# A Natural Partner? Intelligence Cooperation with India and Australia's Regional Interests

## Martin White

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's recent description of India as a "natural partner" in "the top tier of Australia's partnerships"[1] emphasises the continuing emergence of India as a key strategic partner. Although its strategic culture has historically led India to shun 'natural partners', mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the 'Quad') are gradually strengthening to provide some evidence of converging Australian-Indian geostrategic interests.

There are many possible aspects that this relationship can build upon, although India's independent outlook means that its position cannot be taken for granted. Seemingly, as any strategic partnership grows, attention soon turns to intelligence sharing. Indeed, recent Australian-Indian intelligence sharing has occurred,[2] and other relevant multilateral forums have also sought greater intelligence sharing.[3]

Rudyard Kipling's famous novel *Kim* portrayed British Empire spying efforts to prevent Russian expansion into India as part of the 'Great Game'. *Kim* characterised this espionage as offering shared benefits—or indeed, the same benefits—to the British Empire and to Indian nationals, despite the anachronistic nature of the relationship and the lack of Indian agency in the matter. In comparison, contemporary international intelligence sharing generally only occurs if the nations involved have a common view of the need—although a common view is not, in itself, sufficient to prompt intelligence cooperation.[4]

There are numerous contemporary Australian-Indian shared security concerns, commonly portrayed in Australian strategic commentary, that may demand an intelligence dimension. These include: the growth in Chinese military capability and regional ambition;[5] Indian Ocean security;[6] and terrorism.[7] Indian policymakers have shared intelligence with other

1   Scott Morrison, 'In Our Interest', Speech, The 2019 Lowy Lecture, Sydney, 3 October 2019.

2   Sameer Patil, 'An Amplified India-Australia Security', *Gateway House International Council on Global Relations*, 27 June 2019, <www.gatewayhouse.in/india-australia-security/> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

3   Daniel Baldino, 'Fight with Intelligence: Information Sharing and the Absence of Trust', Australian Institute of International Affairs, 5 June 2018, <www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/fight-with-intelligence-information-sharing-and-the-absence-of-trust/> [Accessed 2 December 2019].

4   Stephane Lefebvre, 'The Difficulties and Dilemmas of International Intelligence Cooperation', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, vol. 16, no. 4 (2003), p. 529.

5   Yogesh Joshi and Anit Mukherjee, 'From Denial to Punishment: The Security Dilemma and Changes in India's Military Strategy towards China', *Asian Security*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2019), pp. 25-26.

6   C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), pp. 133-34.

7   Paul Staniland, 'Insurgencies in India', in Atul Kohli and Prerna Singh (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Indian Politics* (1st edition, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013), p. 167.

countries in the past, where they perceived a common interest, although consistently in a transactional way with no firm commitment to enduring arrangements.[8] Further, India's self-view as a superpower-in-waiting may affect its contemporary approach to intelligence sharing.

At face value, Indian intelligence[9] is capable of performing well in the contemporary strategic environment, developing capacity to compete with technologically sophisticated nations. However, India does not greatly value Joint (inter-service) military operations; it has not dismantled barriers between its intelligence agencies; and, its intelligence organisations are considered to be poorly structured for contemporary operational demands[10] and for its own emerging doctrine.[11] There are conspicuous organisational and technical limitations and risks for India as it undertakes intelligence operations. These risks could also be carried by an intelligence sharing partner, and Australian policymakers and intelligence actors will be aware of the possible risks as impetus is generated for greater intelligence sharing.

Using the February 2019 Indian attack on Balakot, Pakistan, as an intelligence frame of reference,[12] this paper will: outline Australian strategic interests vis-á-vis India, highlighting reasons that intelligence cooperation could become important for the relationship; summarise the known and inferred Indian intelligence capability, identifying strengths and weaknesses and analysing the risks that may arise for Australian policymakers if intelligence cooperation grows; and, identify policy considerations for Australia.

## Seas of Misunderstanding

The Indian Air Force conducted missile strikes on a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorist training camp in Balakot, Pakistan, in February 2019, retaliating to an attack on Indian security forces. Precision munitions fired from multiple Indian combat aircraft probably narrowly missed their target.[13] If the Indian Air Force was indeed attempting to strike the target, the multiple narrow misses are a somewhat concerning validation of India's military

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8    The intelligence relationship with France during the Cold War, which focused on Soviet and US movement in the Indian Ocean, was an example. See B. Raman, 'Indo-French Intelligence Cooperation: High Expectations, Poor Results!', Indian Defence Review, 26 August 2018, <www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/indo-french-intelligence-cooperation-high-expectations-poor-results/> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

9    The term 'Indian intelligence' will be used in this paper for brevity. However, it is well understood that the organisations that comprise Indian intelligence, including the Indian military, the Research and Analysis Wing and the Intelligence Bureau are not an homogenous entity.

10   Saikat Datta, 'India Rejigs Plans for Conflict with Pakistan, China', Asia Times, 29 June 2019, <www.asiatimes.com/2019/06/article/india-rejigs-plans-for-conflict-with-pakistan-china/> [Accessed 6 December 2019].

11   For example, India's Cold Start doctrine relates to the conduct of offensive operations and holding attacks in Pakistan, with the aim to avoid nuclear escalation. See Walter Ladwig III, 'A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited Warfare Doctrine', International Security, vol. 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 158-59.

12   The Balakot airstrike has been covered extensively from a military-strategic perspective, but less so from an intelligence perspective. See Rohan Mukherjee, 'Climbing the Escalation Ladder: India and the Balakot Crisis', War on the Rocks, 2 October 2019, <warontherocks.com/2019/10/climbing-the-escalation-ladder-india-and-the-balakot-crisis/> [Accessed 8 December 2019].

13   Marcus Hellyer, Nathan Ruser and Aakriti Bachhawat, 'India's Strike on Balakot: A Very Precise Miss?', The Strategist, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 27 March 2019, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/indias-strike-on-balakot-a-very-precise-miss/> [Accessed 3 December 2019].

'precision targeting' capability. However, other concerning aspects of the mission—relating to intelligence—merit further consideration.

Two features underscore the gravity of the Balakot mission. First, in issuing direction for the strike, Prime Minister Modi ordered the avoidance of "any collateral damage to civilians and military targets", as he was concerned about conflict escalation.[14] Second, the Balakot mission saw a nuclear state using strategic air power against another nuclear state. It is difficult to imagine any greater brinkmanship. Given these circumstances, it is reasonable to expect that the Indian Air Force would take all necessary actions to ensure mission success within the Prime Minister's parameters.

In the aftermath of the strike, inaccurate information was publicly proffered by Indian political figures. By way of explanation for the strike, the Home Affairs Minister emphasised that "300 mobile phones were active there" prior to the mission.[15]

The '300 mobile phones' statement raises more questions relating to Indian use of intelligence than it answers. Indeed, a question absent from the subsequent media and commentary is: who was using the 300 mobile handsets?

