Spy Stories

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Inside the Secret World of the R.A.W. and the I.S.I.

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juggernaut

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"It is always better to admire the best among our foes rather than the worst among our friends"

Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*

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Acknowledgements and a Note on Sources and Methods

What follows are personal accounts – and, occasionally, the regretful recollections – of rival officers and analysts working to outwit and trap one another in the ground zero of the spy wars. The principals in this book are from India's Research and Analysis Wing (R.A.W.), which is rarely talked about at all, and has been denigrated as a bureaucratic viper's nest, while its enemies, in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (I.S.I.), are spoken about all the time, but mostly portrayed as mysterious, self-serving, and deadly.

These are politically tinged tropes, and in the pages that follow spies from both secret services appear altogether different, as they describe how they became (and some still are) invisible protagonists, knee-deep in chaos, a few of them becoming militant, some losing traction, others having religious and political epiphanies, some going rogue, a few becoming crazy. Many of the events they participated in are well-known outrages, but they have redrawn them in the book in intimate, and revelatory ways, shedding new light, providing finger-tip context, and drawing, sometimes, contrary, and shocking, conclusions.

Their stories are deeply subjective, sometimes confessional, and nearly always partial thanks to operational security that throttled their vision so that often they only saw their own inputs and outputs. On other

occasions, their vehemence reflects the hold their outfits still have over them, framing everything they see and do. Some who began as hawks and arch pragmatists have become pacifists, now believing in dialogue over warfare, advocating for negotiation as the path to resolution. A small number who have never stepped into the sunlight remain committed to hot-metal solutions, impatient with the tangles in democracy.

The (religious and secular) insurgents in India and Pakistan that these spies tracked, recruited, ran as assets, or tried to kill, over two decades, emerge anew in the following pages too, as a small band of capable, relentless, and ruthless antagonists, with names that are familiar but whose goals and antecedents are surprising. And, like a crimewave family, a small band of men (and the thousands they recruited and sent to their deaths) triggered a cascade of incidents, small and large, that almost engulfed the entire region in war, and raised nuclear hackles. Also here are extracts from their liturgy, the powerful creation stories, and religious justifications, drawn all the way back from the conspiracy in 1981 to kill President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, and re-purposed for the 9/11 levies.

This is not a book about the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) but it is everywhere, framed by two secret missions. One was the Gary Powers spy-plane calamity in 1960, which glued together an early version of the I.S.I.–C.I.A. pact, after an American long-range U2 surveillance plane was permitted to take off from a base near to Peshawar (to carry out a deep, unparalleled reconnaissance mission over the Soviet Union). The second was in 2017, as Donald Trump became the surprise pick for president and actioned a covert plan to spring from a Pakistan jail a local doctor accused of conspiring with the C.I.A. to track and kill Osama bin Laden. These waystations in history saw the Agency balancing its *need* for the I.S.I. (it now mistrusts) against a *desire* for India (and the R.A.W., which the C.I.A. now prefers) to grow as a strategic buffer to China, while opening-up its markets to American industry.

Wooed by those it shunned, pandered to by its current protégés and partners, the C.I.A., as the stories that emerge here suggest, was a

catalyst for change and security in Pakistan and India, when it did well. But when C.I.A. officers went off the rails, their brutal excesses were aped too by the I.S.I. and the R.A.W., dragging on the democracies of India and Pakistan, to devastating effect.

Stories from this precinct have been told brilliantly from Langley's perspective. We all have our favourite books, documentaries, and movies. The C.I.A.'s management of its myth is perhaps its greatest work. And even though India–Pakistan remains a global flashpoint, an understanding of which is key to knowing where we have come from and where we might end up, there are very few accounts that emanate from the blind tower off Lodhi Road (where the R.A.W. resides) or the cool, grey, granite-and-marble precinct of Aabpara (where the I.S.I. rules). Some of this is down to secrecy laws, and a concept of operational security borrowed from the British and Israelis. Also at play are thin-skinned governments and administrations of all colours in both countries that have cracked down on spies talking and journalists asking.

