

Frontiers, Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies in South Asia, 1820-2013 by Kaushik Roy, New Delhi: Routledge, 2015, pp. xix+226, INR 668

*Manas Dutta**

Frontiers, Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies in South Asia is a well written and intelligently composed monograph by Kaushik Roy, a leading expert in South Asian military studies. It primarily deals with frontier issues, insurgency and counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in South Asia from 1820 to 2013, adequately emphasising on the inter-relationships between colonial making of frontiers, state formation, and small wars conducted by the British in this particular region. Unlike most of the recently published military histories of South Asia, the present volume consists of a political and military narrative of South Asia's conventional and unconventional warfare along with the insurgency and COIN operations which have taken place since the 1820s. The monograph also contributes to the available information on various armed conflicts in South Asia, drawing both the archival and the secondary sources to explain the diverse strategies associated with small wars, and COIN in South Asia.

The author argues that the origins of insurgencies and COIN operations in contemporary states in South Asia can be traced back to British policies of managing the border regions in the North-East of India, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Baluchistan. These areas, as

* The Reviewer is Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Kazi Nazrul University, West Bengal, India.



the author argues, have experienced long-standing insurgencies. He also argues that the frontier management policies and COIN in South Asia can be traced back to the policies of limited warfare fought by the British. Limited warfare, according to Roy, means a war fought with limited means over a geographically circumscribed region for limited political aims (p. 159). Roy, citing the concept of Jeremy Black, mentions that the British small wars against the Nagas, Kukis, Lushais, and the Pathans were limited conflicts from imperial perspectives, but appeared as Total War for the stateless frontier societies (p. 161).

The monograph is divided into five chapters along with the introduction and the conclusion. The first of these titled, 'British India, North-West Frontier and the Afghan Problem: circa 1800-1913', describes the evolution of British India's North-West Frontier policy from the late eighteenth century till the eve of World War I. Interactions between developments in Afghanistan and its adverse effects on the volatile Indus frontier had been visible even as the East India Company tried to expand its territory towards north-west India in colonial times. British policy oscillated from aggression to pacification. The First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars (1838-42, 1878-80), according to the colonial authorities were attempts to follow a forward policy in order to control the north-western Frontier. The objective for the British was to establish Afghanistan as a buffer state against the Czarist Russian expansion in Central Asia and to ensure political and social stability in the Indus frontier (p. 33).

Chapter two, 'British India's North-East Frontier and Burma: 1772-1913', points out the diverse facets of frontier policy that were followed in north-east India and Burma before World War I. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the British evolved the theory of small wars in order to tackle border tribes in these regions. The author states here that while Afghanistan remained the cornerstone for British pacification of the Indus frontier, Burma remained the key for establishing security of British India's north-east frontier (p. 50).

The next chapter titled, 'North-West and North-East Frontiers during the Two World Wars: 1914-45', explains that in the age of total war, the British Raj conducted *Der Totale Krieg* (Total War), as well as small wars along the turbulent North-West and North-East Frontiers. The British Raj realised that heavy artillery, armoured cars, etc., were only useful in conventional war, and were not of much use in fighting against the lethal border guerrillas. This contradiction, to a great extent, paved the way for

the unravelling of the Raj from the 1940s. The economic and societal impact of total war resulted in militarisation of the frontier societies and its effects, in turn, are still felt by the Indian and Pakistani governments respectively (p. 70).

Chapter four entitled, 'North-West Frontiers of India and Pakistan: 1947-2013', focuses on the troubles faced by both the Indian and Pakistani governments in maintaining the 'rule of law' in the erstwhile British India's troublesome North-West Frontier. According to the author, the insurgency in Kashmir cannot be understood in mere isolation. Rather, insurgency in Kashmir is linked with fractured militarised politics in Afghanistan, and in the FATA and NWFP of Pakistan. Moreover, one must remember here that insurgency cannot be sustained and continued without moral and financial support from foreign sponsors. For example, Afghanistan provided arms and training camps to Pashtun/Pushtun *lashkars* against the British till 1947, and the Afghan government is still following this policy against Pakistan in FATA and NWFP (p. 123). The insurgencies in post-1947 Kashmir, Assam (United Liberation Front of Asom [ULFA] issue) and Nagaland cannot be explained without the moral, material and financial assistance provided by Pakistan. So, according to the author, cross-border transnational insurgency is not new but rooted in the past.

The final chapter, 'Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies in North-East India: 1947-2013', – turns the focus towards North-East India. As mentioned earlier, Afghanistan and Pakistan played a crucial role in triggering insurgency in Kashmir. It is also obvious that Islam played a very important role in fomenting disaffection in Kashmir. In contrast, ethno-tribal assertion and Christianity are the crucial integers with regard to the origins of multi-layered rebellions in India's North-East. The author informs that from the late 1980s, drug money has been financing the Naga insurgency to a great extent. Besides, the calibrated use of force, the initiation of development packages, and the intervention of Indian government dissensions as well as divide and rule policies have been implemented among the numerous insurgents outfits—such as National Socialist Council of Nagaland or NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang)—in this region. The monograph, also explains COIN that includes both military and non-military elements in South Asia (p. 151).

This monograph provides an in-depth analysis of the frontier, insurgencies and COINs in South Asia for the period 1820-2013, and

offers varied and valuable perspectives on the relationship between war and the state formation. While describing the nature and tendency of insurgencies and COINs, the author could have focussed on the political and economic aspects of the countries in this region, namely, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. I would like to mention here that the popularity of new military history and the changing dynamics of international relations worldwide have also left an impression on the present work. The author is well aware of the new genre of research in military history and has proved his worth in the military studies of South Asia.

According to the author, this volume is a synthesis of published works and archival materials (p. 9). These materials provide the genesis of this present study and give a wealth of information to the reader. The roots of organised violence in stateless communities in the border areas of South Asia have been historically analysed here, with some interesting insights. The author also debates whether insurgencies and COIN can be considered new wars or old wine repackaged in the new bottles in the new millennium (p. 9). Quoting Frank Kitson's definition of insurgency, Roy writes:

Insurgency will be held to cover the use of armed force by a section of the people against the government...Subversion and insurgency can take place in the same country at the same time, and either or both can be supported by a foreign country, which may well provide the impetus. Between them these terms cover virtually every form of disturbance up to the threshold of conventional war.¹

Overall, this volume will be of interest to South Asia area specialists, journalists covering the region, as well as policymakers. The volume is definitely recommended for reading by a wider readership interested in the emerging historiographical forays in the sphere of military history and the troubled history of South Asia. Political scientists, however, may be slightly disappointed in the book. While the volume does mention various practices related to COIN and hints at models of COIN, it does not provide a comprehensive model or theory of COIN. The literature on COIN models and theory would be a welcome addition to the book. One more limitation of the volume is the heavy reliance on secondary sources. The vast majority of citations are not primary sources and are not attributed to fieldwork. These criticisms aside, the volume offers a very good description of colonial and post-colonial cases of insurgency

and COIN. It is here that the book makes its greatest contribution. Finally, it is the author's empirical forays that will bring him closer to the new genres of frontier, insurgency and COIN studies, as represented by John S. Galbraith, Frederick Jackson Turner, Paul B. Rich, Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Moeed Yusuf.²

NOTES

1. Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping*, Dehradun: Natraj, 1992, p. 21.
2. John S. Galbraith, 'The Turbulent Frontier as a Factor in British Expansion', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1960; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Dover Publications, 2012; Paul B. Rich and Isabelle Duyvesteyn (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, New York: Routledge, 2012; Moeed Yusuf, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in South Asia*, New York: USIP Press, 2014.

