HISTORY OF THE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION IN WWI

Roots, accomplishments and legacy

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Introduction

In today's time, the matters of intelligence have expanded at the point in which anything that is national interest passes though the hands of intelligence agencies. We live in what is often called the "Age of Information", and quite accurately. Information, or rather say "data", has become one of the most valuable assets in the contemporary society. Businesses and governments alike shape their strategies on the analysis of continuous flows of massive amount of data, fostered by the almost never-ending supply of information that is collected from all levels of society, from individuals, firms and public entities. However, it is wrong to consider this phenomenon as one that originated in our times, and as one that is the mere product of an informatic society. In fact, information used to be valuable resource also in the past which can be traced back to very ancient times. The history of espionage and intelligence dates back to ancient civilizations, beginning 6,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, where institutions and persons were devoted to the security and preservation of their ruling regimes. In the Middle East, and later Byzantium, the large government bureaucracy established one of the earliest civilian intelligence agencies. Civilian agents of espionage culled information about foreign militaries and economic practices from traders, merchants, sailors, and other businessmen. Ancient Egypt had a thoroughly developed system for the acquisition of intelligence. The Hebrews used spies as well, as in the story of Rahab. Thanks to the Bible (Joshua 2:1–24), we have in this story of the spies sent by Ancient Hebrews to Jericho before attacking the city one of the earliest detailed reports of a very sophisticated intelligence operation. The Frumentarii were an ancient Roman military organization used as an intelligence agency. They began their history as a courier service and developed into an intelligence agency.

In this thesis however, I will be concentrating on tracing back the origins of Britain's intelligence agencies, which have effectively shaped all other modern intelligence agencies and are, together with the American CIA, considered among the most influential agencies today. In the first chapter we will go through the context and factors leading to the creation of Britain's intelligence agencies. We will analyse the reasons and necessities that pushed Britain into the need for an

organised intelligence structure and how it evolved into MI5 and MI6, starting from individual spymasters and court intrigues and concluding into some of the mayor conflicts fought by the British before World War One. In the second chapter we will look at some of the most influential individuals in the history of British intelligence, spanning almost 500 years of history. Each of the figures that will be explored further have been included in this thesis because of their significance to the evolution of the agencies and their contributions. In the final chapter, we will take an in depth look at the efforts of the British intelligence agencies in the First World War, which prompted many changes in the approach to intelligence due to new technological advancements and a completely new form of warfare and their legacy in the interwar period. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the need for a state to access and control information, in war and peace time alike, and understand the evolution of the British intelligence service during their history, until the Great War and the inter-war period.

Context and factors leading to the creation of British intelligence

Overview of Britain at the end of the Victorian era

The establishment of British intelligence agencies can be traced back to the 19th century when the British Army recognized the importance of strategic intelligence and planning by establishing an explicitly named unit, the Intelligence Branch, in 1873. Intelligence has always been an aspect of organized warfare. The intelligence branch was created under the auspices of the War Office, dedicated to the development of strategic intelligence. The primary purpose of the Intelligence Branch was to develop strategic intelligence for the British military. It was staffed by both military and civilian personnel, totalling twenty-seven individuals at the

time of its establishment. The Intelligence Branch underwent upgrades and changes in its status over the years, reflecting the evolving geopolitical landscape and the increasing hegemony of Britain as an imperial power. Based on documents held in the National Archives (UK), a study explores the ways in which the work of the Intelligence Branch developed before the First World War in response to imperial and foreign military challenges and the growing awareness of the importance of strategic intelligence and planning.[1]

The Branch's steam-age origins should not disguise the intensity and sophistication of the information management that underpinned its operations. The establishment of the Intelligence Branch in the British military in 1873 was a significant step in recognizing the importance of intelligence in warfare and laying the foundation for the development of British intelligence agencies. The Intelligence Branch was established to develop strategic intelligence for the British military and underwent upgrades and changes in its status over the years. The consolidation of various intelligence branches within the British military occurred later in 1964 when the Joint Intelligence Bureau, Naval Intelligence, Military Intelligence, and Air Intelligence were combined to form the Defence Intelligence.[2]

The years prior to the establishment of the first British intelligence agencies were years of profound change for Britain both internally and externally. Between 1880 and 1910, Britain underwent significant historical and geopolitical changes that shaped the country's development and global influence. The Victorian Era, which lasted from 1837 to 1901, was characterized by significant social, economic, and political changes in Britain.[3] During this period, England changed from a rural, agricultural country to an urban, industrialized one, involving massive dislocation and radically altering the nature of society. The transformations during this period led to many social changes with the birth and spread of political movements, most

[1]Alistair Black. 2020. Information management in the Intelligence Branch of Britain's War Office, 1873-1914: 'All information flows toward it, or returns to it, in a form worked up into shape'

[2] Huw Dylan. 2012. 'Modern Conditions Demand Integration and Professionalism': The Transitions from Joint Intelligence Bureau to Defence Intelligence Staff and the Long March to Centralization in British Military Intelligence

[3] Susie Steinbach. 2023. Victorian Era, Article on Encyclopaedia Britannica

notably socialism, liberalism, and organized feminism.[4] Britain underwent significant political reforms during this period, including the Third Reform Act of 1884, which extended the right to vote to more people, and the Second Home Rule Bill of 1893, which aimed to grant Ireland greater autonomy. The Intelligence Branch developed before World War I in response to imperial and foreign military challenges and the growing awareness of the importance of strategic intelligence and planning.

Despite the economic challenges, Britain continued to expand its empire during this period. The country's imperialism acquired a new impetus, with Japan, Russia, the USA, and other European countries competing for global influence. The emergence of Jacobitism and the Boer Wars were also significant events during this period. During the Victorian Era, Great Britain continued to expand its empire, acquiring new territories and resources. The expansion of the British Empire was facilitated by the development of trade and the rise of business, which were among the major causes of the Industrial Revolution and it marked a major turning point in history, influencing almost every aspect of daily life. The development of trade and business led to significant economic growth, urbanization, and social changes. The British Empire was a significant source of wealth and power for Great Britain. The empire provided access to new markets and resources, which fuelled the country's economic growth. The empire also allowed Great Britain to project its power and influence globally, making it a dominant force in world affairs.

However, the expansion of the British Empire was not without its challenges. Further in this chapter, we will go through two significant conflicts fought by Britain between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The acquisition of new territories often led to conflicts with local populations and resistance movements. The Boer Wars, fought between Great Britain and the Boer states in southern Africa, and the second Anglo-Afghan war are significant examples of this. The conflict with the Boers set the stage for the First and Second Boer Wars and marked a significant challenge to Great Britain's imperial ambitions.

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[4] Revolution and the growth of industrial society, 1789 – 1914. 2023. Encyclopaedia Britannica

The Second Boer War, which lasted from 1899 to 1902, was fought between the British Empire and two Boer states in South Africa. Both the two Boer wars and the second Anglo-Afghan war were significant for their impact on British politics and society, as well as for its influence on military tactics and intelligence gathering.

The Second Anglo-Afghan War

The Second Anglo-Afghan War was a military conflict fought between the British Raj and the Emirate of Afghanistan from 1878 to 1880. The war was part of the Great Game between the British and Russian empires, with Britain seeking to extend its control over neighbouring Afghanistan to oppose Russian influence there. The Great Game was a competition between the two empires for control of Central Asia, with Afghanistan serving as a buffer state between the two. The British were concerned about Russian advances in Central Asia and used Afghanistan as a buffer state to protect all approaches to British India. Also, the British also wanted to establish control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs and to have a permanent British embassy in Kabul. The war began in November 1878 when the British invaded Afghanistan in response to the Afghan Emir's refusal to accept a British mission. The war was marked by several decisive actions, including the Battle of Ali Masjid, the Battle of Peiwar Kotal, and the Battle of Khushk-i-Nakud, all of which were British victories. As a result, the British army occupied Kabul, and a treaty signed at Gandamak on May 26, 1879, recognized the Emir's son, Yaʿqūb Khan, as emir. The war had significant consequences for Afghanistan, including the loss of territory to British India and the imposition of a British resident in Kabul, but also for Britain, which suffered the loss of over 4,000 soldiers and the expenditure of a large number of resources.[5]

The Second Anglo-Afghan War brought into sharp focus the fact that Britain had no permanent intelligence system nor trained staff upon which to build one. From this experience, a manual, Field Intelligence, was produced, which became the basis for future intelligence work. The British managed to win the war thanks to both the

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[5] Anglo-Afghan Wars. 2023. Encyclopaedia Britannica

means of military force and of diplomatic manoeuvring. The British initiated the war by invading Afghanistan and occupying key cities, including Kabul, this strategy aimed to establish control over strategic locations and exert dominance over the Afghan government. They negotiated treaties and agreements with Afghan leaders, such as the aforementioned Treaty of Gandamak, which recognized the authority of the Afghan Emir's son and established control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs.[6] An important factor that contributed to the success of the British in the second Anglo-Afghan war was the focus given on maintaining supply lines and ensuring the provision of necessary resources for their forces. This involved establishing communication networks, securing transportation routes, and managing logistical challenges in a challenging terrain. The British also pursued a policy of collaboration with local allies. They managed to gain support from local Afghan tribes and leader who were opposed to the ruling emir. They formed alliances and utilized local forces to aid in their military operations.[7] However, the occupation of Afghanistan was not swift and without resistance. As the war progressed, and after the conflict was over, the British faced guerrilla warfare tactics from the Afghan forces. They adapted their strategies to counter these tactics and implemented measures to disrupt and suppress the guerrilla activities.[8]

The second Anglo-Afghan war had a notable impact on the development of British intelligence and a consequential influence on the establishment of intelligence agencies. The war witnessed an extensive use of intelligence gathering, highlighting the importance of intelligence gathering for military operations. The British relied heavily on intelligence to plan their military actions and to gain insights into Afghan military capabilities and intentions. The war led to the development of military intelligence agencies, such as the Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster-General's Department. These agencies were responsible for gathering and analysing

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[6] Second Afghan War, National Army Museum Website

[7] John Lowe Duthie. 1983. Pragmatic Diplomacy or Imperial Encroachment: British Policy Towards Afghanistan, 1874 – 1879, The International History Review

[8] Salman Bangash & Shahida Aman. 2010. British Imperialism, the Great Game and the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878 – 80): A Critical Appraisal

intelligence on enemy forces and providing information to military commanders. The war saw the increased use of spies and informants to gather intelligence on Afghan military capabilities and intentions: the British employed local agents and informants to gather information on Afghan tribal politics and military movements. The war also saw the development of codebreaking capabilities, with British intelligence agencies intercepting and deciphering Afghan communications, allowing the British to gain insights into Afghan military plans and intentions. The war emphasized the importance of intelligence sharing between different branches of the military and between different countries The British shared intelligence with Indian military authorities and with other European powers.

