

Intelligence in Public Literature

Mission R&AW

R.K. Yadav (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2014), 543 pp.

Reviewed by Ryan Shaffer, PhD

In this book, R.K. Yadav, a former R&AW officer who joined the agency in 1973, examines the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) of India's foreign intelligence agency. He writes of R&AW from first-hand experiences and through recollections of conversations with senior agency leaders. He reviews the history of India's external intelligence since Indian independence, and he argues that R&AW now needs reform because the quality of its intelligence has diminished to a dangerous level and the agency is rife with corruption and unprofessional behavior at all levels.

The work highlights territory familiar to scholars of intelligence in general, most notably the power struggles between elected government officials and the external and internal intelligence agencies, R&AW and the Intelligence Bureau, respectively. Yadav writes that the "absence of legal sanction has resulted in the misuse of power" by both agencies. (26) Ultimately, Yadav has tried to do too much with this book. He might have done better had he focused on his own first-hand experience in R&AW rather than retelling second or third-hand claims. Even so, the book contains insight into a rarely-written-about agency and discusses events that are of interest to scholars.

Mission R&AW opens with a history of Indian intelligence before R&AW's creation. Yadav explains that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi started R&AW in September 1968, with a staff of 250 people, because she wanted a foreign intelligence agency similar to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Nearly half the book details, unevenly, events during the five years before Yadav joined R&AW. Examples of this unevenness include, a six-page chapter about Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Intelligence Bureau's involvement in setting up Ghana's intelligence services; a chapter of 70 pages offering historical background on China and Tibet and the Sino-Indian War, which includes details of shortcomings in translations of Chinese wireless messages, faulty

maps, reporting on the Aksai Chin road construction, and the Indian government's turning the Intelligence Bureau into a scapegoat for the massacre of Indian policemen; and the outcome of his "long discussions on this subject with R.N. Kao . . . and K. Sankaran Nair, his deputy and many other R&AW officers," who "were of the opinion that overall intelligence with regard to the strength, armaments and potential threat was conveyed to the Army Headquarters," but the "Army generals morally lost the war before it actually started." (167–68)

With respect to Pakistan, Yadav reviews operations leading to war with Pakistan in 1965. He does not, however, discuss the particulars of intelligence, simply concluding that Indian intelligence "was not adequately utilized." (183) With the liberation war that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, Yadav explores R&AW information gathering just three years after its creation from Pakistani sources and learned about the planned military action in East Bengal. He details R&AW's involvement with the Mukti Bahini, the Bengali guerilla forces, against the Pakistan Army and gives a daily account of the Indo-Pakistani War in 1971. Yadav writes that the war was short and explains that a large number of Pakistani troops surrendered "because Indian Army and intelligence strategists had meticulously planned this war well in advance." (260)

Moving to internal issues, Yadav discusses Indira Gandhi's imposition of emergency rule from 1975 to 1977, when she suspended the constitution and elections. He denies Kao and R&AW were involved in suppressing Gandhi's opponents, despite numerous media reports to the contrary. Yadav claims to have found "only one instance of R&AW's involvement in internal affairs of the country," and that issue was a "kickback" from the Indian government funneled by R&AW through a Swiss bank account. (333) When Gandhi lost power and Morarji Desai became prime minister in 1977, he reduced R&AW

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to two-thirds of its strength under a new R&AW director, N.F. Suntook. Those dismissed were field officers, technical experts, economists, scientists and staff involved in cryptography, which severely hurt Indian intelligence. R&AW employees started protesting low wages, and organized a union Yadav led. Soon articles in the press began reporting the problems and Suntook was replaced by G.C. Saxena in 1983. Saxena, in turn, took a leading role in advising Gandhi on terrorism in Punjab, and resigned following her assassination by Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Subsequently, S.E. Joshi became head of R&AW and began meeting with Yadav to resolve the labor dispute in the midst of a series of intelligence failures. Yadav argues this struggle still affects R&AW morale and culture.

The aspects of the book touching on corruption and misbehavior come near the end in chapters titled, “Bizarre R&AW Incidents,” “Denigration of R&AW,” and “Sex Escapades.” Yadav argues that R&AW needs to be held accountable to the Indian Parliament and writes that the R&AW hierarchy has been involved “in corruption” and has a “total lack of devotion and sincerity.” (384) In writing about “bizarre” events, Yadav discusses the disruption of an assassination plot in New York City and Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence’s associations with Indian politicians. He also writes that S.B.S. Tomar, an R&AW

officer, was warned about the notorious 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814, but he ignored the tip, which was not passed to R&AW headquarters. Tomar then traveled on the flight days later when it was hijacked. In another case, Ashok Chaturvedi, R&AW chief, was accused of “twisting” facts to clear his name in the media over the 26/11 attack in Mumbai. In a chapter about the decline of the agency, Yadav discusses every R&AW chief from the start of the agency to the present, and argues that it is now faced with rampant corruption, incompetence and a lack of discipline.

Mission R&AW is a difficult book to analyze because it has no footnotes, no endnotes, and no bibliography, which means there are no citations from secondary sources, archives, or documents to support the claims. The book is strongest when Yadav discusses what he witnessed and experienced, but the sections that contain historical narrative lack independent sources necessary to document the events. As an R&AW officer, Yadav could have laid some myths to rest, but this would have required verifiable citations and references. However, a book by a former R&AW officer will be in demand because there are not many works published on the subject and his first-hand observations provide a useful source for information about Indian intelligence.

