



RCAS Commentary

India's Transnational Death Squad Startled Western Nations

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About RCAS

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RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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India's leading intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, has been involved in the assassination of Kashmiri and Sikh activists living in Canada and the United States. Admittedly, it's an open secret about the RAW's sponsored death squads' unbridled terrorist activities in Pakistan. Ironically, the Western nations did not reprimand India's intelligence agency's death squad killing of Pakistanis, Kashmiris, and Sikhs.



▲ Security personnel outside the High Commission of Canada in New Delhi. Both India and Canada have expelled a diplomat as part of escalating tensions over the death of a Sikh activist in British Columbia in June. Arun Sankar/AFP via Getty Images.

The Pakistani law enforcement agencies arrested RAW's chief operator, a serving Commander in the Indian Navy, Kulbhushan Yadav, during a counter-intelligence operation on March 3, 2016. He was managing terrorist activities in Baluchistan. Jadhav confessed that "India is providing support to militants and Baloch separatists to take subversive and terrorist attacks in Pakistan. It is also trying to disrupt and sabotage through terrorist activities and provocation of Baloch militants against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Islamabad appraised the United Nations about the Indian intelligence agencies' involvement in terrorist acts in Pakistan. However, the international community has shown little concern for India's apparent disregard for the rule of law in Pakistan.

Similarly, the international community kept quiet over the Indian Naval officers' involvement in sabotaging doings in Qatar. Nonetheless, it seems complicated to ignore the violation of the sovereignty of Canada, European nations, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

RAW is encountering criticism internationally due to its criminal activities in Europe, Canada, and the United States. In September 2023, Prime Minister Justin Pierre James Trudeau claimed RAW killed a Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada. Since then, the gruesome act of RAW has strained ties between Canada and India.

Last month, the United States charged RAW agents with attempting to assassinate an American citizen in New York. Will the United States' revelation of a plot to kill a Sikh activist impair the bilateral relationship between New Delhi and Washington?

The American Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen said investigators had "foiled and exposed a dangerous plot to assassinate a U.S. citizen on U.S. soil." On November 28, the United States charged Nikhil Gupta, an Indian national, arrested in the Czech Republic in June 2023 for paying \$100,000 to a hit man to assassinate a prominent Sikh activist and U.S. citizen on its soil. Nikhil paid the hitman a \$15,000 advance to carry out manslaughter Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, general counsel for the New York-based Sikh activist group Sikhs for Justice.

Interestingly, to cover up RAW's criminal plot, the Indian government charged Gurpatwant Singh Pannun under anti-terror legislation for alleged threats to Air India. Meanwhile, Pannun proclaimed that he asked Sikhs to boycott the airline. Indeed, asking for an airline boycott does not qualify as a terrorist act.

The United States issued a warning to the Indian government over the involvement of RAW in the assassination plot of an American citizen. However, due to India's relevance in its geostrategic calculation in Asia-Pacific and China's containment policy, Washington has refrained from taking stern action. Can the United States approve India's state terrorism and state-sponsored killing on foreign soil?

Legally speaking, obviously not, or at least does not permit it on its soil. Even though the United States had carried out targeted assassinations on foreign soil—including strikes against those designated as terrorists or involved in terror plots. For instance, the Obama administration carried out the killing of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011, and the Trump administration authorized the assassination of Iranian Gen. Qassem Suleimani in Iraq in 2020.

New Delhi's response to Prime Minister Trudeau's claim was arrogant and irritating. Instead of reining in RAW, abiding by the rule of law, and diplomatically ensuring the aggrieved party respects the sovereignty of Canada in the future, the Indian officials,

while denying the involvement of their intelligence agency in the killing of Najjar, accused Canada of a “safe haven for terrorists.” Moreover, they asked Canada to substantially reduce its diplomatic staff in New Delhi and temporarily suspend issuing visas to Canadian citizens.

Significantly, India’s response to the accusation from the United States was muted and rational. Instead of angry denials, India’s Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tried to appease the Americans by stating that U.S. officials “shared some inputs about the nexus between organized criminals, gun-runners, terrorists and others. The inputs are a cause of concern for both countries, and they have decided to take necessary follow-up action.”

The illegitimate assassination activities of RAW in foreign countries alarm about the probability of Pakistani political leaders being hit during the 2024 general election campaign to create a political crisis in the country. Notably, RAW has already sponsored and conducted such criminal acts in Pakistan.

In September 2023, Karachi police claimed the involvement of RAW in the killing of the administrator of a seminary in Karachi’s Gulistani-Jauhar. On October 11, 2023, Punjab Inspector General of Police Dr Usman Anwar categorically claimed that “rogue nation’s hostile intelligence agency” was involved in the killing of Maulana Latif and his security guard in Daska mosque during Fajr prayers.

The Indians justified the killing of Latif by claiming that he had guided four terrorists to carry out a terror attack at the Pathankot airbase in 2016. RAW was also suspected in the killing of a Jamaatud Dawa-linked person in Azad Jammu and Kashmir’s Rawalakot area on September 8, 2023. These recorded incidents prove that the RAW death squad murdered religious leaders to unleash sectarian clashes in the country. Hence, it could use its death squad to create political instability in Pakistan.

To conclude, the Indian government has been involved in an extra-judicial killing of the Kashmiri and Sikh leaders in the Indian illegally occupied Kashmir and the Indian Punjab. Its intelligence agencies had also killed the freedom movement leaders in the foreign countries. Similarly, RAW recently killed Nijjar and attempted to kill Pannun in Canada and the United States, respectively, because they advocated for the creation of an independent Sikh state known as Khalistan. The condemnation and stoppage of such gruesome actions of RAW by the United Nations is imperative for the respect of the state’s sovereignty and international security.

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About Author



Zafar Nawaz Jaspal is an Nonresident Senior Fellow of the Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS), Hong Kong. He is also a Director and Professor at the School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan, where he teaches various aspects of Global Politics, Nuclear Studies, Conventional/Nuclear arms control, Demining, Pakistan's National Security, Hybrid warfare, etc. Prof. Jaspal also served as Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences in 2021 and a Course Coordinator at the Foreign Services Academy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad.