The British-American Intelligence Alliance: Very Special Indeed!

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It seems to be a "law" – in the sense of Murphy's law or Parkinson's law or the Peter principle – that intelligence organisations do not like to cooperate. Why? Because they are intensely concerned that by passing on intelligence information to other organisations, or indeed to any "outsiders", they risk compromising their most precious "sources and methods".

That intelligence officials should be so concerned with protecting their sources and methods is only logical. Much of what is called "intelligence gathering" is not just about stealing or otherwise detecting the secrets of other states but about protecting one's own secrets by discovering the opponent's sources and methods. If the policy-maker or military leader is primarily concerned with the accuracy and reliability of a piece of intelligence information – for he or she will ultimately make decisions based on it and may put vital national interests, even human lives, at risk – the intelligence professional will have further questions. Is more information to be gained from the same source? By the same method? Does the opponent know what we know? Will he be able to find out how we found out? In other words, to intelligence professionals the contents of a piece of information is intricably connected to the way in which it was obtained. And it is for this reason alone that their professionalism tells them not to share such hard-won information unless forced by their political masters.

Once we appreciate how the sharing of intelligence material across national borders complicates everything intelligence professional do, the very special character of the British-American intelligence alliance comes into focus. During the six decades it has existed, more than enough reasons might have been found to terminate this relationship. But it wasn't. It persists to this day and shows no sign of weakening. No doubt, the Iraq war since 2003 is a further demonstration of the vitality of the "special relationship" in this field. Even more, on the British side it is a sign of how far a British government is willing to follow the lead from Washington on a path which increasingly alienates London from its European partners –

and as many would claim from its national interests outside the European Union. While we do not have sufficient openly available source material to judge conclusively Whitehall's intensions and decision-making on this issue it seems safe to assume that the preservation of the intelligence alliance with Washington was (and remains) a key factor.

How and why did the intelligence alliance gain such importance? Some historians and political scientists have claimed that its importance may have been exaggerated – like so much else concerning the "special relationship". They point out that the two countries' cooperation in intelligence was never easy and never really as close as it might have been. In the absence of sufficient documentation it is hard to argue with this point. But the fact remains that in the history of modern times there has been no intelligence alliance as firmly institutionalized and as thoroughly practised among two or more powers as this one. By comparison intelligence-sharing within NATO – the most durable military alliance system in history – was a mere trickle in terms of quantity as well as quality and at any rate never exceeded narrow questions of Soviet and Warsaw Pact weapons, military organization and plans.

After World War II, when the United States built up a complex web of alliances, coalitions, and relationships in support of their newly-defined global policy, they sought to take the leadership in virtually all fields of intelligence. In support of their global policy they developed intelligence relations with many larger and smaller power with whom they exchanged information and occasionally ran joint projects. But with Britain alone those exchanges and joint projects were institutionalized. Entire categories of material were shared, long-term projects were run on an equal footing.

This is not to say that British intelligence officials could simply walk into any US intelligence outfit and open every door or every filing cabinet. The principles of sovereignty were always maintained. Neither side was willing to surrender any part of it openly(!). Intelligence relations were governed by a large number of contracts and formal understandings. But until we have documentations to prove otherwise the conclusions stands that this alliance had a different quality altogether.[1]

Unfortunately, intelligence studies are still woefully underdeveloped. They are bound to hold all kinds of surprises. "We don't know what we don't know", as Christopher Andrew, the field's doyen on the British side,

1 It seems worth pointing out that the other super power, the Soviet Union, never dealt with any of its allies on a similar basis of complete trust. While intelligence relations, or indeed intelligence diplomacy, served to exert influence on smaller allies in both "empires", the Soviets always found it hard even to pretend otherwise.

likes to put it. Therefore we may yet discover intelligence relations which may at times have been closer than those between London and Washington. By the same token we may discover further conflicts and disconnects between the two. But the chances are not very great because we know more about British and US intelligence than about almost any other, excepting perhaps the history of the now extinct East German intelligence ("Stasi history") and – surprisingly – of Israel. Among the two Anglo-Saxon powers, the United States have released much more information than Britain and both sides protect information on "relations with friendly services" with particular jealousy. In other words both are more likely to release purely national information than information about intelligence relationships with others. Nevertheless, intelligence studies have come a long way in documenting and analyzing how British and United States services have cooperated during the cold war and beyond.[2]

What we know and how we know it

Strictly speaking, this has been and still is an alliance not just between Britain and the United States. Its most important part, the collaboration on technical intelligence (TECHINT), particularly signals intelligence (SIGINT), includes Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The reason lies in the technologies used for this work which includes intelligence information gained from electronic sources such as radio waves and radar as well as other information gained by electronic means. The most common application is the monitoring of telephone and other electronic communications. This is done with equipment on the ground, from "airborne platforms", i.e., specially equipped aircraft, and by satellite. All these platforms need to be in constant touch with each other if messages are to be relayed to headquarters without loss of time. There the pieces of the puzzle are assembled and made intelligible. This final step can be immensely cumbersome and costly since most electronic communication is nowadays encrypted. Therefore SIGINT is not only about recording the signals but also about "translating" them into intelligible language. In Britain the pri-

2 Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (New York 2002). This equally massive and impressive study contains an extensive bibliography on British-US intelligence relations which needs no duplication here. For further special studies and a survey of the scholarly literature, see David Stafford, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (eds.), *American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations 1939-2000* (London 2000). A very capable brief exposition is found in Michael Warner, "Intelligence Transformation and Intelligence Liaison", *SAIS Review* 24,1 (2004), 77-89.

mary service concerned is the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) based at Cheltenham. In the US most of this work is done by the National Security Agency (NSA) headquartered near Washington DC.

