

The Architecture of Order: A Chronological Analysis of Police Operations and Internal Security Strategies in India

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Abstract—The development of police operations in India includes a complex interplay between ancient traditions of justice, colonial administrative systems, and the modern constraints of a federal republic facing different security challenges. From the truncheon-bearing night patrols of the Gupta era to the high-technology, “360-degree” anti-terror grids of the twenty-first century, the Indian police system has transitioned from a localized mechanism of social control into a sophisticated national security force. This movement reflects not just changes in strategic deployment but also a major change in the intellectual underpinnings of the state’s obligation towards its citizens, moving from the preservation of imperial authority to the proactive safeguarding of constitutional democracy.¹

Historical Foundations of Law Enforcement in the Subcontinent

The concept of police in India evaluated from the Vedic period, during which the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda specifically specified some offenses and the appropriate sanctions to maintain societal balance.¹ In this period, the maintenance of order was fundamentally associated to the protection of Dharma, with a ruler functioning as the supreme guarantor of justice. During the transition to the Mauryan and Gupta empires, informal ways were replaced by structured administrations. During the Gupta era, metropolitan areas were protected by trained officers called Dandini, who patrolled the streets at night with truncheons to catch criminals and secure thoroughfares.¹ The initial patrolling utilized cemetery sites and coordinated with gatekeepers and royal guards to prevent the infiltration of unknown entities into the city.¹

The medieval era, ranging from around 600 AD to the mid-eighteenth century, further defined these roles with the introduction of the Kotwal in urban settings and the Chowkidar in rural locales.¹ However, the most major structural transformation happened during

British governance, especially with the implementation of the Indian Councils Act of 1861.² The law established a professional law enforcement bureaucracy, constituting the Superior Police Services (subsequently the Indian Imperial Police) and establishing a hierarchy of Inspector Generals at a provincial level and Superintendents of Police at the district level.² This colonial structure was largely intended for the repression of resistance and the preservation of British rule, a legacy that contemporary India committed decades to modifying in order to align with democratic values.²

Post-Independence Consolidation and Hybrid Police Actions (1947–1965)

After separation and independence in 1947, the emerging Indian state saw immediate concerns to its territorial integrity. During this period, the phrase “Police Action” frequently served as a diplomatic and legal term for military actions aimed at integrating princely states and securing borders, therefore avoiding the international legal consequences associated with a formal declaration of war.⁵

The Integration of Hyderabad and Junagadh (1948)

In 1948, the Indian government faced a significant challenge in the princely state of Hyderabad. On August 15, 1947, Nizam Osman Ali Khan Asaf Jah VII declared Hyderabad to be an independent nation, refusing to join the Indian Union.⁵ Home Minister Sardar Patel memorably defined the independent state as a “ulcer in the heart of India”.⁵ To overcome this, the government initiated Operation Polo, also known as Operation Caterpillar, on September 13, 1948.⁵ Although it was a military invasion including armored formations and soldiers, it was termed a “police action” to highlight that the subject was an internal administrative correction of a rebellious territory.⁵ The

operation lasted five days, finishing on September 18, 1948, with the surrender of the Nizam's army and the absorption of Hyderabad into the Indian Union.⁵ At the same time, Operation Peace was started to capture the state of Junagadh, following the same logic of internal balance.⁸

The Liberation of Goa and Operation Vijay (1961)

The early 1960s saw the complete removal of European colonial enclaves on Indian soil. After years of fruitless diplomatic conversations with Portugal and the ruthless repression of peaceful Satyagrahis in 1955, the Indian government determined to deploy a force.⁶ In December 1961, Operation Vijay was initiated, comprising an integrated effort by the Army, Navy, and Air Force to free Goa, Daman, and Diu.⁵ The Portuguese attacked upon Indian coastal steamers and fishing vessels near Anjidiv island, which served as the primary reason for the final assault.⁶ The operation effectively ended 451 years of Portuguese control, which Prime Minister Nehru had called as “ugly warts on the beautiful face of India”.⁶

Countering Ideological Insurgency: The Rise of Naxalism (1967–1979)

The 1967 peasant rebellion in the village of Naxalbari, West Bengal, uncovered a new and persistent threat: the Maoist-Leninist insurgency.⁹ This period required the police to turn from territorial integration to internal ideological warfare, tackling groups that attempted to destroy the state through rural rebellion.⁹

Operation Steeplechase (1971)