However, despite the risks, a huge number of officials from the security services in India and Pakistan, well over a hundred, taped over the decades, helped to make this book happen, after years of asking by our long-term friend, editor, and publisher Chiki Sarkar, whom we first met when she was at Penguin India.

Many of these interviewees, whom we saw multiple times, cannot be name checked and would be grateful if we never mentioned their role. So, here's to you, respecting your need for anonymity.

The Pakistan High Commission in London was in for the marathon and often open to us, even when Islamabad, sometimes, was not, as in the years we were blacklisted by one section of the military, while being engaged by another. Diplomats and military officers stationed in London talked candidly, and we surprised each other, agreeing and disagreeing. The High Commission magnified our requests, fielded our disappointment, and cheered with us when things worked out. Irritated by a hostile reading of Pakistan in the West that was often Islamophobic, it was keen to explore how to set that right.

Many officers at every level in the Pakistan military–intelligence services combine heard us out, and relived encounters, successes, and failures with candour, and in the kind of detail we have never heard before. We talked to almost all XI Corps commanders, and among the clearest thinkers were Lt. Gen. Masood Aslam and Lt. Gen. Khalid Rabbani, who between them endured much of what the "war on terror" years could chuck at the Pakistan military.

We engaged with Joint Intelligence chiefs, and with seven former I.S.I. chiefs, including General Ehsan ul-Haq, who has a profound regional view and who remains close to European and U.S. thinking, as well as that in the Gulf states, Singapore, and Turkey. We interviewed many of the I.S.I.'s Deputy Director Generals and their support staff for the "war on terror" years, to finesse an overlapping picture. Inside intelligence, but more overwhelmingly inside the military, Lt. Gen. Javed Alam Khan is a capable raconteur with a passion for history like no other. Within counter-insurgency, Major General Ghulam Qamar remains a sharp tool, engaging with a wide international audience, and a deep constituency in Pakistan. We spent time with I.S.I. regional desk officers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and veterans like Asad Munir and many others whose names have never made it into the public domain, and instead are known by their service legends: Chacha, Tariq, Qasim, Abdallah, and Ibrahim. Their counterparts in Sindh and Punjab opened doors for us, including among political factions, like the Jamaat e-Islami Pakistan and the Muttahida Quami Movement.

Equally forthright was the police, and the judiciary, who spent days and months with us, pushing back. Included are those who ran the Federal Investigation Agency, when it was winning more than it was losing. Its counter-terror specialists inside the Special Investigations Group, and their first scenes of crime lab and bomb squad officers, showed us the ways of the new terror, its chemistry and physiognomy, describing the insider threat, drawing for us in-depth profiles of the enemies they sought. And we continued to nag these officers when they moved back to the parent outfits in Punjab and Sindh, hoping they would write books too. Tariq

Khosa never stops working and writing, even in hostile times, and is always demanding and counterintuitive in his thinking. Tariq Parvez has seen civilian intelligence and counter-terrorism work from the ground up and is an eloquent guide as has been Syed Asif Akhtar, from his days in the F.I.A. and Interpol. Likewise, Khalid Qureshi, former S.I.G. chief at the F.I.A., navigated political and sectarian waters. Mohammed Shoaib Suddle, who took us from Baluchistan to Karachi via Islamabad, is a reformer, innovator, and, mostly, a stubborn pragmatist, who refuses to let go of the idea of change.

Dr Sohail Tajik has tracked, from the ground up, terror, extortion, and organized crime, and was, when we last spoke, heading into a role in the Punjab government. Along the way he has had his life's work hacked and stolen on a laptop, and met protagonists who have eluded most Western intelligence officers. His own book, when it comes, will be compulsory reading as will those in the pipeline by Rahimullah Yusufzai, who as a journalist and interlocutor, based in Peshawar, has sat down to eat with most people commonly regarded as insurgents, terrorists, or outlaws, strung out along the Durand Line in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Rabia Akhtar and Adil Sultan, both deep divers, provided challenging narratives.