On learning about the 300 mobile handsets in the location, adhering to the Prime Minister's direction to avoid collateral damage with any degree of certainty would have become extremely difficult. Confirmation that all 300 of those mobile handsets belonged to terrorists would have required Indian intelligence to positively identify the user of each handset. This implies that India: had excellent signals intelligence (SIGINT) coverage of the mobile networks being used; was translating and monitoring the content of all 300 handsets; and, had recent verification that each handset was being used by a JeM member. Further, given that the Balakot site was said to comprise "97 fidayeen … undergoing training" and another "150 recruits",[16] the effort required to identify, translate and monitor these presumably newly selected JeM members through their mobile handsets (that is, without historical evidence of the handset use) is beyond the capacity of most intelligence agencies.

SIGINT alone could not have confirmed who was onsite at Balakot. For example, comprehensively monitoring 300 mobile handsets still could not have identified any people on the site who did not have mobile handsets (such as children). Other sources would be necessary. For example, airborne video surveillance could be very effective in this situation, providing a greater understanding of the target before and after the strike.

Applying the most generous interpretation from the available information, one could assess that Indian policymakers accepted a particularly low threshold to validate the handsets of the intended targets, had other effective intelligence sources that accurately identified the absence of non-combatants on the Balakot site, and provided intelligence estimates of the post-strike situation for briefing into the public domain in good faith but with inaccurate information.

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14    Raj Chengappa, 'Balakot: How India Planned IAF Airstrike in Pakistan: An Inside Story', *India Today*, 15 March 2019, <www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20190325-balakot-airstrikes-pulwama-terror-attack-abhinandan-vartharaman-narendra-modi-masood-azhar-1478511-2019-03-15> [Accessed 3 December 2019].

15    Krishna Das, 'India Cites "Active Mobile Phones" to Back Air Strike Casualty Claim', *Reuters*, 6 March 2019, <web.archive.org/web/20190307171349/https://in.reuters.com/article/india-kashmir-airstrike-idINKCN1QM1F3> [Accessed 3 December 2019].

16    Chengappa, 'Balakot: How India Planned IAF Airstrike'.

Plainly, there are other possibilities. For example, the Indian Air Force: assumed that all individuals at the site were terrorists despite no intelligence source providing this verification; relied upon human intelligence (HUMINT) sources, superseded photographic imagery of the site and a mobile telephone usage snapshot that did not validate the user of any of the proximate handsets; fired on a target with incomplete understanding and no direct visibility of what was going to be struck; and, made inaccurate post-strike claims about the outcome of the targeting mission in the absence of tangible evidence.

Moreover, the Indian Air Force probably missed the target despite using multiple, sophisticated munitions, inspiring little confidence in the Indian use of intelligence for precision targeting.

It may be somewhat unfair to take this single recent example of how Indian intelligence has been practically applied. Further, the Balakot strike does not represent a strategic mission of direct Australian-Indian shared interest. However, given the paucity of public information on Indian intelligence, instances where there is some understanding of how Indian policymakers have received and applied intelligence must be considered, and Balakot portrays a view of current intelligence shortfalls. Further, the lack of questioning in the media and Indian strategic commentary of the '300 mobile phones' statement is indicative of an intelligence enterprise that has not been subject to close scrutiny.

With this context in mind, this paper will now consider the Australian-Indian shared interests that could warrant intelligence cooperation.

## Great Games, Old and New

While no fait accompli, the future could see India as the world's third largest economy assuming a mantle as "the primary power to Australia's west", much as China is now the key actor to the north.[17] India is slowly emerging, economically and militarily, with growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and a desire to be recognised for what it sees as its inevitable future as a global superpower.

Australian policymakers have consistently viewed Australia's security and prosperity as being inextricably tied to global events and great powers. Actions taken within this frame of reference have mostly been calculated and pragmatic, with policymakers seeking security through a predictable and global rules-based order and from the longstanding US alliance.[18] The potential emergence of India as a greater power in the Indian Ocean region and beyond, and the potential for India's relationships with other major powers to influence global security, is viewed in Australia through the same pragmatic lens, and is reflected in defence policy.[19] Importantly, there is little evidence that Australian policymakers have accepted any suggestion of a US decline in relative influence in the Indo-Pacific.

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17    Hugh White, *How to Defend Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: La Trobe University Press with Black Inc., 2019), pp. 42-43.

18    Derek Grossman, 'Quad Supports US Goal to Preserve Rules-Based Order', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 7 February 2019, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/quad-supports-us-goal-to-preserve-rules-based-order/> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

19    Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), p. 62.

The expanding interests of democratic India in the Indo-Pacific; the US views on India as a critical regional actor; and Australia's continuing view of its prosperity being tied to regional security have therefore made a closer Australian-Indian relationship appear (to some) as a natural fit. Already, bilateral actions taken outside the Quad framework have demonstrated the shared desire for a closer security relationship.[20] At this point, it remains difficult to view this strengthened relationship outside the prism of the Australia-US alliance and continued US engagement in the region, but the increase in combined military activities speaks to the growing sense of Australian-Indian shared strategic interests.

Shared interests have been regularly identified in Australian strategic commentary. Some of these interests, such as the maintenance of a strong US presence in the Indo-Pacific region, are longstanding features that both nations consider fundamental to ongoing stability; albeit with India's view of the desirability of US pre-eminence subject to change if India's strategic weight continues to grow, and a risk that India and the United States view China's Indo-Pacific ambitions differently.[21]

This paper will focus on shared interests that have been commonly highlighted in the literature, and which have a potential or actual intelligence-sharing component. They are: China's growing geostrategic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific; Indian Ocean security; and terrorism.

These are not new issues for India. China is geographically immutable, and particularly since the 1962 border war, Indian policymakers have viewed China with suspicion. The Indian Ocean is also geographically immutable, and the "Super Power naval build-up in the Indian Ocean" which poses "a serious threat to peace and tranquillity" is not a novel concept for India.[22] India has lived with terrorism for decades, and has fostered some complex and often severe forms of suppression.[23]

However, all three issues have been lower order issues for India, subordinated to its decades-long preoccupation with Pakistan and Kashmir.

The situation differs somewhat for Australia. These three issues barely featured on Australia's strategic radar prior to the new millennium.[24] First, China has been identified as a potential strategic competitor and emerging Asian power for decades,[25] but has only recently materially influenced Australian defence policy. Some have suggested that the

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20  Aakriti Bachhawat, 'No Longer in a Cleft Stick: India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 25 June 2019, <www.aspistrategist.org.au/no-longer-in-a-cleft-stick-india-and-australia-in-the-indo-pacific/> [Accessed 6 December 2019], highlighted a number of measures of closer cooperation between the two nations, including the number of military bilateral meetings, exercises and activities increasing from eleven in 2014 to thirty-eight in 2018.

