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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The strategic logic of policing in British India

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ABSTRACT

Within British India, the police were used to suppress challenges to colonial authority. Yet, police actions in fulfilling this role varied by region. Within the provinces, the police were a coercive force to enforce internal security, augmenting military efforts. On the frontier, the aim of the police was to integrate locals into the local security framework and weld their interests to government control, rather than the direct application of force. Relying on Indian archival records, this comparative analysis demonstrates the importance of considering this variation for a more complete understanding of the strategic logic of colonial policing.

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Conceptions of British imperialism at the time frequently saw the extension of British 'rule of law' – that is an adherence to common law practices, constitutionalism, and a respect for civil liberties – to peoples of the colonies as an aspect of the 'moral justification of empire' as it freed them from 'oriental despotism'.[1] However, scholars have recognized a distinction between the 'rule of law' and the 'rule by law' – or the 'jurisprudence of power' in the words of legal historian Rande Kostal – in which colonial peoples were subjugated or oppressed by colonial institutions, even if their actions violated the substantive legal principles of the 'rule of law' espoused by British authorities.[2] Political scientist Crawford Young observed that 'the inner logic' of colonialism 'was shaped by the vocation of domination'.[3]

Alongside deployments of the military to violently suppress challenges to British authority and assert British control, officials in British India also recognized that the colonial police forces played a role in responding to such challenges, with British India's Home Department stating that the British government would be 'unable to administer the country without [the police forces'] assistance.'[4] In the context of global counterinsurgency efforts, Stuart Schrader introduced the 'police-military continuum' in a 2022 special double

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issue of *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. Under this analytic framework, Schrader, and the other contributing scholars, sought to explore both contemporarily and historically the militarization of the police and the role the police have played to 'augment' military efforts in violently suppressing insurgencies and other challenges to government authority, with a focus on urban areas and national and international-level policing policies and programs.[5]

In a study of British colonial policing in the urban setting of Dar Es Salaam in Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania) within this special double issue, Kaden Paulson-Smith further observed that the police 'were central to the British Empire's attempts to contain what they perceived as insurgencies, or as threats to their rule in externally occupied territories'. Challenging the neat division between the military and the police operating under civil authorities, Paulson-Smith argued that the colonial police forces frequently received military training, carried arms, worked in tandem with military forces, and could be deployed 'as a military force when called upon by the Governor to discharge military duties'.[6] However, the studies focused on exploring the 'police-military continuum' analyze various aspects of policing largely without considering domestic variation in the institutional structures and strategic approaches to the local police forces conditioned to local political and administrative contexts, which can influence the police's relationship with the military. By failing to account for regional variations and nuances in policing institutions and practices, one forms an inaccurate representation of the underlying strategies and purposes of the police, often shaped by local characteristics and challenges.

Within studies of colonial policing in British India, many scholars tend to focus on the provinces that were under direct British administration, examining policing strategy, the polices' institutional development, the police forces' connection with broader governance issues, and police members' relations with local communities.[7] Yet, colonial governance within South Asia was not uniform.[8] Reflecting the varying administrative structures and approaches employed in different regions, approaches to colonial policing likewise varied within British colonies, reflecting local social and environmental contexts. In a study of policing under British rule in Kenya, for instance, Richard Waller demonstrates the necessity of dividing colonial policing into different 'zones of intensity' to understand it. In the Kenyan context, Waller argued that policing varied from 'policed' zones where the police forces maintained a routine and widespread presence to 'unpoliced' zones of the frontier where police presence was sparser and the rule of law 'was hard to define and harder still to enforce'.[9] In a discussion of law and order in British colonial Africa, David Killingray similarly observed that 'law and order meant different things to different people at different times. Colonial officials administering a territory from the capital had a markedly different view of what constituted,

and what was involved, in maintaining law and order than did African rulers whose authority rested upon a system of indirect rule'.[10]

As I argue here, the means and underlying logic by which colonial policing acted to protect British authority within South Asia, as well as their relationship with the military, similarly varied by geographic location, local social context, and different administrative structures. In India, the British Indian government was able to exert direct political control within provinces with established administrative structures under the authority of British officials serving in the Indian Civil Service. Beyond the direct reach of British authorities lay the frontier regions, such as the strategic Tribal Areas of the northwestern frontier abutting the border with Afghanistan, that the British lay claim to but did not exert direct control owing to several geographic and political challenges. In these regions, the colonial government instead relied on a system of indirect rule, an administrative approach in which British authorities co-opted local elites and shared political, administrative, and judicial authority with them as a means of maintaining law and order. Each region required adjustments in British strategy and engagement with local actors to protect British interests. For engagement on the frontier, one British official noted, the distinction between governance on the frontier and the provinces and argued that 'practice elsewhere is of course not always a suitable guide' for governing the tribesmen on the frontier.[11]