The Boer Wars

For more than a century, some form of conflict had existed between Britain and the Boers. In 1877, Britain had moved to annex the Transvaal Republic, bringing it under its control, and this eventually led to what is known as the First Boer War in 1880-1. After a number of defeats handed to the British, independence was restored but relations never recovered. The wars were fought over the amount of influence and expansion impetus that Great Britain had in the area.[9]

The Second Boer War (1899-1902) was caused by disputes over sovereignty and control of highly lucrative natural resources, particularly gold. The British Empire fought against the Boer forces of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, this war witnessed a significant investment in tactical, field intelligence, and a Field Intelligence Department was formed to undertake reconnaissance and gather any useful information on the enemy. During the Boer Wars, the British Intelligence Branch played a significant role in intelligence gathering and information management. The Intelligence Branch was responsible for gathering intelligence on the Boer forces, including their numbers, movements, and intentions. They also provided information on the terrain, climate, and other factors that could affect military operations. The Intelligence Branch worked closely with the Royal Engineers to produce maps and other intelligence products. They also worked with

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[9] The Boer War. 2018. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History

local sources, such as scouts and informants, to gather intelligence on the Boer army.[10]

The Boer Wars also influenced tactics and training in the regular British Army from 1902 to 1914 and prompted a complete overhaul of reconnaissance organisation and innovative training methods, leading to several changes to the British Army's tactics and training as a result of the lessons learned during the war. In particular, during the Second Boer War the Boers fought using guerrilla tactics, which proved difficult for the British to defeat due to their unfamiliarity with such tactics. The Boers' guerrilla tactics were a significant factor in the outcome of the Boer Wars. The Boers' mobile and innovative approach to warfare, drawing on their experiences from the First Boer War, presented the British forces with a severe tactical challenge. The Boers fought as independent groups of commandos, which were not formally structured, and men could choose to leave one to join another. However, their tactics were not suitable for fighting in heavily defended areas such as British-held towns. The British eventually prevailed, but not without adopting controversial tactics. In response to continued failures to defeat the Boer guerrillas, British high command ordered to enact a scorched earth policy to be implemented as part of a large scale and multi-pronged counterinsurgency campaign. In the third and final phase, beginning in March 1900 and lasting a further two years, the Boers conducted a hard-fought guerrilla war, attacking British troop columns, telegraph sites, railways, and storage depots. In response, the British cleared vast areas, destroying Boer farms and moving the civilians into concentration camps. This policy had severe consequences for the Boer population, devastating over 30,000 Boer farmhouses and more then 300,000 livestock.[11]

The Intelligence Branch's work during the Boer Wars helped to shape the development of British military intelligence in the years that followed. The Boer

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[10] Kenneth O. Morgan. 2002. The Boer War and the Media (1899 – 1902), Twentieth Century British History

[11] Bill Nasson. 2001. The Boer War and the Making of South Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies

Wars led to the development of a variety of information and intelligence gathering units, such as Rimington's Tigers and the Corps of Guides. Rimington's Guides (also known as Rimington's Tigers or Rimington's Corps of Guides) were a unit of light horse in the British Army active in the Boer War used for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, and they were known for their night marches and stealth-like movement. These units were often used in conjunction with other scouting units, such as Lovat's Scouts and Driscoll's Scouts. These scout units, which were often locals who knew the terrain and could move around undetected, played a crucial role in British intelligence gathering. Scouting was considered the primary duty of cavalry, but British cavalry were poorly trained in this role prior to the Boer War. The reporting of information was standardized and centralized, and by the end of the war, 132 intelligence officers were in place, supported by over 2000 troops devoted to intelligence tasks.[12]

The Crimean War

It is clear that the origins of British intelligence can be traced back to several decades before the actual establishment of the intelligence agencies and of their official state recognition and backup. As we have analysed above, it is possible to trace these roots back to the last quarter of the 19th century. However, it is possible to take a further leap backwards of another 25 years. In particular, it is possible to see the first need for an organised intelligence structure as back in time as the Crimean War (1853 – 1856).

The Crimean War was a military conflict fought between the Russian Empire on one side, against an alliance of Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and Sardinia-Piedmont. The outbreak of violence arose from various factors, including the issue of Christian minority rights in the Holy Land and in the Balkans (in particular those of orthodox Christians, the majoritarian religious group in the Russian Empire) the overall declining Ottoman Empire leading to the "eastern question," and a resistance from the British and French to Russian expansion. The complexity of the war meant

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[12] Spencer Jones. 2009. The Influence of the Boer War (1899 – 1902) on the Tactical Development of the Regular British Army 1902 – 1914

that it was fought on the grounds of various reasons by different parties, as everyone had a vested interest in the region. The roots of the war lay in the long-standing struggle between Russia and the Ottoman Empire for control over territories in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. The Crimean War was fought from October 1853 to February 1856 and was one of the first conflicts in which military forces used modern technologies such as explosive naval shells, railways, and telegraphs. The war was also one of the first to be extensively documented in written reports and photographs, making it one of the earliest wars to receive widespread media coverage. The war was managed and commanded poorly by both sides, and disease accounted for many of the approximately 250,000 men lost by each side.[13] The war had significant consequences, including reshaping the balance of power in Europe and highlighting the declining Ottoman Empire and the growing influence of other nations in the region.

The British participated in the war for several reasons, of which we can identify 3 most significant ones. As aforementioned, the British were concerned about Russia's growing power in what historians call the "Great Game"[14] and its potential to expand towards India. This prospect was daunting for the United Kingdom, as the British wanted to avoid facing of a powerful Russian navy.

Another significant factor that led to the outbreak of the war was Britain's willingness to protect the Ottoman Empire against the Russians. The declining Ottoman Empire was seen as a buffer against Russian expansion in the region. By supporting the Ottomans, Britain aimed to maintain the balance of power and prevent Russia from gaining further influence. Furthermore, there were important geopolitical considerations made supporting the British involvement in the war. In fact, the Crimean War presented an opportunity for Britain to assert its influence and maintain its status as a major European power. By participating in the conflict,

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[13] Crimean War. 2023. Encyclopaedia Britannica

[14] Cynthia Smith. 2023. The Great Game and Afghanistan, Library of Congress

Britain aimed to protect its interests, maintain its alliances, and shape the balance of power in Europe.[15]

Britain fought in the Crimean War through naval operations, land campaigns, participation in major battles, the siege of Sevastopol, medical support, and logistical assistance. The British military played a significant role in the conflict, alongside their allies, in their efforts to counter Russian expansion and protect their interests in the region. The British contributed to the war effort both with naval and land campaigns, deploying a significant naval force to the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, blockading Russian ports, disrupting naval operations and providing support to the allied forces. Also, British troops were deployed to the Crimean Peninsula, where they participated in several major battles, notably the Battle of Alma, the battle of Balaklava and the Battle of Inkerman. They fought alongside French, Ottoman, and Sardinian forces against the Russian Army. The British troops laid an almost one-year-long siege on Sevastopol, playing a significant role in the eventual capture of the city.[16]

However, Britain's contribution to the war was not limited to the direct fighting struggle against Russian troops, as Great Britain provided logistical support to its troops and to the allied forces and were one of the main actors in coordinating the overall strategy and management of the war effort. The Intelligence Branch, which was established at the beginning of the war, provided military commanders with critical information about the enemy's strength, positions and intentions.[17] The Intelligence Branch was responsible for gathering information through various methods such as reconnaissance, espionage and interrogations of prisoners of war. Intelligence officers were then tasked with analysing and organising the collected information, creating intelligence reports that were then disseminated to the military commanders, providing information that allowed more informed decision-making.

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[15]Brison D. Gooch. 1956. A Century of Historiography on the Origins of the Crimean War, The American Historical Review

[16] Orlando Figes. 2011. The Crimean War: A History

[17] Andrew Lambert. 2011. The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy Against Russia, 1853 – 56

During the Crimean War, the British Intelligence Branch worked closely with Britain's allies, in particular with France, to share intelligence and coordinate military operations. It is also important to note that the Crimean War saw important advancements in communication technology, such as the telegraph, which enabled faster transmission of intelligence reports.[18]

Establishment of Key Intelligence Agencies (MI5 & MI6)

The establishment of the Secret Service Bureau in 1909 was a response to the changing nature of warfare and the need for a coordinated intelligence effort. The Bureau was established on the recommendation of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which recognized the need for a centralized intelligence agency to coordinate the intelligence work of the Admiralty, War Office, and the Foreign Office. The Bureau was initially staffed by a small number of officers, including Captain Vernon Kell, who would later become the first Director General of MI5. We will have the chance to discuss the figure of Captain Kell and other key figures in the next chapter.