Thanks too to the conservative religious parties and fighting groups, including office holders and clerics in Lashkar-e-Toiba, the Hizbul Mujahideen, Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, and Hizb ut-Tahrir, as well as sectarian veterans of Lashakar-e-Janghvi, who, after some cajoling, talked frequently, sometimes cryptically, occasionally hectoring and threatening, but also welcoming.

In London, the Indian High Commission has often helped us in every way imaginable, and thanks to all there who facilitate, critique, listen, and counter. In India, several senior diplomats who served in Pakistan and Europe guided and inspired us, as they have done for many years, especially T.C.A. Raghavan, whose own writing on the neighbour next door is compelling. We spoke at length to six former heads of R.A.W. (including the late Girish Saxena), who, over the years, we met many

times, along with a clutch of Joint, Special and Additional Secretaries, as well as some of the founding figures in India's strategic thought world, who served in the Prime Minister's Office, in the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.), the Defence Intelligence Agency, Military Intelligence, Rashtriya Rifles, and the Border Security Force.

It is easy to forget that the strategic domain – as a discipline and tool – is relatively new in India and those who came first or became prominent (like the late K. Subramanyam, who we spoke to often, and the team he led on the Kargil post-mortem) had to jostle to be heard, working against the left-leaning mainstream, and surviving regular demotions and politically contrived career setbacks. The R.A.W. and the military, now feted on Netflix and in Bollywood, have also been despised and ghosted by past governments.

A key vector in India for this book was Nitin A. Gokhale and his Bharat Shakti, one of the several security-facing think tanks he runs. Nitin is an industry, jostling with the liberal media, to produce an enormous output of books, podcasts, videocasts, and commentaries that record the country's nationalist tendency, tracing its evolution, the campaigns, and strategies. He is now working like an unofficial Indian external affairs agency, hoping to transform foreign opinions on India but also countering Western (and Chinese) narratives, supplanting them with a subcontinental, nationalist take on events, and one that is unashamedly assertive. To be a self-reliant conservative or a religious nationalist in an industry of secular liberals, and in a country of peaceniks, can be the hardest place to be, but Nitin is resilient, and has access to the post-2014 circle of national security chiefs in every wing and sector. We agreed to disagree in some areas – especially Kashmir – while finding consensus in others, including on jihad and the mujahid epochs.

Syed Asif Ibrahim is a stone-cold thinker, for the I.B. and, afterwards, the broader security and intelligence community, with a tool chest of practical experience in the subcontinent but also within

the wider region. His practitioner's knowledge was honed on multiple vicious operations spanning three decades that somehow he survived. Many of them ran parallel to those orchestrated by I.B. officer (and then service chief) Ajit Doval, a deadly, pragmatic hand who was integral to fighting the putsches and insurgencies accelerated by Pakistan, as well as authoring strategic relations with countries that were historically opposed to India. Doval, a pessimist, became an officer who made his own luck, shaping narratives across the subcontinent. We met with him in and out of service, during his years at a conservative think tank in Delhi, and since 2015 in his new incarnation as the National Security Adviser, and head of the National Security Advisory Board, where he supported the idea of this book, fishing for details on security dynamics in Pakistan.

Rajinder Khanna, a work-horse detective, served in many difficult, complex field stations in Europe and Southeast Asia before becoming service chief, and is a deep decoder of Pakistan and the wider region. Khanna suspects the worst, hoping for the best, and has a deep memory as well as a nose for conspiracies and their proliferation. We satellited around him when he was undercover, and in recent years, more openly, to debate the past and the future, sharing a passion, especially, for Southeast Asia and beyond.

R.A.W. officers like Rana Banerji and Tilak Devasher, two quite different temperaments, have never stopped developing their theses on India's neighbours and borderlands, on insurgencies and Islamism. The latter is by character a political economist, and the former a puzzle piece solver and data wrangler.