The institutional structure and conduct of the colonial police forces in the British Indian provinces and on the frontier were key aspects of the British authorities' different approaches to governance within each space, with varying institutional setups underlying the intentionality of British colonial officials in adapting governing practices to geographic and political conditions. British policing practices were emblematic of the British authorities' understanding and views of the different regions under their control and how they defined their relations with the local populations, important aspects underlying the governing structures that the British government established in the Subcontinent; for many Indians, the police were the most visible part of the system of government that ruled their country. As David Arnold wrote in his study of the colonial police in Madras, 'The police also serve as a metaphor for the colonial regime as a whole. Through the police it is possible to see institutionalized and enacted the priorities and the principles of colonial administration'.[12]

While policing on the frontier and within the British-ruled provinces was understood as a mechanism to protect British authority and interests as a key priority of colonial governance; how this was accomplished in practice varied. Within the British Indian provinces, where the British government relied on direct rule, the provincial police stood apart from the local population and served as a coercive force to enforce colonial order, including the use of everyday violence. On the northwestern frontier, where the British

government relied on indirect rule through local tribal elders, the local tribal police force under the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901, known as the *khassadari*, was not primarily intended to be a coercive institution, unlike the police in the provinces. Rather, the aim of frontier policing was to integrate locals into the local security framework and to weld the tribesmen's interests and well-being to the perpetuation of the control of the colonial government.

To demonstrate these differences in policing strategy within the British Indian provinces and the frontier, this paper analyzes three key and interrelated issues during the period of British Crown rule in India (1858–1947): the police forces and recruitment practices, the police forces and the use of force, and the police forces' relationship with the military. The analysis largely relies on colonial records within the National Archives of India, including policing reports from the Home Department, assessments of internal security, and various strategy memos from British officials. These sources shed light on the internal organization of the various police forces and the underlying strategies and explanations for policing practices. While these sources privilege the views of British officials and too often neglect Indian perspectives on these issues, including the frequently repressive nature of the police, the primary purpose of this article is to understand the underlying strategic logic and understanding of British colonial officials in respect to variations in their approach to colonial policing. Variations within these three areas demonstrate the differing governing strategies employed by the British within India, differences that not only provide a more complete understanding of colonial policing and its underlying strategic logic but varying approaches to governance employed by colonial authorities, which continued to have distinct and lasting impacts through their influences on post-colonial governance and security in different parts of both India and Pakistan.

Why colonial-era governance matters

Several scholars have demonstrated the importance of considering a state's colonial history to understand a wide variety of outcomes in the post-colonial state, including governance,[13] economic development,[14] social and ethnic dynamics,[15] and patterns of violence.[16] In India, studies have examined how the administrative structures and policies of the British colonial government impacted various outcomes within the post-colonial state. More specifically, scholars have demonstrated various continuities and influences from imperial policing under British colonial rule within South Asia to contemporary policing and security, though their studies largely focused on policing in the British Indian provinces. As David Campion observed in the context of India, 'Many of the problems of the present-day Indian Police Service have their

roots in that organization's imperial past, and can only be fully understood in relation to that legacy'.[17]

For instance, Ajay Verghese and Emmanuel Teitalbaum demonstrate that insurgent violence associated with the Maoist Naxalite movement in contemporary India is linked to the period of colonial rule through three distinct mechanisms – land inequality, discriminatory policies toward low caste and tribal groups, and upper-caste-dominated and westernized bureaucratic structures, which included the Imperial Police that served as the direct descendant to the Indian Police Service.[18] Similarly, in Myanmar (which fell under the authority of the British Indian government as a province between 1886 and 1937), Andrew Selth examined how the country's police forces have maintained certain characteristics from the period of British rule, such as its institutional structure, the focus on both criminal and political activities, and the close relationship with the military.[19]

Kristine Eck further contends that colonial-era police reforms by the British government in the face of armed conflict help to explain levels of efficiency and capacity of contemporary policing institutions. In the face of armed insurrection, Eck argues, British authorities increased efforts to reform colonial police forces and increase local recruitment to boost counterinsurgency efforts, premised on the understanding that locals would be more effective in gathering information and targeting insurgents. Therefore, locals received training they would not normally have received, thereby increasing the efficiency of the police in the post-colonial state. However, Eck's analysis relies on national-level data on police expenditures as the explanatory variable and, therefore, does not capture intra-state variation of policing institutions.[20]