By the early 1970s, the Naxalite movement had developed into a strategy of assassinating “class enemies,” including police officers, landlords, and politicians.¹⁰ In answer, the West Bengal government, with the assistance of the central government and the paramilitary wings of the Indian Armed Forces, carried out Operation Steeplechase in July 1971.¹⁰ This was a significant counter-insurgency effort aimed to neutralize insurgent positions through coordinated sweeps.¹⁰ The operation resulted in the killing and imprisonment of thousands of suspected operatives and the eventual arrest of master mind of the movement, Charu Majumdar, by the West Bengal Police in July 1972.¹⁰ While the operation successfully interrupted the momentum of the initial wave of Naxalism, it also received criticism for its intensity,

setting the stage for decades of debate about the balance between security and civil rights in the “Red Corridor”.¹⁰

The Decade of Extremism: Punjab and the National Security Guard (1980–1990)

The 1980s were distinguished by the emergence of Sikh separatism in Punjab, a crisis that pushed the limitations of regular police procedures and led to the creation of elite specialized units.

Operation Blue Star, Metal, and Shop (1984)

In June 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi instructed the Indian Army to undertake Operation Blue Star to remove Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his armed supporters from the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar.¹² The operation was a massive military intervention subdivided into specific components:

1. Operation Metal: The tactical assault to neutralize militants within the Harmandir Sahib complex.¹²
2. Operation Shop: A state-wide mop-up operation aiming to raid militant hideouts across rural Punjab.¹² The operation, while fulfilling its military purpose, was socially and politically devastating, leading to thousands of civilian casualties, a subsequent assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the commencement of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.¹²

The Evolution of Tactical Refinement: Black Thunder I and II (1986, 1988)

To remedy the faults of Blue Star, notably the significant collateral harm and the violation of religious purity, the government established the National Security Guard (NSG) in 1986.¹⁵ Operation Black Thunder I was initiated in April 1986 by the NSG to eliminate out extremists who had re-occupied the Golden Temple.¹⁵ This operation was remarkable for its speed and accuracy, resulting in 122 apprehensions without injuries to security forces.¹⁵

In May 1988, Operation Black Thunder II was begun under the command of DGP K.P.S. Gill.¹⁷ This operation defined a significant shift in doctrine; rather than a direct attack, the police and NSG used snipers to neutralize insurgents at vantage positions and employed a method of attrition.¹⁵ After a ceasefire was declared in order to allow surrenders, 146 radicals surrenders themselves up.¹⁵ Black Thunder II is generally seen as a turning moment in counter-

terrorism, illustrating that diligent, intelligence-led police work may achieve objectives with minimal destruction to holy sites and civilian life.¹⁷

Urban Policing, Organized Crime, and the Underworld (1990–2000)

As the 1990s begin, Indian law enforcement faced a new frontier: the growth of multinational crime syndicates, specifically the D-Company originated by Dawood Ibrahim.¹⁸

The Lokhandwala Complex Shootout (1991)

In November 1991, the Mumbai Police involved in a high-profile battle at the Lokhandwala Complex, aiming a group of D-Company gangsters.²⁰ This operation was one of the first extensively publicized exemplification of urban “encounter killings,” a contentious tactic that would ultimately gain significance in the Mumbai Police's battle against organized crime over the decade.¹⁸

The 1993 Mumbai Blasts and the Nexus Doctrine

The March 1993 bombings in Mumbai, which crushed 13 facilities including the Bombay Stock Exchange and the Air India headquarters, significantly transformed the intelligence community's understanding of crime.²¹ Investigations into the explosions discovered that the D-Company had employed its established smuggling network, commonly utilized for gold and silver, to smuggle RDX and military-grade weaponry provided by Pakistan's ISI.¹⁹ This needed a reform in police doctrine: “organized crime” and “terrorism” were no longer different categories but were seen as an interrelated “criminal-terror nexus”.²¹

This period witnessed the enactment of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) and subsequently the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA), which granted law enforcement with enhanced powers to intercept communications and arrest suspects.¹¹

The Modern Federalization of Internal Security (2000–2015)

The early 2000s were defined by a realization that traditional state police agencies were ill-equipped to tackle increasing complexity of interstate and international threats.

