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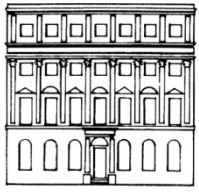

BULLETIN

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Intelligence in World History, c.1500–1918
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Intelligence in World History, c.1500–1918. Conference organized by the German Historical Institute London in collaboration with the International Programmes, Pembroke College Cambridge and held at the GHIL, 6–8 February 2014. Conveners: Christopher Andrew (Cambridge), Andreas Gestrich (GHIL), Tobias Graf (Heidelberg), Daniel Larsen (Cambridge), and Sönke Neitzel (LSE).

The history of intelligence has long been a poor relation to the study of international relations. On the whole, historians have tended to pay relatively little attention to the kinds of information at the disposal of those who made decisions about war and peace, and even less to the methods by which such decision-makers acquired the information which underlay the decisions they took. Yet few would question that it did matter what decision-makers knew about the world which they reacted to, shaped, and attempted to control. The meeting was organized in order to stimulate exchange between historians working on intelligence organizations and issues across the traditional boundaries of periodical and regional specialization, and thus gain a better understanding of what might provocatively be called the 'long' early modern period of intelligence services.

The event opened with a keynote lecture by Christopher Andrew (Cambridge), the official historian of the British Security Service (MI5), in which he provided a sweeping overview of the development of secret intelligence in Europe from the Renaissance to the end of the First World War. He highlighted the general lack of awareness of the history of intelligence across the ages. In particular, rapid advances in techniques and technologies since the early twentieth century obscure the fact that for centuries the West had lagged far behind its competitors in Asia and the Middle East, especially in the field of cryptology. Here, European states began to take the lead only gradually from the sixteenth century onwards. These advances, however, remained geographically and chronologically uneven.

Sir Richard Dearlove (Cambridge), former head of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), complemented the historian's overview with insights from his own experience as an intelligence professional. Crucially, the need of intelligence services for secrecy pro-

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

vides a major obstacle to developing a historical understanding of their activities and role, even for professionals themselves. The same need for secrecy also largely prevents writing the history of intelligence as a human history, even as, not least because of the continued importance of human intelligence, the human factor looms large in the activities and performance of intelligence services.

Sir Christopher Bayly (Cambridge) opened the first thematic session by placing intelligence into a wider framework. Focusing on British India, he highlighted the importance of knowledge-management for both the colonial government and those who provided resistance to it. The colonial state could not function without tapping into pools of what Bayly called 'mundane knowledge'. This form of knowledge-collection from local knowledge communities and, from the nineteenth century onwards, newspapers provided a central element of British colonial intelligence.

Cengiz Kırlı (Istanbul) explained how the Ottoman state in the nineteenth century, particularly during the rule of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), attempted to tap into precisely such knowledge communities by conducting systematic surveillance of the population in the capital. While such activities had been an integral part of Ottoman governance in previous centuries, they had remained sporadic. Under Abdülhamid, what had originally been a means for identifying and silencing dissent, now served the wider purpose of gathering information as well as monitoring public opinion, which, as Kırlı argued, ultimately opened policy-making to the influence of subjects' political wishes.

Moving back in time to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Mia Rodríguez-Salgado (London), Ioanna Iordanou (Warwick), and Tobias Graf (Heidelberg) showed that well-organized and often bureaucratic intelligence services had come into being long before the emergence of the modern nation-state. The comparison between the Venetian and Austrian Habsburg intelligence organizations in the Ottoman Empire on the one hand, and their Spanish Habsburg counterparts on the other is particularly instructive. In the former, resident ambassadors in Istanbul took the lead by virtue of their office, while the Spanish Habsburgs, lacking formal diplomatic relations with the Sublime Porte, relied on networks of spies and informants run from the fringes of their empire. However, as Rodríguez-Salgado pointed out, such a degree of organizational sophistication

was rarely permanent. Rather, agencies and networks developed in response to specific threats and fell into disuse once these threats had dissipated. Only Venice's intelligence apparatus which, as Iordanou showed, was institutionalized in a single centralized office early in the sixteenth century, was an exception to this rule.