From an institutional perspective, the provincial police forces and the khassadari continued to influence post-colonial policing as the post-colonial states largely maintained the same institutional structures as they passed from British to Indian hands following independence, thereby shaping the Indian and Pakistani governments' policing strategy according to their colonial past. The key legal framework for the colonial police within the British Indian provinces, the Indian Police Act of 1861, is still in effect today in India. Basudeb Chatterjee saw the Indian police forces today as originally developed under 'alien rule not so much to promote public interest as to maintain an Imperial authority. It was alienated from the public support because of its repressive character'. He further observed, 'Even now the colonial legacy is manifest in the organisation, relevant laws and regulations and above all the feudalistic attitude of the administration'.[21] Similarly, the Pakistani government maintained the khassadari system and the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) until 2018, when the FCR was revoked and FATA was merged with the neighboring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (formerly the North-West Frontier Province).

Through these policing institutions, the police forces in both India and Pakistan continued to be shaped by the colonial past, underlying the importance of understanding their historical lineage under British colonial rule for a more complete understanding of post-colonial policing and governance practices.

Policing in the British Indian Provinces

During the 18th and early 19th centuries, British India's colonial judicial system and police forces slowly took shape as the British consolidated their political control across the Indian Subcontinent, spurred on by the need to oversee revenue generation and the campaign to suppress the thugs in the 1830s, culminating in the establishment of the Thuggee Department.[22] During this time, local British authorities often lacked easily available and reliable security forces, which were 'usually scanty and of interior quality', and were limited in their abilities to assert their control. This was, in part, because the officials of the East India Company were relative novices in the establishment of a functioning colonial administration.[23] In the wake of the 1857 rebellion and the introduction of British Crown rule, the British government sought to introduce a westernized and centrally controlled police force to support civil authorities, which in many instances was intended to uproot and replace distinct indigenous policing systems to further cement British political control within India.[24] The Indian Police Act of 1861 established a consolidated police force within the British Indian provinces. The activities of the provincial police forces, which were overseen by district magistrates serving within the Indian Civil Service (ICS), were aimed at the 'suppression' of crime in order to protect law and order, according to the chief commissioner of Delhi in the mid-1930s. Though, within Delhi at the time, the police frequently proved more successful in suppressing petty crimes such as burglary rather than more serious offenses, including kidnapping, murder, and terrorism.[25]

The initial aim of the civil police force was to separate the military from the business of securing internal public order in India. The police, therefore, had an inherently political purpose. Rather than simply addressing crime and protecting the life and property of the Indian population, it was intended to protect the state and maintain colonial rule. As Peter Robb argued, the imperial police 'long remained a largely symbolic representation of power and order, playing its part alongside other such instruments rather than being a force for the detection and reduction of crime'.[26] With the increasing political agitation of the Indian nationalist movement in the early 20th century, the 'burden' of handling 'this tense political atmosphere' frequently fell on the shoulders of the police forces, according to the chief secretary to the Bengal government.[27] In 1932, the Delhi administration observed the government's prioritization of the police forces' political work in addressing the

growing civil disobedience movement generally monopolized their attention and resources, 'no doubt a fairly common feature throughout the country'. British officials argued that the 'months of concentration on political work to the exclusion of crime work' contributed to an increase in petty criminal activity.[28] Through the early 20th century, as the police increasingly focused on the political work of suppressing challenges to colonial authority, they also increasingly resorted to the use of violence.

The provincial police forces and the use of force

A key aspect of the provincial police forces' role was the use of 'everyday violence' to enforce law and order – violence that occurred 'as part of the banal experience of everyday life'.[29] In particular, the police relied on local violence to suppress any opposition or political unrest potentially undermining the authority of the colonial government, violence which may not have been centrally planned but nevertheless shaped the conception and functioning of the colonial state. While the British nominally held a 'doctrine of minimal force' to win hearts and minds in enforcing colonial authority, Paulson-Smith recognized that this approach was frequently discarded by both colonial military and police forces as they used 'extreme violence to suppress anti-colonial resistance', as well as the police relying on 'the more routine, everyday acts of violence'.[30] Such use of force against challenges to British authorities held 'an integral place' in what historian Taylor Sherman calls the colonial authorities' 'coercive network' to maintain law and order. Sherman defines the 'coercive network' as 'the interconnected institutions, laws and practices that made up the state's coercive repertoire. Far from being limited to a single institution, coercive practices ranged from firing on crowds and bombing from the air, to dismissal from one's place of work or study, to collective fines, imprisonment and corporal punishment'.[31]