This five nations' SIGINT alliance allows for coverage of much of the globe. It benefits not only from the widespread territories of the five member countries but also from their widespread networks of military bases and quasi-colonial outposts, many of which have technical facilities related to SIGINT work. In the end something is achieved which even an empire as wide-spread as the American one cannot do on its own. To draw this conclusion is not a trivial matter because the United States have not been in the habit of making themselves dependent on others for the pursuit of their foreign policy.

In a broader framework one can even speak of the geopolitics of SIGINT. If one knew exactly how those particular spying technologies work, what their precise technical requirements are, one could compose a strategy for detecting SIGINT installations. If for example one understands that telephone "landlines" frequently are no lines at all but consist of microwave transmitters which "beam" telephone conversations (as well as fax and computer transmissions) across long distances – always along straight optical lines – or relay them via satellite we can look for devices which seek to "highjack" such transmissions. Such technical configurations explain for examples why one of the most important cold war listening posts ("Teufelsberg"), jointly run by GCHQ and NSA, was located on a hill in West Berlin from where a good deal of the political, military, and private communications of communist East Berlin and its surroundings could be monitored.[3] In other words, the technical configuration of listening or monitoring equipment will often give away the secret purpose of an installation. The same is true of their geographical location. Therefore such listening and relay stations are not only expensive to maintain. To a certain degree they limit the political options of their owners and encourage their hosts to demand their "fair share" of the intelligence harvest.

Two very general conclusions can be drawn from this: Firstly, it is obvious that SIGINT organizations will go to great lengths to protect the technical specifics of their equipment. And secondly, geography often dictates SIGINT cooperation. Proximity to a sought-after intelligence object entails political leverage. It seems logical therefore that Australia and New Zealand became of special interest to British and US intelligence when

3 Donald Steury (ed.), *On the Frontlines of the Cold War: Documents on the Intelligence War in Berlin, 1946 to 1961* (Washington, DC 1999).

China became a nuclear power, and much later joined the global competition for power and markets. Or, to take another example: since even the vast surface controlled by the five-power SIGINT alliance was not sufficient to monitor certain aspects of the Soviet fleet, the US entered into a very specific SIGINT arrangement with others. One particularly well-documented example was Norway from whose northern most outposts the movements and communications of the adjacent Soviet nuclear submarine base at Kola peninsula could be monitored.[4] Unfortunately we have little solid documentation on other SIGINT partners such as West Germany from whose territory the Warsaw Pact's movements, communications, equipment, and installations just across the border with East Germany and communist Czechoslovakia could be monitored.[5]

In contrast with such examples of specific intelligence relations, typically based on geography and the characteristics of monitoring or spying equipment, the special intelligence relationship between Britain and the United States covers a very much wider range of activities. Indeed there may be few longer-term intelligence operations – both during the cold war and after – which either of those two ran without somehow involving the other. Judging from both the earlier cold war years and from the Iraq wars since 1990 as well as from the intelligence war currently fought against Islamist terrorism such an assumption of wide-ranging cooperation seems not too far-fetched.

Both British and US intelligence professional have pointed out, albeit in hindsight when reflecting on their relations, that their cooperation began in World War II as something like a teaching process. At that time Britain, the longtime seapower which controlled a global empire and had fought World War I on a full national scale, was already a master in virtually all aspects of intelligence work while the Americans were in many ways newcomers. (It has, however, been pointed out that Americans, among them George Washington, had been interested in intelligence since the founding of the republic.[6]) The newly-created Office of Strategic Services (OSS) worked closely with the equally new Special Operations Executive (SOE) on the British side and of their main foreign intelligence

4 Olav Riste, *The Norwegian Intelligence Service 1945-1970* (London 1999).

5 Klaus Beyrer (ed.), *Streng Geheim – Die Welt der verschlüsselten Kommunikation* (Frankfurt a. M. 1999) has some useful references to SIGINT for the German side. Cf. Peter F. Müller, Michael Mueller, *Gegen Freund und Feind: Der BND* (Hamburg 2002); Udo Ulfkotte, *Verschluss-Sache BND* (München 1997).

6 For the best survey, see Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York 1996).

arm, usually referred to as MI-6. Training for OSS special forces took place in Canada under British supervision. The British had an important intelligence liaison post in New York headed by the legendary Canadian businessman William Stephenson.

Given the close British-American collaboration in the field of nuclear weapons, known by its code name as the Manhattan Project, in which Canada also had a share, it was only natural that intelligence work in this area should be shared, both with respect to finding out how far German scientists might have mastered those technologies and concerning the same question with respect to Soviet Union. Two fundamental political decisions were at the bottom of this work. One was to build the atomic bomb in what was assumed to be a race against Germany (and if possible to use it against Germany), the other was not to inform or engage the Soviet Union in this trilateral program. Consequently, counter-intelligence efforts had to be directed not just against potential German nuclear spies but also against those from the Soviet side. In hindsight we know that the former was a non-issue while the latter failed miserably, due to an astounding number of traitors both on the British and the American side.[7]

The key to British-US wartime cooperation was the creation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) which sat at the top of a wide range of military functions, one of them a common intelligence structure. Much of its history has by now been written, a good part of it in the framework of huge official history projects. However, all works published before the mid-1970s omit any direct references to the most successful aspect of Anglo-American SIGINT cooperation: their efforts to decrypt German and Japanese military and diplomatic radio communications – commonly referred to as ULTRA and MAGIC. Since then a flood of publications has appeared, based on archival documentation, which shows the degree to which Anglo-American wartime successes flowed from what on the British side is usually identified with the centre for decryption at Bletchley Park.[8]

While the British have now released the majority of their intelligence files on World War II, we depend mostly on the American side for declas-

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7 For a good summary with a wealth of further references, see Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of Its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York 1991); Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London 1999).

