findings on the EU’s “global relevance challenge” and visibility in Asia. It will prove an invaluable resource for EU–Asia researchers. However, the inclusion of an index would have made it more beneficial.

CONCLUSION: THE PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIMENSION OF ASIA–EUROPE

The publications reviewed for this article make valuable contributions to a more rounded appreciation of the context and mechanics of Asia–Europe relations. In terms of the EU’s “Asia Strategies”, policy-makers, think-tanks, scholars and general readers alike should take on board the valuable insights offered here—controversial as some of them may be—since they have momentous policy implications. In 2008–9, the EU’s Asia policies are once again, moving with the times and undergoing profound changes. Thus, the EU is extending the multi-layered model of its China policy to its other partners in Asia. It is also tapping into the parallel trends of securitisation, globalisation, regionalisation, multi-lateralisation and bi-lateralisation, which characterise contemporary East–West relations. Most importantly, the EU recognises that its Asia policy is little more than a hollow shell without a solid anchoring in intellectual exchange, “know-how based” cooperation and a “people-to-people” dimension. Careful readings of these publications will reward readers with a better comprehension of these developments, an understanding of the resulting policy implications and an ability to help shape the East–West discourse of the next decade.

THE KAOBOYS OF R&AW: DOWN MEMORY LANE


G NARASIMHA RAGHAVAN

The Kaoboys of R&AW: Down Memory Lane, by B Raman, (former head of counter-terrorism of India’s external intelligence collection agency, R&AW or the Research and Analysis Wing) minces no words in detailing the role played by R&AW during the 1971 war with Pakistan, the Khalistani movement, the influence of political leadership in India and the people who headed the organisation. “Burma” Raman (as he came to be known due to his expertise on Burma matters) recounts how R&AW evolved from its inception and embroiders his narration with memorable sketches of his boss and the first head of R&AW, the Late Rameshwar Nath Kao.
Hence the name Kaoboys—an expression that reflects loyal officers’ integrity and affection for the charismatic former chief of R&AW. As this book aptly shows, Raman is one of the die-hard Kaoboys.

THE KAOBOY

For all his fondness for Kao, Raman’s account of his interaction with the chief and his reassessment of Kao’s actions while in office and after, are in no way skewed or hagiographical. Raman’s acumen as a secret agent enables him to consider issues with a pinch of salt. There are few officers, especially from the secret services/intelligence agencies, who take pride in having worked under a remarkable boss and not many would spare time and energy to write about a person who influenced their lives and the development of the organisation. The first thing that captivates a reader is the smiling face of Kao on the front cover of the book. Through his easy-to-comprehend style, the author reveals how Kao and his team built R&AW from scratch, surmounted problems, helped in the 1971 liberation of Bangladesh, raised an upright scaffold for R&AW in times of crises and how other heads of R&AW carried forward the organisation after Kao’s retirement.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND R&AW

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi created R&AW in 1968 for the collection of external intelligence and Kao was made its head. Raman’s narration of R&AW’s formation, priority and interactions with Indira Gandhi that ultimately ensured India’s victory in the war with Pakistan in 1971, is peppered with anecdotes and incidences that disclose the inherent flaws and strengths of the newly formed organisation. Politics played a major role in deciding the fate of R&AW. It was Indira Gandhi’s steadfast attitude that Bangladesh must be free that triggered R&AW to act accordingly and admirably. The misunderstood issue of R&AW being used covertly during the Emergency reflects the consequences of politicising the organisation’s actions. Morarji Desai, who headed the Government of India after Indira Gandhi’s defeat, had little regard for R&AW, which lost influence during that period. However, Rajiv Gandhi and P V Narasimha Rao heeded R&AW’s counsel and ensured the organisation’s close coordination with the government. Raman repeatedly asserts that political situations have a lot to do with R&AW’s performance. However, lest R&AW be seen as a handmaiden of the ruling party at the Centre—Raman avows that it has never been so and never
will be, even though R&AW’s exercise of capability and wherewithal is contingent upon political decrees.

SETTING AN AGENDA

There is more to the book than Kao’s accomplishments. It talks about the author’s own experiences in R&AW for over 25 years. The book is also about R&AW officers, who were involved in a variety of covert operations and how that shaped R&AW’s perception. The background of the Khalistani movement, the role of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Agency in Kashmir, the roles played by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other Western intelligence agencies, among others, are related by Raman, giving the reader a historical angle for understanding contemporary matters of terrorism and insurgency.

Two important issues stand out. First is the need for coordination among the eight intelligence agencies in India, to guarantee timely action against anti-national elements. According to Raman, there is a tradition of unfriendliness among the agencies. Second is the need to establish a historical division like the CIA’s, which procures and maintains a “complete record of the role of the agency and its officers to ensure that their memories, perceptions, insights and conclusions” (p 27) become available to the future generations of officers and the public. How else would one know about the negotiations carried out by Indira Gandhi before flagging off the sensitive Operation Bluestar or the discussions of G Parthasarathi with Pu Laldenga of Mizoram that led to a change in the stance of the latter’s outfit? Without a doubt, this book is the starting point for experienced secret agents to share with the public, to a limited extent at least, the behind-the-screen elements of wars, riots and insurgencies.

The book’s narration is not racy like most accounts of exploits and successes of secret agents. Nevertheless, the matter-of-fact style gives credibility to the narration and does not manipulate the reader by either regressing or digressing. However, one wonders whether Kao would have welcomed this book by one of his Kaoboys, given his inconspicuous personality.