During the 1930s, media reports came out of India describing the increasingly heavy hand of the police in challenging the growing anti-British civil disobedience movement led by the Indian National Congress, which had been increasing in prominence within India's political sphere as it clamored for self-rule in India. In June 1931, the Chicago *Daily News* carried a first-hand account of action taken by English-led Mahratti policemen against a peaceful procession of members of the Indian National Congress in Bombay. The *Daily News* correspondent Negley Farson observed,

> Mounted Indian policemen who had been galloping across the field, whacking heads indiscriminately, came to a halt when they faced the little cluster of blue Akali turbans on the slender Sikh men . . . the police, determined to try to clear the field, at last rushed around the Sikh women and began to hit the men. I stood within five feet of a Sikh leader, as he took the *lathi* blows. He was a short, heavily muscled man. The blows came; he stood straight. His turban

> knocked off. The long black hair was bared with the round topknot. He closed his eyes as the blows fell—until at last he swayed and fell to the ground.[32]

This movement saw the police as a symbol of the brutality of British rule given its role as a coercive instrument of the state in daily contact with the Indian population.

In reference to Indian nationalists' efforts to 'sap the loyalty' of the police and the military in India, the director of the Indian Intelligence Bureau stated in July 1930 that 'if these twin anchors hold, the ship of State can hardly fail to ride out the storm'.[33] Therefore, British officials defended the use of force by the police to suppress challenges to British rule, especially as a response to the growing spread of political resistance during the early 1920s and 1930s.[34] As a principle of policing the British empire's colonial subjects, Charles Gwynn, a former British army officer, argued in his 1934 manual *Imperial Policing*, that any delay or hesitation in the application of force by the police 'will always be interpreted as weakness, encourage further disorder and eventually necessitate measures more severe than those which would suffice in the first instance'.[35] In defense of police action taken against rioters in Calcutta in 1926, officials within the Bengal government similarly argued,

> The question of the degree of force to be used in dispersing a mob is one which has to be decided by the officer on the spot, and presents a most difficult problem to the individual judgment. The general principle is that the degree of force must depend on the nature of the riot, and that the force used must be proportioned to the circumstances of the case. The use of too little force at the outset may prove an error leading to additional loss of life no less than the use of too much force.[36]

On 23 November 1941, the Delhi police used tear gas for the first time to break up a Sikh procession in commemoration of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh guru who was executed by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1675, over concerns that the procession would exacerbate communal tensions with the Muslim community. According to a police report, local foot police initially found themselves unable to disperse the crowd without resorting to the use of force, even following the deployment of mounted police into the gathered masses. The police soon withdrew and resorted to bombarding the crowd with tear gas 'in a heavy concentration', which 'proved successful'.[37]

The provincial police forces and recruitment practices

Colonial officials saw a certain level of tension and mistrust between the broader population and Indian members of the police force (especially following the gradual Indianization of the colonial services beginning in the early 20th century), given their role as a coercive instrument for projecting and enforcing imperial power. In May 1914, for example, the Army in India

Committee argued in the case of any disaffection affecting the security services that 'the police are likely to be more and not less loyal than the sepoy, especially since the anti-British agitators have made them the subject of special attack'. Members of the committee further noted, 'The experience of the past decade has shown, that, on the whole, the civil police of the country are a reliable force, who have come out of a period of great trial with credit. Witnesses have testified to the manner in which they are identified with Government, and that, in spite of unjust attacks, they have striven to do their duty'.[38] The hostility of the broader population toward the police increased during the 1930s amid the civil disobedience movement, given the policemen's association with what the movement saw as a colonial system of oppression.[39]

The divide between the provincial police and local communities was further heightened by colonial authorities' suspicions of local recruitment, which they saw as undermining the effectiveness of the police forces. Recruitment for the provincial police force was formally based on finding men of 'a satisfactory standard, both as regards physique and education'.[40] During the early 20th century, however, British officials noted the importance of recruiting non-locals to bolster the efficiency, reliability, and effectiveness of the police force in urban areas such as Bombay, in particular from among social groups dubbed the 'martial races' by British officials, such as the Sikhs, Pashtun, and Rajputs, and heavily recruited for service in the military and police.[41] In June 1911, the secretary to the Bombay government's judicial department, C.A. Kincaid, wrote to the Indian home secretary stressing the importance of relying on non-local recruits to improve the effectiveness of the police forces. 'For certain parts of the city where the traffic is heaviest or the population most difficult to deal with', he argued, 'the police recruited locally are found unable to maintain efficient control and it is thought absolutely necessary, if any improvement is to be effected, that there should be a nucleus of Sikh police on which reliance can be placed for difficult work'.[42] Rajnarayan Chandavarkar similarly observed that, in the view of British authorities, Indians with 'too many friends and interests among the people' were unable to 'police them reliably and consistently according to the commands of their senior officers', especially when any recourse to violence was deemed necessary within the eyes of British authorities.[43]