8 The best starting point for further reading is now Michael Smith, Ralph Erskine (eds.), *Action This Day: Bletchley Park from the Breaking of the Enigma Code to the Birth of the Modern Computer* (London 2001).

sified and released documents concerning the postwar intelligence alliance. During the 1970s and 1980s the CIA handed virtually all of the OSS files to the National Archives where they were gradually released to researchers. Concerning the CIA's own files for the later years an "openness policy" was launched in 1992 which was to make files and in-house historical studies available on a voluntary basis. (The emphasis is on voluntary because for its first three decades the Freedom of Information Act – FOIA – of 1964 did not apply to intelligence organisations.) After thorough checking was done by the CIA history staff entire classes of records ("bulk release") began to be released. This made it possible for scholars to carry out more systematic research both on the organisation of intelligence during certain periods and on a number of key events such as the CORONA-Satellite system, the Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam war, and many of the National Intelligence Estimates concerning Soviet military policy and Soviet economic development. Eventually, intelligence material found its way into the "Foreign Relations of the United States" series, which became relevant for certain documentary volumes for the 1950s and 1960s.

Some years before the start of the "openness policy" the CIA (and some of the other US intelligence organisations) significantly changed their press policy. As a result the reporting in certain newspapers, particularly the New York Times and the Washington Post, became much more timely and accurate. The press used this information to expand its own role as a control "agency" vis-a-vis the US public. Indeed, intelligence oversight, which is really the job of the US Congress and of certain internal mechanisms (such as the office of the Inspector General inside the intelligence community), is often driven by press reporting. Since the 1970s the Congress has occupied itself much more thoroughly with this subject and has produced a wealth of material which allows researchers to look deeply into this clandestine world.[9] Memoirs and commissioned biographies of intelligence chiefs have also added to our documentary base though it must be clearly understood that each and every one of those books had to receive its imprimatur from government censors.

In 1995 the Clinton administration took the decisive step of subjecting intelligence organizations to the mandatory declassification procedures under the Freedom of Information Act. To be sure, FOIA procedures are

9 For the politics of "openness" and its impact on research, see Wolfgang Krieger, "Die Bedeutung der Nachrichtendienste für die internationalen Beziehungen im Kalten Krieg: Probleme und Möglichkeiten der Forschung in den USA," in: Reinhard R. Doerries (ed.), *Diplomaten und Agenten: Nachrichtendienste in der Geschichte der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen* American Studies/Monographs vol. 88 (Heidelberg 2001).

still difficult to apply to intelligence materials. But it can now be done and there is even a panel of scholars and officials to which appeals can be directed. However, two broad types of exemptions remain in place which concern "sources and methods" as well as "relations with friendly services" – the latter obviously protects Anglo-American intelligence cooperation in particular. It can therefore be assumed that any release of documents on alliance activity happens by consensus only.

The reasons for hiding the extent and the details of British-American intelligence cooperation are more complex and perhaps less well understood than those bland references to "sources and methods" suggest. At the level of technologies used in intelligence work, particularly in encryption and decryption, it seems that equipment was used for many years after the end of the war which was sufficiently similar to the German ENIGMA machines to allow both powers to continue their decryption work, albeit directed against other powers. The Americans even promoted the sale of secret communications equipment to certain nations, apparently with the intention of subsequently monitoring their secret communication. Another line of argument appears to have been that US and British military power might lose some of its deterrent effect, if it were known that some of its most glamorous World War II military victories were won not so much by sheer bravery and firepower but due to superior intelligence work.[10]

While this is not the place to analyse in any detail the reasons for keeping important aspects of World War II intelligence locked away from the public for so long, it is worth noting that the politics of intelligence history is an important aspect of our subject. Files are not simply locked away to protect high officials from unflattering disclosures about their earlier careers or because there are true national secrets to protect. They are also subjects of diplomacy and indeed of deterrence policy.

Another broad conclusion to be drawn is that many activities which first became known on the side of the United States eventually turn out to have been joint British-US activities. VENONA, the code-breaking effort directed against Soviet intelligence during the war, is a case in point. (Its British code word is BRIDE.) Its existence was not publicly admitted until 1996 but in fact some of its finding had been used both in British and American spy trials as early as the 1950s – for example against the Rosenbergs and Klaus Fuchs.

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10 On this issue see David Reynolds' forthcoming book on the politics of writing the Churchill memoirs.

On the British side there was much hesitation with respect to the release of intelligence records. As a substitute of some sort the government commissioned various official histories of which M.D.R. Foot's book on *SOE in France* (1966) was an early example. Starting in 1979 a multi-volume study by Harry Hinsley (Cambridge) and his associates on wartime British intelligence was published, followed by the release of the Bletchley Park materials.[11] Then came the 1993 Walgrave initiative on "open government" which led to a certain amount of record releases for the cold war years.

Quite obviously, the significant differences between British and American political cultures are at the bottom of their very different ways of dealing with intelligence history in public. It must be remembered that until the early 1990s Britain refused to admit officially that MI-6 or the Secret Intelligence Service as it is properly called even existed. The heads of MI-5, the domestic intelligence organisation, were only made public by name after they retired. Today both services have websites and public recruiting campaigns. MI-5 has commissioned an official history (to be undertaken by Christopher Andrew of Cambridge). The chief of MI-6 even testified in a public enquiry during the dispute over the accuracy of intelligence before and during the 2003 Iraq war. Typically, however, he did so without referring to joint British-American intelligence activities with Washington.

