

Intelligence Mechanisms in our Neighbourhood Indian Perspective

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In a recent joint paper, two former heads of intelligence, AS Daulat of R&AW and Asad Durrani of ISI stated the need for intelligence cooperation between India and Pakistan. They went on to elaborate that when faced with common threats, exchange of information might not only be thinkable but desirable, even prudent.¹ Intelligence services could provide an ideal backchannel to pave the way for political dialogue – with added advantage of discretion and deniability. In light of aforesaid, it is imperative for us to analyse the intelligence mechanism in our regional neighbourhood and work out the way ahead in this field.

China

China's main intelligence agency is the Ministry of State Security (MSS)² which is believed to be highly active outside the People's Republic of China. Chinese human-intelligence operations primarily rely on collecting a small amount of information from a large number of people. It is generally believed that Chinese employ academics or students who will be in their host country only for a short time, rather than spending years cultivating a few high-level sources or double agents.

Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)

Pakistan's ISI remains focussed on India and what we have been facing for some years now and will continue to face, is best termed as 'Asymmetric War'. Over the

years, the ISI has emerged as a powerful intelligence agency and enjoys wide international cooperation. Unlike intelligence agencies of democratic countries which are subservient to the political authority, the ISI is fiercely independent and remains a law unto itself. In fact, it constitutes a parallel government which gives its operatives tremendous operational freedom. The other details related to ISI are well known in India and therefore not being discussed in detail here.

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Nepal

Nepal's main intelligence agency,³ is "National Investigation Department (NID)" headquartered in Singhadurbar, Kathmandu. The intelligence gathering module is mainly focused on national security, terrorism, narcotics, economic embezzlement and thriving organised crime. Besides Crime Investigation Department of Nepal Police, Department of Military Intelligence (DMI) of Nepal Army and National Vigilance Centre are also carrying out the process of intelligence-gathering as per their respective working area.⁴ Financial Information Unit (FIU) is Nepal's financial intelligence unit which has a major role to play in light of rampant financial offences in the country.

Bangladesh

The National Security Intelligence⁵, also known as the Directorate-General of National Security Intelligence is the primary intelligence agency responsible for internal security (including internal political affairs), foreign intelligence and counterintelligence. The Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) is the main military intelligence outfit, responsible for intelligence gathering for all military purposes.

Prognosis

The ISI linkages with terrorists fomenting internal security challenges in our country need no further elaboration. It is reportedly learnt that the Chinese and Nepal Governments have agreed in the past to set up a joint mechanism to share intelligence on 'anti-China activities' in Nepal. The reported linkages between Maoists in Nepal and India are a matter of grave concern. Even though officially denied by Bangladesh, the alleged links maintained by Bangladeshi intelligence

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agencies with the ISI and their patronage of anti-India separatist groups such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and Islamic terrorist outfits such as the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) have been reported. The influence of ISI in Nepal has only increased with time and is perceived to be one of the biggest challenges for India in light of recent political developments in Nepal.

Sharing of intelligence has always been a double edged weapon. Our neighbourhood, except China is looking for the role of a “big brother” in the intelligence set up as well. It is recommended that the Government encourages Indian intelligence agencies in reaching out to neighbouring intelligence agencies before they get further patronage from forces inimical to us. The intelligence sharing on groups operating from either side of the border has a wide scope in the present scenario. However, the threshold of trust between intelligence of our neighbouring countries is very low, which needs to be cautiously enhanced.

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Notes

1. Article by AS Daulat and Asad Durrani published in Indian daily 'Hindu' dated 14 July11
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_intelligence_activity_in_other_countries
3. Article on The National Intelligence Department (NID) by Kiran Nepal
4. Official website of FIU accessed online
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_intelligence_community