The provincial police forces and the military

Yet, in the case of widespread unrest or anti-British agitation, British colonial officials recognized that the police required support from regular troops, such as the deployment of troops in Amritsar in April 1919 that led to the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. In late April 1930, with anti-government and Congress-led political unrest in Peshawar spreading, a local official advised the Home

Department in Simla that authorities should secure all 'important positions' in the city with troops and that 'police should resume real and effective control under cover of military support. Overwhelming display of military force, in my opinion, offers best chance of avoiding further bloodshed on this occasion', with the Home Department authorizing the deployment of troops as needed to work with the local police.[44]

On the other hand, British officials also saw the police in India as a supplementary force for the military in suppressing any unrest, particularly should India's military forces become occupied in any frontier or foreign wars. In 1904, in defense of the expansion of the armed police, the director of the Central Criminal Intelligence Department, H.A. Stuart, argued,

> It is the function of an efficient police not only to prevent and detect crime, but also to secure the peace and tranquility of the country. The numbers, organization and equipment of the force must, therefore, be such as will enable it to deal both promptly and effectually with tumults and local disturbances without the aid of the military arm.[45]

In a March 1905 dispatch to the Viceroy, the Secretary of State for India, St. John Brodrick, further stressed the importance of maintaining the strength and standards of the armed police in India owing to the need 'to guarantee the maintenance of the tranquility of the country in the event of military operations on or beyond the frontier occupying the bulk of the troops now cantoned throughout India'.[46]

With this role in mind, colonial officials understood the mobilization of India's provincial police forces as 'closely connected with the general scheme of military mobilisation'.[47] Nevertheless, during the early 20th century, there were debates about the extent to which the police should be armed to serve in this role, with British India's Army Department arguing that 'the number of firearms in the hands of the civil police should be kept as low as is consistent with the efficient discharge of their duties'.[48] Nevertheless, during the period of British rule in India, colonial authorities relied on the police force within the provinces as the most visible, day-to-day instrument to enforce British authority and protect internal security, During the period of, the British Indian government's underlying strategic logic for the provincial police forces was to serve as a coercive instrument to suppress challenges to British rule.

The Northwestern frontier and the frontier crimes regulation

The Tribal Areas of the northwestern frontier was a liminal space beyond the jurisdiction of the municipal law of British India; it landed on the British side of the Durand Line established in 1893 to serve as the boundary between British India and Afghanistan. But the principles of international law did not govern the colonial government's engagement with the region's tribes. In this

frontier region, the British government faced the challenge of how to effectively enforce British control with limited government presence, especially with growing British concern for the region's Pashtun tribes raiding into settled areas and opposing the presence of outsiders in their territory.

While localized tribal revolts and raiding in of itself did not pose an existential threat to British rule in the Subcontinent, British officials feared that any unrest within the Tribal Areas could be exploited by imperial rivals, such as Russia, to sow and spread political discord in India. In a 1904 speech, Lord Curzon, a noted Russophobe who served as India's viceroy from 1899–1905, stated that with,

> a land frontier 5700 miles in length, peopled by hundreds of different tribes . . . a single outbreak at a single point may set entire sections of the frontier ablaze. Then, beyond it . . . are the muffled figure of great European Power, advancing nearer and nearer, and sometimes finding in these conditions temptations to action that is not in strict accordance with the interests which were are bound to defend.[49]

In the late 19th century, British Indian military leaders argued for the necessity of pursuing 'an active policy with regard to the belt of independent tribes which lies along our North-West Frontier; that we must endeavour to open their country for the movement of our troops, and organise them for the purpose of advance against an external enemy'.[50] Yet, by this time, the political leadership in Calcutta increasingly saw the pursuit of a largely military response to asserting control and maintaining law and order in the region as inadvisable as the military's presence was understood to be a provocation to local tribesmen and contributed to local unrest.[51] In 1898, the British Indian government hoped to minimize the impact of the military's presence on the frontier by ordering, 'No new responsibility should be undertaken on the frontier which was not rendered obligatory by actual strategical requirements; that unnecessary interference with the tribes should be avoided; and that concentration of the troops should be effected'.[52]