Due to these various declassification programs and to the much greater visibility of various clandestine services intelligence is no longer "the missing dimension" in the history of foreign relations – to quote the title of a now famous volume of essays published in 1982 – even though much remains to be done to give it its proper place in academic studies.[12] But can we confidently assume that we fully understand the role played by intelligence?

In his book *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence*, published in 2001, Richard Aldrich has ably demonstrated what can now be found out for the early cold war period, that is to say until the early 1960s. Quite properly he begins his study by pointing out how the release of carefully selected records – selected by government officials no doubt under direct White House and 10 Downing Street supervision! – is

11 M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France 1940-1944* (London 1966); idem, *SOE: An Outline History of the Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946* (London 1984); F. H. Hinsley et al., *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, 4 vols. (London 1979-90).

12 Christopher Andrew, David Dilks (eds.), *The Missing Dimension: Government and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London 1982).

in itself part of an effort to guide our interest in certain directions and not in others. US-UK intelligence work directed against the Soviet Union is now made accessible to a large extent while other world regions such as the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and China are carefully shielded.

The political intentions behind this policy is not difficult to imagine. Scholars, the press, and the public are invited to look at the heroic deeds of the intelligence services in the "struggle of good against evil", i.e., of Anglo-Saxon democracies against past totalitarian dictatorships. The essential necessity for maintaining huge intelligence machineries is to be demonstrated in this way. (Jobs and tax-payers' money will thus be secured.) At the same time public attention is directed away from the often nasty aspects of intelligence work, particularly from the collaboration with undemocratic or even outright tyrannical third world regimes which are often maintained in direct contradiction to one's own declared foreign and human rights policy. It takes a case of obviously illegal activity (like the Iran-Contra scandal) or of massive failure (like the deeply flawed relationship with the Mugahedin and their Al Qaida offspring in Afghanistan) to throw a bit of light on those areas of activity. Law courts and Congressional inquiries can then shake loose files and information which scholars and journalists ordinarily cannot get hold of. Even then, however, such revelations are usually made without referring to the British intelligence allies.[13]

Some examples of British-American intelligence cooperation

For the first time, it is now possible to show in detail how the alliance used occupied Germany as a platform for acquiring intelligence about the Soviet Union. At the same time both powers sought to exploit German technical advances, particularly in the field of aeronautics for their own benefit. The British government used such intelligence to catch up in commercial terms as well. Thus the task was not just to find out what the Germans had but also to deny scientific experts, special skills, blueprints and components (or finished specimen) to the Soviets. Aldrich's research shows nicely how the intelligence alliance with the US could come into conflict with national commercial or political interests on either side. The joint program for monitoring Soviet nuclear weapons developments is an obvi-

13 This even applies to the (censored!) publications by critics from inside. For example Robert Baer, *See No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism* (New York 2002) contains no references to Britain although it is highly unlikely that during his years in the Middle East the author never worked with British colleagues.

ous case.[14] While both powers collaborated closely at the intelligence level, the United States in fact boycotted Britain's ambitions to build up its own nuclear arsenal which she regarded absolutely necessary to preserve her status as a global power.[15]

Among the most daring projects was the construction of the "Berlin tunnel" which was aimed at Soviet military telephone landlines running along the outskirts of Berlin. It was by no means a unique project since the British and the Americans had already installed similar listening equipment in Vienna, which, like Berlin, was occupied by the four victor powers, and Trieste where the British and the Americans were joined by Tito's Yugoslavia in an equally uneasy relationship. In each case, the alliance powers worked closely together.[16] In Vienna and in Berlin they hoped to get military information which would provide timely warning in case the Soviets were preparing military action or even starting World War III. At the technical level the tunnel was expected to be a substitute for the lack of other SIGINT from Soviet sources. Since the late 1940s, when the Soviets suffered several defections on the part of staff familiar with their cipher system, they applied a strict "one-time pad" cypher system which the British and Americans found virtually impossible to break.[17] Thus an old-fashioned wiretapping of telephone lines seemed to offer a much-desired alternative.

The Berlin tunnel operated from February 1955 until April 1956 but was compromised from the start by a highly placed mole on the British side, the infamous George Blake of the "Cambridge spies". In hindsight, in fact since April 1956, western analysts have wondered why the Soviets allowed their telephone communications, both military and civilian, to continue unchanged although they knew about the British-American wiretapping operation. Was it all a gigantic deception operation on their part? Or was the mole in question of such importance that he was worth the sacrifice of so much of Soviet communications security? One of the Soviet intelligence officials who worked in East Berlin at the time, claims that the

14 Matthew Uttley, "Operation Surgeon and Britain's Postwar Exploitation of Nazi German Aeronautics", *Intelligence and National Security* 17,2 (2002), 1-26 ; Paul Maddrell, "British-American Scientific Collabortion During the Occupation of Germany", in: Stafford, Jeffreys-Jones, *American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations.*

15 Lorna Arnold, *Britain and the H-Bomb* (London 2001) is among the best new studies, with a useful guide to further reading.

16 David Stafford, *Spies Beneath Berlin* (London rev. ed. 2002), 14 ff.

17 Andrew, Gordievsky, *KGB* 367 ff.

latter was the case.[18] But so far we have no documentary evidence on Soviet deliberations concerning this point. If the recorded conversations were carried on unsuspecting the thousands of pages of transcripts produced and analysed by the alliance provided a unique window on how the Soviets operated in the mid-1950s. Indeed they provided assurance for the western side that Moscow made no preparations for war at that time.