21  Joshua White, 'Modi-Trump Multiple Embraces Signals India-US Ties on Strong Footing', *The Indian Express*, 28 June 2017, <indianexpress.com/article/opinion/modi-trump-meeting-multiple-embraces-signals-india-us-ties-on-strong-footing-4725197/> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

22  O. N. Mehrotra, 'India's Defence Strategy', *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 4, no. 9 (1980), p. 399.

23  Paul Staniland, 'Internal Security Strategy in India', *India Review*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2018), pp. 142-43.

24  For example, Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), pp. 13, 37, only contextualised terrorism as a problem that Australia has military options to resolve; did not specifically mention the Indian Ocean; and, offered only two sentences on China as "the country with the fastest growing security influence in the region".

25  For example, China's 'war potential' was described as 'formidable' in the 1962 Strategic Basis. See Stephan Frühling, *A History of Australian Strategic Policy since 1945* (Canberra: Australian Dept. of Defence, 2009), p. 282.

closer Australia-India relationship mostly reflects an evolving 'exclusive' view of China in the region (that is, with an aim to reduce or obstruct China's influence),[26] although this is not reflected in Australian policy.

Second, Australian policymakers have only recently prioritised the Indian Ocean. While policymakers now argue that Australia has important Indian Ocean equities (and view India as a key Indian Ocean actor),[27] the Indian Ocean has rarely had policy prominence. Nonetheless, the maintenance of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' and rules-based order, for countries that both predominantly rely on Indian Ocean ports for their trade, is now considered a shared interest.

Finally, the 2000 Defence White Paper framed terrorism as no more than a potential problem for Australia.[28] The strategic risk associated with terrorism was elevated in Australia after the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks.

Prior to 2000, none of these three issues had the same urgency for, or proximity to, Australia as they had for India. But India also did not elevate their priority above Kashmir and Pakistan. Therefore, although these three issues have been described as 'shared interests', a more accurate description is that they have become more proximate issues for Australia's security in the twenty-first century, and it is conceivable that India will have sufficient capacity to think more about these issues in the future.

To be sure, Pakistan and Kashmir insatiably subsume India's 'strategic bandwidth'. Indian policymakers may well try to situate their strategic priorities 'east', but this declared pivot risks magnifying a considerable existing disjunction between Indian declared policy and operational practice. There is every chance that India will remain mired in conflict with Pakistan (and will be forced to expend significant intelligence resources on tasks such as monitoring Pakistan's nuclear capabilities),[29] and this will dictate the effort allocated to other strategic issues. For example, equivocation in India about its 'no first use' nuclear strike doctrine is firmly related to ongoing tensions with Pakistan; yet the considerable implications of such ambiguity for India's relationship with China appear to be a secondary consideration.[30]

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26  Bachhawat, 'No Longer in a Cleft Stick'.

27  Dhruva Jaishankar, 'Australia Articulates its Indian Ocean Priorities', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 21 January 2019, <www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/australia-articulates-its-indian-ocean-priority> [Accessed 2 December 2019].

28  Department of Defence, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, p. 13.

29  Vivek Prahladan, 'Declassified: How India Tracked Pakistan's Development of a Nuclear Device', *The Diplomat*, 6 January 2017, <thediplomat.com/2017/01/declassified-how-india-tracked-pakistans-development-of-a-nuclear-device/> [Accessed 1 December 2019]. India used intelligence to track various stages of Pakistan's nuclear development progression, from centrifuge research to supply chains.

30  Sushant Singh, 'Manohar Parrikar Questions India's No-First-Use Nuclear Policy, Adds "My Thinking"', *The Indian Express*, 11 November 2016, <indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/manohar-parrikar-questions-no-first-use-nuclear-policy-adds-my-thinking-4369062/> [Accessed 6 December 2019].

## The Strength of the Wolf is the (Indo)-Pac

From an intelligence perspective, Kashmir (and the related "menagerie of Pakistan-sponsored Islamist military groups")[31] has almost fully occupied military and civilian intelligence resources for decades. Australian-Indian intelligence cooperation must be contextualised within the reality of competing, immediate demands facing India. What may be important for Australia has previously proven less critical for India, given the immediacy of the Kashmir security requirement and the enormous intelligence demands conferred by such endeavours as India's 'Cold Start' doctrine or other Balakot-like missions. India has had little choice but to adopt a higher risk acceptance threshold for China, the Indian Ocean and terrorism, because none of them pose the same proximate threat as a nuclear first-strike from Pakistan or a mass-casualty terrorist attack in India.

Nonetheless, each of the identified Australian-Indian shared interests have intelligence dimensions that would benefit from collaboration, and intelligence cooperation is realistic given the steady increase in 'strategic trust' between the nations.[32]

First, it may not yet be a new great game, but China's growing ambition in the Indo-Pacific region is influencing the security and intelligence planning for many nations. China is the most challenging intelligence mission of the three identified shared interests. Historically, India has accepted that China is a difficult intelligence target, and has not prioritised intelligence resources against China. For example, India has not achieved notable results from HUMINT missions in China (when compared to the effectiveness of HUMINT in Pakistan). This has resulted in India having less understanding of Chinese military capability, intentions and culture than one would expect, given the shared border and regular conflicts.[33]

India's proximity to China offers some unique intelligence collection opportunities. This includes the ability to access SIGINT on tactical Chinese capabilities; HUMINT in border regions; and air intelligence through relatively sophisticated Indian radar systems. The growing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region will also allow maritime collection of electronic intelligence. Given the enormous number of possible intelligence collection targets in China, the ability to collaborate on China may be desirable for India.

Some commentators have warned that containment of China should not become the only driver of Australian-Indian engagement.[34] Indeed, other factors are motivating closer cooperation. Intelligence sharing may also grow to support security outcomes in the Indian Ocean. Covering 20 per cent of the earth's surface, wide area surveillance is required to offer a persistent view of this expanse. Electronic intelligence from satellites,

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31   C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3.

32   Pravda Parakkal, 'Towards an India-Australia Strategic Partnership', Australian Institute of International Affairs, 11 November 2018, <www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/towards-an-india-australia-strategic-partnership/> [Accessed 9 December 2019].

33   Nicolas Groffman, 'Guess What India and China Need to Improve Relations? More Spies', *South China Morning Post*, 24 October 2016, <www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2039640/guess-what-india-and-china-need-improve-relations-more-spies> [Accessed 4 December 2019].

34   James Curran, 'Where India Fits in an Activist Australian Foreign Policy', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 1 May 2017, <www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/where-india-fits-activist-australian-foreign-policy> [Accessed 3 December 2019].

aircraft and maritime vessels, including technology such as change detection algorithms,[35] contribute to wide area surveillance. While intelligence in this region will often relate to the growing Chinese maritime activity, Australia and India must also address issues such as piracy; people smuggling; and illicit flows of drugs and money.[36]

Many wide area surveillance systems, such as electronic intelligence receivers, do not have onerous security and classification requirements. Wide area surveillance therefore offers a low 'barrier to entry' for intelligence sharing. With the enormous quantities of unstructured data that will be collected in the region,[37] such surveillance must be supported by data analytics tools—another function that could be undertaken at a low classification.