The Home section of the Secret Service Bureau, which later became MI5, was tasked with protecting Britain's secrets. Its primary role was to counter espionage and protect Britain from foreign agents who sought to infiltrate the country and steal its secrets. The Foreign section, which later became MI6, was tasked with gathering intelligence on potential enemies abroad. Its role was to find out the secrets of foreign countries and to provide the British government with the information it needed to make informed decisions about foreign policy. [19]

At the moment of their founding, MI5 and MI6 were each entrusted with distinct jurisdiction and responsibilities. MI5, also known as the Security Service, was (and is to this day) responsible for investigating matters of national security within the UK. Its primary role is to counter espionage and protect Britain from foreign agents seeking to infiltrate the country and potentially steal state secrets. MI5 played a

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[18] Stephen Harris. 1999. British Military Intelligence in the Crimean War, 1854 – 1856

[19] Christopher Andrew. 2009. The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5

crucial role in safeguarding the UK, its interests, and citizens against major threats to national security, including penetration of foreign spies, counterinsurgency, and other internal threats. [20]

On the other hand, MI6, also known as the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), was established as the British foreign intelligence service. Its main responsibility was to gather intelligence relevant to the UK's international affairs. During its history, MI6 focused on finding out the secrets of foreign countries and providing the British government with the necessary information to make informed decisions about foreign policy. This involved spying on foreign countries and gathering intelligence on potential enemies abroad. MI6 was also involved in counterintelligence, working to protect British interests by identifying and neutralizing foreign intelligence threats.

While MI5 and MI6 have distinct roles, there is some operational overlap between the two agencies. National security extends beyond the borders of the UK, and both agencies work together to protect Britain's national security and interests. They collaborate on intelligence sharing, joint operations, and coordination to ensure the safety and well-being of the country.

Operating Structure of MI5 and MI6

MI5 has a hierarchical structure that reflects its focus on domestic counter-intelligence and security within the UK. The head of MI5 is the Director General (DG), who is responsible for the overall leadership and strategic direction of the agency. As we already mentioned above, the first Director General of MI5 was Captain Vernon Kell. The Deputy Director General (DDG) supports the Director General and is responsible for the operational activity of the service. The DDG oversees four branches within MI5, which are International Counter-Terrorism, National Security, Irish Counter-Terrorism, and Technical and Surveillance. These branches are responsible for countering international terrorism threats, protecting national security and countering threats within the UK, addressing threats from

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[20] MI5 Official Website

dissident republican terrorism, and handling technical operations and surveillance activities to support MI5's mission, respectively.

MI5 is directed by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which provides strategic direction and oversight. The JIC is an interagency deliberative body responsible for intelligence assessment, coordination, and oversight of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), Security Service (MI5), Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and Defence Intelligence (DI). The JIC assesses events and situations relating to external affairs, defence, terrorism, major international criminal activity, scientific, technical, and international economic matters, and other transnational issues. It draws on secret intelligence, diplomatic reporting, and open-source material to provide intelligence assessments to ministers, enabling informed policy-making. The JIC is chaired by a permanent chairman, who is a member of the Senior Civil Service. The committee is supported by the Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO) under the Cabinet Office. The JIO includes an assessments staff, which consists of experienced senior analysts drawn from across government and the military. The assessment staff conducts all-source analysis on subjects of interest to the committee. JIC papers draw input from across the intelligence and security agencies and other related bodies. The JIC was formed in 1936 and has evolved over time to meet the changing intelligence landscape.[21] Its system for coordinating the analysis and dissemination of incoming intelligence has developed gradually in response to the evolving challenges. The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) provides oversight of the JIC, among other intelligence and security-related areas. The ISC examines the work of the JIC and assures accountability and transparency in intelligence activities. MI5 also works closely with other intelligence and security agencies, such as the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and Defence Intelligence (DI). It also has executive liaison groups that enable the safe sharing of intelligence with the police for evidence gathering and prosecution purposes. [22]

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[21] Michael S. Goodman. 2014. The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Volume I: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis

[22] Chris Northcott. 2007. The Role, Organisation, and Methods of MI5

The Secret Intelligence Service has a similar operating structure to that of MI5, albeit more complicated and wrapped in a shroud of secrecy. MI6 has an operating structure that reflects its focus on foreign intelligence gathering and espionage activities. The head of MI6 is the Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, who is directly accountable to the Foreign Secretary. The Chief provides leadership and strategic direction to the agency. MI6 operates through various divisions and departments, each with specific responsibilities and areas of expertise. These divisions include Operations, Analysis, and Technical Support. MI6 works closely with other intelligence and security agencies, both domestically and internationally, to share intelligence, coordinate operations, and ensure effective national security efforts.[23] The Operations division is responsible for conducting espionage activities outside British territory. It carries out covert operations to gather foreign intelligence and protect the UK's national security interests. MI6's operations are often conducted in secret, and details of its activities are seldom disclosed to the public. The Analysis division is tasked with the collection, analysis, and appropriate dissemination of foreign intelligence. It assesses the gathered intelligence to provide insights and assessments to inform policy-making. The division draws on a range of sources, including human intelligence, signals intelligence, and open-source intelligence. The Technical Support department provides technical expertise and support for intelligence operations, including surveillance, communications, and other technical aspects. [24]

The establishment of British intelligence agencies was influenced by various factors, including the need for effective intelligence gathering during times of war, the desire to control secret intelligence operations in the UK and overseas, and the need to maintain national security. The Secret Service Bureau was established in 1909, which later became the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence

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[23] Christopher Andrew. 2009. The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5

[24] Nigel West. 1984. MI6: British Secret Intelligence Service Operations 1909 – 1945

Service (MI6). The purpose of MI5 was to protect Britain's secrets while MI6's task was to find out the secrets of potential enemies abroad.

Key Figures in the History of British Intelligence and its Creation

In this chapter, we will explore some of the most prominent figures in the history of British intelligence. We will explore their lives and contributions to the establishment of intelligence agencies and their operational efforts, other than their influence on the agencies themselves. Most of them were spymasters or agents of either the MI5 or the MI6, and are ordered in historical chronological order, starting from the 16th century up until the 20th century. Here it will be possible to grasp the deep and ancient roots of British intelligence, finally arriving at the two World Wars.

Sir Francis Walsingham (1534 – 1590)

One of the earliest, if not the earliest, figure that we can identify as having a great contribution to the birth of British intelligence is Sir Francis Walsingham. Born in 1532 from a wealthy family of landowners, he studied in Cambridge university and started his working career as a lawyer. In the 1570s he became the English ambassador to France, from there rising the ranks of the queens' inner circles. He was the principal secretary of the Queen Elisabeth I Tudor and is remembered as the first true spymaster of the realm.

Sir Francis Walsingham was a highly influential figure during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England. He held multiple roles, including statesman, private secretary, adviser, diplomat, and spymaster. Walsingham played a crucial role in uncovering various plots against Queen Elizabeth I and is believed to have saved

her life multiple times. He was known as her "Moor" and was highly trusted by the queen.[25]

Walsingham managed to collect insights from the whole world thanks to his network of Italian agents that he managed to build when he was the royal envoy to France. English custom agents working in English ports supplied him with information gathered from all people arriving and leaving the nation. Furthermore, English shippers overseas provided reports to the secretary for favorable settlement of trade contentions. In order for his spy operations to work, Walsingham gathered a large number of specialists to organize and prepare the large sum of insights that came into his hands. They worked out of his house located a couple hundred yards from the Tower of London. He established a highly effective intelligence network and was responsible for thwarting England's foreign enemies and exposing domestic plotters who sought to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I and restore a Roman Catholic monarch to the throne. At its peak, his espionage network numbered 53 spies, 18 agents stationed in foreign lands, and numerous informants throughout England. He also employed a range of technical experts such as code breakers and even an expert at opening and then resealing letters without the sender or recipient knowing. [26]

Walsingham was successful in foiling a number of plots against Queen Elizabeth I, including the Babington Plot, which aimed to assassinate the queen and replace her with Mary, Queen of Scots. He was known for his ruthless tactics, including the use of double agents and prison informants. Walsingham's intelligence efforts were instrumental in protecting the queen and maintaining the security of England. Sir Francis Walsingham died on April 6, 1590. His contributions as a statesman, diplomat, and spymaster during the Elizabethan era have made him a legendary figure in British history and a highly influential figure for the future development of British intelligence.[27]

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[25] Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2023. Sir Francis Walsingham

[26] Hsuan-Ying Tu. 2013. Francis Walsingham's Espionage in Elizabethan Politics

[27] Jessica Brain. 2017. Sir Francis Walsingham, Spymaster General

John Thurloe (1616 – 1668)

Another relevant figure in the history of British intelligence John Thurloe. He was an English politician who served as spymaster for Oliver Cromwell, secretary to the council of state in the Commonwealth of England and postmaster general from 1655 to 1660. He was born in June 1616 in Great Milton in Oxfordshire. He was appointed as secretary to Cromwell's Council of State in March 1652 and soon became head of a vast intelligence service that operated throughout Europe, gathering information about Royalist plots to overthrow Cromwell's government.[28] Thurloe developed a widespread network of spies in England and on the continent, including the Dutch diplomat and historian Lieuwe van Aitzema, the mathematician John Wallis, who established a code-breaking department, as well as diplomat and mathematician Samuel Morland, who served as Thurloe's assistant.[29] Thurloe's intelligence service broke the Sealed Knot, a secret society of Royalists, and uncovered various other plots against the Protectorate. Thurloe is considered one of the pioneers of modern intelligence gathering and is often referred to as "Cromwell's spymaster"[30]. He played a key role in the succession of Richard Cromwell as Lord Protector in 1658 and sat in the Parliament of 1659, but his influence waned after Cromwell's fall the same year.