Dozens of journalists in India and Pakistan – who are among the best on their beats in the world – have helped us along the way, and some cannot be thanked. Saleem Shahzad, a long-time confederate, was murdered and many others who survived him cannot operate freely, with Pakistan 145th on the World Press Freedom Index, falling three places, but India has slipped too, two places, to 142. One journalist we can

acknowledge is Josy Joseph, an inveterate optimist, who shares a love for primary sources. We have shared data, ideas, and connections over the recent years, and there are few who are as driven.

The high khaki class in Pakistan and India are cousins, which makes the spy war in some ways a family dispute. Everyone, on both sides, wondered about our repetitive technique. Over how many breakfasts and lunches would we rake the past? Generosity was stretched to breaking point. For the record, tessellating spy stories takes time and however far we have travelled, the officials who talked – and fed us – have gone that much further than anyone else. And who does not want to spend time with men and women who for three decades have listened into the maelstrom, humming its tunes.

Any mistakes in earlier editions are all ours and have been corrected online, so the record is as accurate as it can be in this spy genre of versions and views, but these small changes too reflect the absolute needs and requirements of those who talked to us. Some, still don't like to be named - and are angered to be outed, nervous for their institution of rules - but in so doing, we have tried to counter the negative stereotypes about two rival agencies, instead defining officers' extraordinary service and their world views. These long serving spies abhor being forced into the open but this decision was ours alone and where there are disagreements we hope they also demonstrate how free publication, without staging or censorship, can trigger enlightenment - and also some institutional chafing!

Finally, thanks to David and Heather Godwin and Philippa Sitters (at the D.G.A.). Thanks to Kirsty McLachlan, who now has her own agency in London. At Juggernaut, thanks to everyone who helped us through the marathon process, and especially to our editor, Jaishree Ram Mohan.

Prologue

In the 1990s, the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) decided on a facelift and appointed a Tinseltown liaison, Chase Brandon, a cousin of the star Tommy Lee Jones but also from the old order.[1] Brandon had spent four decades in espionage, almost twenty-five years of it undercover for the Agency in regions including Latin America.

He got to work in 1996 engaging studio heads, directors, stars, and writers, encouraging them to project a different kind of spy in their scripts. In the two decades before, the C.I.A. had been accused of acting illegally, immorally, and without constraint, experimenting with group conditioning and hallucinogens, doping volunteers, and spiking the unsuspecting. Abroad it was seen to have commissioned assassinations and coups, with officers involved in torture and death squads.[2] Democracy appeared to be the flats of a stage, behind which the Agency toiled.[3]

But now, Brandon maintained, the Agency had changed. "We've been portrayed erroneously as evil and Machiavellian. It took us a long time to support projects that portray us in the light we want to be seen in," he said.[4] What came were shows including *The Agency*, which aired in 2001 on CBS, depicting diligent, workaday spooks who solved ferocious problems through fortitude and hard work.

More followed. There was Jennifer Garner in the TV show *Alias*, where she played a C.I.A. undercover officer, regularly saving the world, and *The Bourne Identity*. Stars were now given privileged tours of Langley in Virginia, which featured in movies for the first time.

However, the most sensational intervention came post-9/11 when the Agency faced its nadir. Accused of sitting on intelligence that might have helped other agencies in cinching the conspiracy, it faced rising condemnation for abducting suspects, concealing them off the grid in black sites, and creating an interrogation programme that was ruled to be torture. To shift the narrative, the Agency got involved in *Zero Dark Thirty*, sharing intelligence with the writer and the director.[5] It was a film that presented a case that the brutal programme was not only necessary but effective, generating vital intelligence that saved countless lives. For a service of secrets, the C.I.A. was filled with knowing leakers, who constantly briefed American authors, journalists, documentarians, and film makers in a way most other Western clandestine services rarely, if ever, do.

Apart from repointing history, much of what emerged created tropes out of parts of the world that were actually bearing the brunt of insurgencies and Islamism's death cults. Cities from Karachi to Peshawar that resounded with suicide bomb strikes seldom featured at all, replaced with locations in Jordan and India. Moreover, the spies and police from Rawalpindi and Mumbai became clumsy bit-part players portrayed as venal, servile, and ill-educated. The C.I.A.'s – and much of Hollywood's – versions of its operations ignored their impact on these countries, their leaders, and their security services.[6]

Six years ago, we began trying to reveal more of the covert scaffolding in South Asia and the impact on it of the C.I.A.'s "war on terror" years. Criss-crossing between New Delhi and Islamabad, travelling in the Gulf, Europe, and the United States, we found soldiers and spies from the subcontinental perma-military, whom we encouraged to come out, like C.I.A. officers and contractors were doing, to reveal some of the hidden world.

Some of those we talked to were from the Research and Analysis Wing (R.A.W.). This is not an agency, or a service, like the C.I.A. or MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service in Britain, but an adjunct of the Prime

Minister's Office (P.M.O.), without a charter or legislative oversight, contrary to most other services in Europe and the U.S.

It is based in a tower off Lodhi Road that was as corporate as utilitarian Delhi allowed in the 1980s, the era when it was constructed for Rs 98 crore – tall and blind, eleven storeys high and with little natural light. The budget generated for the R.A.W. headquarters strained relations with civil servants and other arms of government, as did the very idea of a secret foreign intelligence service.[7] Inside Lodhi Road, R.A.W. officers from that time complained, it was like working in a government school where the students had gone feral. But the R.A.W. hardly ever wrote about itself and came down hard on those who did, like Major General V.K. Singh (not to be confused with the cabinet minister), who, having served for four years, rising to the rank of Joint Secretary, composed a mild memoir, and in 2007 had his home raided and his passport, computer, and papers seized.[8]

Others we interviewed worked for the Inter-Services Intelligence (I.S.I.) directorate in Pakistan, established in 1948, just months after the country was founded following Partition. Widely caricatured as thugs, they are often at the centre of bloody pandemonium in Pakistan and regarded by Western and Indian voices as the evil protagonists in a region in which R.A.W. is often portrayed as white knights.

Shadowy and misunderstood, and also resisting active oversight from civilian governments, the I.S.I. is regularly referred to as Aabpara, the name of the comfy Islamabad district where it is headquartered.[9] After 9/11, the military erected a new polished campus there, financed by millions of U.S. dollars, derived from bounties paid for capturing high-value al Qaeda suspects. The monolithic, gleaming-grey edifice looms like Pakistan's very own Tyrell Corporation.

Much has been written about the R.A.W. and the I.S.I. by foreign observers, correspondents, and analysts, but most of it is voiced by competing Western operators, officers, and government officials from outside the region who sparred with these outfits. One of the few

substantial books that came from within was co-authored in 2018 by retired I.S.I. chief Lt. Gen. Asad Durrani and retired R.A.W. boss Amarjit Singh Dulat, with the former blackballed by the Pakistan military that went apoplectic and prevented him from leaving the country for a time, while the latter, modest and combative, rode out the brickbats, also brushing off the praise.[10]

Two tight-lipped services drawn from the same DNA, these days they intermittently talked to one another, via backchannels managed, secretly, by Saudi Arabia and also a Gulf monarchy. But on the ground they remained locked in a death spiral, sometimes winning, occasionally losing, and hardly ever finding common ground or understanding.

Advice on how to approach R.A.W. came from a veteran Indian diplomat whom we met over masala cheese toast at a South Delhi club. Only institutional support would work – otherwise "no one will talk openly at all." This set the bar high.

A senior officer in the Intelligence Bureau (I.B.) warned: "R.A.W.'s great achievement is to endure brickbats for its presumed pacifism and inactivity when it is frantically sculpting India's image as a benign state. Its second achievement is spilling blood *invisibly*. To explain the second would be to undermine the first. So good luck!"