Other intelligence capabilities relevant to the Indian Ocean region may include HUMINT, and aircraft or satellite video and imagery intelligence, for missions such as countering piracy. These intelligence capabilities can be used to identify maritime piracy bases, or support threat vessel boarding. Sharing of data with private companies operating in the Indian Ocean has also been historically important (to avoid hostage situations), as has the collection of financial intelligence.[38] Australian-Indian sharing of this intelligence is realistic.

Third, India and Australia have agreed to "deepen counter-terrorism cooperation", including through intelligence sharing.[39] India broadly classifies many domestic groups as 'terrorists', most of which are not directly relevant to Australia. To be of mutual benefit, counter-terrorism intelligence sharing would address transregional threats such as Al Qaeda.[40]

The intelligence required for counter-terrorism is widely understood but demanding, with signals, human, imagery and finance intelligence all regularly shared between nations for specific missions. Over time, technologies such as predictive artificial intelligence may be useful areas of collaboration.[41]

Nascent Australian-Indian intelligence sharing is occurring, and the scope for greater cooperation is growing as shared interests develop. As such, Australian policymakers should understand the structure, strengths and weaknesses of Indian intelligence.

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35  IANS, 'Indian Army Plans to Procure Drones to Counter Enemy Threats', *The Economic Times*, 16 October 2019, <economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-army-plans-to-procure-drones-to-counter-enemy-threats/articleshow/71612264.cms?from=mdr> [Accessed 8 December 2019].

36  United Nations, 'High Seas Crime Becoming More Sophisticated, Endangering Lives, International Security, Speakers Tell Security Council', press release, 5 February 2019, <www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13691.doc.htm> [Accessed 6 December 2019].

37  Department of Defence, *Wide Area Surveillance Activity Based Intelligence* (Fact Sheet, DSC 1757, Australian Government, 2017), p. 1.

38  United States National Security Council, *Countering Piracy off the Horn of Africa: Partnership & Action Plan* (December 2008), pp. 1-2, 12.

39  News Services Division, 'India, Australia Agree to Further Deepen Counter-Terrorism Co-operation', *All India Radio*, 4 May 2019, <www.newsonair.com/Main-News-Details.aspx?id=362996> [Accessed 7 December 2019].

40  Carin Zissis, 'Terror Groups in India', Council on Foreign Relations, 27 November 2008, <www.cfr.org/backgrounder/terror-groups-india> [Accessed 7 December 2019].

41  Kathleen McKendrick, *Artificial Intelligence Prediction and Counterterrorism*, Research Paper, (London: Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, August 2019), <www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-08-07-AICounterterrorism.pdf> [Accessed 7 December 2019].

## The First Condition of Understanding a Foreign Country is… Effective Intelligence

Like many nations, numerous organisations (more than twenty) comprise Indian intelligence. The main strategic agencies are the Intelligence Bureau and the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). The Intelligence Bureau, which resides within the Ministry of Home Affairs, is responsible for internal security and has a major role in counter-terrorism. R&AW reports to the Prime Minister (and resides under the cabinet secretariat) and is responsible for external intelligence.

The military is also a significant intelligence actor. The three military services maintain intelligence organisations. The Defence Intelligence Agency coordinates military intelligence and controls many signals, cyber and imagery intelligence capabilities.[42] Other organisations, such as the National Technical Research Organisation, perform technical intelligence functions. Coordinating groups, such as the Technical Coordination Group, were established after a series of classified reviews through the 2000s.[43]

Some have argued that Indian intelligence is best understood by categorising different capabilities as either 'strategic' or 'tactical'.[44] This approach tends to constrain the view of intelligence to a 'wartime' prism where strategic and tactical intelligence may have greater delineation. In situations short of declared major conflict,[45] all intelligence resources contribute to the same information pool, and all are used in emerging methods of data analysis. Therefore, this paper does not segregate Indian intelligence into tactical and strategic groupings.

Unlike in other nations, and despite the tens of thousands of personnel employed in the area, Indian intelligence is not a frequent topic for strategic commentators. Partly, this is because intelligence is often classified, and obsolete intelligence is declassified less frequently in India than in Western nations.[46] Further, when Indian intelligence is publicly discussed, most commentary has focused on single intelligence capabilities, so a synopsis of the range of Indian intelligence capabilities is rarely presented.[47] An overall view is important, because it demonstrates the capabilities that could have been used at Balakot (but were not); and Australian policymakers should understand the breadth of Indian intelligence to determine how to optimise cooperation. Consequently, this paper has triangulated a range of commentary and policy to outline Indian intelligence capabilities.

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42  Vikram Sood, 'The Indian Intelligence System: Meeting the Challenges of a New World', in Harsh Pant (ed.), *Handbook of Indian Defence Policy: Themes, Structures and Doctrines* (India: Routledge, 2016), p. 340.

43  Shrivastava Manoj, *Re-energising Indian Intelligence* (India: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Vij Books, 2013), pp. 17-19.

44  Prem Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India: Strategic Intelligence and National Security in South Asia* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 2-3.

45  Some have described this as 'grey zone' warfare, which is more common than declared conflict. For example, Angus Campbell, Speech, Australian Strategic Policy Institute International Conference 'War in 2025', Canberra, 13 June 2019, p. 9.

46  Janani Krishnaswamy, *Why Intelligence Fails*, Policy Report No. 3 (Chennai: The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, 2013), p. 12.

47  This is not to imply that Indian intelligence capabilities operate as a unified entity, but it is important to understand the scope of the resources available.

## No Sin So Great as Bad Intelligence

The key Indian intelligence capabilities span all normal security-related domains—space; air; maritime; land and informational.

India has developed satellites relevant to military intelligence, managed through the Indian Space Research Organisation and the Defence Research Development Organisation. The military has reported operational use of imagery derived from its Cartosat satellites for 'surgical strike' operations. Image resolution is reported to have improved with India's newer satellites,[48] although satellite imagery could not be obtained after the Balakot strike.[49] Further satellite launches may establish an electronic intelligence and radar surveillance capability,[50] although some commentary still assesses intelligence derived from satellites to be nascent.[51]

Drones feature prominently in Indian intelligence, although they appeared to play no direct role in Balakot. The high organisational priority for drone technology suggests a likely near-term capability improvement. Basic drone intelligence collection capabilities are used (such as the Israeli-designed Heron),[52] in a large fleet, with further procurements planned.[53] Previous problems associated with imagery and SIGINT drones could be overcome.[54] India's incorporation of drone technology is likely to be an important determinant of its future intelligence capacity.

Manned aircraft also collect intelligence, and some of these aircraft reside within R&AW's Aviation Research Centre.[55] Joshi summarised the extent of the modest fleet of surveillance aircraft, which includes aircraft capable of collecting basic electronic intelligence and imagery.[56] Combat aircraft are also fitted with radar detection equipment.