Upon the Restoration of Charles II in May 1660, he was arrested for high treason; his release was granted on condition that he provide the new government with information on the current state of England's foreign policy.[31] John Thurloe died on 21 February 1668 in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Thurloe's voluminous correspondence provides one of the chief historical sources for the Cromwellian era.[32] Thurloe's intelligence service was one of the most extensive and sophisticated of its time, and his methods of intelligence gathering and analysis were highly

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[28] BCW Project. 2007. Biography of John Thurloe

[29] Edmund Baker. 1958. John Thurloe: Secretary of State 1652 – 1660

[30] Timothy Noel Peacock. 2018. Cromwell's "Spymaster"? John Thurloe and Rethinking Early Modern Intelligence

[31] Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2023. John Thurloe

[32] British History Online. 2010. Codes and Ciphers of Thurloe's Agents

influential in the development of modern intelligence services. Thurloe's legacy as a spymaster and intelligence pioneer continues to be studied and celebrated to this day.

William Melville (1850 – 1918)

William Melville was an Irish law enforcement officer who played a significant role in the early development of British intelligence. Melville's early life was marked by a diverse range of experiences, from working as a bank clerk to serving as a crew member on a packet ship. He joined the Metropolitan Police in London in 1872 and was assigned to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Melville was known for his intelligence-gathering skills and his ability to infiltrate anarchist groups. In 1882, Melville was chosen to be one of the founding members of the Special Irish Branch, which was founded to work against Fenians and anarchists.[33]

In December 1888, Melville was assigned to protect the Shah of Persia in his state visit. Melville was appointed as the first chief of the British Secret Service Bureau in 1903, which later became MI5. Melville was later involved with the military counter-intelligence units looking for German spies in Britain.

He strengthened the British intelligence system by emphasizing the centrality of the intelligence cycle – query, collection, collation, analysis and dissemination – and the need for an all-source centre of intelligence. At a time of widespread and growing anti-German feeling and fear, plans were drawn up for an extensive offensive intelligence system to be used as an instrument in the event of a European war. Due to intense lobbying by William Melville after he obtained German mobilization plans and proof of their financial support to the Boers, the government authorized the creation of a new intelligence section in the War Office, MO3 (subsequently redesignated M05) headed by Melville, in 1903. Working undercover from a flat in London, Melville ran both counterintelligence and foreign intelligence operations, capitalizing on the knowledge and foreign contacts he had accumulated during his years running Special Branch.

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[33] Katya Rogatchevskaia. 2017. Revolutionaries, Spies and Royals

Melville's work in law enforcement and intelligence gathering helped to lay the foundation for the modern intelligence agencies of the United Kingdom. His intelligence-gathering skills and his ability to infiltrate anarchist groups were later used as a model for the development of MI5's counter-subversion capabilities. Melville's work in the Special Irish Branch helped to establish the use of intelligence gathering and covert operations against terrorist groups. Melville's work in the British Secret Service Bureau helped to establish the use of intelligence gathering and covert operations against foreign intelligence services. Melville retired from Special Branch in mysterious circumstances in 1903, despite having risen all the way to Superintendent.[34]

Captain Sir George Mansfield Smith-Cumming (1859 – 1923)

Another figure of key relevance in the history of British Intelligence, in particular, relevant to the actual formation and guidance of the Secret Service Bureau is Captain Sir George Mansfield Smith-Cumming.

When World War I broke out in 1914, the British intelligence agencies needed personnel in various areas, and effective intelligence gathering became crucial.

Mansfield Cumming was a British naval officer and the first Chief of the Secret Service Bureau, which later evolved into MI5 and MI6. He was born on April 1, 1859, and passed away on June 14, 1923.[35] Cumming was appointed to head the division responsible for gathering military, political, and technical intelligence from overseas. His role involved recruiting agents and coordinating intelligence activities prior to the outbreak of World War I. Cumming's career in intelligence began when he was chosen to run the Secret Service Bureau. Before that, he was working on boom defences in Bursledon on the River Hamble.[36] He added the surname "Cumming" after marrying Leslie Marian Valiant-Cumming in 1889. Cumming's eccentricities and unique personality traits have become part of his legacy. He was known for wearing a gold-rimmed monocle, having an eye for the ladies, and

[34] Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature. 2017. "William Melville"

[35] John Simkin. 1997. Mansfield Smith-Cumming, Spartacus Educational

[36] Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2023. Sir Mansfield Smith-Cumming

having a fondness for gadgets, codes, and practical jokes. In addition to his real-life contributions to British intelligence, Cumming served as the inspiration for the fictional head of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) in the original James Bond novels by Ian Fleming. The character "M" was named after Cumming's first name, Mansfield.[37]

Mansfield Cumming is considered a legendary figure in British intelligence. Despite his accomplishments, much of his life remains shrouded in secrecy. His leadership and influence continue to shape the field of intelligence to this day. Cumming played a pivotal role in the formation of MI6 as part of Britain's efforts to coordinate intelligence activities prior to the outbreak of World War I.

As the first Chief of the Secret Service Bureau, Cumming provided leadership and coordination for intelligence operations. He was responsible for recruiting agents, gathering foreign intelligence, and overseeing espionage activities outside British territory. During World War I, the offices were renamed. The Home Section of the Secret Service Bureau became MI5 or the Security Service, while Cumming's Foreign Section became MI6 or the Secret Intelligence Service. This reorganization reflected the division of responsibilities between domestic and foreign intelligence operations. Cumming worked closely with Vernon Kell, the head of MI5, and Sir Basil Thomson of the Special Branch to counter German espionage activities in England. Together, they successfully arrested and executed German spies, as well as Sir Roger Casement, who was found guilty of treason in 1916. [38]

Overall, Mansfield Cumming's contributions to the formation of MI6 laid the foundation for the organization's future role in gathering and analysing foreign intelligence. His leadership and coordination efforts were instrumental in establishing a robust intelligence service for the British government.[39]

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[37] Piers Brendon. 2009. The Spymaster who was Stranger than Fiction

[38] Christopher Andrew. 2009. The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5

[39] Michael Smith. 2011. Six: The Real James Bonds 1909 – 1939: A History of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service

Major General Sir Vernon George Waldegrave Kell (1873 – 1942)

Vernon Kell was a British military officer and intelligence officer. He was born on November 21, 1873, in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk. Kell played a crucial role in the establishment of MI5, the British Security Service, in 1909. Under his leadership, a new section was created to handle secret operations outside Britain, which eventually became known as MI6.

As the founder and first Director General of MI5, Kell was responsible for identifying and countering German spies operating in Britain. He worked closely with other intelligence agencies, such as the Special Branch of Scotland Yard, to ensure national security. Kell remained in charge of MI5 until 1940, overseeing its growth and operations during World War I and the interwar period.

During World War I, Kell headed MI5(g), a section focused on addressing the Indian seditionist movement in Europe. He was known by the codename "K" and held the position of "Commandant, War Department Constabulary" in Who's Who. Kell retired as a Major General in 1924 and was knighted for his services, but he continued to be involved with the agency until his retirement.

Vernon Kell's contributions to intelligence and counterintelligence efforts were significant in protecting British interests and national security. His role in the formation of MI5 and his leadership in the early years of the agency laid the foundation for its future success in safeguarding the country during times of increasing global tensions.[40]

During the Great War, espionage was a crucial factor in the advance of the war, and all major players, including Britain, put intelligence gathering at the forefront of their strategies. The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) was established in 1909 as the Secret Service Bureau, which was a joint initiative of the Admiralty and the War Office to control secret intelligence operations in the UK and overseas, particularly concentrating on the activities of the Imperial German government.

The Security Service (MI5) was established at the same time as MI6 and was responsible for counter-espionage activities. [41]

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[40] Keith Jeffery. 2010. MI6, The History of the Secret Intelligence Service

[41] Major-General Sir Vernon Kell, mi5.gov.uk

Vernon Kell's leadership style had a significant impact on MI5's operations. Kell was appointed CBE in 1917 and KBE in 1919 for his services to intelligence work. He was focused on identifying and countering German spies working in Britain, which was the primary reason for the establishment of MI5 in 1909. Kell realized that some form of centralized control of intelligence functions was necessary and established MI5 to achieve this. This allowed for better coordination and communication between different intelligence agencies. [42]

However, Kell's leadership style was not without its flaws. He underestimated the threat from Soviet espionage and dismissed the idea that Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists posed a serious threat to the government. This led to MI5 being caught off guard and failing to prevent further Soviet infiltration. According to former MI5 heads Stella Rimington, Stephen Lander, and Eliza Manningham-Buller, MI5's anti-subversion campaign had gotten out of hand due to a lack of clarity and oversight. This suggests that Kell's leadership style may have contributed to a lack of clarity and oversight within the agency. [43]

Despite these challenges, Kell's leadership style was successful in protecting Britain during World War I. MI5 played a crucial role in identifying and countering German spies and infiltrators, which helped to ensure that Britain was not infiltrated by enemy agents. The end of the war had a huge impact on MI5: in November 1918, it had a staff of 850 and an annual budget of £100,000.[44] Substantial changes to the service's structure and operations were made in the post-war period, reflecting the changing nature of the intelligence landscape.