We crossed over at the Wagah border, and drove to Islamabad, where I.S.I. secrecy was fiercely maintained to protect the state (and its military businesses). We asked for endorsements and connections, calming nerves, trying to reason our way around deep-seated suspicions, discussing books and movies as reference points.

In Rawalpindi, officers derided the TV series *Homeland*, which cast the I.S.I. as duplicitous and savage, showed Indian cars driving down presumed Pakistan streets, and tribal cities where boys conversed in Urdu instead of Pashto. But still they watched it. Although it was officially banned, *Zero Dark Thirty*, which showed the I.S.I. as Osama bin Laden's protector, had also become compulsive viewing.

We suggested watching *Argo*, which polished the C.I.A. role in an international plan to free U.S. citizens who were hostages in Iran after

the revolution of 1979. Look at *Black Hawk Down*. Screen *Gatekeepers*. The last of these was the least well known and did not polish the U.S. national interest. Its focus was another formidable outfit, Shin Beth, Israel's domestic intelligence service, motto: "The Defender that Shall Not be Seen". But the film makers drew out silent men and crafted a compelling covert history of Israel–Palestine.

No means maybe. The I.S.I. see-sawed. The Analysis Wing worried that Pakistan would not benefit from the I.S.I. talking. "The C.I.A. can say whatever it likes. But we are not a superpower and we are vying for small advantages in a kinetic backyard – why would we want to expose ourselves?" argued a deputy director general (D.D.G.) in C-Wing, which is responsible for counter-intelligence, counterterrorism, counter-espionage, and domestic intelligence. Another pointed to every occasion we had criticized Pakistan over two decades, telling the then I.S.I. chief, Lt. Gen. Naveed Mukhtar: "We can never trust them." Mukhtar's circle pushed back, suggesting that writers who had been both "for" and "against" Pakistan were *credible*, which made this an *opportunity*.

It was *Black Hawk Down* that triggered a rethink. In the 1993 battle for Mogadishu U.S. Special Forces tried to capture allies of the warlord Mohamed Aidid. However, two Black Hawk helicopters were downed, and a convoy of soldiers deployed to rescue the crew. They came under heavy fire, with hundreds of Somalis killed, as well as eighteen U.S. operators, with seventy-three more injured. Footage of U.S. corpses being dragged through the streets scarred the American military.

Senior I.S.I. officers who watched Ridley Scott's movie saw how it turned U.S. war fighters into heroes even in the face of disaster, and they were irritated by it. Pakistani troops had been there too, playing a significant but unsung role. A contingent working as U.N. peacekeepers had given up their lives; yet no one had told their story. A D.D.G. in B-Wing, or external intelligence, told Mukhtar: "Highlighting success and memorializing failure is something that Pakistan dismally fails at – and so no one ever knows what we did and what it cost."[11]

A chink of light. A lunch was arranged at the Rawalpindi Polo Club

and an officer asked many questions as his daughter cantered over the scrub, and havildars in maroon brought snacks, napkins, and ketchup. Who exactly did we want to talk to? What would we ask? Where would the material go, if they gave it? Could they maintain editorial control?

The officer, who had once been a fighter pilot, believed in the project but did not want to *own* it, because he liked his life. We described a method – survey the top level of chiefs and their deputies who served in the "war on terror" years, and then interviews with a second tier of operators who saw things from the street corner. He referred it up the chain of command, with our caveat that only a book without any constraints would be credible.

Spies of all countries sign iron-cast secrecy agreements not to welch on other spies. But we compiled wish lists for both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) and began to feel our way through the murky world of clandestine operators, case officers, subject matter experts, targeters, and analysts. Some names in Pakistan and India drew grimaces. The I.S.I. crossed out a third immediately. One man was "under a cloud." Another had "political issues." A senior officer in the R.A.W. who once ran interference operations against Pakistan, and who we thought was out, could not talk now, as he was on his way back in.