This is not to say that intelligence was deemed unimportant—on the contrary. Taking the eighteenth-century electors of Saxony August II and August III, who were also kings of Poland in personal unions, as a starting point, Anne-Simone Rous (Dresden) emphasized just how important intelligence was to early modern rulers as an element of secret diplomacy. Drawing on her case studies, she suggested a refined model of secret diplomacy which divides pertinent activities into three categories according to their aims and means: defensive, offensive, and aggressive.

The contributions by Karl de Leeuw (Amsterdam) and Neil Kent (Cambridge) presented historical precedents for the 'special relationship' between the UK and the USA. During the Nine Years War (1688–97), William III of England (r. 1689–1702) and Stadtholder in the Dutch Republic (r. 1672–1702) already relied heavily on postal interception and code-breaking in England, the Netherlands, and Hanover to thwart French military and diplomatic efforts. However, as de Leeuw showed, even as Britain and the Netherlands intensified their military cooperation over the course of the eighteenth century, their former intelligence alliance turned into rivalry out of fear that they were pursuing conflicting interests. Kent, in contrast, demonstrated that as a direct result of the dynastic connection, Britain and Hanover maintained an intelligence alliance throughout the eighteenth century. In spite of intelligence being tainted by its reputation as 'dirty work' at the time, in his various government positions, Thomas Pelham-Holles, 1st Duke of Newcastle (1693–1768), excelled in putting it to good use, especially to keep the Jacobites, supporters of the Stuart dynasty, which had been deposed in 1688, and their French allies at bay.

Russia provided the geographical focus for the penultimate session, which opened with Svetlana Lokhova's (Cambridge) presentation of rare and previously unused material from the archives of the Okhrana, the tsarist intelligence service. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge) undertook an instructive diachronic comparison of Russian intelligence during the Napoleonic Wars and on the eve of the First

World War. Counter-intuitively, despite the service's professionalization by 1914, Russian intelligence had been more effective in the earlier period. While by virtue of their social status Russian 'agents' mingled freely with the French elite in the early nineteenth century, professional intelligence officers in the latter period were deprived of this possibility by their specialization. This is reflective of a wider social reconfiguration which resulted in the separation of the largely overlapping premodern elites into more distinct segments of political, military, and social elites.

Calder Walton (London) highlighted the importance of the colonial experience for the development of intelligence services in Europe. This was especially, though not exclusively, true of the UK, where the majority of the personnel in the domestic security and foreign intelligence services had a colonial background. These officers brought with them innovative ideas and practices, such as fingerprinting, which had been developed and successfully implemented in the colonies.

That the role of intelligence very much depends on a country's political culture became clear from Daniel Larsen's (Cambridge) presentation on the role of secrecy in the USA before, during, and after the First World War. From publishing all official correspondence on foreign relations in the 1860s, the State Department gradually began to appreciate the importance of keeping information secure to the extent of developing an obsession with secrecy by the beginning of the Cold War. This development did not continue uninterruptedly, however. In the early 1930s laxity of security for diplomatic correspondence had almost reverted to its pre-First World War state.

All contributors highlighted the importance of intelligence for the study of political history, while pointing out that this dimension has so far been understudied. The reason for this is perhaps not so much the dearth of source material, but most historians' focus on the outcomes, rather than the mechanisms, of decision-making. Different historiographical traditions in the UK and Germany, as a member of the audience pointed out, explain why British historians seem relatively fascinated by the history of intelligence, while the same field has thus far received little attention in Germany. In a context in which history is concerned less with the search for underlying grand narratives, but regarded first and foremost as a sequence of events, it

may simply be more credible to believe that intelligence made a difference.

Taken together, the presentations seem to validate this point. Initially, the organizers had hoped that the conference would shed new light on currently ill-understood long-term processes such as the professionalization of intelligence services and their development into distinct bureaucratic agencies. If anything, the papers showed that there is no clear underlying historical trajectory, but that intelligence services emerged, expanded, contracted, and disbanded according to the needs of the day. Perhaps, then, one important contribution which intelligence history can make to the discipline of history at large is to shed further doubt on the validity of modernization theory as a framework for the study of the past.

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