Air reconnaissance of Soviet nuclear and air force installations was another one of the big bilateral spying projects. It began with brief incursions into Soviet-controlled airspace to test Soviet air defences. Initially the Americans even used their giant B-29 bombers which were first brought to Germany in 1946 and to Britain in 1948, on a rotation basis. Since it was known that this type of aircraft had been used to drop the two atomic bombs on Japan, the psychological "value" of such mock-challenges was obvious, even though it seems likely that the Soviets knew that none of the aircraft actually used in Europe were configured to drop nuclear weapons.[19] Later both the British and the Americans used reconfigured military transport planes for reconnaissance missions which were in part carried out over Soviet territory. Quite a number of those flights ended tragically because Soviet air defence had now much improved.[20]

In April 1956 the first American U-2 spy aircraft arrived at Lakenheath airfield in Britain. It marked a completely new approach to overhead reconnaissance since it was not a reconfigured military plane. The U-2 was especially designed for high-altitude flight – high above what could be reached by Soviet air defence at the time. But the first flight over the Soviet Union started from Wiesbaden US airbase in Germany because the British government was initially terrified lest such overflights might trigger a Soviet attack on Britain. To be sure the Americans could be more daring since neither Soviet bombers nor Soviet missiles could yet reach significant targets on US territory. Chancellor Adenauer had no such fears although US nuclear weapons began to be deployed in West Germany around that time, providing rewarding targets for a potential Soviet first-strike. In return Adenauer was periodically shown some of the images gained from U-2 missions. Then, in March 1957 prime minister Macmillan reviewed the U-2 agreement with the US and about a year later, in May 1958, Britain

18 David E. Murphy, S.A. Kondrashev, George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven, CT 1997).

19 Harry R. Borowsky, *A Hollow Threat: Strategic Airpower and Containment before Korea* (Westport, CT 1982).

20 James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency from the Cold War to the Dawn of A New Century* (New York 2001).

finally took her share in the U-2 program. Each side could authorize such missions independently from the other. British U-2 operations ended in December 1970.[21]

Since intelligence collection from flying over Soviet territory was particularly dangerous, yielding at best a very patchy impression of Soviet nuclear weapons activities, various other means were urgently explored. One of them was what began as operation DICK TRACEY and later developed into several sub-projects. In May 1945 British and US intelligence teams had begun to collect a large stock of German Luftwaffe mapping photography and areal target traces for the Soviet Union.[22] Nine different collections, snatched from various Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht command centres, were assembled at Pinetree, Essex, where British-US teams sorted and exploited them for the benefit of their own air forces. The Germans had photographed and mapped a good deal of the western parts of the Soviet Union for which no other maps, certainly no accurate and detailed maps, were available. As this analysis work proceeded, the planners dealing with a future bombing war against the Soviet Union developed a very large numbers of potential targets. For each target they could now provide precise location and topographical details. In addition, the material served to establish flight paths along which the bombers would find those targets.

From a variety of sources it is clear beyond doubt that the information gained from this German material provided essential information which neither the British nor the Americans could have gained in any other way – at any rate before overhead reconnaissance from satellites became sufficiently ample and sophisticated. But this took a number of years after the technology first became available in the early 1960s. In a nuclear war with the Soviet Union, US Strategic Air Command (SAC), popularly known from the unforgettable movie "Dr Strangelove", would have been largely guided by Luftwaffe intelligence.

To understand the full significance of this joint project one must not only point to the unique character of the German material and its value for the nuclear defence of Britain, for US forces around Europe and indeed for the US homeland. The agreement for this joint project, signed in early 1946, was amazingly sweeping in character. It provided a "world-wide exchange of photographic cover of every description on an entirely world-wide basis [...] without financial compensation."[23] Thus one of the most

21 Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, 521 ff.
22 Ibid., 206 ff.
23 Quoted from ibid., 213.

important categories of intelligence information was to be shared between London and Washington on an unlimited basis.

Same intelligence, different assessments

While both powers were looking at essentially the same intelligence information they often drew rather different conclusions from it. This was particularly true with regard to their guesswork on Soviet intentions, that is on Soviet war plans and Soviet risk-taking. Did Moscow really plan to overrun western Europe as many politicians and journalists said and wrote? If so, would they open hostilities at the moment when they felt strongest and believed that the west was most vulnerable? Or would it take some kind of provocation on the part of the west or perhaps a major crisis within the east European satellite states for Moscow to go to war?

Since the outbreak of the Korean war, which had been anticipated neither by the Americans nor the British, a Soviet surprise attack in Europe was a serious concern for Britain in particular. Britain was within easy reach for Soviet bombers and was a most likely target of either a Soviet first-strike (particularly on US bases in Britain) or of a retaliatory strike on British cities. This very much uneven exposure to the Soviet threat produced a number of grave differences between London and Washington. Now the British were much less eager to use aggressive means of gathering intelligence and to pursue clandestine operations behind the iron curtain. The threat of Soviet nuclear weapons was just too obvious. In 1952 the British government demanded that provocative intelligence operations should stop and that western policy should attempt to bring about a "general stabilisation" in their relations with Moscow. On the US side there was a clear disappointment with this new British policy. It would put a final stop to a whole series of joint activities of covert action in Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.[24] General Omar Bradley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, even spoke of "an appeasement ring" which he claimed to detect in British documents on the subject.[25]

At the same time, however, the two powers continued their covert operations in what came to be known as the third world and the non-aligned world. The best-know examples are the 1953 coup in Iran and the support

24 Stephen Dorril, *MI-6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London 2000).

25 Richard Aldrich, "British Intelligence and the Anglo-American Special Relationship during the Cold War", *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998), 339-40.