Overall, Vernon Kell's leadership style had both positive and negative impacts on MI5's operations. His focus on identifying and countering German spies was effective, but his underestimation of other threats and lack of clarity and oversight may have contributed to some of MI5's challenges.

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[42] Nigel West. 1984. British Secret Intelligence Service Operations 1909 – 1945

[43] Richard Norton-Taylor. 2009. MI5, The Secret Servants

[44] Anne Wright & J.S.L. Pulfrod. 2010. Vernon George Waldegrave Kell

Gertrude Bell (1868 – 1926)

Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell was an English writer, traveller, political officer, administrator, and archaeologist. She was born in England to a wealthy and well-connected family in 1868, and her father, whom she idolized, continued to adore her after her mother's death when she was three years old. Bell became the first woman to gain a first in Modern History at Oxford University. She spent much of her life exploring and mapping the Middle East, and became highly influential to British imperial policy-making as an Arabist due to her knowledge and contacts built up through extensive travels. Bell wrote voluminously during her life, and after her death in 1926, her stepmother Florence Bell took the first attempt to curate a selection of her writing from over 2,400 pages of letters. In 1927, two volumes of Gertrude's collected correspondence, albeit leaving out her more romantic letters out of propriety as well as omitting material she thought might be embarrassing to the Iraqi government. Bell's letters make compelling reading in part due to her fabulous style. Bell was a wry diarist with a heady sense of her narrative. She was an Edwardian Great Explorer of the stamp history usually records and lauds in men. The British heiress applied her energy, intellect and funds to any problem she felt was worth solving, which over the course of her life included social issues at home, the Wounded and Missing department in the Great War, espionage and mountain climbing. Bell played an important role in the Middle East in the early 1900s, and was a masterful spy and diplomat. After World War I, she was almost single-handedly responsible for the creation of the modern state of Iraq. Bell's life provides a rich legacy, and her work has been studied for over 25 years.[45]

Gertrude Bell played a crucial role in the establishment of Iraq after World War I. Bell was recruited by the British government to work as a spy due to her extensive knowledge of the Middle East and her contacts built up through extensive travels. She was instrumental in creating the borders of the countries of the Near East and, especially, for the foundation of the modern state of Iraq. Bell was entrusted by the British government, on the basis of her unparalleled knowledge of the region, to sketch out what she describes as "a reasonable border" between Iraq and the

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[45] Jamie Tarabay. 2006. Gertrude Bell, a Masterful Spy and Diplomat

territory controlled by Ibn Saud, the founder of the future Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Bell was a confidante of Faisal and helped ease his passage into the role of the king of Iraq. Bell played the role of mediator between Faisal's government, British officials, and local notables. She took a special interest in public relations, arranging receptions, parties, and meetings, discussing the state of affairs with both the British and Arab elite of Baghdad, and transferring requests to high-ranking British officials. Bell supported the cause of the largely urban Sunni population in their attempts to modernize Iraq. Bell also founded the Iraq Museum as a place to house the country's antiquities and insisted that antiquities excavated should stay in the country of their origin, thereby ensuring that the National Museum of Iraq, which is her monument in the land she loved, would possess a splendid collection of artifacts. Bell's footsteps across Türkiye, an adventurer's prelude to nation-building, echo through time, binding her audacious spirit to the region. Bell's legacy in Iraq is still widely respected, and she is considered to have played a key role in the establishment of an Arab state in Mesopotamia. Gertrude Bell and T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, knew each other well and worked together during World War I. They both worked in the Arab Bureau in Cairo, which gathered and analyzed information to help the British oust the Ottoman Empire from the region. Bell and Lawrence's stories intertwined, and they both played important roles in shaping British policy in the Middle East.

Before and during World War I, the Middle East was important to the British for several reasons. The region's strategic location provided access to valuable resources and trade routes, and its control would help protect British economic interests, including investments in oil, trade, and infrastructure. The British feared that the Ottomans might attack and capture the Middle East's oil fields, which were vital for the British Royal Navy. The Ottoman Empire's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers in 1914 prompted the British to take a more active role in the Middle East. They saw the conflict with the Ottomans as a diversion from the primary task of defeating Germany, but they quickly moved to confront Turkey on the battlefield and plan for the post-war dispensation in the region. World War I transformed the Middle East, with the Europeans completing the takeover of the

Ottoman Empire and establishing the modern boundaries of the region. The British took over Palestine and three Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia, which later became Iraq. The French gained control of Syria and Lebanon. The war's aftermath also led to the emergence of modern Arab nationalist and Islamic movements. In the Middle East, the British developed military technologies and techniques that would later inspire the tactics of World War II. This innovation and experience in the region were valuable for the British war effort and their future military strategies.[46]

Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888 – 1935)

Thomas Edward Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, was a British archaeologist, army officer, diplomat, and writer who became famous for his role in the Arab Revolt and the Sinai and Palestine Campaign against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Lawrence was born in Tremadoc, Caernarvonshire, Wales in 1888 and worked as an archaeologist and photographer in the Middle East before the war. He was recruited by British intelligence to work with Arab forces in the Middle East during World War I and became known for his leadership of the Arab Revolt, including his capture of the port of Aqaba in Jordan. Lawrence was a complex figure, torn between his loyalty to the British Empire and his sympathy for the Arab cause. After the war, Lawrence was involved in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the modern Middle East, including the creation of Iraq. Lawrence's reputation continued to grow after his death, and he became the subject of numerous books and films, including the 1962 epic Lawrence of Arabia. He convinced the Arab leaders to coordinate their actions in support of the British strategy. He developed a close relationship with Faisal, whose Arab Northern Army was to become the main beneficiary of British aid. He organized guerrilla raids against the inland Hejaz Railway, capturing a succession of Turkish-held towns along the Red Sea coast. Lawrence's clandestine guerrilla warfare tactics hit the

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[46] Matthew F. Jacobs. 2014. World War I: A War (and Peace?) for the Middle East

Turks hard where they were most vulnerable and played a significant role in the Arab Revolt's success.[47]

Gertrude Bell and T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, knew each other well and worked together during World War I. They both worked in the Arab Bureau in Cairo, which gathered and analyzed information to help the British oust the Ottoman Empire from the region. Bell and Lawrence's stories intertwined, and they both played important roles in shaping British policy in the Middle East.

The figures that I have talked about in this chapter were all pivotal to the development of the British intelligence agencies. We can observe how the need for an organised and centralised intelligence structure was present since the 16th century, both to deal with internal threats to the stability of Britain, and for the wartime effort. An organized intelligence structure is essential for a state to protect its national security, conduct foreign relations, and provide timely, relevant information to policymakers and decision-makers. Intelligence agencies collect information about foreign persons, places, events, and activities that is needed by the government.[48] This information can be used to assess probable outcomes of proposed policy options, provide leadership profiles on foreign officials, and inform official travellers of counterintelligence and security threats. Intelligence can also help to save lives and provide the pretext to go to war. In addition to protecting national security and safeguarding internal security, intelligence can provide insights not available elsewhere that warn of potential threats and opportunities. Intelligence agencies need to update priorities and collection capabilities frequently to ensure that the country remains secure. Providing a common feature among individuals, groups, organizations, states, and others who need information is another reason why a state needs an organized intelligence structure.[49]

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[47] Nancy Nicole Nicholls. 2011. The Last Victorian Knight: A Study of T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt

[48] Dovydas Vitkauskas. 1997. The Role of a Security Intelligence Service in a Democracy

[49] Karolis Kupcikas. 2013. The Importance of Intelligence to International Security

While MI5 and MI6 shared origins and much of their history in the world wars and Cold War era ran along parallel lines, their functions were quite separate.

MI5 was responsible for internal security and domestic counterintelligence activities, while MI6 was responsible for foreign intelligence gathering and espionage activities. MI6 has always been more secretive than MI5, and information about its operations and relationships seldom appeared in the British press until the 1990s.

The first years of MI5 and MI6 cannot be considered to be a success under all perspectives as the two agencies faced different struggles during this period. In fact, the two agencies had to cope with different complications that hindered their operational capabilities, especially regarding the work of MI6. MI6 faced credibility issues and had a lacklustre performance compared to MI5's successes during this period.