On both sides, some officers suggested correctives, putting forward stalwarts who they said did not toe the line or advocate for any government, but who "did their job." In Pakistan, a full colonel talked about "malcontents and patriots." He said: "Your list is filled with flag-wavers but not everyone was for the U.S. war on terror, although they were Pakistan patriots."[12] A similar conversation in Delhi pointed to analysts who had served during the most tumultuous episodes, but who complained of the increasing politicization of intelligence, which they feared was stoked by Hindu chauvinists. We listened to them all.

Maybe means yes. We drove to Lahore for discussions, crossing over at Wagah, and heading for Delhi. The Indian intelligence community had begun to share thoughts with us shortly after we wrote *Deception*, a book about the A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network, and invited us

to the third floor of Sardar Patel Bhavan, to talk to the National Security Adviser (N.S.A.), Ajit Doval.

We were ushered into a darkened "situation room" from where, off to the side, he conducted marathon eighteen-hour days. He was a youthful, conspiratorial workaholic, who, restless and slight, concealed his seventy-four years. Doval was intrigued by our I.S.I. vs R.A.W. idea. It was an opportunity to cherry-pick key kinetic episodes over the last eighteen years, rather than retelling all of it, and so gaining some input in helping us select which battles to focus on that would benefit India too. Hearing we had been with I.S.I. officers in Rawalpindi the day before, Doval asked: "How was it over there?" His smile flickered like a room in the Overlook Hotel. He would not be visiting Pakistan any time soon. R.A.W.–I.S.I. relations were mostly sub-zero, barring the on–off backchannel meets, like the sessions that took place between Doval and his counterpart from Pakistan, Lt. Gen. Nasir Khan Janjua, in Bangkok, Thailand, from 2015 to 2018. And the more recent second-tier discussions that sought to end the LoC shelling.[13]

Doval stepped out to greet a Saudi delegation, a project that typified his ambition for India to make its way in new territories that had previously shunned Delhi, he said. But it was a doubly interesting fixture for what went unsaid, as the Saudis continued their role as intermediary, bringing news from Rawalpindi.[14]

Later a colleague of Doval told us a story that had electrified officers in the I.B. and the R.A.W. At the end of the Cold War, as Germany readied for unification, the C.I.A. met the K.G.B. in a house in Karlshorst, in Berlin's eastern sector. Milton Bearden, chief of the C.I.A.'s Soviet division, and Hugh Price, its chief of counter-intelligence, were summoned by their Soviet counterparts, Rem Krassilnikov and Leonid Nikitenko, the heads of K.G.B. counter-intelligence. They wanted to understand the high level of defections from the East to the West.

What fascinated this officer was not the chit-chat. It was the mechanism that had got bitter adversaries into a room in East Berlin shortly before the wall was dismantled.[15] It was known as the Gavrilov

channel, named after an eighteenth-century Russian poet, a top-secret telephone hotline linking Langley to the Lubyanka that could call meetings on short notice, and had commenced in 1983. Without Gavrilov there was nothing, and this hotline reduced tensions, leading to a post-Soviet relationship between the C.I.A. and the K.G.B. successor outfits, finding common ground on narcotics trafficking and terrorism.

Publicly, politicians in India claimed they had nothing to talk about to Pakistan, but privately even hard-line spies worried, continually, about hearing a rival agency (mostly) via eavesdropping, as everything became misdirected, muffled, and potentially misconstrued. "We have zero deep, trusting connections to the I.S.I.," Doval's colleague complained. The pitter-patter of messages carried by others. A few foreign jaunts. "And – by and large – what we know about them is what we overhear, and they tap us too, both sides whispering lies, which can't be good."

Later Doval called us back. "These are critical times." Was he talking about the Saudi water carrying? "There is no detail that is too small when it comes to the I.S.I. I need to study every scintilla. They are our forever enemy and we can never, ever know enough," he said, agreeing to the project.

We were also Gavrilov.