48  Chethan Kumar, 'Surgical Strikes: First Major Use of Cartosat Images for Army', *The Times of India*, 30 September 2016, <timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Surgical-Strikes-First-major-use-of-Cartosat-images-for-Army/articleshow/54596113.cms> [Accessed 1 November 2019].

49  Vishnu Som, 'What Happened at Balakot? Unreleased Satellite Pics May Prove India's Case', *NDTV*, 3 March 2019, <www.ndtv.com/india-news/what-happened-at-balakot-unreleased-satellite-pic-may-prove-indias-case-2002060> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

50  Narayan Prasad, 'Recent Developments and Trends in India's Space Missions and Industry', in Marco Aliberti, Narayan Prasad and Sara Hadley (eds), *Europe-India Space Cooperation: Policy, Legal and Business Perspectives from India*, ESPI Report no. 69 (Vienna: European Space Policy Institute, 2019), 14; Surendra Singh, 'DRDO Satellite That Will Sniff Out Enemy Radars to be Launched on April 1', *The Times of India*, 25 March 2019, <timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/drdo-sat-that-will-sniff-out-enemy-radars-to-be-launched-on-april-1/articleshow/68551896.cms> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

51  Manoj Joshi, 'India Has a Long Way to go Before It Can Use Space for Modern Warfare', Observer Research Foundation, 17 June 2019, <www.orfonline.org/research/india-has-a-long-way-to-go-before-it-can-use-space-for-modern-warfare-52106/> [Accessed 10 November 2019].

52  Waquar Haider, 'Surgical Strike 2.0: Five Aerial Vehicles Which the Indian Armed Forces Can Call up if Needed to Protect the Borders', *News 18*, 26 February 2019, <www.news18.com/news/tech/surgical-strike-2-0-five-aerial-vehicles-which-the-indian-armed-forces-can-call-up-if-needed-to-protect-the-borders-2049069.html> [Accessed 1 November 2019].

53  For example, Greg Waldron, 'AERO INDIA: IAI Launches New Mini Harpy Loitering Munition', *Flight Global*, 21 February 2019, [Accessed 1 November 2019], highlighted new electro optical and radiation detection capabilities to be employed by the Indian Air Force.

54  Robert Beckhusen, 'Every One of India's Nishant Drones Has Crashed', *War is Boring*, 10 December 2015, <warisboring.com/every-one-of-indias-nishant-drones-has-crashed/> [Accessed 1 November 2019].

55  One commentator accused R&AW of often misusing these aircraft for senior official travel rather than for intelligence collection. See V. K. Singh, *India's External Intelligence: Secrets of the Research & Analysis Wing* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2007), pp. 164-65.

56  Shashank Joshi, *Indian Power Projection: Ambitions, Arms and Influence*, Whitehall Paper no. 85 (Abingdon: Routledge for RUSI, 2017), pp. 103-5.

India is acquiring similar Boeing P8 maritime patrol aircraft to those used by Australia, suitable for wide area surveillance.[57]

The procurement of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems, with associated S-Band radars capable of detecting aircraft and missiles out to 600 kilometres, offers a formidable air intelligence capability,[58] which some fear could alter the strategic balance vis-à-vis Pakistan.[59]

The maritime environment may be considered the weakest of India's intelligence domains, with gradual improvements planned. In addition to the integral surveillance capabilities in an almost 200 vessel Navy (such as the air- and surface-search radar systems on Talwar-class frigates),[60] India is introducing specific intelligence collection vessels.[61] Enhancing maritime surveillance, an X-Band and S-Band 'Integrated Coastal Surveillance System' has been deployed in several coastal locations,[62] and may offset the coastal surveillance gaps highlighted by the 2008 Mumbai attack.[63] Also, India has foreshadowed the development of Over-The-Horizon radar to detect aircraft and missiles at distance.[64] This will be complemented by enhanced Automatic Identification System access.[65]

Sub-surface intelligence is also less capable, with new submarine progression "particularly weak", with "long delays and cost over-runs".[66] The continued delay to the Scorpene-class submarine fleet is an indication of the lower priority for maritime platforms in the Indian budget,[67] and this will limit its intelligence collection capacity and potential in the maritime and littoral environments. The sixteen-vessel submarine fleet appears predominantly focused on the weapons systems (particularly relating to nuclear deterrence) that can be

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57   Manu Pubby, 'India to go Ahead with $3.1 bn US Deal for Maritime Patrol Aircraft', *The Economic Times*, 5 September 2019, <economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-to-go-ahead-with-3-1-bn-us-deal-for-maritime-patrol-aircraft/articleshow/70986634.cms> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

58   V.S. Chernyak and I. Ya. Immoreev, 'A Brief History of Radar in the Soviet Union and Russia', *IEEE A&E Systems Magazine*, September 2009, p. B20.

59   Ayaz Gul, 'Pakistan Blasts India Over Purchase of Russian Air Defense System', *Voa News*, 19 October 2018, <www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/pakistan-blasts-india-over-purchase-russian-air-defense-system> [Accessed 8 December 2019].

60   Naval Technology, 'Talwar Class Guided Missile Frigate, India', <www.naval-technology.com/projects/talwarclassfrigate/> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

61   Shiv Aroor, 'REVEALED: India's Next "Advanced Technology Vessel"', *Live Fist Defence*, 19 January 2017, <www.livefistdefence.com/2017/01/revealed-indian-navys-next-advanced-technology-vessel.html> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

62   Defence Research Development Organisation, *Coastal Surveillance Radar* (Delhi, 2015), pp. 1-2, highlighted the detection range of 50 kilometres. Saurav Jha, 'India Beefs Up Coastal Security, But there is More to be Done', Delhi Defence Review, 28 January 2017, <delhidefencereview.com/2017/01/28/india-beefs-up-coastal-security-but-there-is-more-to-be-done/> [Accessed 15 November 2019], identified that there may be up to eighty-four fixed and eight mobile radar sites established in the near-term.

63   Angel Rabasa, Robert Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C. Christine Fair, Brian Jackson, Brian Jenkins, Seth Jones, Nathaniel Shestak and Ashley Tellis, *The Lessons of Mumbai*, Occasional Paper (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), p. 9.

64   Kalyan Ray, 'We'll Become Self-Reliant in Radars, Sonars in 5 Yrs', *Deccan Herald*, 9 September 2019, <www.deccanherald.com/national/we-ll-become-self-reliant-in-radars-sonars-in-5-yrs-760227.html> [Accessed 8 December 2019]. This capability was foreshadowed by the Chairman of the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

65   Jha, 'India Beefs Up Coastal Security'.

66   Satu Limaye, *Weighted West, Focused on the Indian Ocean and Cooperating across the Indo-Pacific: The Indian Navy's New Maritime Strategy, Capabilities, and Diplomacy* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2017), p. 25.