As a political approach to asserting control in the Tribal Areas and suppressing challenges to its authority, the British Indian government established a hybrid system of administration through implementation of the 1901 Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), a more comprehensive law that replaced earlier versions of it. The administrative approach under the FCR was based on the principles of indirect rule, whereby British authorities co-opted local elites and institutionalized their position through sharing political, administrative, and judicial authorities with them.[53] The administrative structure under the FCR was based on the British Indian government recognizing the authority of tribal elders, known as *maliks*. The government-recognized maliks served as the intermediary between the government and the broader tribe. They operated through councils of elders known as *jirgas*,

which relied on a mixture of the tribal code of honor, known as *Pashtunwali*, tribal custom, and religious law to inform their decision-making. Within the jirga, the maliks were empowered to decide on issues related to law and order and the broader well-being of the tribe, with tribal members having no recourse to challenge their decisions; the law was described as denying local residents within the Tribal Areas appeal, *wakeel* (lawyer), and *daleel* (argument) – 'the right to appeal a conviction, the right to legal representation, and the right to present evidence to argue one's case'.[54]

In April 1902, Lord Curzon traveled to Peshawar to meet with a *durbar* (court) of around 3,000 tribal leaders to discuss this new administrative framework for the frontier. He stated,

> The policy of the Government of India towards the trans-border men is very simple, and it is this. We have no wish to seize your territory or interfere with your independence. If you go on worrying and raiding and attacking, there comes a time when we say, This thing must be put an end to: and if the tribes will not help us do it, then we must do it ourselves. The matter is thus almost entirely in your own hands.[55]

Lord Curzon also assured them that the government would continue to disburse 'tribal allowances for keeping open the roads and passes, such as the Khyber and Kohat Passes and the Chitral Road, for the maintenance of peace and tranquility, and for the punishment of crime'.[56]

A key aspect of this frontier policy was the recruitment of individuals from among local communities on the frontier to serve in the FCR's governing structures and in support of colonial authorities.[57] By recruiting local Pashtun into varying roles within this administrative system, British authorities intended to tie local communities and their interests to systems of colonial governance and control, thereby facilitating increased political penetration and influence into the periphery and ultimately hoping to pacify the tribes. Lord Curzon stated that this framework was intended to employ 'the tribes themselves as far as possible to protect our military interests' and 'promote a spirit of local harmony and co-operation by the enlistment, in the service of the British Government, but in defence of their own country, of the wild but not intractable inhabitants of these regions'.[58]

Frontier policing under the FCR

In the early 1930s, the British Indian government's Frontier Regulations Enquiry Committee observed that, generally speaking, 'serious crime prevails to a far less extent in tribal territory than in British territory, the reason being that every one is armed and retribution is sure and swift. Fear of sectional warfare following a murder has a great preventive effect'. Nevertheless, they also saw that on the frontier 'a tendency to resort to violence exists in

a greater degree' than in other parts of the British Raj, with blood feuds among the region's tribes an ever-present threat.[59] Given the constant threat of the outbreak of violence, the governor of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in the 1940s, Olaf Caroe, noted that throughout the frontier the jirga system 'cannot operate as a substitute for a police force, though it may be subsidiary thereto … Even in tribal areas it has been found necessary to constitute a Police force in the form of Khassadars'.[60] The *khassadari* was a semi-official tribal police force in the Tribal Areas that operated under the authority of British political officers in each tribal agency, who were members of the Indian Political Service (IPS).[61] The khassadars were responsible for a number of policing duties within their territory included guarding passes and buildings and protecting British officials as well as recovering stolen property. They also served as a 'check on the movement of the trans-border tribes'.[62] Operating as a semi-formal police force, the khassadars received little in the way of formal training and used their own weapons; unlike many of the members of the provincial police forces, members of the khassadari were always armed. As a support force to political authorities in the agency, the khassadari acted as the daily 'arm' of British political officers working on the frontier to counter low-level violence, crime, and political disorder. As historian Christian Tripodi noted, the khassadari 'placed the political officer in daily contact with the tribal rank and file; an effective political "barometer"'.[63]

The tribal police force and recruitment practices

The purpose of the tribal policing under the FCR was to integrate members of the local community into the administrative structure and weld their interests to the continuation of British control. Therefore, the structure of the khassadari was predicated on local recruitment to serve its purpose, distinct from the recruitment practices of the provincial police forces. While the khassadari operated under the authority of British political officers, the maliks were responsible for the selection of local tribesmen to serve as its members, who then were provided an allowance from the government for their service. Though, They were not provided this allowance directly from British officials. The maliks 'had practically an uncontrolled power over the tribal subsidies which were handed over to them for distribution'.[64] In effect, the khassadari served as a vehicle for establishing a patronage network, thereby bolstering the position of the government-recognized maliks. British authorities recognized that the frontier policy relied on providing 'support and encouragement to leading headmen who throw in their lot with and range themselves on the side of Government, controlling them of the marauding factions and bad characters and consequent maintenance of peace and order'.[65]

Anthropologist Akbar Ahmed, who also served as a political agent in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas during the 1970s and 1980s,

noted that a malik's importance was 'judged by the number of *khassadars* he can obtain from the administration', thereby increasing the government-provided funds that were distributed through his hands within his tribal community and strengthening his position and status within the tribe.[66] The control of the Khyber Pass within the Khyber Agency, for instance, was a priority for the frontier administration, which necessitated the backing of strong maliks within the area.