This affected its reputation and posed challenges in establishing itself as an effective intelligence agency. Also, there were inter-agency conflicts between MI5 and MI6, along with other intelligence agencies, which impacted their coordination and cooperation. These conflicts sometimes hindered the smooth functioning of intelligence operations. MI6 faced difficulties in establishing a network within Germany itself, limiting its ability to gather intelligence from the country directly. As a matter of fact, most of its results came from military and commercial intelligence collected through networks in neutral countries, occupied territories, and Russia. MI6 also struggled with limited funding and recruitment challenges, especially compared to MI5. This affected its capacity to carry out operations effectively and recruit the necessary personnel. Both MI5 and MI6 faced challenges related to foreign penetration.[50]

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[50]Nigel West. 1984. MI6: British Secret Intelligence Service Operations 1909 – 1945

Role of the British Intelligence in World War I

Historical Context Leading Britain into the Great War

Before World War I, Europe was in a complex geopolitical situation that involved rival alliances, clashing interests, and secret treaties. The creation of a unified Germany in 1871 had disturbed the old 'balance of power' in Europe, and fear of Germany encouraged France and Russia to form an alliance in 1894.This prompted Germany to form a formal alliance with its neighbor, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By 1914, Europe was divided into two rival alliance systems: the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, and Russia) and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). All of the Major Powers of Europe had goals and national interests that they believed would be achieved by the means of war. These years witnessed developments in military technology at an astonishingly rapid pace, which forced them to spend huge sums on their armed forces. Mobilization schedules, martial rhetoric, and secret obligations laid most of Europe's path to war. These factors contributed to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The war lasted for four years and resulted in the deaths of millions of people. It also led to significant changes in the geopolitical landscape of Europe, including the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the emergence of new nation-states. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the war, imposed heavy reparations on Germany and redrew the map of Europe. The war also had a profound impact on the global balance of power, leading to the decline of European dominance and the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip set off a crisis in Europe. Since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, peace had, to a large extent, prevailed among the nations of Europe, preserved through international conferences and a delicate balance of power. However, interlocking alliances were threatening to plunge Europe into war, as Austria-Hungary was threatening war against Serbia. Germany was allied with Austria-Hungary, while Russia viewed itself as the protector of Serbia. Britain was torn between fear of a German victory and a

Russian one. France supported Russia but also needed Britain on its side. The German High Command had only one war plan, which was to knock France out of the war before turning against France's ally, Russia. German politicians saw the Balkan crisis in 1914 as a chance to inflict a diplomatic strike on Russia and France, but its Generals feared Russia's growing military power and were prepared to attack before it was too late. By violating Belgium's neutrality, Germany established itself as the threatening aggressor and made the British intervention a moral issue regarding the rights of small nations. The entry of the British Empire truly elevated the conflict to a global war.[51] The M-A-I-N acronym – militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism – is often used to analyze the war, and each of these reasons is cited to be the four main causes of World War One.[52] It's simplistic but provides a useful framework. Militarism, imperialism, and nationalism were all intrinsically connected. The expansion of the British and French empires, fired by the rise of industrialism and the pursuit of new markets, caused some resentment in Germany, and the pursuit of a short, discontinued imperial policy at the end of the nineteenth century. However, the suggestion that Germany wanted to create a European empire in 1914 is not sustained by the pre-war rhetoric and strategy. The crisis brought Germany and Austria closer together, and the head military leaders from these two countries began to meet. The Germans and Austrians committed themselves to each other and the Austrians started to adopt a more aggressive policy against the Slavic threat. Britain presented a 24-hour ultimatum calling for Germany to withdraw its forces from Belgium. Germany rejected, and on August 4, 1914, Germany and Britain were at war.[53]

At the brink of World War I, Britain was facing a number of internal challenges, including social, industrial, and political unrest, as well as the threat of civil war in Ireland. These issues occupied much of the nation's attention, but Britain was also concerned about Germany's domination of the continent and its challenge to British

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[51] Dennis E. Showalter & John Graham Royde-Smith. 2023. World War I, Britannica Online

[52] Alex Browne. 2021. The M-A-I-N Causes of World War One

[53] Why did World War One Happen?. 2023. World 101 Contemporary History

industrial and imperial supremacy. The British declaration of war on Germany on August 4, 1914, brought an end to the threat of civil war in Ireland and party warfare came to an end. The Conservatives agreed not to challenge by-elections and to support the government in matters concerning the war. However, the war had lost its meaning, and in the next two years, Lloyd George set out to reinvest the war with meaning, aiming to create a better Britain and a safer world. The war had a profound impact on British society, sweeping away much of the old Victorian and Edwardian order and establishing many of the features that we associate with 'modern' 20th-century Britain. The scale and duration of the conflict with the Central Powers was such that, for the first time, the whole of British society was mobilized for what historians have termed 'total war'.[54] These changes did not take place overnight in August 1914, but were a gradual and cumulative process, governed more by reactions to events than by any grand strategy. The central agent of change was the British state, whose role was largely confined to security issues such as the Defence of the Realm Act, censorship, and aliens in the early stages of the war (DORA). However, from 1915 onwards, state power was extended into new areas. By 1915, there was a pressing need to mobilize. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) was passed in the United Kingdom on August 8, 1914, four days after it entered the First World War and was added to as the war progressed. The DORA was designed to help prevent potential invasion and to keep homeland morale high. It gave the government broad-spectrum powers during the war, such as the possibility to confiscate buildings or lands needed to contribute to the war effort, or to make regulations regarding criminal offences. The DORA introduced a wide range of restrictions and regulations that affected British society, including private letter censorship, restrictions on the movement of foreign nationals, nighttime blackouts, alcohol and drug restrictions and strict rules on the production of essential goods, such as wheat.[55]

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[54] Stephen Badsey. 2017. Britain, International Encyclopedia of the First World War

[55] Giles Bayliss. 2015. First World War Law

The start of the twentieth century was an unstable period in British history, with dynamic shifts in political party powers and public calls for social reform leaving Britain on the brink of substantial change before the outbreak of World War I. The development of new war technology, the introduction of conscription to British society, and the sheer scale of a global war were foreign to many and drastically changed the way that people viewed the world. World War One pushed society into the reality of war, significantly changing the face of literature because it changed the way people looked at life. The realities of a global conflict had revealed the frivolous nature of consummate entertainment and opened questions about existence and death, purpose and guidance, justice, patriotism, love, and renouncement.[56]

Britain joined World War I for a combination of reasons. One of the primary reasons was Germany's invasion of Belgium, which was a violation of Belgian neutrality and a direct threat to British security. As one of the signatories of the Treaty of London, Britain issued Germany an ultimatum to retreat from Belgium by midnight on August 3, 1914, or Britain would declare war in defense of Belgium's neutrality. With no response given late on August 4, 1914, Britain declared war with Germany and officially entered the war on the side of the Allies. Another reason for Britain's entry into the war was the balance of power in Europe. Britain was concerned about Germany's domination of the continent and its challenge to British industrial and imperial supremacy. The prospect of a hostile power controlling the entirety of the facing seacoast and the waterways that led into Europe was intolerable. Britain depended on trade with Europe, and the country's long-term interests meant that countering Germany was pretty much unavoidable. The threat to France was also a significant factor in Britain's decision to enter the war. Britain had a strong relationship and alliance with France, and it couldn't afford to see France defeated. Germany's invasion of France was a direct threat to British security and interests. The protection of British interests was another reason for Britain's entry into the war. For much of the British public, the Empire was what made Britain great. The British were compelled to enter the war because the

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[56] Britain and the War, the War and the Changing Face of British Society, the National Archives

possibility of an enemy power controlling the totality of the facing coastline and the waterways that led into Europe was unacceptable. Britain depended on trade with Europe, and the country's long-term interests meant that countering Germany was pretty much unavoidable. Finally, the violation of international law was a significant factor in Britain's decision to enter the war. The idea that neutrality could not be observed, that powers would simply ignore it, was something that distressed the British. Breaking that fundamental principle led to a worry that it may set a troubling precedent for other countries, in part because the UK had often been neutral.[57]

Status of British Intelligence Agencies previously to the Outbreak of WWI

At the brink of World War I, the British intelligence agencies were still in their early stages of development. Organized intelligence collection and planning for the Government of the United Kingdom and the British Empire was established during the 19th century. The War Office, which was responsible for the administration and organization of the British Army, established the Intelligence Branch in 1873. However, the agencies responsible for collecting, analyzing, and exploiting foreign and domestic intelligence, providing military intelligence, and performing espionage and counter-espionage were still in their infancy. In the early years of the 20th century, the British government was increasingly worried about the threat to its Empire set by Germany's imperial ambitions. The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) was established in 1909, and its first director, Mansfield Cumming, set up his headquarters in a modest flat in London. This was the first example of what has since then been considered the classic 'import/export' espionage method, in which anything that was sent to this address was forwarded to him at Ashley Mansions. At the start of the First World War, with the assistance provided by the police, MI5 gathered all the agents of any level and importance working for German naval

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[57] Norman Simms. 2019. Why Great Britain Entered the Great War

intelligence. The British intelligence agencies were still in their early stages of development, but they played a crucial role in the war effort. Their intelligence assessments contributed to the conduct of the foreign relations of the United Kingdom, maintaining the national security of the United Kingdom, military planning, public safety, and law enforcement in the United Kingdom.[58]

Before World War I, the British intelligence agencies attempted to establish a spy network in Germany. However, their efforts met with little success. The German spy network in Britain before 1914 was not as extensive as British intelligence believed. Seven agents were spying in the years 1910-1912, few did so effectively, and all were caught.[59] Although the German naval intelligence began their operations with few secret agents, the British authorities largely shared the common belief in the existence of an extended network of German spies. The Secret Service Bureau (SSB) was established in 1909 to counter the threat of German espionage in the UK. Counter-espionage was assigned to MO5, the War Office's military intelligence department, headed by Captain Vernon Kell. Female intelligence agents were successful in gathering and relaying information on German movements thanks to their position on the home front. In addition to these efforts, false accounts of suspicious 'night-signaling' were submitted, and Le Queux's German Spies in England: An exposure, published in February 1915, fabricated a system of German espionage that ranged from German prostitutes around Piccadilly Circus to 'naturalized' businessmen of the highest social standing. Such claims inevitably encouraged anti-German sentiments.[60] The British government in the years before the First World War had devised an economic warfare strategy that included the targeted disruption of the global communications network. The economic warfare strategy as implemented in August 1914 intended at more than disrupting specific industries or critical elements of the country's infrastructure. In fact, the British aimed at unsettling the German economy, producing a debilitating

