

intelligence officer's bookshelf

Compiled and reviewed by Hayden Peake.

Intelligence Abroad

Contemporary Intelligence in Africa

Edited by Tshepo Gwatiwa
(Routledge, 2025) 319 pages, end-of-chapter notes, index.

Tshepo Gwatiwa is a lecturer in intelligence studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, and senior research fellow at the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC), University of Johannesburg (South Africa). In *Contemporary Intelligence in Africa*, he presents revisions of 18 papers, by 15 contributors, originally given at a symposium on African intelligence and security held at the University of Glasgow in 2019. The objectives of the volume are to demonstrate the nature of contemporary intelligence services in African nations and regions while inspiring students and scholars to study the subject.

After a historical review of intelligence and security practices until the end of the colonial era, the volume deals with contemporary issues. The first is what Gwatiwa calls a “cosmic theory” of intelligence which he hopes will “start a conversation around the prospects for a theory for African intelligence.” (1) While thought provoking, the earthly relevance of the concept is clouded by the length of his discussion and the use of terms like “ontogenetic cleavages” without explanation. (27)

Succeeding chapters discuss the intelligence services in most, but not all, of the African nations and regions, such as the Sahel, whose uncertain boundaries cover several countries and complicate intelligence operations. In each case attention is paid to the political, social, and economic factors involved.

The contributions also deal with issues that apply in varying degrees to all the services, including security, covert

action, counterintelligence, counterinsurgency, and counter-terrorism. More generally, they discuss examples that justify the persistent view that intelligence and security services are still an instrument of suppression and regime preservation. Thus intelligence is still a taboo subject in much of Africa because it is associated with everything wrong with African statecraft. (14)

A related topic concerns the paradoxical relationship of African and Western intelligence organizations. The latter are considered “too white” while its “form and experience remain the yardstick for optimum intelligence.” (3) Despite these obstacles, or in some cases including them, African nations have distinctive characteristics, and these are discussed in chapters on several nations: Morocco, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Uganda, and the DRC. Most other nations receive passing attention.

Contemporary Intelligence in Africa is a valuable and distinctive contribution to the intelligence literature. ■

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

By Dheeraj Paramesha Chaya
(Routledge, 2023) 287 pages, end-of-chapter notes, appendix, index.

Dheeraj Paramesha Chaya is assistant professor of geopolitics and international relations at India's Manipal Academy of Higher Education. He earned his PhD in intelligence studies at the University of Leicester. *India's Intelligence Culture and Strategic Surprises* is based on his dissertation. The subtitle, *Spying for South Block*, refers to the part of the building housing India's intelligence power center, analogous to the “West Wing.”

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

In his foreword to the book, Vikram Sood, former secretary (chief executive) of India's foreign intelligence service, the Research & Analysis Wing (RAW), notes that while most previous books on Indian intelligence have been autobiographies, "Dr Dheeraj's book is perhaps the first academic work on India's foreign intelligence culture." (x)

Chaya's principal argument is that the quality of a nation's intelligence performance is a function of its intelligence culture, a term he never explicitly defines. He does, however, offer some hints. They include organizational structure, management, bureaucracy, values, behavioral norms, operational flexibility, and how the nation views the subject. In short, the why and the way things are done.

India's Intelligence Culture and Strategic Surprises follows the transformation of India's intelligence culture from its Kautilyan roots, through its colonial and postcolonial periods to its modern implementation. Kautilya, author of the ancient Indian politico-economic and international relations treatise, the *Arthashastra*, posited views on intelligence that are received in India as Sun Tzu is in the West, but in Chaya's view are not applied in modern India. He emphasizes this point by discussing intelligence practices in several wars involving India. He also compares the approach of the anglosphere services in similar circumstances, finding that they tend to explain conditions in organizational terms—a somewhat narrow view—whereas Indian services rely on culture as a better explanation for intelligence failures and strategic surprises. (229)

This is a scholarly, thoroughly documented study that will inform the reader about Indian intelligence history, while making an argument for reviving the Kautilyan intelligence culture for India's national security. But the author never recognizes that all intelligence services are a function of the national cultures in which they exist. Their differences are therefore inherent. ■

Intelligence Practices in High-Trust Societies: Scandinavian Exceptionalism

Edited by Kira Vrist Rønn, et al.
(Routledge, 2025) 232, end-of-chapter notes, references, appendices, index.

Historian Wilhelm Agrell, professor emeritus at Lund University in Sweden, is one of the founding figures of intelligence studies in Scandinavia. In Agrell's foreword

to this volume, he reviews the evolution of Scandinavian intelligence from its very secret beginning in the late 1930s to its modern status, which encourages greater public discussion of intelligence matters.

In the book's introduction and overview to its 14 chapters, the editors discuss some important definitions and provide a "Scandinavian perspective on intelligence studies that distinguishes them from the predominant Anglo-American perspectives." (7)

To better understand the Scandinavian context, several definitions deserve mention. The first is that "Scandinavia" and its variants denote Denmark, Norway, and Sweden only. The term "Nordic countries" refers to Finland and Iceland. "High-Trust Societies" applies to Scandinavia because of "their unique social and cultural characteristics, which foster a sense of trust, cooperation, and solidarity among citizens and institutions." (2)

The term "Scandinavian Exceptionalism" refers to three important characteristics that may affect how intelligence is practiced in the Scandinavian context: 1) the high level of trust that characterizes Scandinavian societies; 2) Scandinavian history and ... the universalist welfare state; and 3) the role of the Scandinavian intelligence services in domestic and international affairs.