67   Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'The Trouble with India's Slow Naval Buildup', *Observer Research Foundation*, 5 October 2019, <www.orfonline.org/research/trouble-india-slow-naval-buildup-56188/> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

employed from submarines, rather than on intelligence.[68] The establishment of underwater acoustic sensors for surveillance purposes, aimed at countering Chinese submarines in areas such as the Bay of Bengal, has recently progressed.[69]

Given the Army's primacy in Indian security matters, and the capabilities resident within strategic intelligence agencies, India's land intelligence capability is relatively strong.

SIGINT is heavily relied upon, with effective strategic and military SIGINT organisations. India has historically maintained strong radio and telecommunications intercept capabilities.[70] The military's tactical 'Wireless Experimental Units', strategic collection agencies and permanent SIGINT collection sites provide an extensive and enduring SIGINT focus on Pakistan. A good mobile telephony interception capability exists, both through intercept equipment positioned within domestic service providers,[71] and also in neighbouring countries. India has previously installed software on mobile handsets to track the movements of individuals.[72]

India has also proven its ability to intercept basic satellite communications. Famously, India publicly released recorded voice from then-military chief Pervez Musharraf after Pakistan occupied Kargil in 1999, identifying Pakistan as the aggressor in that situation.[73]

India has collected cyber intelligence for more than a decade. Internet collection capability in India was considered 'virtually non-existent' in 2000, but has improved substantially. Internet collection is undertaken through numerous methods, including monitoring of the Internet Service Provider gateways in India.[74] The recent establishment of the Defence Cyber Agency will add more structure around cyber collection.[75]

India's HUMINT capability is experienced, and heavily committed against Pakistan. India has extensively used interrogation techniques to gain intelligence, although regular accusations of human rights violations have been made.[76] Due to ethnic and language similarities, India more easily establishes and maintains HUMINT networks in Pakistan

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68   Nuclear Threat Initiative, 'India Submarine Capabilities', 11 October 2019, <www.nti.org/analysis/articles/india-submarine-capabilities/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]. This relates to the need to maintain India's submarine-borne nuclear deterrent.

69   Abhijit Singh, 'India's "Undersea Wall" in the Eastern Indian Ocean', *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 15 June 2016, <amti.csis.org/indias-undersea-wall-eastern-indian-ocean/> [Accessed 15 November 2019]; Peter Coates, 'Japan-US-Indian IUSS Cable Link Completed across Bay of Bengal', *Submarine Matters*, 11 September 2018, <gentleseas.blogspot.com/2018/09/us-indian-iuss-link-completed-from-port.html> [Accessed 15 November 2019].

70   This includes combined operations, at various times, with Britain, the United States and Russia. See Desmond Ball, 'Signals Intelligence in India', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1995), pp. 377-88.

71   Sflc.in and World Wide Web Foundation, *India's Surveillance State* (New Delhi: Sflc.in and World Wide Web Foundation, 2014), pp. 3-5.

72   Neha Alawadhi and Jochelle Mendonca, 'Wikileaks Reveals Indian Security Agencies Using Little-Known Firms to Obtain Spying Technology', *The Economic Times*, 16 July 2015, <economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/ites/wikileaks-reveals-indian-security-agencies-using-little-knoﻍn-firms-to-obtain-spying-technology/articleshow/48091679.cms?from=mdr> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

73   B. Raman, 'Release of Kargil Tape: Masterpiece or Blunder?', *Rediff India Abroad*, 27 June 2007, <www.rediff.com/news/2007/jun/27raman.htm> [Accessed 8 June 2007.

74   Singh, *India's External Intelligence*, pp. 129-35.

75   'India is Quietly Preparing a Cyber Warfare Unit to Fight a New Kind of Enemy', *The Economic Times*, 14 July 2018, <economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-is-quietly-preparing-a-cyber-warfare-unit-to-fight-a-new-kind-of-enemy/articleshow/61141277.cms> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

76   Jason Burke, 'Wikileaks Cables: India Accused of Systematic Use of Torture in Kashmir', *The Guardian*, 16 December 2010, <hwww.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/16/wikileaks-cables-indian-torture-kashmir> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

and Sri Lanka, but China has been more difficult. Remote intelligence collection devices are widely used.[77]

Domestically, India has honed its video surveillance technology, with millions of Closed-Circuit Television cameras in operation. The addition of facial recognition applications has troubled privacy advocates, but can improve foreign intelligence collection.[78]

A synopsis of Indian intelligence capabilities is at Figure 1.

**Figure 1—Indian intelligence capabilities[79]**
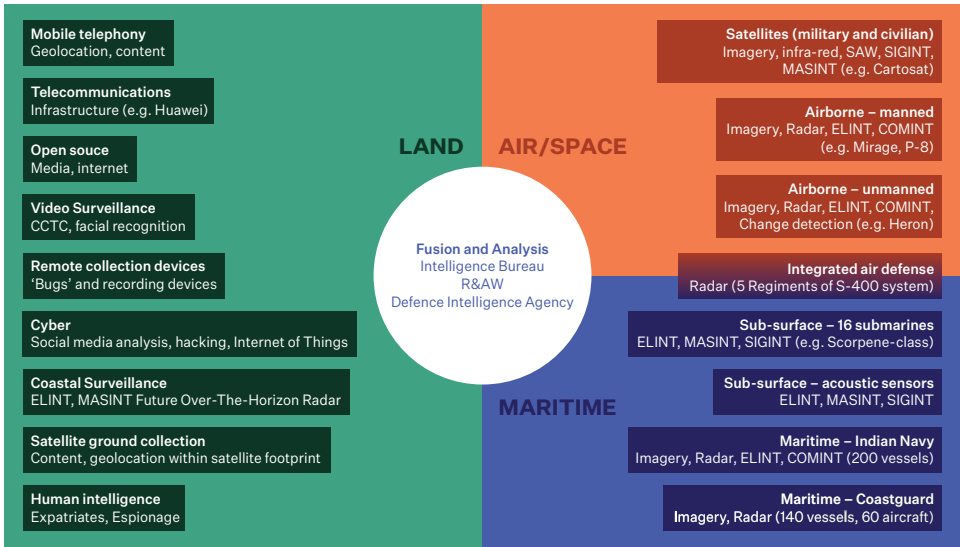


India has the basis of a sophisticated intelligence capability that could effectively share intelligence. Indian intelligence can generate data from a large number of sources, although its analysis and fusion capacity will need to develop in time. Balakot demonstrated that India's intelligence potential has not yet been realised in a more challenging operational setting where internal coordination is essential. This is partly due to strict compartmentalisation of information within each intelligence organisation.