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[58] Intelligence and Security Services, the National Archives

[59] The Kaiser's Spy in Scotland – Naval Espionage before the Great War, National Records of Scotland

[60] Christopher Andrew. 2022. MI5 in World War One

effect to the national economic and productive system that would incapacitate the enemy in engaging in high intensity warfare. This strategy was designed not only to cripple the German military-industrial complex, but its society as a whole. This instance can be considered one of the first (if not the first) attempt in world history to win a war by targeting the enemy's society thought the economy.[61]

Contributions of the British Intelligence Agencies in the Great War

British Intelligence agencies made significant contributions to the war effort during World War I. In particular, the British were particularly exceptional in codebreaking: the Naval Intelligence Division led the Royal Navy's successful cryptographic efforts in Room 40. Room 40 was the cryptanalysis section of the British Admiralty during the First World War. It was officially part of NID25 and was based in the Admiralty Building in London. Room 40 was responsible for intercepting and decrypting enemy communications, including German naval messages. The unit played a crucial role in the war effort by providing valuable intelligence to the British military commands and their allies. Room 40 was established in 1914 and was led by Captain Reginald "Blinker" Hall. The unit employed a team of cryptanalysts who worked to break enemy codes and ciphers. The team included experts in languages, mathematics, and engineering. The work was tedious and required a great deal of patience and attention to detail.[62] One of the most significant achievements of Room 40 was the decryption of the Zimmermann Telegram, a secret diplomatic communication issued from the German Foreign Office in January 1917 that suggested a military alliance between Germany and Mexico in the case in which the United States entered World War I against Germany. The Zimmermann Telegram proposed that if Mexico joined Germany in the war against the United States, Germany would help Mexico recover Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. The telegram was part of an effort carried out by

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[61] Nicholas Lambert. 2017. Brits-Krieg: The Strategy of Economic Warfare

[62] Patrick Beesley. 1982. Room 40: British Naval Intelligence, 1914-18

the Germans to postpone the transportation of supplies and other war materials from the United States to the Allies, which were at war against Germany. The main purpose of the telegram was to make the Mexican government declare war on the United States in hopes of tying down American forces and slowing the export of American arms The telegram was intercepted by British intelligence, and its contents were revealed to the United States. The telegram contributed in drawing the United States into the war and thus in changing the course of its history.[63]

During World War I, MI5 played a crucial role in counter-espionage, identifying and capturing German spies operating in Britain. MI5 proved to be persistently fortunate throughout the rest of the 1910s and 1920s in carrying out its core counter-espionage role. Throughout the First World War, Germany continually attempted to infiltrate Britain, but MI5 was able to identify most, if not all, of the agents dispatched. MI5 used a method that depended on strict control of entry and exit to the country and, crucially, large-scale inspection of mail. In addition to its counter-espionage role, MI5 acquired many additional responsibilities during the war. Most significantly, its strict counter-espionage role blurred considerably. It acquired a much more political role, involving the surveillance not merely of foreign agents, but also of pacifist and anti-conscription organizations. Also, MI5 was involved in shaping public opinion and played an important role in the propaganda efforts throughout the conflict. The War Propaganda Bureau was established in 1914 to coordinate the propaganda production and distribution, and the intelligence gathered by the agencies was used to shape the perceptions of both British citizens and foreign nationals.[64] During the second half of World War I, MI5's focus shifted to counter-subversion. Faced with the declining threat from German espionage, MI5 paid increasing attention to counter-subversion. MI5 actively monitored enemy spies, investigated sabotage attempts, and focused on preventing subversive

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[63] Jay Bellamy. 2016. The Zimmermann Telegram and Other Events Leading to America's Entry into World War One

[64] First World War Espionage, The National Archives Website

activities. The shift in focus was due to the declining threat from German espionage, which allowed MI5 to focus on other areas of national security.[65]

MI6 made important contributions to the British war effort during the First World War. As we mentioned in the first chapter, MI6, formally known as the Secret Intelligence Service was constituted in 1912 by Commander Sir Mansfield Smith Cumming in 1912 as Britain's attempt to coordinate intelligence activities prior to the outbreak of WWI. MI6 conducted espionage operations, and was responsible for the collection, analysis and appropriate dissemination of foreign intelligence. MI6 directed operations of espionage in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. However, it is notable that the British did not manage to set up a proper spy network in Germany itself, mostly relying in military and commercial intelligence collected through networks in neutral countries and occupied territories.[66] Some key operatives and agents of MI6 in WWI were: William Somerset Maugham: British playwright, novelist, and short-story writer who was sent to Switzerland to establish contact with German agents and gather intelligence on their activities. Maugham was one of several famous authors who worked for MI6, including Graham Greene, Arthur Ransome, Compton Mackenzie, and Malcolm Muggeridge. Also, Sydney Reilly is a noteworthy agent which was active during the Great War. In particular, Reilly was a Russian-born British agent who worked for MI6 during World War I. He was known as the "Ace of Spies" and was involved in several espionage operations in Russia and Europe. Reilly spent the war in the United States, brokering major arms deals for tsarist Russia, and then decided to become a professional spy. He purchased munitions and helped in countering German sabotage of American factories supplying the Allies. However, when the United States entered the war in April 1917, Reilly's business became less profitable since his company was now prohibited from selling ammunition to the Germans. Other than these names, we can mention another notable author which worked as a spy for MI6: Paul Dukes. Dukes was sent to Russia to gather intelligence on the

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[65] Christopher Andrew. MI5 in World War One, MI5 Website

[66] MI6, Encyclopaedia Britannica (2023)

Bolsheviks and their activities. He was able to establish a network of agents and informants and was successful in gathering valuable intelligence for MI6. Dukes was able to infiltrate the Bolsheviks and gain their trust, managing to collect information on their activities and plans, which he passed on to the British. Eventually, he was uncovered by the Bolsheviks and imprisoned for several months, and was later released in a prisoner exchange and returned to Britain.[67] The intelligence gathered by the British agencies was used to support all aspects of the British military and diplomatic war effort. From 1916 onwards, it was used to help plan and execute major offensives, such as the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Passchendaele. The plan for the Somme was drawn up by Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Henry Rawlinson. Despite their experience of fighting on the Western Front, Haig and Robertson showed little wisdom in their planning and execution of the Somme attack. The intelligence gathered by the British agencies was not the sole factor in the outcome of the Battle of the Somme, but it played a crucial role in shaping strategic and tactical decisions. The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest and most ferocious battles of the First World War. The opening day of the attack, 1 July 1916, saw the British Army suffer 57,000 casualties, the bloodiest day in its history. The plan for the Somme was to break through the German lines and advance towards the city of Bapaume. However, the British underestimated the strength of the German defenses and suffered heavy losses. Despite the heavy losses, the British continued to attack and eventually made some gains. The battle lasted nearly five months and resulted in over one million casualties. The intelligence gathered by the British agencies was an irreplaceable asset when the British Army adopted it alongside strategic and tactical movements.[68] Furthermore, The British intelligence agencies played an important role in the planning and execution of the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, in World War I, fought between July 31 and November 6, 1917. This battle is an example of poor strategic planning, where the battlefield's prohibitive conditions played a major role. The British intelligence agencies gathered information on the

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[67] Charles Cumming. 2019. The Long Strange History of Novelists who Became Spies

[68] Joseph T. Coleman. 2016. Historiographical Essay on the Battle of the Somme

enemy's military capabilities and intentions, which was used to support all aspects of the British military and diplomatic war effort, including the planning and execution of major offensives. Despite the intelligence gathered by the British agencies, the battle was a failure and resulted in heavy casualties. The armies under British command sustained some 275,000 casualties at Passchendaele, an event that makes a historical mockery of Haig's pledge that he would not commit the country to "heavy losses." Among these were 38,000 Australians, 5,300 New Zealanders, and over 15,600 Canadians. The battle was fought in appalling conditions, with the deadly swamps of mud that covered the battleground being a significant challenge for the troops. The battle was another attempt to win a decisive breakthrough on the Western Front, and the British high command's plans in 1917 were to seize control of the area once and for all. The battle was fought between 50 divisions of the Allies against up to 83 divisions of the German Empire. The Battle of Passchendaele is remembered as one of the symbols of the horrors of the First World War, the absolute futility of much of the fighting, and the reckless carelessness by some of the war's senior commanders for the lives of the men under their command. The battle contributed to the development of British tactical skill and weaponry, which gave them a decisive edge over the German Empire.[69]

The Legacy of the British Intelligence Agencies of World War One

The end of World War One brought significant changes to the British intelligence community. The experiences of MI5 and MI6 during the Great War had an important impact on the development of intelligence agencies in the following decades, both domestic and foreign. In particular, the increasing cooperation in the post war period between the United Kingdom and the United States became the cornerstone of Western intelligence gathering. The increasing successes of the British intelligence agencies and their contribution to the war effort led to the expansion of the intelligence's capabilities and consequentially of their importance to the government, as a result, the agencies were increasingly institutionalized and became more cooperative, as the state recognized the importance of centralized and

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[69] Nick Lloyd. 2017. Passchendaele: A New History

organized intelligence agencies in both peace and war times. None of the parties involved in the war in any case considered themselves able to manage a war without intelligence, and were all concerned with the results that the opponent could record in this area, the emphasis on intelligence continued after the war.