for anti-communist rebel groups in Indonesia during the 1950s and beyond. On the subject of Fidel Castro's Cuba the British sought to restrain the aggressive American course, before and after the failed adventure of the Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. Eventually both allies failed to anticipate Khrushchev's daring move to emplace medium-range and air-defence nuclear-tipped missiles on Cuba – a move which ran against everything British and US intelligence analysts and diplomats had assumed about Soviet strategy. (Only CIA chief John McCone doubted this piece of received wisdom and insisted on further U-2 overflights which promptly documented the clandestine Soviet move.) It may be more than a footnote of history that Britain maintained her embassy in Havana throughout the crisis as did Chile and several other nations friendly to the US who contributed intelligence information in this manner.[26]

Even stronger disagreements between British and US views developed on the Middle East. Here the British considered themselves to be the intelligence schoolmasters of the inexperienced Yankee boy scouts. But the CIA had in fact built up a relationship with Gamal Abdel Nasser and his circle at a time when the British – despite their political disaster in the Suez affair in late 1956 – hoped to bring back to power some Egyptian ancien régime figures. Washington placed much hope in a series of negotiations between Israel and the new Egyptian leadership. This project was code-named ALPHA. Had it been successful, it would have settled what was eventually signed 25 years later, in 1979, at Camp David between Anwar Al Sadat and Menahim Begin. Both in Washington and in London the key concern was to contain Soviet influence in the region. But British prime minister Eden saw in Nasser a second Hitler while the Eisenhower administration thought of him as a modern third world leader who could be made into an instrument of western policy.

Surprisingly, the CIA-MI-6 relationship held up despite the Suez crisis. Indeed, according to a recent study, it was the British-US intelligence relationship which facilitated the realignment of relations in the aftermath of that crisis.[27] There was a somewhat bizarre moment on 31 October 1956, which happened to be the first day of the British-French military operations. On that day the Americans showed the British some of their U-2

26 James G. Hershberg, "Their Men in Havanna: How America, Britain, and Canada Transformed Espionage into Subversion", in: Stafford, Jeffreys-Jones, *America-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations*, 121-76.

27 W. Scott Lucas, Alistair Morey, "The Hidden Alliance: The CIA and MI-6 Before and After Suez", in: Stafford, Jeffreys-Jones, *America-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations*, 97 ff.

pictures they had taken over Egypt. The exact purpose of their U-2 mission in the eastern Mediterranean is not clear. It may have served to ascertain that the Soviets were not making any military moves in the region. At any rate the US were keeping a close eye on the situation because they were hoping to launch a clandestine attack on Syria.[28]

Given its manyfold colonial (and later post-colonial) connections in most parts of the world, Britain was particularly well placed to provide communications posts in Asia and Africa through which traffic could be routed and from which signals intelligence could be collected. Concerning the rising threat of communist China, which was of particular concern to the Americans and to Japan, their prime security client in Asia, the British had an embassy in Peking and everything which the possession (or rather 99-year lease) of Hongkong could offer. Both provided vital intelligence assets in combination with stations in South Korea and Taiwan. In Asia as well as in Africa British outposts could be used for dealing with the rising nationalist movements in the third world, particularly for arms shipments. While the struggle against Soviet communism was in the forefront of those activities, business and national strategic interests were never far from the masterminds of the intelligence alliance. Both types of reasons led to intelligence relationships (and military aid relationships) with those newly-independent states which allowed western powers to manipulate the politics in ways which were far removed from public scrutiny.

Next to this imperial and post-imperial global network on the part of the British the Americans had their own system of military bases which they had vastly expanded during World War II and maintained virtually undiminished thereafter.[29] And yet, during the early cold war years it became rapidly visible that the two partners were becoming more and more unequal. Two factors were particularly critical in this respect: the incomparable expansion of the US economy and the much greater nuclear threat posed by the Soviet arsenal to Britain compared to the United States. By the time Soviet nuclear weapons could threaten the North American continent in a massive and credible way, say around 1970, the United States had long moved to the status of a superpower. It conducted arms control negotiations and discussions on global issues with Moscow on a bilateral basis. It seems, however, that even under those new circumstances the

28 Ibid., 110 ff.

29 Cf., Simon Duke, Wolfgang Krieger (eds.), *US Military Forces in Europe: The Early Years, 1945-1970* (Boulder, CO 1993); still unsurpassed in both information and analysis is Robert Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases: The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy* (New York 1982).

British offered intelligence assets which the US could not but acknowledge as being "indispensable" to their own security.[30]

Some conclusions

While there are now some well-documented studies for the early postwar years we know much less about the day-to-day operations, the successes and failures, and the overall extent of the British-US intelligence relationship since the 1970s. Many important questions can only be answered on the basis of educated guesses. For example we simply cannot document in any detail how the growing importance of satellite and computer technologies may have changed the intelligence alliance. To the extent that we have partial insight into those matters they tell us little about where the alliance stands today and what its likely future may be.

Of course there are some useful hints in the reports from the official inquiries into the "9/11" terrorist attacks and the 2003 Iraq war. Those can be interpreted on the basis of what is now known about the structure of the alliance and its record so far. Additional insight can be gained from the major reforms of the national intelligence structures which have been put in motion on both sides of the Atlantic. If those reforms turn out to be more radical than any since the immediate post-1945 restructuring, as some observers maintain a new set of bilateral structures will emerge. Whether they will increase or diminish the importance of the intelligence alliance must be considered an open question.[31]

For those who have studied the evolution of both national intelligence systems and of their long-time relationship it is hard to avoid being cynical about what is going on at the moment. There is a feeling of dejá vu. Despite the loud cries for more centralisation and better efficiency there is a strong feeling among seasoned observers that some things will never change. Thus the stark differences between the US and the British ways of organising intelligence can be expected to remain.