Operation Cocoon (2004)

One of the most effective state police operations in history was Operation Cocoon, performed by the Special Task Force (STF) of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.²⁰ The objective was Veerappan, the forest brigand who had escaped capture for decades while participating in sandalwood smuggling and elephant poaching.²⁰ The operation was a great performance in deep-cover infiltration; STF officers spent years living in forest settlement and eventually enticed Veerappan out by posing as intermediaries for a medical procedure, resulting to his murder in an ambush.²⁰

The Post - 26/11 Architecture: Creation of the NIA (2009)

The November 2008 Mumbai attacks (26/11) showed serious shortcomings in intelligence sharing and local police response.²³ In response, the Parliament enacted the National Investigation Agency Act on December 31, 2008, leading to the establishment of the NIA in 2009.²³ The NIA was granted concurrent jurisdiction, allowing it to inquire terror-related acts across state boundaries without obtaining prior authorization from state governments, a fundamental shift in the federal structure of policing in India.²⁴

Operation Green Hunt (2009–2026)

Following the enactment of the Naxalite insurgency as the country's largest internal security concern, the government launched Operation Green Hunt in late 2009.¹¹ This was not a single mission but a prolonged, multi-state offensive involving the CRPF's CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) and state police squads such as the Greyhounds (Andhra/Telangana) and Jharkhand Jaguar.⁹ The operation combined strong military-style sweeps with the “Clear-Hold-Build” plan.⁹ By the 2020s, this continued pressure, combined developmental initiatives, led to a collapse of the Maoist leadership.⁹ In 2026, the government officially declared the country “Naxal-free,” marking the conclusion of a nearly sixty-year battle.⁹

Contemporary Specialized Operations and the “Zero Tolerance” Era (2015–2026)

Under the present administration, Indian police operations have adopted a “ruthless” attitude toward narcotics, cyber-terrorism, and organized gangs, using technology and international collaborations.²⁸

Operation Muskaan and Operation Smile (2015–Present)

Initially a pilot by the Ghaziabad Police in 2014, Operation Muskaan (Smile) was implemented nationally by the Ministry of Home Affairs in July 2015.³⁰ The objective is to trace, rescue, and rehabilitate missing children through month-long rigorous campaigns.³⁰ The operation leverages the Track Child site and Facial Recognition Software like Darpan to match rescued children with national databases.³¹ In July 2025, the Telangana Police conducted Operation Muskaan-XI, which recovered 7,600 children from exploitation and resulted in nearly 1,700 arrests.³³

The CBI's Globalized Drives: Garuda, Meghchakra, and Chakra (2022–2025)

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has initiated a series of “named” operations to address 21st-century threats:

- Operation Garuda (2022): A global drive to disrupt drug networks by collaborating with Interpol and state police agencies.³⁵
- Operation Meghchakra (2022): An operation focuses on locating individuals involved in the online circulation of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).³⁵
- Operation Chakra (2022–2025): A sustained attempt to eliminate cyber-crime mafias and “Digital Arrest” scams.³³ By 2025, Operation Chakra-5 especially targeted advanced digital arrest syndicates that deceived citizens through impersonation.³³

Operation Octopus and the PFI Ban (2022)

In September 2022, the NIA and Enforcement Directorate (ED), assisted by the CRPF and state police, commenced Operation Octopus.³⁸ This was a massive coordinated raid against the Popular Front of India (PFI) across 15 states, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.³⁹ The operation targeted the group's leadership for alleged terror funding, radicalization, and organized crime.³⁹ The scale of the raids, conducted at over 100 locations, led to the banning of the PFI for five years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).³⁹

Operation Dhvast (2023)

In May 2023, the NIA, in collaboration with the Punjab and Haryana police, initiated Operation Dhvast.²⁶ The aim was to disrupt the interlinked network of terrorists, criminals, and drug traffickers operating from within prisons and from external bases in Canada and Pakistan.⁴² The operation focused on “weapon suppliers, financiers, and hawala operators” aiding pro-Khalistan groups, leading to searches at 324 sites across six states.²⁶

The New Doctrine: Operations Sindoor and Mahadev (2025)

In 2025, India's counter-terrorism strategy saw a notable intensification after the Pahalgam tragedy in April, which resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians.⁴⁴ This began the commencement of two interconnected operations that established a “New Doctrine” of zero tolerance.⁴⁶

Operation Sindoor (May 2025)

