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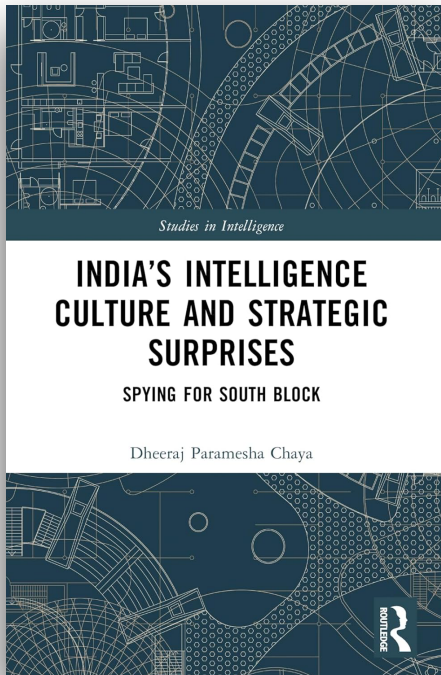
Weekly Intelligence Notes Exclusive Book Review (August 2024)

India's Intelligence Culture and Strategic Surprise: Spying for the South Block

by Dheeraj Paramesha Chaya
Routledge
27 May 2024 (paperback)

Review by former
CIA Assistant Director for South and
Central Asia **Paul Kepp***

In a field traditionally dominated by studies of Western intelligence agencies, Dheeraj Paramesha Chaya's new book offers a fresh and comprehensive perspective on the intelligence services and security culture in India. Meticulous research and clear writing make this book a standout in the genre. It is a welcome addition to the growing literature on intelligence in the Global South.



Most books about Indian intelligence consist of biographies of notable Indian intelligence figures, or histories of specific conflicts and events. Chaya, a UK-based academic, has taken a more comprehensive approach and India's Intelligence Culture is the best work available on intelligence and security in India.

India's Intelligence Culture is both a history of Indian security services, and a study of Indian intelligence culture as a function of the country's history and politics. Chaya traces the roots of Indian intelligence to antiquity, specifically to the Arthashastra, an Indian political treatise which addressed intelligence themes in a nuanced and sophisticated fashion, according to Chaya's description. The Arthashastra will be unfamiliar to most readers but is an interesting counterpoint to the shopworn Sun Tzu references in other works; Chaya's account convincingly demonstrates the depth of India's intelligence lineage.

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That tradition atrophied under the British. Characteristic of all colonies in the Global South, under British rule Indian intelligence devolved into a police function, focused on internal security. Foreign intelligence and strategic analysis were London's concern, not New Delhi's.

After independence in 1947, it took India years and hard lessons to develop a true foreign intelligence capability. Chaya uses three events to illuminate the theme: the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict; the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war; and the 1999 Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan in Kashmir. The first and last were intelligence failures. The war with Islamabad in East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971 was an unqualified victory for India. Each event is analyzed in detail; Chaya dissects the political, leadership and organizational factors which led to these outcomes.

The 1971 case is of particular interest since it was the first major test for India's newly-formed foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis wing (R&AW), set up in 1968. R&AW's founder was the enigmatic and brilliant spymaster, R. N. Kao. Kao and R&AW were central in India's support to the rebellion in East Pakistan. R&AW's comprehensive intelligence penetration of East Pakistan, bold covert action, and its efficient coordination with the Indian army, contributed significantly to the defeat of the Pakistani army in just 13 days. New Delhi gained a pro- Indian independent state, Bangladesh, on its eastern flank. Chaya's chapter on this event examines what happens when cogent policy, good intelligence, and sound leadership coalesce in a crisis.

No country can sustain an unbroken record of intel success and in the years since 1971, Indian has seen its share of strategic surprises, as Chaya illustrates in the chapter on India's failure to anticipate Pakistan's 1999 assault on Kargil. Chaya attributes the uneven performance of India's intelligence community to leadership and consumer literacy. Chaya quotes Vikram Sood, a former chief of R&AW: "so long as we had a good chief and a government that listened, it was all fine." This is an oversimplification, but the dynamic will be broadly familiar to any intelligence historian. India's Intelligence Culture is an academic work, not popular history. But Chaya writes very well and the book is not hard going. Extensive footnotes and references at the end of every chapter are a rich resource for further study.

* **Paul Kepp** is former CIA Assistant Director for South and Central Asia. He is the recipient of the National Intelligence Exceptional Achievement medal, CIA Director's Award, and the Donovan Award. During his career as a CIA Operations Officer in Africa, Asia, and Europe, he served five tours as Chief of Station. In retirement, Mr. Kepp serves on the editorial board of CIA's journal, *Studies in Intelligence*.