Consider for example the overwhelming influence of the US Defence department which controls about 80 percent of the US total intelligence budget while the CIA receives only about 16 percent. (The total budget is likely to be around $ 40 billion and going up.) Although the National Security Act of 1947 explicitly created a Central (!) Intelligence Agency (CIA),

30 Quoted from a 1957 NSC document in: Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, 349.

31 For an interesting comment by a former chief of Israel's Mossad, see Efraim Halevy, "In Defense of the Intelligence Services", *The Economist*, July 29, 2004.

the military refused to give up any part of intelligence which they consider important in warfare or any part which they think to be vital for preserving their institutional power and their procurement programs. Thus the Pentagon successfully avoided a situation where independent or "central" intelligence officials could define the Soviet (and Chinese) military threat and could therefore define the weapons programs required to meet this threat. Other departments which are concerned with "foreign" affairs – be they finance, trade, border controls, or narcotics – followed this example and kept or established their own intelligence departments. As a result the US "intelligence community" grew to 15 agencies of which the largest and most expensive ones, those tasked with TECHINT of various sorts, are subordinate to the defence department.

This organisational structure makes itself felt when it comes to drawing up the combined intelligence assessments, called National Intelligence Estimates (NIE), for the overall guidance of the president and his administration. All too often those NIE are essentially institutional compromises rather than the best possible expert advice. Powerful agencies have the option of submitting dissenting assessments or at least dissenting footnotes in the NIE. The power of the Director of Central Intelligence, nominally the chief intelligence adviser to the president, is therefore little more than that of a moderator of institutional power play. It remains to be seen if the latest US intelligence reform will do anything to change this institutional Rube Goldberg setup.[32]

It is against this background that some of the problems of British-US cooperation on intelligence must be seen. In Britain national estimates are produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), established in 1939 first under the guidance of the Chief of Defence Staff and subsequently, in the aftermath of the Suez crisis, placed under the Cabinet Office in 1957. Its chairman together with an Assessment Staff is guiding a process to which the collection agencies (MI-5, MI-6, and GCHQ), the Defence Intelligence Staff and the principal "consumers" (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Treasury, Ministry of Defence, Home Office, etc.) all contribute.

Clearly the two very different political cultures have produced two divergent ways of producing and using intelligence. While the US "intelligence culture" is characterized by inter-agency "turf-wars" and "bureau-

32 Philip Shenon, "Accord Reached on Overhauling US Intelligence," *New York Times*, December 7, 2004.

cratic politics" the British system is more oriented toward collegiality or interlocking committees.[33]

Today, after the recent debacles over "9/11" and the intelligence concerning weapons of mass destruction as a justification for starting the war against Iraq in 2003, one may doubt the value of either system. But so far there is not enough documentation to show how much those intelligence estimates – done separately or jointly in London and Washington? – were of critical importance for the Blair cabinet to go along with the Bush administration and become their key military ally in that war.[34]

If history provides any guidance it is likely that the coordination of intelligence estimates was a good deal less intense than one might expect. Thus, there would be little reason to assume that intelligence assessment as such was actually driving the process of the Bush-Blair war coalition. For during the cold war it was apparently quite common for both partners to share only "sanitized" versions of their respective estimates.[35] According to Aldrich's research it seems that those estimates had little impact anyway. Perhaps this is not so surprising when one takes into account that military leaders in both countries often did not accept the intelligence estimates of their own governments either.[36]

What really counted in this intelligence alliance was "raw" intelligence from technical sources as well as from HUMINT plus a number of joint covert action programs ranging from bribery to propaganda all the way to the use of commando units. In a sense the intelligence alliance was therefore to a large extent a patchwork of "narrow, compartmentalized relationships" between highly specialized units and subunits on both sides of the Atlantic.[37] In this manner each side could benefit from additional pieces of information which either complemented their own data or made it possible to check them in terms of accuracy, detail, and reliability.

Finally, what effect did the alliance have on the overall British-US relationship? It is not difficult to see that both sides used the alliance to exert

33 Philip H. J. Davies, "Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17,3 (2004), 495-520.

34 For information on how the WMD intelligence brief was produced in a special intelligence unit in London, see Glen Frankel, "From Inside Sceptic to Public Dissent", *Washington Post*, August 27, 2004; for an angry voice from a seasoned writer on international security issues, see Max Hastings, "The Iraq Intelligence Fiasco Exposes Us to Terrible Danger", *The Guardian*, September 20, 2004; the story of the Iraqi WMD issue and US intelligence is traced and analysed by Thomas Powers, "Secret Intelligence and the War on Terror", *New York Review of Books*, 51,20 (December 16, 2004)

35 Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, 346.

36 Ibid., 347 gives some examples.

37 Ibid., 337.

influence on the other. But this does not seem to have worked too well. Between 1946 and 1958, for example, the United States steadfastly refused to help the British with their nuclear weapons developments. Later on their help still remained limited although it is true to say that Britain was the only country which received such technology in any major way from the Americans ever. There is even evidence to show that both sides withheld part of their knowledge about the Soviet nuclear weapons programs lest such information might give away their own technological edge. In other words, the intelligence alliance seems to have provided little leverage on nuclear relations between Washington and London at the time when Britain could have benefited most and could have saved enormous amounts of money.

Several major policy areas can be identified where the United States used intelligence politics to influence British foreign policy. As Aldrich has discovered, from 1949 to 1960 they secretly financed various pro-European groups in Britain which sought to undermine London's opposition to European integration at the economic and political level.[38] To this one might add the somewhat different case of Irish nationalism. Until the 1990s Washington did little to prevent private Irish nationalist groups from raising money from Irish-Americans for their "struggle" in Northern Ireland. Weapons shipments and money from Irish-Americans allowed them to carry on their terrorist campaigns against the British government for decades.