In May 1923, the chief commissioner of NWFP advised that the expansion of Khassadari posts should be expanded around the Khyber Pass 'as instruments of our treaty rights' (referencing past treaties which established British control over the area), but, more importantly, expansion of the khassadari would 'help to create strong Maliks who are at present lacking among Pass Afridis [the local Pashtun tribe]'. The chief commissioner felt that this would have the effect of solving 'ancient difficulties of this dangerous tribal salient which has always given passage to raiding gangs into Campbellpur and Punjab and has always harboured outlaws'.[67]

Frontier governance under the FCR closed the impoverished tribal areas off from the remainder of the British India, both politically and economically, and limited access to outsiders. Yet, despite the inhabitants being treated as 'independent', the tribal areas remained politically and economically dependent on British India as the British government prioritized control of the region. Therefore, the khassadari system also served as a means of integrating local tribesmen into the security forces and commodifying their labor to inject money into the local economy of the Tribal Areas, a means of further fostering dependence on British power structures in the Subcontinent and asserting British political control within the periphery. As historian Benjamin Hopkins wrote, local tribesmen 'had their labor of violence turned into wage work' within 'a military labor market' that was 'closely tied to policing frontier peoples'.[68]

As a form of political pressure to suppress instances of tribal unrest, colonial authorities would withhold the allowance for the khassadari, which not only harmed the individual members' livelihood and standing but negatively impacted the injection of capital into the tribe.[69] This served as a sanction against the entire tribe and was, in effect, 'blackmail', in the words of a former British civil servant in India, to ensure the good behavior of the tribe and suppress challenges to British authority.[70] A former British civil servant explained, 'The khassadars were servants of the tribe, not the Government; they were ordered by the Government to guard a stretch of road, a pass, or an officer but they acted on behalf of the tribes. They were responsible to the tribe – and for the tribe; if the tribe misbehaved, the Government could dismiss the khassadars even though as individuals they were blameless'.[71] In this role, a British military officer who served on the frontier referred to the khassadars as 'insurance men'. He stated, 'Had any

British officer been killed while under their care, not only would official retribution follow swiftly but the *khassadar* system would be stopped, drawing down the ire of the tribal chiefs; the miscreants would probably be killed in their turn by their own people, for "spoiling the market"'.[72]

The tribal police forces and the use of force

British authorities were acutely aware of the limitations of the khassadars and the ever-present tension between government interests and their tribal identities. Despite being organized as a security force, the khassadari rarely used force in the performance of their duties, unlike the provincial police forces. This was a fact well-known to British officers serving on the frontier. They understood that khassadars would often refrain from committing acts of violence over fears of sparking a blood feud with fellow tribesmen.[73] When confronted with tribal raiders or others engaged in criminal activity, the khassadars would usually 'aim high' to avoid the inevitable acts of revenge against them or their clans for killing a fellow Pashtun.[74] In the 1920s, military authorities recognized the limitations of khassadari in the context of military operations in Waziristan and argued that the local tribal police forces 'will be no great detriment to offensive action by the Mahsuds [a tribe in South Waziristan Agency]'.[75]

British authorities saw that the khassadari, which had 'greater mobility, fewer requirements, and more intimate local knowledge', were at best effective against 'raiding gangs and minor aggressions'. In the ideal, they were viewed as the 'keepers of the peace and the repressors of the wrong doers'. Moreover, they served under political authorities, making their activities distinct from external military action and more palatable to local tribesmen. Yet, when facing 'anything more serious than raiding gangs and minor aggressions', the chief of the General Staff noted, the khassadari and other irregular tribal forces 'have little power, and such power as they have decreases in proportion as tribal armament improves. For more serious situations regular troops must always be indispensable'.[76] From the British perspective, it was evident that they did not envision the tribal police as a substitute to the military in the use of force to suppress unrest, as they did with the police forces within the provinces. In recognition of the fact that military deployments in the Tribal Areas could serve as a provocation to local tribesmen and do little to improve the law-and-order situation, the British government often instead relied on paramilitary groups, such as the South Waziristan Scouts and the Khyber Rifles, as well as ad hoc tribal militias as substitutes to military deployments, rather than the khassadars.[77]