The successful work of the British intelligence agencies during World War One influenced the development of other foreign security agencies in several ways. In a time in which the world governments realized the importance of a working intelligence structure to maintain order and security, and to protect the state from foreign penetration, the British were the forerunners of such a strategy. The honing and refinement of modern espionage techniques during World War One contributed to the development of sophisticated structures for the training and handling of spies and for the processing of intelligence information obtained through espionage. British intelligence played a major role in bringing the United States into the First World War, which greatly affected the American public and the American public opinion. This led to the establishment of the FBI as we know it today. The intelligence lessons on World War One, along with advantages in technology, resulted in a proliferation of new intelligence agencies in the 1920s and '30s in democratic states as much as in totalitarian states such as Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union. The development of intelligence bureaus throughout the European continent resulted in a corresponding growth in counterintelligence, influencing modern intelligence practices.[70]

The Interwar Period (1919-1938)

Intelligence was successfully utilized throughout the Great War and had a definitive impact on its outcome. It proved to be an irreplaceable asset when the British Army adopted it alongside strategic and tactical movements.[71] Intelligence was seen as an essential asset to British success in the Great War and continued to be a vital tool

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[70] Intelligence in the Modern Era. 2023. Encyclopaedia Britannica

[71] Olivia Jessup. 2021. British Intelligence in the Great War

in the interwar period. During this period, the Treaty of Versailles had a significant impact on the formation and operation of British intelligence agencies. The Treaty forbade Germany to engage in espionage, which meant that German intelligence activities were limited, making it easier for British intelligence agencies to operate without interference from German spies. The pre-war years were charged with fear over German Imperial enlargement and stories of German spies on British soil. The Treaty of Versailles did not eliminate this fear, but it did provide a framework for British intelligence agencies to operate within. The Treaty of Versailles led to the formation of Secret Service Bureau, which later became MI6. This was a result of the need for a more institutionalized intelligence service to deal with the emerging threats to the British Empire. The most important part of British Intelligence remit in the interwar years was counter-subversion. This was likely a response to the perceived threat of German spies and subversive activities in the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles.[72] The harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles brought it into disrepute and fostered an increasingly negative view of it. This may have impacted the way British intelligence agencies viewed the Treaty and their role in relation to it. The search for stability and order was closely connected to the strive towards societal integration, because political and social conflicts posed the major threat.[73]

After the First World War, the British intelligence agencies operated independently of the military and assumed increasingly important roles. The war had a major effect on the growth of the intelligence agencies as it proved to be an essential formation for modern warfare. This led to a push for increased institutionalization of intelligence services in thr United Kingdom, with the formation of the Secret Service Bureau. The four main agencies formed were the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), the Security Service (MI5), the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and Defence Intelligence (DI). MI5 was responsible for counter-subversion, while MI6 was responsible for the collection, analysis, and appropriate dissemination of foreign intelligence, as well as the conduct of

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[72] Catherine Ann Cline. 2014. British Historians and the Treaty of Versailles

[73] Christopher Andrew. 2018. Secret World: A History of Intelligence

espionage activities outside British territory. The Air Ministry gathered intelligence on hostile aircraft, airfields, and bombing targets as well as reports on the efficacy of allied bombing missions (using aerial reconnaissance) and enemy and allied air activity in general.[74] British and French intelligence services focused on the emerging Soviet Union, which despite its efforts, was not able to establish a strong network in the UK. The intelligence agencies also worked to penetrate the London embassy of Nazi Germany, with MI5's most important source being the anti-Nazi German diplomat Wolfgang zu Putlitz, who constantly warned the British that their appeasing policy and concessions towards Hitler would make the war more likely rather than less.[75]

In regards to its policy towards countries other than Germany, the British government had an ambivalent (and sometimes ambiguous) attitude, and this was reflected by the intelligence agencies as well, especially towards the Soviet Union, at least until the breach of 1927. The breach with Russia in 1927 was a significant event during the interwar period. It was a result of a combination of factors, including the Soviet Union's refusal to pay its debts to the UK, the Soviet Union's support for communist movements in the United Kingdom, and the discovery of Soviet espionage activities in the UK. The British intelligence services were intimately involved in the breaking of Anglo-Soviet diplomatic relations in May 1927. They provided much of the intelligence that led to the decision to break off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. On May 12 1927, the British police raided the headquarters of the Soviet Trade Delegation, confiscating a large number of files which had been allegedly stolen from the War Office of the United Kingdom. The breach was an infringement of the 1921 trade agreement between the UK and the Soviet Union, which granted diplomatic immunity to the authorized Russian trade agents. The raid was the peak of a period of tense diplomatic relations between the two countries. The breach with Russia did nothing to limit Soviet activities and was followed by a period of increased Soviet espionage in the UK. It

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[75] Paul Lashmar. 2020. Spies, Spin and the Fouth Estate: British Intelligence and the Media

led to an increased focus on counterintelligence and the development of new techniques and technologies for gathering and analyzing intelligence.[76] The Labour Party, which had just won the 1924 elections, was accused of being funded by the Soviet Union and of being a subversive organization. In August 1924 the members of parliament passed a motion of no confidence towards the standing government and new elections were issued, which were won by the conservative Stanley Baldwin. A few days before the elections, a letter known as the Zinoviev Letter was published. The Zinoviev Letter was a fake document published by the British Daily Mail newspaper four days before the general election of October 1924. The letter claimed to be written by Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow, to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), instructing it to engage in seditious activities. The letter was sensationalized and led to the downfall of the first Labour Government in 1924. Contemporary scholarship on the Zinoviev letter dates from a 1967 monograph published by three British journalists working for The Sunday Times. The authors, Lewis Chester, Steven Fay, and Hugo Young, asserted that two members of a Russian monarchist organization called the "Brotherhood of St. George" composed the document in Berlin. Despite extensive research, it is impossible to say who wrote the Zinoviev Letter. However, it is now believed to have been produced by two Russian monarchists in Berlin or the Baltic states, most likely in Riga. The authenticity of the Zinoviev letter was examined by the National Archives, but they found it impossible to determine its authenticity on the evidence available in the Departments concerned. The Zinoviev letter is widely accepted as a forgery. According to some scholars, the letter could have been created by the MI5 in order to make the Labour government fall and to reelect a conservative government that would continue to pursue a constraining policy against the Soviet Union. The Zinoviev Letter is a significant event in British political history, and it has been the subject of much research and discussion. It is an example of how fake news can be used to influence public opinion and political

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[76] Christopher Andrew. 1982. British Intelligence and the Breach with Russia in 1927

outcomes. The letter's publication led to a "Red Scare" in Britain, with fears of a communist revolution and Soviet interference in British politics.[77]

During the 1930s, the British intelligence agencies were focused on countering the threat of communism and fascism. They were operating independently of the military and had assumed increasingly important roles since their establishment in 1909. MI6 was considered the most effective intelligence service in the world during the 1930s and '40s and conducted espionage operations in Europe and Latin America. The British intelligence agencies were gathering intelligence on foreign governments and political movements, including the Soviet Union and British double agents who had served the Soviet Union since the 1930s. The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6) was established in the early 1900s and was increasingly concerned about the threat to the British Empire posed by Germany's imperial ambitions. In 1931, full control for counter-subversion was devolved to MI5, which was officially known from this time on as the Security Service. The British intelligence agencies were under threat of being disbanded for a time, but by the start of the 1930s, they had gained new importance in countering communist and fascist threats. The British intelligence agencies were also involved in shaping public opinion and propaganda efforts during the 1930s. The War Propaganda Bureau, which had been established during World War I, was reactivated in 1935 to coordinate propaganda efforts against Nazi Germany. The intelligence gathered by the British agencies was used to inform British military strategy and to help shape the outcome of key events, such as the Munich Crisis of 1938.[78]

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[77] Sibyl Crowe. 1975. The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal

[78] The Inter-war Years, MI5 Website

Conclusion

It appears clear that there is a profound need for a state willing to pursuit its primary needs of security and stability to have an organised structure for the collection, analysis and distribution of intelligence data. When considering the British, this need emerges over the centuries under different forms, and solicitated by different threats. We have seen how spymasters in the '500 and '600 were more of a trusted advisory and postmaster working personally for the king, in a period in which the king was the state, and attack on Britain often meant attacks on the crown. With the evolving of the British society in the Victorian era and the expansion of Great Britain into a global empire the need for trusted intelligence channels became more and more vital. The wars fought by Britain in the 19th century can be considered a training ground for the first forms of official and organised intelligence collection. In particular, the Secondo Anglo-Afghan War, the Boer Wars and the Crimean War played a cardinal war in shaping the British Intelligence Agencies and prepared them for the Great War, albeit still having a marginal role in the wars themselves. The First World War has been the first major showcase for Britain's Intelligence Agencies, which offered major contributions under the strategic and tactical point of view, and pioneered the techniques of counter-espionage and anti-subversion. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that, without the effort of the British Intelligence Agencies, the war wouldn't have followed the same course. The British success shed light on the importance and potential of intelligence, and paved the way for other countries' efforts: remarkably, the CIA. In this time period, many prominent figures have emerged, proving that the work of intelligence is not only a coordinated effort between the policymakers, the state and the army, but a history of individuals who have singlehandedly shaped history and warfare.

I must say that my research, however, is incomplete under certain aspects. Although the historical material is plentiful regarding WWI and the conflicts in Chapter 1, there is unfortunately a lack of in-depth academic sources on the first stages of MI5 and MI6. Being that the British government never spoke openly about their secret services until the 1990s, I was short on publications on the actual foundation and first operations of MI5 and MI6. This was the major challenge that I faced during

my research. However, I am sure that in the following year the amount of available literature on the subject will increase, considering the revival in interest in the matters of intelligence that we are experiencing.

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