Operation Sindoor was a retaliatory, non-escalatory military-intelligence operation targeting terrorist headquarters and infrastructure in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).⁴⁵ The operation, called as a “Vijay Utsav” by Prime Minister Modi, purportedly murdered over 100 terrorists and destroyed nine significant infrastructures used by groups like the TRF (The Resistance Front).⁴⁵ The strategic dimension of Sindoor was to target the “masters” of the terrorists rather than just the foot soldiers.³

Operation Mahadev (July 2025)

While Sindoor targeted the planners, Operation Mahadev was a tactical police-paramilitary operation aimed to eliminate the specific executioners of the Pahalgam attack.³ Conducted in the Dachigam forest near Srinagar, the operation featured an effortless grid of J&K Police, the Army, and the CRPF.³ Three high-profile Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists were neutralized, sending a message that “no terrorist can evade India's relentless pursuit of justice”.⁴⁶

Sectoral and Specialized Police Units

The current Indian police system is not a monolith but a collection of specialized organizations, each with a unique purpose for keeping order in certain fields.⁴⁷

Railway Protection Force (RPF) Operations

The RPF, acting under the Ministry of Railways, has initiated many vital operations to secure the nation's transportation network:

- Operation Narcos: To prevent the smuggling of narcotics through the train network.³⁵
- Operation AAHT: A strategic effort to save women and children from human traffickers utilizing trains for transport.³⁵
- Operation Available: A crackdown on the black-marketing of train tickets.³⁵
- Operation Vigilant: Focused on preventing the smuggling of illicit liquor and tobacco.³⁵

The “360-Degree” Anti-Narcotics Strategy

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and NIA have moved beyond basic seizures to “360-degree investigations”.²⁹ This technique involves mapping extensive drug networks, covering international access points to local “small area” suppliers.²⁹ In 2025, the NCB conducted massive drug destruction campaigns, incinerating over 1.37 lakh kg of drugs worth ₹4,800 crore across 11 locations.²⁹ This transition prioritizes demand reduction via initiatives such as “Mission Drug-Free Campus” and intelligence collection through the MANAS helpline (1933).²⁹

Tactical and Structural Hierarchy in Modern Operations

For a police operation in India to succeed, it must effectively operate through the complex hierarchical framework of the state police and its engagement with central agencies.⁴ The Civil Police serves as the primary operational unit at the grassroots level.⁴

A typical state police hierarchy for an operation includes:

1. Director General of Police (DGP): The top-ranking official in charge of overseeing statewide administration provides strategic direction to the government.²
2. Superintendent of Police (SP) / Senior SP (SSP): The district-level commander serves as the primary operational unit for local policing.²
3. Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP): Supervises sub-divisional police stations and administers district-level specialized units.⁴
4. Station House Officer (SHO): An Inspector or Sub-Inspector who heads a police station, the

primary unit for regular patrols and crime prevention.⁴

In specialized operations such as Octopus or Dhvast, local ranks integrate into a larger framework wherein NIA or CBI personnel provide intelligence direction, while local police provide “boots on the ground” and knowledge of the area.³ The partnership is facilitated by advanced technology frameworks like NATGRID and the deployment of drones for transnational monitoring.²⁷

Technological Advancements and Future Outlook

The development of police operations indicates a shift towards the total digitization of criminal records and evidence.³ For example, the Visakhapatnam Police introduced “e-Malkhana” in 2023, a scientific storage system where property and evidence are labeled with QR codes for transparent tracking.²⁶ Furthermore, the NIA’s Organised Crime Network Database provides for the real-time surveillance of fugitives who flee abroad to lead terrorist organizations.³

The future of policing in India, as outlined in the 2025 Anti-Terrorism Conference, will focus on a “ruthless” approach toward the drug-terror nexus and the destruction of “hybrid militants” who utilize encrypted applications and VPNs to cover up their tracks.³ The statement of a “Naxal-free India” by March 2026 and the successful execution of Operations Sindoor and Mahadev highlight a state that has transformed from colonial-era reactive steps to a proactive, technology-driven security concept.⁹

Strategic Summary of Operational Year-Wise Evolution

The following table summarizes the strategic purpose of these operations across the post-independence timeline:

Through this chronological evolution, the Indian police system has grown into a multi-layered force capable of reacting to everything from ancient forms of dacoity to the most current expressions of cyber warfare. The ongoing theme has been the search for a balance between the effective use of force and the preservation of the democratic framework, a journey that continues with the “New Doctrine” of the contemporary era.²⁸

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