The contributors to this volume show that the idea of greater public openness about intelligence and its academic study emerged slowly from secrecy of the early days. One example of the early, intense protection of secrecy became public when a private researcher published a study of defense installations in Norway; the government sought to ban the publication, saying it contained "secret" defense matters. The court hearing the case rejected the government's bid when the supposedly classified information was shown to have been drawn from an unclassified "Norwegian ministry of defense telephone directory." (xiv)

Other topics addressed include contemporary issues illustrating the roles Scandinavian intelligence services play in the world. A common theme concerns the roles of relatively small intelligence organizations when cooperating with one of the larger powers. The Danish foreign intelligence service (DDIS) and the CIA is an interesting example. (11ff) Other chapter topics include accountability, oversight, counterintelligence, recruiting, education, and secrecy.

Intelligence Practices in High-Trust Societies brings Scandinavian voices to international intelligence literature. Well documented, interesting, and informative, it leaves no doubt that the quality of an intelligence service is not dependent on its size. A valuable contribution. ■

Intelligence Services in South Asia: Colonial Past and Post-Colonial Realities

Edited by Ryan Shaffer and ASM Ali Ashraf
(Routledge, 2025) 227, end-of-chapter notes, index.

Historian, author, and independent scholar, Ryan Shaffer has written extensively on Asian and African intelligence cultures, extremism, and security issues. His co-editor, Ali Ashraf, is professor and chair of the Department of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. He has a PhD in international security policy from the University of Pittsburgh and specializes in South Asian intelligence and security issues, traditional and nontraditional. In addition to the editors contributions, *Intelligence Services in South Asia* has articles by scholars from Australia, Scotland, England, and India.

This anthology focuses on South Asian intelligence in three eras: the ancient or Kautilyan era, named after the historian and author of the *Arthashastra* that included the precept “Every neighboring state is an enemy and the enemy’s enemy is a friend;” (5) and the colonial and postcolonial periods. Although the chapters are country focused, a central theme throughout is that most countries in South Asia were influenced by colonial intelligence practices and have been further shaped by postcolonial domestic and international services.

Starting with Afghanistan the countries discussed are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Republic of Maldives, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Only Pakistan relies on its military intelligence as its primary security service. The issues addressed for each country include intelligence service history, difficulties in creating an intelligence service, domestic and foreign relations, and how each has dealt with the basic intelligence functions; i.e., espionage, covert operations, counterintelligence, and internal security. A separate chapter compares intelligence oversight in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, countries that once shared similar colonial intelligence institutions but then diverged after independence to adopt dissimilar oversight mechanisms.

No operational case studies are included, as the emphasis is in on what the functions should do, where they fit in their organizations, and management issues. The editors indicate that this circumstance is in part due to the refusal of South Asian governments to routinely and systemically declassify historical records about their intelligence services while dissuading authors from publishing on the subject.

Intelligence Services in South Asia offers observations on how political systems, demographics, population size, geography, failures and successes, and “kinetic conflicts” (209) influenced intelligence changes and continuities since colonialism. The book concludes that intelligence has played a significant role in the overall security of South Asia before, during, and since independence. A valuable treatment of intelligence services not frequently discussed in the literature. ■

Israeli National Intelligence Culture: Problem Solving, Exceptionalism, and Pragmatism

By Itai Shapira.
(Routledge, 2025) 257, end-of-chapter notes, appendix, index.

Retired Army Colonel Itai Shapira’s 26-year career in Israeli Defence Intelligence included a year at the Israeli National Defense College. His studies focused on the distinct intelligence cultures in national intelligence services generally, and Israel’s in particular. That work serves as the foundation for this book.

Shapira defines national intelligence culture as “the set of norms, values, beliefs, and habits which create the context for Israeli intelligence organization, product, and process.” (2) His book compares the cultures of the Anglosphere (i.e., the US and UK services) and the IDI, Mossad, and Shabak. For example, unlike US and UK intelligence officers, “Israeli intelligence officers are ... expected to provide recommendations for strategy, policy, and operations [and] also aim to influence decision-making of Israel’s partners and allies in the world.” (214)

Israeli National Intelligence Culture is not, however, about Israeli intelligence operational successes and failures. In fact it only deals speculatively with one, the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel. Instead, in addition to specific examples, the book examines the reasons that culture alone cannot account for performance in real-life cases and is not sufficient for analyzing them. (7)

Drawing on the work of many respected academic contributions that provide background for his observations, Shapira concludes that the unique aspects of Israeli intelligence culture that influence the foundations of intelligence professionalism include: rejection of formal management on the national level; no insistence that national intelligence assessments be based on consensus; encouragement of innovation; emphasis on human judgment; aversion to theory; placement of the burden

of national mission on individual intelligence officers; emphasis on bold action, contrarian thinking, and moral courage in the face of hierarchy.

Israeli National Intelligence Culture is an interesting study that helps explain why Israeli intelligence has an outstanding reputation. ■