## Forty Million Reasons for (Intelligence) Failure

Balakot highlighted shortfalls that have been ascribed to Indian intelligence, but this puts undue blame on intelligence capabilities. Balakot mostly exposed shortfalls in how intelligence is used for operational purposes. Some commentators astutely argued that political shortcomings lead to outcomes that are labelled as 'intelligence failures',

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77  Sayantan Chakravarty, 'Security Agencies Encroach on Privacy Using Surveillance Technology', *India Today*, 17 November 2003, <www.indiatoday.in/magazine/technology-innovation/story/20031117-security-agencies-use-cutting-edge-technology-to-track-terrorists-791487-2003-11-17> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

78  Paul Bischoff, 'The World's Most-Surveilled Cities', *Comparitech*, 15 August 2019, <www.comparitech.com/vpn-privacy/the-worlds-most-surveilled-cities/> [Accessed 16 November 2019].

79  Compiled by Author.

but these outcomes are better described as 'leadership failures to act on intelligence'. Further, commentators have argued that generations of political leaders have encumbered the intelligence agencies with difficult organisational structures and incentives.[80] This suggests that political decisions (or political inertia) have directly and indirectly contributed to intelligence problems.[81]

It is unreasonable to expect public commentary to widely and favourably endorse Indian intelligence; exceptional performance rarely inspires commentary on intelligence matters. Therefore, the tone is unsurprisingly disparaging. Further, much of the commentary on Indian intelligence has its own limitations and its validity can be difficult to judge,[82] and can even deviate into 'spy fiction' presented as fact.[83] The commentary also often unfairly conflates (legitimate) whistle-blower complaints with criticisms of actual technical capacity.

Nonetheless, Indian intelligence commentary can be triangulated with the Balakot example, and the outcomes of intelligence reviews (where outcomes have not remained classified), exposing some trends. These trends can predominantly be categorised into *organisational* shortfalls and *capability* shortfalls, and both types of shortfalls may be relevant to Australian-Indian intelligence sharing.

*Organisational* criticism often relates to instances of corruption and rampant parochialism, mostly within R&AW and the Intelligence Bureau, although the military is not immune.[84] Singh argued that many R&AW operations do not have sufficient legal basis; the rivalry with the Intelligence Bureau is extreme; and, corruption and internal subversion is rampant.[85] Yadav highlighted further corruption examples.[86]

These organisational limitations have been verified in other credible reports. Consequently, it has been common for official reviews and other commentary to make recommendations relating to the need for greater parliamentary oversight and a clear legal framework for intelligence operations.[87]

Inadequate deconfliction of intelligence assets is another regular criticism, and India has not made significant breakthroughs in facilitating a joint or whole-of-government concept for intelligence when compared to other countries.[88] To be sure, intelligence coordination

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80   Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India*, p. 2; Krishnaswamy, *Why Intelligence Fails*, pp. 1-2.

81   Other evidence suggests that R&AW, in particular, had significant political influence, and appears to have influenced major Indian foreign policy decisions such as its intervention in Sri Lanka in the 1980s including the provision of support to Tamil militants. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* (Colombo: South Asian Network on Conflict Research, 1993), p. 5.

82   For example, one commentator was clearly a poor cultural fit for service within R&AW, and much of his criticism of R&AW was based on his perception that the Army was a superior organisation. See Singh, *India's External Intelligence*. Manoj tenuously linked British colonialism as the key reason for contemporary organisational shortfalls. See Manoj, *Re-energising Indian Intelligence*, p. 4.

83   Ryan Shaffer, 'Indian Spies Inside Pakistan: South Asian Human Intelligence Across Borders', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 34, no. 5 (2019), p. 727.

84   Pradip Sagar, 'I Gave My Life to Army, in Return I Got Taint, Says MI officer Acquitted of Graft Charges', *The Week*, 26 November 2018, <www.theweek.in/news/india/2018/11/26/I-gave-my-life-to-Army-in-return-I-got-taint-says-MI-officer-acquitted-of-graft-charges.html> [Accessed 10 December 2019].

85   Singh, *India's External Intelligence*, pp. 13, 44.

86   R. K. Yadav, *Mission R&AW* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2014), pp. 433-35.

87   Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, *A Case for Intelligence Reforms in India* (New Delhi: IDSA Task Force Report, 2012), pp. 7-9.

88   China's 2016 establishment of its Strategic Support Force as a service-level equivalent within the People's Liberation Army is a good example of other, more Joint efforts in Asia.

has been a longstanding problem in Western nations, subject to countless inquiries;[89] but the Indian interagency barriers to sharing and coordination seem particularly acute.

Many intelligence deconfliction problems can be traced to the Army's continued predominance within the military,[90] and intelligence resourcing reflects that—for example, in the relatively limited submarine intelligence capability; and in the priority of provision of change detection capability on drones for operations in Kashmir (rather than the Indian Ocean where it may be more effective).[91]

Manoj argued that different intelligence agencies are "stumbling over each other" in border regions rather than deconflicting effort, and policymakers had little appetite to investigate deconfliction failures such as those relating to the 2008 Mumbai attacks.[92] Numerous others made similar contentions about poor coordination.[93] Intelligence sharing between strategic agencies and counter-terrorist forces (including police) is an identified weakness,[94] as is intelligence for special operations.[95]

Ball described the 'considerable overlap' in Indian SIGINT tasks and responsibilities twenty-five years ago,[96] and it appears that little has changed.

Australian-Indian intelligence sharing may not be directly affected by Indian domestic intelligence actions, but considerable and longstanding evidence of misuse of Indian intelligence resources may encourage Australian policymakers to progress steadily, and to avoid situations where Australia could be implicated in any irregular situation. Illegal spying on politicians,[97] use of torture to extract information from detainees[98] and misuse of intelligence aircraft for personal use are some of the alleged irregularities. The sheer weight of examples of intelligence corruption, oddly downplayed in one publication as "Bizarre R&AW Incidents",[99] presents some uncertainties about the efficacy of Indian intelligence.

Intelligence *capability* criticism was less frequent than organisational criticism (in the literature), partly due to the potential legal risk of divulging too much detail on specific intelligence capabilities. However, the Balakot example shows that levels of intelligence capability can at least partly be inferred.

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89   For example, United States Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities Before and After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, December 2002).

90   Joshi, *Indian Power Projection*, pp. 22-23.

91   IANS, 'Indian Army Plans to Procure Drones'.

92   Manoj, *Re-energising Indian Intelligence*, pp. 4, 11, 20.

93   Manoj Joshi and Pushan Das, 'India's Intelligence Agencies: In Need of Reform and Oversight', *ORF Issue Brief*, no. 98 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, July 2015), 2; Manoj, *Re-energising Indian Intelligence*, p. 4.

94   Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India*, p. 11.

95   Joshi and Das, 'India's Intelligence Agencies', p. 2.

96   Ball, 'Signals intelligence in India', p. 387.

97   Maria Xynou, 'Spy Files 3: WikiLeaks Sheds More Light on the Global Surveillance Industry', The Centre for Internet & Society, 25 October 2013, <cis-india.org/internet-governance/blog/spy-files-three> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

98   Burke, 'Wikileaks Cables'.

99   Yadav, *Mission R&AW*, p. 425.

Often, commentators expressed concern about Indian intelligence capacity, and the deleterious effect of the burden of Kashmir operations.[100] In a comparative sense, previous tactical studies have firmly situated India's intelligence capability as well below that of China,[101] and this remains an accurate judgement.