The extent to which secret means may have been used to get Britain to change her Middle Eastern policy, eventually leading to her retreat from "east of Suez", is still a matter of debate.[39] This question is now of renewed significance because of the ever closer coalition with the US in the wars against Iraq since 1990. On the part of the British government it is quite likely that they joined Washington hoping they could influence American policy in the Middle East and get a share in the new strategic relationships with some of the key actors in that region. At any rate the fight against international terrorism appears to be an insufficient explanation of the Bush-Blair relationship.

Next to the obvious and less obvious benefits of the British-US intelligence alliance – and to those areas where it may not have made much difference – one needs to consider its outright dangers. The most obvious

38 Idem, *Hidden Hand*, 342 ff.

39 Douglas Little, "Mission Impossible: The CIA and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East," *Diplomatic History* 28,5 (2004), 663-701 has much material on this issue.

ones are posed by the numerous kinds of counter-intelligence failures which have pained the alliance over the decades.

Since the early 1950s, when the extent of Soviet subversion came to be known to the security and intelligence services on both sides of the Atlantic – though not yet to the wider public – a never-ending story of betrayal came to light which touched virtually all relevant civilian and military departments. In May 1951, when two British diplomats (Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean) fled from London, it seemed that the British were hurt worse by the presence of Soviet moles than the Americans. But subsequent discoveries made it quite clear that the number of moles and the amounts of damage done to the security apparatus, to the military, to the diplomatic staffs, and to the scientific laboratories working on nuclear weapons in particular were utterly depressing.

At first the British were eager to hide or at least downplay the damage done on their side. In this way they hoped to protect their special intelligence relationship and, if at all possible, to revive their collaboration in the field of nuclear weapons. After much hesitation they introduced "positive vetting" for those officials who were likely to come into contact with intelligence, defence and scientific secrets. There was a great fear that this move would lead to panic if known to the wider public and that it would discourage brilliant minds from entering government service. Thus the procedure was kept as secret as possible. But it turned out that the original estimates of requiring perhaps 1.000 officials to undergo this procedure was far from the reality of what on the US side came to be called the "national security state". By the 1980s some 68.000 British officials had to undergo positive vetting. Between 1948 and the mid-1950s hundreds of people were urged to resign "voluntarily" from public service or were dismissed outright.[40] In most cases arrangements were found which avoided putting those people on trial. Quite obviously, British counter-intelligence did not wish to compromise their "sources and methods".

In later years, some of the ways in which British officialdom dealt with their moles and traitors came under severe criticism. Of the famous "Cambridge five", a spy ring formed during the 1930s, two were only "interrogated" rather than put to trial. One of them, Anthony Blunt, even went on to becoming "Sir Anthony" and head of the Queen's art gallery. The most publicized of them, Kim Philby, worked for MI-6 and became friendly with James Jesus Angleton, the top mole hunter inside the CIA, while sta-

40 Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, 421 ff.

tioned in Washington. He escaped to Moscow and eventually published his memoirs in 1968.

Apart from their frenzied effort to down-play their mole problem the British were facing the same problem as the Americans when prosecuting some of their own moles. The key evidence against those people was derived from the joint VENONA project for deciphering Soviet communications recorded during the war on American soil. As indicated above the alliance refused to compromise VENONA. They hoped to decrypt more messages and, above all, to catch more moles. Half a century later scholars are still debating to what extent VENONA evidence can now resolve such controversial cases as the Rosenbergs, Harry Dexter White, Alger Hiss and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Back in the 1950s, the Americans felt they could not handle their Soviet spying cases as discreetly as the British. Congress staged various public hearings in which people were put under intense pressure to confess and to divulge the names of other Soviet moles. A number of highly publicized court trials followed suit which served to heat up anti-communist sentiments across the country. But due to the intense efforts to protect the VENONA secret, the evidence brought against defendants like the Rosenbergs appeared a lot weaker than it actually was. This led many "liberals" and left-wing sympathizers in the United States – and indeed throughout the western world – to believe that there was a witchhunt going on when in fact the evidence against most of those defendants was overwhelming. (Whether those trials can be said to have been fair and whether the sentences passed were appropriate is another matter altogether.) To this day the overwhelming impression of this period is that those purges and trials were essentially due to some public hysteria called the "McCarthy era".

Intelligence history, however well documented, is unlikely to change that impression. But those who are interested can learn from recent research – some of it now based on Soviet testimony and documentation – that the Soviets managed to insert their agents or to recruit moles in nearly all relevant branches of government both in Britain and in the US. By contrast, those British or American spies who were really highly placed within the Soviet apparatus and who produced very significant amounts of high quality material were few and far between.[41] Whether western SIGINT successes compensated for this sad western balance will probably not be know for another fifty years. It may well be that the Soviets and their

41 For a summary of the final cold war years, see Milt Bearden, James Risen, *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA's Final Showdown with the KGB* (New York 2003).

many allies defeated the British-US alliance (with their associates) on the battlefield of intelligence. At any rate this is the pessimists' conclusion. The optimists claim that most of the western successes are still unknown to the public.

As the British-US intelligence alliance has largely been redirected from the Soviet and Chinese targets to "rogue states", WMD proliferation, and Islamist terrorism such grand theories and their questionable value may produce some sober thinking on what intelligence can or cannot accomplish. For the practitioners of intelligence studies the most appropriate response is perhaps to smile politely at the profound wisdom (?) which seems to guide current intelligence reform in Washington and in London – and to return to their very own "sources and methods."