's counterinsurgency doctrine in Kashmir reflects a trajectory shaped by political upheaval, insurgent mobilization, and the tension between security imperatives and democratic legitimacy. Beginning with the late 1980s, the emergence of militancy and the mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits underscored the human cost of political disillusionment, communal polarization, and external intervention,

while also exposing the inadequacy of reactive state measures. The 2000s marked Phase II, defined by militarization under AFSPA and the deployment of large security forces, yet accompanied by tentative political negotiations and confidence-building measures. Although these efforts signaled recognition that coercion alone could not resolve the crisis, human rights controversies and the dominance of military power limited their credibility. Phase III (2010–2019) witnessed renewed insurgency, fueled by youth disillusionment, social media mobilization, and symbolic figures such as Burhan Wani. India's hybrid doctrine of militarization combined with selective outreach exposed its limits, as militant networks were disrupted but underlying grievances remained unresolved, while human rights concerns eroded legitimacy. The abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 ushered in Phase IV, a decisive doctrinal shift from accommodation to integration, marked by centralized authority, political restructuring, and developmental initiatives. This approach curtailed insurgent mobilization in the short term but intensified debates about democratic rights and civil liberties. Taken together, the four phases illustrate both continuity and change: coercive force has remained central, but its effectiveness has consistently been undermined by unresolved grievances and human rights controversies. The post-370 doctrine represents the most ambitious attempt to integrate Kashmir within the Indian Union, yet its long-term success depends on whether developmental legitimacy and political inclusion can replace coercion as the foundation of stability. Ultimately, the Kashmir case demonstrates that counterinsurgency cannot be sustained by military power alone; durable peace requires reconciling sovereignty with democratic engagement, ensuring that security strategies are complemented by respect for rights, inclusive politics, and socio-economic development.

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