While it has had notable successes, India's HUMINT has been regularly criticised. India's relative lack of success in China has been highlighted.[102] Further, the lack of trained linguists to support intelligence has impeded efforts against China,[103] and insufficient linguistic capability has been raised in numerous contexts.[104] Others observed that the same HUMINT sources were sometimes unknowingly used by multiple Indian intelligence agencies.[105]

India's counter-intelligence capabilities have also been critiqued. Internal corruption and foreign infiltration may diminish Australia's confidence that India can protect specific information. Yadav identified the likelihood that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence had 'penetrated' R&AW.[106] Such claims are not unusual for large intelligence agencies, but trust is a critical commodity for international intelligence sharing. If R&AW has been prepared to let insider threats abscond from India (rather than investigate them) due to reputational reasons, transparency may be an issue.

Some shortfalls have been identified in India's capacity for intelligence analysis, noting that all countries are in nascent stages of machine learning implementation.[107] India has made progress in analysis of large data sets using Artificial Intelligence.[108] However, the insular nature of the intelligence sharing between agencies may render the ability to make sense of immense data quantities a difficult progression for India.

Although shared interests may lead to greater consideration of Australian-Indian intelligence sharing, it is important that Australia understands the strengths and weaknesses of its potential partner. India clearly has the potential to develop a highly sophisticated intelligence apparatus. Currently, Indian intelligence's organisational limitations (particularly relating to corruption and deconfliction) and capability limitations (for example, the relative weakness of maritime intelligence) are important for Australian policymakers to understand. Some considerations for Australian policymakers will now be highlighted.

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100 Steve Coll, 'India and Pakistan's Secret Kashmir Talks', *The New Yorker*, 22 February 2009, <www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/02/the-back-channel> [Accessed 2 December 2019].

101 Kartik Bommakanti, *Electronic and Cyber Warfare: A Comparative Analysis of the PLA and the Indian Army*, ORF Occasional Paper, no. 203 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, July 2019), p. 19.

102 Manoj, *Re-energising Indian Intelligence*, p. 35.

103 Ibid., p. 24.

104 Joshi and Das, 'India's Intelligence Agencies', p. 2.

105 Krishnaswamy, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p. 21.

106 Yadav, *Mission R&AW*, pp. 463, 501.

107 Krishnaswamy, *Why Intelligence Fails*, p. 27.

108 Scott Eisenstein, 'Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu Welcome New Age of Collaboration for Israel and India', *Cision PR Newswire*, 29 January 2018, <www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/prime-ministers-narendra-modi-and-benjamin-netanyahu-welcome-new-age-of-collaboration-for-israel-and-india-300589299.html> [Accessed 16 November 2019].

## No Gift Like Friendship

On balance, there is benefit in Australia steadily pursuing greater intelligence sharing with India. However, the geostrategic independence that is inherent to Indian strategic culture, and the inadequate internal intelligence deconfliction, will make progress slow.

Perhaps foremost, Australia should expect a transactional intelligence relationship with India. India is unlikely to enter into an intelligence sharing arrangement for a specific mission, such as the Indian Ocean, with broader intelligence sharing aims in mind. India has historically sought tightly bounded goals when sharing intelligence with France,[109] the United States,[110] and others. Combined with the cautious Indian bureaucracy, a patient and transactional Australian approach will be necessary. Australia should not be surprised if India withdraws from intelligence sharing with little notice if the specific intelligence effort is not seen as beneficial, even if other aspects of the relationship are very strong.

Second, given the parochial nature of the Indian intelligence organisations and the limited internal communication, Australia may have to accept that intelligence sharing is likely to occur within Indian-designated organisational boundaries. This is straightforward for Indian Ocean surveillance, where a Navy-to-Navy interface is probably sufficient. However, it could become challenging for the other shared interests, as China and terrorism are multi-faceted and highly complex interagency intelligence targets. It is possible that Indian intelligence would seek limitations in Australia on the organisations that could access certain intelligence.

Third, at basic levels of intelligence sharing commitment, the alleged corruption within Indian intelligence would probably not manifest into broader problems for Australia. However, if linkages grow deeper over time, Australian policymakers should be prepared to set clear expectations or 'red lines' for how intelligence operations will be managed. For example, Australian intelligence capabilities or information being used to support another Balakot-like mission could be politically problematic, not least because Australia seeks to maintain good relations with Pakistan. Further, Australia should be conscious of India's threshold for intelligence 'failure'. It is higher than in Australia. The 2008 Mumbai attacks, with at least 174 people killed, did not elicit a major intelligence review despite deficient intelligence coordination.[111]

Finally, although all three shared interests—China's regional ambitions, Indian Ocean security and counter-terrorism—should be considered for intelligence sharing, the Indian Ocean mission is a logical starting point. Intelligence sharing would be meaningful for both parties; intelligence could be shared at a relatively low classification; and, many Australian and Indian maritime and air platforms already operate regularly in the region. The maritime domain is relatively weaker for India (than other domains), and so it is possible that Indian policymakers would view Indian Ocean intelligence sharing as beneficial to them. Indian intelligence efforts against China have been less successful, but are likely to improve over time, and intelligence sharing for that shared interest remains viable.

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109  Raman, 'Indo-French Intelligence Cooperation'.

110  Desmond Ball, *Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) in South Asia: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka (Ceylon)*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, no. 117 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1996), p. 12.

111  Rabasa et al., *The Lessons of Mumbai*, pp. 1-5.

Considering all factors, Australian-Indian intelligence sharing in the three identified areas of shared interest is likely to be mutually beneficial, particularly as the demand for intelligence grows, and a steady progression would appear to suit both nations.

## Conclusion

Although not new issues, shared Australian-Indian strategic interests have gradually emerged, and intelligence sharing relating to China's growing Indo-Pacific ambitions, Indian Ocean security and terrorism appears to be mutually beneficial, particularly as the intelligence requirements for these three issues grows. Indian intelligence sharing has been pragmatic and transactional in the past, and Australian policymakers should expect this to remain the case.

Indian intelligence has the basis of a sophisticated capability, although there are organisational and capability challenges, some of which were visible during the 2019 Balakot mission. Indian intelligence is strongest in the land environment, and is probably least developed in the maritime environment, and intelligence sharing in the Indian Ocean is a realistic first step for closer integration. As intelligence sharing occurs, Australian policymakers may be exposed to some of India's organisational shortfalls, and Australia will need to set clear expectations for how intelligence could be used. Intelligence sharing may not exactly be 'natural' between Australia and India, but it could provide an important boost for a nascent strategic partnership.

*Martin White is an Australian Army Officer. These views are the author's alone and do not represent the Australian Army or Department of Defence.*