The tribal police forces and the military

While the system of governance under the FCR was intended to maintain law and order, it often ran up against the realities of governing on the frontier. At times, tribal unrest overwhelmed the limited capabilities of the local forces, with the colonial authorities understanding that the local tribal police forces were unable to act as a substitute to the military in the application of force. In these instances, the military was deployed to suppress widespread unrest on the frontier and pacify the region. However, these occupations often followed the 'line of least resistance' and focused on occupying the territory of the 'less recalcitrant and less warlike of the tribesmen', leaving the more troublesome areas untouched such as Mahsud territory within South Waziristan Agency – British officials described the Mahsud as the 'most virile, warlike and hardy of all the Waziristan tribes'.[78] These occupations often served more as a blocking mechanism against tribal raiding out of the Tribal Areas rather than a punitive expedition. However, British officials understood that the threat of military action could be a more effective means of maintaining law and order on the frontier than building up effective local policing institutions, given the limitations of the central government's presence and influence. Within Waziristan during the early 1920s, the General Staff of the Indian Army further observed, 'Unless threatened retribution is both adequate and visible it is comparatively valueless. A distant threat will never be effective'. The nearby presence of the military carries the threat of potential action against the tribesmen's villages and homes and thus 'immobilizes' them for 'offensive purposes'.[79]

Within the provinces, British military authorities recognized that the military likewise served as supporting role to the civil police, with the military only deployed when 'the situation is such that the civil force can no longer cope with it'. Yet, given the relative ease of travel through the provinces by the early 20th century, it was 'comparatively immaterial' where the military was located. They were able to be deployed to support police within a matter of hours to prevent unrest from spreading. Within the frontier, regular troops did not have the same ease of travel through the difficult terrain, and therefore an adequate force must be stationed within easy reach of the areas of potential trouble to provide vital and timely assistance to the frontier police forces, whether within Waziristan proper or residing along the border between the tribal areas and the settled areas abutting them. The General Staff wrote,

> If [assistance] cannot arrive in time, it may almost as well, for all practical purposes, not exist at all. The main essential, therefore, in the selection of the locations of the regular troops is that they are so situated as to be able to support the Scouts and Khassadars before the latter can be overwhelmed. Regular troops cannot prevent the irregular and outlying forces being attacked; but they can, and should be able to prevent them being overwhelmed.[80]

The potential effectiveness of the frontier police forces was bound with the expectation of the deployment of timely backing force by the military, including the use of air power.

While British authorities recognized the various limitations of the khassadari and their inability to serve as a coercive force like the provincial police, this frontier police force acted as a means of enforcing British control no less than their counterparts in the provinces. However, the khassadari primarily accomplished through integrating local tribesmen into the security framework of the Tribal Areas and tying the interests of the population to the continuance of British political control. The British Indian government's underlying strategic logic for the khassadari, therefore, was based in its local character and the khassadars serving as representatives of the local tribe, quite unlike the characteristics of the provincial police.

Conclusion

Within British India, as well as other British colonies in Asia and Africa, the police forces, no less than the military, served as a means of suppressing challenges to colonial rule and enforcing British control. Yet, the ways in which the police fulfilled this role varied according to different political and socioeconomic contexts and local administrative structures. Within the British Indian provinces, colonial officials intended the police to stand apart from local communities and serve as enforcers of British authority among the Indian population, including the use of violence to ensure internal security. On the frontier, on the other hand, British authorities relied on the khassadars as a more passive instrument of protecting British political authority; they were a means of establishing a patronage network to bolster the standing and influence of government-recognized maliks, inject capital into tribal communities, and act as a form of 'blackmail' to ensure the good behavior of the tribe.

The British approach to policing on the northwestern frontier was similar to the approaches to colonial policing in other frontier and tribal regions across the British Empire, including India's northeastern frontier, the Aden Protectorate, southern Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, Transjordan, and Australia.[81] The FCR employed in British India's northwest frontier frequently served as the model for frontier governance. Additionally, ideas generated within British India on policing and governance, especially in the context of frontier governance, traveled through the empire, especially as British colonial officers were transferred to new locations. For instance, Frederick Lugard, a noted champion of indirect rule while serving as the British governor of Nigeria in the early 20th century, began his career in India, with the governance models he employed in Africa developed within India's North-West Frontier.[82] On these other frontiers, British authorities similarly viewed

security forces as primarily a means of integrating locals into the local security framework rather than judging them by their military effectiveness. For a more complete understanding of colonial policing and its legacy in the post-colonial state, it is therefore necessary to consider these variations in colonial governments' approach to policing, reflecting the local political, socioeconomic, and administrative contexts.[83]

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Disclosure statement

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